

Dr. Martin Luther's Church Postil

*The Complete Lenker
Edition in One Volume*



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Luther's Church Postil

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Luther's Church Postil

*The Complete Lenker Edition in One
Volume*

By Martin Luther.

English Edition by Prof. John Nicholas Lenker, D.D.

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Dedication and Acknowledgments

This edition is based in part on the work done by Greg Jackson in preparing his illustrated version of Luther's *Church Postil*. Thanks go to Pastor Jackson for his encouragement to the Lutheran Library and even more so for his dedication to the great teachings of the Lutheran Reformation.

The below are from Dr. Jackson's edition of Lenker's Luther's Church Postil.

From Volume 2

My wife Christina underwent cancer surgery when this series was being planned, and she has been a constant source of encouragement for promoting Luther's works. Virginia Roberts has worked tirelessly on removing the errors picked up by scanning and copying into Word.

Numerous people are helping with this project, and they all report learning so much from Luther, even though they must focus on the glitches rather than the volumes. Their labor of love means more people can read Luther conveniently and at a very low cost.

When I became a Lutheran at the age of 16 and joined Salem Lutheran Church in Moline, Illinois, no one could foresee the changes ahead in the Lutheran Church. But I soon learned about Roland Bainton and read *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. I took a course in Reformation history at Augustana College and soon had a unique opportunity to meet Bainton, hear him lecture, and photograph him with our newborn son, Martin. He responded by drawing a picture of Luther holding Martin and Bethany, our second child. Bainton impressed me with his kindness and generosity, once offering to Xerox pages for me when I was working on my dissertation. He

was a historian who pursued the sources and learned the languages needed. I used his language methods to teach Latin, Greek, and Hebrew to Martin. Therefore, these volumes are directly connected to Bainton's influence on me and all Lutherans. Volume II is dedicated especially to Roland Bainton, honorary Lutheran, scholar and friend.

From Volume 3

Many people help in producing each volume. Virginia Roberts checked every line for errors in scanning and found mistakes that go back to the original printing. A Lutheran pastor checked over the results after I removed as many glitches as I could find. Our finishing editor Janie Sullivan put the volume together for the color, economy edition, and Kindle e-book format. Our artist-in-resident, Norma Boeckler, designed the cover and interior art while providing additional art for Facebook and my Old Testament students. In Perryville, Missouri, the pastor asked me, "How do you know Norma Boeckler?"

Members of Bethany Lutheran Church have always encouraged me to publish even more, and many friends across the globe look forward to each book. My wife Christina enjoys each new volume. Decades ago, we went through these same volumes for quotations from Luther to add to the Megatron database of 3,000

statements from various enthusiasms. What Luther Says was also badly mauled in the process of marking and entering each timeless entry – manually.

I was blessed to study at Yale Divinity School during its greatest Lutheran era, when my favorite professors were also worshipping at Bethesda Lutheran Church, where I worked. I even wrote about them in The Lutheran magazine – Paul Holmer, Nils Dahl, George Lindbeck, Jaroslav Pelikan, Sydney Ahlstrom, and the honorary Lutheran – Roland Bainton. The Biblical studies faculty emphasized the text of the Scriptures in Hebrew and Greek rather than the theories of the modernists, and Professor Dahl was a notable proponent of this approach. He and his wife were also good friends. When we lost our first daughter, Mrs. Dahl opened the locket she always wore – a photo of the baby they lost.

New Testament Professor Nils A. Dahl, 1911-2001, influenced a wide range of students, pastors, and Biblical scholars during his career.

From Volume 4

This volume is dedicated to Gary and Alicia Meyer, who were married 52 years before he passed into eternal life. Gary was a Lieutenant in the US Air Force and flew refueling aircraft for six years. He then flew overseas for United Airlines for 30 years, and later served in the Air National Guard. Their sons are Kurt, Eric, and Brett. Gary and Alicia were early supporters of our Internet services and publications at Bethany Lutheran Church. We look forward to Alicia's cheerful, monthly, handwritten notes.

Volume IV was a challenge in editing. The almost final version was lost twice, once through file corruption. Three people helped in removing errors from the basic text. Virginia Roberts, Terry and Lori Howell went over every line. That is time consuming and requires great patience and attention to detail. No book is free from human error, but their labor of love made it so much easier for future readers.

Reading each sermon is also a way to find gems, which will be gathered in the ninth volume, to promote interest in Luther's timeless sermons.

My wife Christina is a constant source of encouragement, and quite an expert in German. She is a major reason why I am putting together a lengthy series of books – she considers it a valuable use of time.

Norma A. Boeckler has designed the Biblical art and cover for this volume. She has a world-wide group of followers who love her work and find inspiration in her Scriptural illustrations and books.

Janie Sullivan is our invaluable editor for finishing the book for Amazon and Kindle e-books. She has improved each volume with her skills. — Gregory L. Jackson, The 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, October 2017

To: Norman and Jean Woehrle, semper fidelis

This volume is dedicated to two members of my former congregation in Columbus, Ohio. Norman and Jean Woehrle represent the qualities every

pastor admires in members. They have always been faithful in the Means of Grace, in spite of many health challenges. They were also helped the congregation in many ways and were active in the community. If Jean volunteered for the prolife center, she was there, doing her job. They put up a basketball hoop for the neighborhood children. If they saw a doctrinal issue to be addressed, they were on the phone to the synod president. In their vocations, Jean served as a nurse, and Norman a worker for AT&T. More dramatically, he was a Marine in World War II in the Pacific theater. He served on Landing Ship Tanks, the first of two Marines to jump ashore and carry smudge pots to hide their brothers from enemy fire. Needless to say, Norman did not have a cloud of smoke to hide him. Asked about medals he earned, he chuckled and said, “The usual bunch.”

This volume was made possible by the patient editing of Virginia Roberts, the artwork of Norma A. Boeckler, and the preparation work of Janie Sullivan. The speed of publication and the quality of the work is a testament to their labors. Now we have the good news that donated volumes will be sent to various Lutheran seminaries in the Third World, anxious to have copies of Luther’s Sermons and faithful Lutheran works.

From Volume 8

John N. Lenker edited and served as senior translator of The Sermons of Martin Luther, publishing the work in 1903. Pastor Ambrose Henkel published a translation in 1869 at New Market. Pastor C. B. Gohdes worked on one sermon.

From The Final Volume

This final volume of Luther’s Sermons is dedicated to my parents, who certainly prepared me in various ways for this task. Above is my father Homer, who decided I needed to learn how to work. My wife Christina and I were grinning at the photographer. Our son Martin managed to foreshadow a look that we noticed in his son Alexander.

Many of the repetitive tasks of writing and editing, especially editing, are like working in a bakery – making doughnuts, cleaning up; making cookies, cleaning up; making bread, cleaning up; serving a coffee counter, and cleaning up. But one emphasis at work was different from most retail

food establishments. My father insisted on the best ingredients for everything, from the coffee we served fresh to the ingredients in the bakery products. We used the finest chocolate, vanilla, coconut, walnuts, pecans, and flour. People still talk about Melo Cream Donuts and would love to see them reborn. Likewise, I have found it impossible to deal with the study of the Bible and theology without the best teachers – first the Holy Spirit in the Word – secondly, the great Biblical teachers, from Augustine and Luther, to Melancthon, Chemnitz, and the Book of Concord editors.

My mother, Gladys Parker, gave us a chest full of old photos, including the one above, still in the studio folder, marked “Co-ed, 1931.” She was 18 and going to the Normal College to become a teacher. She gradually earned her bachelor’s degree at Augustana College. My mother worked in one-room rural schools and loved it, graduating to the Moline Public Schools when we lived near Garfield Grade School. Her students still write that she was one of her favorites of all the teachers they had in various schools. She wanted to teach at a university, but earning a PhD was an obstacle, late in life. My mother love to write and to teach, so she was very pleased that I began teaching at two universities, some colleges here and there, and publishing books.

From baptism, Sunday School, and worship to memorizing the 23rd Psalm, the books I publish and edit are a direct result of my parents’ influence throughout life. I did my part in guiding them to a Lutheran confession.

I only do one part of this task, which would have been impossible without the help and encouragement of many people:

- My wife Christina never tired of encouraging this plan of publishing eight volumes.
- Norma A. Boeckler was pleased to offer her talents as an artist.
- Virginia Roberts insisted on editing the entire set, even when we had some volunteer editors. She worked tirelessly on this effort and greatly improved the final version.
- Janie Sullivan has been instrumental in finishing the work for Amazon in two versions, plus the e-book for Kindle.

- Many unnamed laity and clergy have participated in many ways supported the work, finding joy in the clarity and insights of Luther's work.

Pastor Gregory L. Jackson, Quasimodogeniti, 2018

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Luke 2:33-40 - Sunday After Christmas
Luke 2:41-52 - Second Sunday after Epiphany
Luke 2:42-52 - First Sunday after Epiphany
Luke 2:42-52 - First Sunday after Epiphany Second Sermon
Luke 3:15-20 - Second Christmas Day
Luke 5:1-11 - Fifth Sunday after Trinity
Luke 5:1-11 - Fifth Sunday after Trinity Second Sermon
Luke 6:36-42 - Fourth Sunday after Trinity
Luke 6:36-42 - Fourth Sunday after Trinity Second Sermon
Luke 8:4-15 - Sexagesima Sunday
Luke 10:23-37 - Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity
Luke 10:23-37 - Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity Second Sermon
Luke 11:14-23 - Third Sunday in Lent
Luke 14:1-11 - Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity
Luke 14:1-11 - Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity Second Sermon
Luke 14:1-11 - Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity
Luke 14:16-24 - Second Sunday after Trinity Second Sermon
Luke 14:16-24 - Second Sunday after Trinity
Luke 15:1-10 - Third Sunday after Trinity
Luke 15:1-10 - Third Sunday after Trinity Second Sermon
Luke 16:1-9 - Ninth Sunday after Trinity
Luke 16:1-9 - Ninth Sunday after Trinity Second Sermon

Luke 16:19-31 - First Sunday after Trinity
Luke 17:11-19 - Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity
Luke 18:9-14 - Eleventh Sunday after Trinity
Luke 18:9-14 - Eleventh Sunday after Trinity Second Sermon
Luke 18:31-43 - Quinquagesima Sunday
Luke 19:41-48 - Tenth Sunday after Trinity
Luke 21:25-36 - Second Sunday in Advent
Luke 24:13-35 - Easter Monday
Luke 24:13-35 - Easter Monday Second Sermon
Luke 24:36-47 - Easter Tuesday
Luke 24:36-47 - Easter Tuesday Second Sermon
John 1:1-14 - Third Christmas Day
John 1:19-28 - Fourth Sunday in Advent
John 3:1-15 - Trinity Sunday
John 3:1-15 - Trinity Sunday Second Sunday
John 3:16-21 - Pentecost Monday
John 3:16-21 - Pentecost Monday Second Sermon
John 4:46-54 - Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity
John 4:46-54 - Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity Second Sunday
John 6:1-15 - Fourth Sunday in Lent
John 6:44-51 - Pentecost Wednesday
John 8:46-59 - Fifth Sunday in Lent
John 10:1-11 - Pentecost Tuesday
John 10:1-11 - Pentecost Tuesday Second Sermon
John 10:11-16 - Second Sunday after Easter
John 10:11-16 - Second Sunday after Easter Second Sermon
John 10:11-16 - Second Sunday after Easter Third Sermon
John 14:23-31 - Pentecost or Whitsunday
John 14:23-31 - Pentecost or Whitsunday Second Sermon
John 14:23-31 - Pentecost or Whitsunday Third Sermon
John 15:26-16 - Sunday after Christ's Ascension
John 15:26-16 - Sunday after Christ's Ascension Second Sermon
John 16:5-15 - Fourth Sunday after Easter
John 16:5-15 - Fourth Sunday after Easter Second Sermon
John 16:5-15 - Fourth Sunday after Easter Third Sermon
John 16:16-23 - Third Sunday after Easter
John 16:16-23 - Third Sunday after Easter Second Sermon

John 16:16-23 - Third Sunday after Easter Third Sermon
 John 16:23-30 - Fifth Sunday after Easter
 John 16:23-30 - Fifth Sunday after Easter Second Sermon
 John 20:19-31 - Sunday after Easter
 John 20:19-31 - Sunday after Easter Second Sermon
 John 20:19-31 - Sunday after Easter Third Sermon
 John 20:19-31 - Sunday after Easter Fourth Sermon
 John 21:19-24 - Day of St. John the Evangelist
 Epistle Sermons
 Isaiah 60:1-6 - Epiphany
 Acts 1:1-12 - Ascension Day
 Acts 2:1-13 - Pentecost
 Acts 2:1-13 - Pentecost Tuesday Second Sermon
 Acts 2:1-13 - Pentecost Wednesday
 Acts 2:14-28 - Pentecost Monday
 Acts 2:29-36 - Pentecost Tuesday
 Acts 6:8-14 - St. Stephen's Day
 Acts 10:34-43 - Easter Monday
 Acts 13:26-33 - Easter Tuesday
 Acts 13:26-33 - Easter Tuesday Second Sermon
 Romans 6:3-11 - Sixth Sunday after Trinity
 Romans 6:19-23 - Seventh Sunday after Trinity
 Romans 8:12-17 - Eighth Sunday after Trinity
 Romans 8:18-22 - Fourth Sunday after Trinity
 Romans 8:18-22 - Fourth Sunday after Trinity Second Sermon
 Romans 11:33-36 - Trinity Sunday
 Romans 11:33-36 - Trinity Sunday Second Sermon
 Romans 12:1-6 - First Sunday after Epiphany
 Romans 12:6-16 - Second Sunday after Epiphany
 Romans 12:16-21 - Third Sunday after Epiphany
 Romans 13:8-10 - Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
 Romans 13:11-14 - First Sunday in Advent
 Romans 15:4-13 - Second Sunday in Advent
 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 - Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity
 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 - Third Sunday in Advent
 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 - Easter Sunday
 1 Corinthians 9:24-10:5 - Third Sunday before Lent

1 Corinthians 10:6-13 - Ninth Sunday after Trinity
1 Corinthians 12:1-11 - Tenth Sunday after Trinity
1 Corinthians 13 - Sunday before Lent
1 Corinthians 15:1-10 - Eleventh Sunday after Trinity
1 Corinthians 15:20-28 - Third Sunday after Easter Second Sermon
1 Corinthians 15:35-50 - Fourth Sunday after Easter
1 Corinthians 15:51-57 - Fifth Sunday after Easter
2 Corinthians 3:4-11 - Twelfth Sunday after Trinity
2 Corinthians 6:1-10 - First Sunday in Lent
2 Corinthians 11:19-12:9 - Second Sunday before Lent
Ephesians 3:13-21 - Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity
Galatians 3:15-22 - Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity
Galatians 3:23-29 - New Year's Day
Galatians 4:1-7 - Sunday after Christmas
Galatians 4:21-31 - Fourth Sunday in Lent
Galatians 5:16-24 - Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity
Galatians 5:25-26 - 6:1-10 - Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity
Ephesians 4:1-6 - Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity
Ephesians 4:22-28 - Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity
Ephesians 5:1-9 - Third Sunday in Lent
Ephesians 5:15-21 - Twentieth Sunday after Trinity
Ephesians 6:10-17 - Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity
Philippians 1:3-11 - Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity
Philippians 2:5-11 - Palm Sunday
Philippians 3:17-21 - Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity
Philippians 4:4-7 - Fourth Sunday in Advent
Colossians 1:3-14 - Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity
Colossians 3:1-7 - Easter Wednesday
Colossians 3:12-17 - Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
1 Thessalonians 4:1-7 - Second Sunday in Lent
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 - Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Trinity
2 Thessalonians 1:3-10 - Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Trinity
Titus 2:11-15 - First Christmas Sermon
Titus 3:4-8 - Second Christmas Sermon
Hebrews 1:1-12 - Third Christmas Sermon
Hebrews 9:11-15 - Fifth Sunday in Lent
James 1:16-21 - Fourth Sunday after Easter Second Sermon

1 Peter 2:21-25 - Second Sunday after Easter
1 Peter 2:11-20 - Third Sunday after Easter
1 Peter 3:8-15 - Fifth Sunday after Trinity
1 Peter 4:8-11 - Sunday after Ascension
1 John 3:13-18 - Second Sunday after Trinity
1 John 5:4-12 - Sunday after Easter
1 John 4:16-21 - First Sunday after Trinity
1 Peter 5:5-11 - Third Sunday after Trinity
Ecclesiasticus 15:1-8 - St. John's Day

Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking authentic spirituality.

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A Note about Typos [Typographical Errors]:

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

Reason for the Church Postils

[1] The Church Postil, which Luther himself considered “The best of all his books,” was called forth by the exigency and need of the Church at the time. The majority of the preachers in those days were incapable of working out their own sermons, and were satisfied in reading the Epistle and Gospel lessons, and perhaps besides they read a sermon of another preacher to the congregation.

The sermons for this purpose were those by Tauler (d. 1361) and those by Geiler of Kaisersberg (d. 1510). But since the latter were not in all parts evangelical Luther concluded he would himself write an explanation of the pericopes of the Church year and place the same in the hands of the preachers for their use. This Luther did not only because the preachers were so incompetent, but also in order to prevent the work of the fanatics and the sects, never however in order to encourage preachers in their laziness to take their sermons from his and other good books, and then never pray, never study and never read and search the Scriptures.

The occasion for writing this work, however, was given by the Elector Frederick the Wise requesting Luther in 1520 to prepare a Postil for all the Sundays, especially for the season before Easter. At the same time he desired thereby to draw Luther from his many disputes to the positive teaching of the Gospel and this Luther knew. In 1521 his Advent Postil appeared at Wittenberg in Latin. It was translated at once into German (but not by Luther), and it appeared in 1522 under the title: “Postil or Explanation of the Epistles and Gospels for Advent.”

Interrupted by his journey to Worms Luther resumed the work on the Wartburg and labored there on the Christmas sermons. He was again interrupted by the Carlstadt disorder. Sept. 17, 1521, however the Postil was finished to Epiphany. This second part was “Completed in the Desert (on the Wartburg) St. Elizabeth’s Day (Nov. 21) 1521.” With it appeared that

classic document “A Short Instruction as to What We Are to Seek and Expect In the Gospel.” In 1525 the sermons from Epiphany to Easter appeared. Bucer translated this Winter Postil into Latin for the friends of the Gospel in Italy, which appeared in five books in Strassburg 1525-1527.

The complete Latin Postil was issued in 1530 and 1535 in Strassburg, and a new edition in 1617 at Frankfurt.

Gospels

First Sunday in Advent. Christ Enters Jerusalem: or Faith; Good Works; and the Spiritual Meaning of This Gospel.

Christ's Entry into Jerusalem

Text: Matthew 21:1-9.

1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.

3 And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

4 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

6 And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,

7 And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.

8 And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.

9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. Matthew 21:1-9

I. Concerning Faith

[1] In the preface I said that there are two things to be noted and considered in the Gospel lessons: first, the works of Christ presented to us as a gift and blessing on which our faith is to cling and exercise itself; secondly, the same works offered as an example and model for us to imitate and follow. All the Gospel lessons thus throw light first on faith and then on good works. We will therefore consider this Gospel under three heads: speaking first of faith; secondly of good works, and thirdly of the lesson story and its hidden meaning.

[2] This Gospel encourages and demands faith, for it prefigures Christ coming with grace, whom none may receive or accept save he who believes him to be the man, and has the mind, as this Gospel portrays in Christ. Nothing but the mercy, tenderness and kindness of Christ are here shown, and he who so receives and believes on him is saved. He sits not upon a proud steed, an animal of war, nor does he come in great pomp and power, but sitting upon an ass, an animal of peace fit only for burdens and labor and a help to man. He indicates by this that he comes not to frighten man, nor to drive or crush him, but to help him and to carry his burden for him. And although it was the custom of the country to ride on asses and to use horses for war, as the Scriptures often tell us, yet here the object is to show that the entrance of this king shall be meek and lowly. Again it also shows the pomp and conduct of the disciples towards Christ who bring the colt to Christ, set him thereon, and spread their garments in the way; also that of the multitude who also spread their garments in the way and cut branches from the trees. They manifested no fear nor terror, but only blessed confidence in him as one for whom they dared to do such things and who would take it kindly and readily consent to it.

[3] Again, he begins his journey and comes to the Mount of Olives to indicate that he comes out of pure mercy. For olive oil in the Scriptures signifies the grace of God that soothes and strengthens the soul as oil soothes and strengthens the body.

[4] Thirdly, there is no armor present, no war-cry, but songs and praise, rejoicing and thanksgiving to the Lord.

[5] Fourthly, Christ weeps, as Luke 19:41, writes, weeps over Jerusalem because she does not know nor receive such grace; yet he was so grieved at her loss that he did not deal harshly with her.

[6] Fifthly, his goodness and mercy are best shown when he quotes the words of the prophets, Isaiah 62:11; Zechariah 9:9, and tenderly invites men to believe and accept Christ, for the fulfilling of which prophecies the events of this Gospel took place and the story was written, as the Evangelist himself testifies. Therefore we must look upon this verse as the chief part of this Gospel, for in it Christ is pictured to us and we are told what we are to believe, and to expect of him, what we are to seek in him, and how we may be benefited by him.

[7] First he says: "Tell ye" the daughter of Zion. This is said to the ministry and a new sermon is given them to preach, namely, nothing but what the words following indicate, a right knowledge of Christ. Whoever preaches anything else is a wolf and deceiver. This is one of the verses in which the Gospel is promised of which Paul writes in Romans 1:2; for the Gospel is a sermon from Christ, as he is here placed before us, calling for faith in him.

[8] I have often said that there are two kinds of faith. First, a faith in which you indeed believe that Christ is such a man as he is described and proclaimed here and in all the Gospels, but do not believe that he is such a man for you, and are in doubt whether you have any part in him and think: Yes, he is such a man to others, to Peter, Paul, and the blessed saints; but who knows that he is such to me and that I may expect the same from him and may confide in it, as these saints did?

[9] Behold, this faith is nothing, it does not receive Christ nor enjoy him, neither can it feel any love and affection for him or from him. It is a faith about Christ and not in or of Christ, a faith which the devils also have as well as evil men. For who is it that does not believe that Christ is a gracious king to the saints? This vain and wicked faith is now taught by the pernicious synagogues of Satan. The universities (Paris and her sister schools), together with the monasteries and all Papists, say that this faith is sufficient to make Christians. In this way they virtually deny Christian faith, make heathen and Turks out of Christians, as St. Peter in 2 Peter 2:1 had

foretold: “There shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them.”

[10] In the second place he particularly mentions, “The daughter of Zion.” In these words he refers to the other, the true faith. For if he commands that the following words concerning Christ be proclaimed, there must be someone to hear, to receive, and to treasure them in firm faith. He does not say: Tell of the daughter of Zion, as if someone were to believe that she has Christ; but to her you are to say that she is to believe it of herself, and not in any wise doubt that it will be fulfilled as the words declare. That alone can be called Christian faith, which believes without wavering that Christ is the Savior not only to Peter and to the saints but also to you. Your salvation does not depend on the fact that you believe Christ to be the Savior of the godly, but that he is a Savior to you and has become your own.

[11] Such a faith will work in you love for Christ and joy in him, and good works will naturally follow. If they do not, faith is surely not present; for where faith is, there the Holy Ghost is and must work love and good works.

[12] This faith is condemned by apostate and rebellious Christians, the pope, bishops, priests, monks, and the universities. They call it arrogance to desire to be like the saints. Thereby they fulfill the prophecy of Peter in 2 Peter 2:2, where he says of these false teachers: “By reason of whom the way of the truth shall be evil spoken of.” For this reason, when they hear faith praised, they think love and good works are prohibited. In their great blindness they do not know what faith, love and good works are. If you would be a Christian you must permit these words to be spoken to you and hold fast to them and believe without a doubt that you will experience what they say. You must not consider it arrogance that in this you are like the saints, but rather a necessary humility and despair not of God’s grace but of your own worthiness. Under penalty of the loss of salvation, does God ask for boldness toward his proffered grace. If you do not desire to become holy like the saints, where will you abide? That would be arrogance if you desired to be saved by your own merit and works, as the Papists teach. They call that arrogance which is faith, and that faith which is arrogance; poor, miserable, deluded people!

[13] If you believe in Christ and in his advent, it is the highest praise and thanks to God to be holy. If you recognize, love, and magnify his grace and work in you, and cast aside and condemn self and the works of self, then you are a Christian. We say: “I believe in the holy Christian church, the communion of saints.” Do you desire to be a part of the holy Christian church and communion of saints, you must also be holy as she is, yet not of yourself but through Christ alone in whom all are holy.

[14] Thirdly he says: “Behold.” With this word he rouses us at once from sleep and unbelief as though he had something great, strange, or remarkable to offer, something we have long wished for and now would receive with joy. Such waking up is necessary for the reason that everything that concerns faith us against reason and nature; for example, how can nature and reason comprehend that such a one should be king of Jerusalem who enters in such poverty and humility as to ride upon a borrowed ass? How does such an advent become a great king? But faith is of the nature that it does not judge nor reason by what it sees or feels but by what it hears. It depends upon the Word alone and not on vision or sight. For this reason Christ was received as a king only by the followers of the word of the prophet, by the believers in Christ, by those who judged and received his kingdom not by sight but by the spirit — these are the true daughters of Zion. For it is not possible for those not to be offended in Christ who walk by sight and feeling and do not adhere firmly to the Word.

[15] Let us receive first and hold fast this picture in which the nature of faith is placed before us. For as the appearance and object of faith as here presented is contrary to nature and reason, so the same ineffectual and unreasonable appearance is to be found in all articles and instances of faith. It would be no faith if it appeared and acted as faith acts and as the words indicate. It is faith because it does not appear and deport itself as faith and as the words declare. If Christ had entered in splendor like a king of earth, the appearance and the words would have been according to nature and reason and would have seemed to the eye according to the words, but then there would have been no room for faith. He who believes in Christ must find riches in poverty, honor in dishonor, joy in sorrow, life in death, and hold fast to them in that faith which clings to the Word and expects such things.

[16] Fourthly: “Thy king.” Here he distinguishes this king from all other kings. It is thy king, he says, who was promised to you, whose own you are, who alone shall direct you, yet in the spirit and not in the body. It is he for whom you have yearned from the beginning, whom the fathers have desired to see, who will deliver you from all that has hitherto burdened, troubled, and held you captive. Oh, this is a comforting word to a believing heart, for without Christ, man is subjected to many raging tyrants who are not kings but murderers, at whose hands he suffers great misery and fear. These are the devil, the flesh, the world, sin, also the law and eternal death, by all of which the troubled conscience is burdened, is under bondage, and lives in anguish. For where there is sin there is no clear conscience; where there is no clear conscience, there is a life of uncertainty and an unquenchable fear of death and hell in the presence of which no real joy can exist in the heart, as Leviticus 26:36 says: “The sound of a driven leaf shall chase them.”

[17] Where the heart receives the king with a firm faith, it is secure and does not fear sin, death, hell, nor any other evil; for he well knows and in no wise doubts that this king is the Lord of life and death, of sin and grace, of hell and heaven, and that all things are in his hand. For this reason he became our king and came down to us that he might deliver us from these tyrants and rule over us himself alone. Therefore he who is under this king cannot be harmed either by sin, death, hell, Satan, man or any other creature. As his king lives without sin and is blessed, so must he be kept forever without sin and death in living blessedness.

[18] See, such great things are contained in these seemingly unimportant words: “Behold, thy king.” Such boundless gifts are brought by this poor and despised king. All this reason does not understand, nor nature comprehend, but faith alone does. Therefore he is called thy king; thine, who art vexed and harassed by sin, Satan, death and hell, the flesh and the world, so that thou mayest be governed and directed in the grace, in the spirit, in life, in heaven, in God. With this word, therefore, he demands faith in order that you may be certain that he is such a king to you, has such a kingdom, and has come and is proclaimed for this purpose. If you do not believe this of him, you will never acquire such faith by any work of yours. What you think of him you will have; what you expect of him you will find; and as you believe so shall it be to you. He will still remain what he is, the King of life, of grace, and of salvation, whether he is believed on or not.

[19] Fifthly: He “cometh.” Without doubt you do not come to him and bring him to you; he is too high and too far from you. With all your effort, work and labor you cannot come to him, lest you boast as though you had received him by your own merit and worthiness. No, dear friend, all merit and worthiness is out of the question, and there is nothing but demerit and unworthiness on your side, nothing but grace and mercy on his. The poor and the rich here come together, as Proverbs 22:2 says.

[20] By this are condemned all those infamous doctrines of free will, which come from the pope, universities and monasteries. For all their teaching consists in that we are to begin and lay the first stone. We should by the power of free will first seek God, come to him, run after him and acquire his grace. Beware, beware of this poison! It is nothing but the doctrine of devils, by which all the world is betrayed. Before you can cry to God and seek him God must come to you and must have found you, as Paul says, Romans 10:14-15: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach except they be sent?” God must lay the first stone and begin with you, if you are to seek him and pray to him. He is present when you begin to seek. If he were not you could not accomplish anything but mere sin, and the greater the sin, the greater and holier the work you will attempt, and you will become a hardened hypocrite.

[21] You ask, how shall we begin to be godly and what shall we do that God may begin his work in us? Answer: Do you not understand, it is not for you to work or to begin to be godly, as little as it is to further and complete it. Everything that you begin is in and remains sin, though it shines ever so brightly; you cannot do anything but sin, do what you will. Hence, the teaching of all the schools and monasteries is misleading, when they teach man to begin to pray and do good works, to found something, to give, to sing, to become spiritual and thereby to seek God’s grace.

[22] You say, however: Then I must sin from necessity, if by my free will I work and live without God? and I could not avoid sin, no matter what I would do? Answer: Truly, it is so, that you must remain in sin, do what you will, and that everything is sin you do alone out of your own free will. For if out of your own free will you might avoid sin and do that which pleases God, what need would you have of Christ? He would be a fool to

shed his blood for your sin, if you yourself were so free and able to do aught that is not sin. From this you learn how the universities and monasteries with their teachings of free will and good works, do nothing else but darken the truth of God so that we know not what Christ is, what we are and what our condition is. They lead the whole world with them into the abyss of hell, and it is indeed time that we eradicate from the earth all chapters and monasteries.

[23] Learn then from this Gospel what takes place when God begins to make us godly, and what the first step is in becoming godly. There is no other beginning than that your king comes to you and begins to work in you. It is done in this way: The Gospel must be the first, this must be preached and heard. In it you hear and learn how all your works count for nothing before God and that everything is sinful that you work and do. Your king must first be in you and rule you. Behold, here is the beginning of your salvation; you relinquish your works and despair of yourself, because you hear and see that all you do is sin and amounts to nothing, as the Gospel tells you, and you receive your king in faith, cling to him, implore his grace and find consolation in his mercy alone. But when you hear and accept this it is not your power, but God's grace, that renders the Gospel fruitful in you, so that you believe that you and your works are nothing. For you see how few there are who accept it, so that Christ weeps over Jerusalem and, as now the Papists are doing, not only refuse it, but condemn such doctrine, for they will not have all their works to be sin, they desire to lay the first stone and rage and fume against the Gospel.

[24] Again, it is not by virtue of your power or your merit that the Gospel is preached and your king comes. God must send him out of pure grace. Hence, not greater wrath of God exists than where he does not send the Gospel; there is only sin, error and darkness, there man may do what he will. Again, there is no greater grace, than where he sends his Gospel, for there must be grace and mercy in its train, even if not all, perhaps only a few, receive it. Thus the pope's government is the most terrible wrath of God, so that Peter calls them the children of execration, for they teach no Gospel, but mere human doctrine of their own works as we, alas, see in all the chapters, monasteries and schools.

[25] This is what is meant by "Thy king cometh." You do not seek him, but he seeks you. You do not find him, he finds you. For the preachers come

from him, not from you; their sermons come from him, not from you; your faith comes from him, not from you; everything that faith works in you comes from him, not from you; and where he does not come, you remain outside; and where there is no Gospel there is no God, but only sin and damnation, free will may do, suffer, work and live as it may and can. Therefore you should not ask, where to begin to be godly; there is no beginning, except where the king enters and is proclaimed.

[26] Sixthly, he cometh “unto thee.” Thee, thee, what does this mean? Is it not enough that he is your king? If he is yours how can he say, he comes to you? All this is stated by the prophet to present Christ in an endearing way and invite to faith. It is not enough that Christ saves us from the rule and tyranny of sin, death and hell, and becomes our king, but he offers himself to us for our possession, that whatever he is and has may be ours, as St. Paul writes, Romans 8:32: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?”

[27] Hence the daughter of Zion has twofold gifts from Christ. The first is faith and the Holy Spirit in the heart, by which she becomes pure and free from sin. The other is Christ himself, that she may glory in the blessings given by Christ, as though everything Christ is and has were her own, and that she may rely upon Christ as upon her own heritage. Of this St. Paul speaks, Romans 8:34: “Christ maketh intercession for us.” If he maketh intercession for us he will receive us and we will receive him as our Lord. And 1 Corinthians 1:30: “Christ was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” Of the twofold gifts Isaiah speaks in Isaiah 40:1-2: “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem; and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she hath received of Jehovah’s hand double for all her sins.” Behold, this means that he comes to you, for your welfare, as your own; in that he is your king, you receive grace from him into your heart, so that he delivers you from sin and death, and thus becomes your king and you his subject. In coming to you he becomes your own, so that you partake of his treasures, as a bride, by the jewelry the bridegroom puts on her, becomes partner of his possessions. Oh, this is a joyful, comforting form of speech! Who would despair and be

afraid of death and hell, if he believes in these words and wins Christ as his own?

[28] Seventhly: “Meek.” This word is to be especially noticed, and it comforts the sin-burdened conscience. Sin naturally makes a timid conscience, which fears God and flees, as Adam did in Paradise, and cannot endure the coming of God, the knowing and feeling that God is an enemy of sin and severely punishes it. Hence it flees and is afraid, when God is only mentioned, and is concerned lest he go at it tooth and nail. In order that such delusion and timidity may not pursue us he gives us the comforting promise that this king comes meekly. As if he would say: Do not flee and despair for he does not come now as he came to Adam, to Cain, at the flood, at Babel, to Sodom and Gomorrah, nor as he came to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai; he comes not in wrath, does not wish to reckon with you and demand his debt. All wrath is laid aside, nothing but tenderness and kindness remain. He will now deal with you so that your heart will have pleasure, love and confidence in him, that henceforth you will much more abide with him and find refuge in him than you feared him and fled from him before. Behold, he is nothing but meekness to you, he is a different man, he acts as if he were sorry ever to have made you afraid and caused you to flee from his punishment and wrath. He desires to reassure and comfort you and bring you to himself by love and kindness. This means to speak consolingly to a sin-burdened conscience, this means to preach Christ rightly and to proclaim his Gospel. How is it possible that such a form of speech should not make a heart glad and drive away all fear of sin, death and hell, and establish a free, secure and good conscience that will henceforth gladly do all and more than is commanded.

[29] The Evangelist, however, altered the words of the prophet slightly. The prophet says in Zechariah 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass.” The Evangelist expresses the invitation to joy and exultation briefly in these words: “Tell the daughter of Zion.” Further on he leaves out the words: “just and having salvation.” Again the prophet says, “he is lowly,” the Evangelist, “he is meek.” The prophet says: “upon the colt, the foal of an ass,” he mentions the last word in the plural number; the

Evangelist says: “upon the colt, the foal of an ass that is used for daily and burden-bearing labor.” How shall we harmonize these accounts?

[30] First, we must keep in mind that the Evangelists do not quote the prophets word by word, it is enough for them to have the same meaning and to show the fulfillment, directing us to the Scriptures so that we ourselves may read, what they omit, and see for ourselves that nothing was written which is not richly fulfilled. It is natural, also, that he who has the substance and the fulfillment, does not care so much for the words. Thus we often find that the Evangelists quote the prophets somewhat changed, yet it is done without detriment to the understanding and intent of the original.

[31] To invite the daughter of Zion and the daughter of Jerusalem to joy and gladness the prophet abundantly gives us to understand that the coming of this king is most comforting to every sin-burdened conscience, since he removes all fear and trembling, so that men do not flee from him and look upon him as a severe judge, who will press them with the law, as Moses did, so that they could not have a joyful confidence in God, as the knowledge and realization of sin naturally come from the law. But he would arouse them with this first word to expect from him all grace and goodness. For what other reason should he invite them to rejoice and command them even to shout and be exceeding glad! He tells this command of God to all who are in sorrow and fear of God. He also shows that it is God’s will and full intent, and demands that they entertain joyful confidence in him against the natural fear and alarm. And this is the natural voice of the Gospel which the prophet here begins to preach, as Christ speaks likewise in the Gospel and the apostles always admonish to rejoice in Christ, as we shall hear further on. It is also full of meaning that he comes from the Mount of Olives. We shall notice that this grace on account of its greatness might be called a mountain of grace, a grace which is not only a drop or handful, but grace abundant and heaped up like a mountain.

[32] He mentions the people twice while the Evangelist says only once, daughter of Zion. For it is one people, daughter of Zion and daughter of Jerusalem, namely the people of the same city, who believe in Christ and receive him. As I said before, the Evangelist quotes the Scriptures only briefly and invites us to read them ourselves and find out more there for ourselves. That the Evangelist does not invite to joy like the prophet, but simply says: Tell it to the daughter of Zion, he does it to show how the joy

and exultation shall be carried on. None should expect bodily but spiritual joy, a joy that can be gathered alone from the Word by the faith of the heart. From a worldly aspect there was nothing joyful in Christ's entrance, his spiritual advent must be preached and believed; that is, his meekness; this makes man joyful and glad.

[33] That the prophet gives Christ three titles, lowly, just, and having salvation, while the Evangelist has only one, meek, is again done for brevity's sake, he suggests more than he explains. It seems to me that the Holy Ghost led the apostles and evangelists to abbreviate passages of the Scriptures for the purpose that we might be kept close to the holy Scriptures, and not set a bad example to future exegetes, who make many words outside the Scriptures and thereby draw us secretly from the Scriptures to human doctrines. As to say: If I spread the Scriptures verbatim everyone will follow the example and it will come to pass that we would read more in other books than in the holy writings of the principal book, and there would be no end to the writing of books and we would be carried from one book to another, until, finally, we would get away from the holy Scriptures altogether, as has happened in fact. Hence, with such incomplete quotations he directs us to the original book where they can be found complete, so that there is no need for everyone to make a separate book and leave the first one.

[34] We notice, therefore, that it is the intention of all the apostles and evangelists in the New Testament to direct and drive us to the Old Testament, which they call the Holy Scriptures proper. For the New Testament was to be only the incarnate living Word and not scripture. Hence Christ did not write anything himself, but gave the command to preach and extend the Gospel, which lay hidden in the Scriptures, as we shall hear on Epiphany Sunday.

[35] In the Hebrew language the two words meek and lowly do not sound unlike, and mean not a poor man who is wanting in money and property, but who in his heart is humble and wretched, in whom truly no anger nor haughtiness is to be found, but meekness and sympathy. And if we wish to obtain the full meaning of this word, we must take it as Luke uses it, who describes how Christ at his entrance wept and wailed over Jerusalem. We interpret therefore the words lowly and meek in the light of Christ's conduct. How does he appear? His heart is full of sorrow and

compassion toward Jerusalem. There is no anger or revenge, but he weeps out of tenderness at their impending doom. None was so bad that he did or wished him harm. His sympathy makes him so kind and full of pity that he thinks not of anger, of haughtiness, of threatening or revenge, but offers boundless compassion and good will. This is what the prophet calls lowly and the Evangelist meek. Blessed he who thus knows Christ in him and believes in him. He cannot be afraid of him, but has a true and comforting confidence in him and entrance to him. He does not try to find fault either, for as he believes, he finds it; these words do not lie nor deceive.

[36] The word “just” does not mean here the justice with which God judges, which is called the severe justice of God. For if Christ came to us with this who could stand before him? Who could receive him, since even the saints cannot endure it? The joy and grace of this entrance would thereby be changed into the greatest fear and terror. But that grace is meant, by which he makes us just or righteous. I wish the word *justus*, *justitia*, were not used for the severe judicial justice; for originally it means godly, godliness. When we say, he is a pious man, the Scriptures express it, he is *justus*, justified or just. But the severe justice of God is called in the Scriptures: Severity, judgment, tribunal. The prophet’s meaning, therefore, is this: Thy king cometh to thee pious or just, i.e., he comes to make you godly through himself and his grace; he knows well that you are not godly. Your piety should consist not in your deeds, but in his grace and gift, so that you are just and godly through him. In this sense St. Paul speaks, Romans 3:26: “That he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.” That is, Christ alone is pious before God and he alone makes us pious. Also, Romans 1:17: “For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith,” that is the godliness of God, namely his grace and mercy, by which he makes us godly before him, is preached in the Gospel. You see in this verse from the prophet that Christ is preached for us unto righteousness, that he comes godly and just, and we become godly and just by faith.

[37] Note this fact carefully, that when you find in the Scriptures the word God’s justice, it is not to be understood of the self-existing, imminent justice of God, as the Papists and many of the fathers held, lest you be frightened; but, according to the usage of Holy Writ, it means the revealed grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ in us by means of which we

are considered godly and righteous before him. Hence it is called God's justice or righteousness effected not by us, but by God through grace, just as God's work, God's wisdom, God's strength, God's word, God's mouth, signifies what he works and speaks in us. All this is demonstrated clearly by St. Paul, Romans 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God (which works in us and strengthens us) unto salvation to everyone that believeth. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God," as it is written in Habakkuk 2:4: "The righteous shall live by his faith." Here you see that he speaks of the righteousness of faith and calls the same the righteousness of God, preached in the Gospel, since the Gospel teaches nothing else but that he who believes has grace and is righteous before God and is saved. In the same manner you should understand Psalm 31:1: "Deliver me in thy righteousness," i.e. by thy grace, which makes me godly and righteous. The word Savior or Redeemer compels us to accept this as the meaning of the little word "just." For if Christ came with his severe justice he would not save anyone, but condemn all, as they are all sinners and unjust. But now he comes to make not only just and righteous, but also blessed, all who receive him, that he alone as the just one and the Savior be offered graciously to all sinners out of unmerited kindness and righteousness.

[38] When the Evangelist calls his steed a burden-bearing and working foal of an ass he describes the animal the prophets mean. He wants to say: The prophecy is fulfilled in this burden-bearing animal. It was not a special animal trained for this purpose, as according to the country's custom riding animals are trained, and when the prophet speaks of the foal of the ass it is his meaning that it was a colt, but not a colt of a horse.

II. Concerning Good Works.

[39] We have said enough of faith. We now come to consider good works. We receive Christ not only as a gift by faith, but also as an example of love toward our neighbor, whom we are to serve as Christ serves us. Faith brings and gives Christ to you with all his possessions. Love gives you to your neighbor with all your possessions. These two things constitute a true and complete Christian life; then follow suffering and persecution for such faith and love, and out of these grows hope in patience.

[40] You ask, perhaps, what are the good works you are to do to your neighbor? Answer: They have no name. As the good works Christ does to you have no name, so your good works are to have no name.

[41] Whereby do you know them? Answer: They have no name, so that there may be no distinction made and they be not divided, that you might do some and leave others undone. You shall give yourself up to him altogether, with all you have, the same as Christ did not simply pray or fast for you. Prayer and fasting are not the works he did for you, but he gave himself up wholly to you, with praying, fasting, all works and suffering, so that there is nothing in him that is not yours and was not done for you. Thus it is not your good work that you give alms or that you pray, but that you offer yourself to your neighbor and serve him, wherever he needs you and every way you can, be it with alms, prayer, work, fasting, counsel, comfort, instruction, admonition, punishment, apologizing, clothing, food, and lastly with suffering and dying for him. Pray, where are now such works to be found in Christendom?

[42] I wish to God I had a voice like a thunderbolt, that I might preach to all the world, and tear the word “good works” out of people’s hearts, mouths, ears, books, or at least give them the right understanding of it. All the world sings, speaks, writes and thinks of good works, everyone wishes to exercise themselves in good works, and yet, good works are done nowhere, no one has the right understanding of good works. Oh, that all such pulpits in all the world were cast into the fire and burned to ashes! How they mislead people with their good works! They call good works what God has not commanded, as pilgrimages, fasting, building and decorating their churches in honor of the saints, saying mass, paying for vigils, praying with rosaries, much prattling and bawling in churches, turning nun, monk, priest, using special food, raiment or dwelling, — who can enumerate all the horrible abominations and deceptions? This is the pope’s government and holiness.

[43] If you have ears to hear and a mind to observe, pray, listen and learn for God’s sake what good works are and mean. A good work is good for the reason that it is useful and benefits and helps the one for whom it is done; why else should it be called good! For there is a difference between good works and great, long, numerous, beautiful works. When you throw a big stone a great distance it is a great work, but whom does it benefit? If you

can jump, run, fence well, it is a fine work, but whom does it benefit? Whom does it help, if you wear a costly coat or build a fine house?

[44] And to come to our Papists' work, what does it avail if they put silver or gold on the walls, wood and stone in the churches? Who would be made better, if each village had ten bells, as big as those at Erfurt? Whom would it help if all the houses were convents and monasteries as splendid as the temple of Solomon? Who is benefited if you fast for St. Catherine, St. Martin or any other saint? Whom does it benefit, if you are shaved half or wholly, if you wear a gray or a black cap? Of what use were it if all people held mass every hour? What benefit is it if in one church, as at Meissen, they sing day and night without interruption? Who is better for it, if every church had more silver, pictures and jewelry than the churches of Halle and Wittenberg? It is folly and deception, men's lies invented these things and called them good works; they all pretend they serve God thus and pray for the people and their sins, just as if they helped God with their property or as if his saints were in need of our work. Sticks and stones are not as rude and mad as we are. A tree bears fruit, not for itself, but for the good of man and beast, and these fruits are its good works.

[45] Hear then how Christ explains good works, Matthew 7:12: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye unto them; for this is the law and the prophets." Do you hear now what are the contents of the whole law and of all the prophets? You are not to do good to God and to his dead saints, they are not in need of it; still less to wood and stone, to which it is of no use, nor is it needed, but to men, to men, to men. Do you not hear? To men you should do everything that you would they should do to you.

[46] I would not have you build me a church or tower or cast bells for me. I would not have you construct for me an organ with fourteen stops and ten rows of flute work. Of this I can neither eat nor drink, support neither wife nor child, keep neither house nor land. You may feast my eyes on these and tickle my ears, but what shall I give to my children? Where are the necessaries of life? O madness, madness! The bishops and lords, who should check it, are the first in such folly, and one blind leader leads the other. Such people remind me of young girls playing with dolls and of boys riding on sticks. Indeed, they are nothing but children and players with dolls, and riders of hobbyhorses.

[47] Keep in mind, that you need not do any work for God nor for the departed saints, but you ask and receive good from him in faith. Christ has done and accomplished everything for you, atoned for your sins, secured grace and life and salvation. Be content with this, only think how he can become more and more your own and strengthen your faith. Hence direct all the good you can do and your whole life to the end that it be good; but it is good only when it is useful to other people and not to yourself. You need it not, since Christ has done and given for you all that you might seek and desire for yourself, here and hereafter, be it forgiveness of sins, merit of salvation or whatever it may be called. If you find a work in you by which you benefit God or his saints or yourself and not your neighbor, know that such a work is not good.

[48] A man is to live, speak, act, hear, suffer and die for the good of his wife and child, the wife for the husband, the children for the parents, the servants for their masters, the masters for their servants, the government for its subjects, the subjects for the government, each one for his fellowman, even for his enemies, so that one is the other's hand, mouth, eye, foot, even heart and mind. This is a truly Christian and good work, which can and shall be done at all times, in all places, toward all people. You notice the Papists' works in organs, pilgrimages, fasting, etc., are really beautiful, great, numerous, long, wide and heavy works, but there is no good, useful and helpful work among them and the proverb may be applied to them: It is already bad.

[49] But beware of their acute subtleties, when they say: If these works are not good to our neighbor in his body, they do spiritual good to his soul, since they serve God and propitiate him and secure his grace. Here it is time to say: You lie as wide as your mouth. God is to be worshipped not with works, but by faith, faith must do everything that is to be done between God and us. There may be more faith in a miller-boy than in all the Papists, and it may gain more than all priests and monks do with their organs and jugglery, even if they had more organs than these now have pipes. He who has faith can pray for his fellowman, he who has no faith can pray for nothing. It is a satanic lie to call such outward pomp spiritually good and useful works. A miller's maid, if she believes, does more good, accomplishes more, and I would trust her more, if she takes the sack from the horse, than all the priests and monks, if they kill themselves singing day

and night and torment themselves to the quick. You great, coarse fools, would you expect to help the people with your faithless life and distribute spiritual goods, when there is on earth no more miserable, needy, godless people than you are? You should be called, not spiritual, but spiritless.

[50] Behold, such good works Christ teaches here by his example. Tell me what does he do to serve himself and to do good to himself? The prophet directs all to the daughter of Zion and says: “He cometh to thee,” and that he comes as a Savior, just and meek, is all for you, to make you just and blessed. None had asked nor bidden him to come; but he came, he comes of his own free will, out of pure love, to do good and to be useful and helpful. Now his work is manifold, it embraces all that is necessary to make us just and blessed. But justification and salvation imply that he delivers us from sin, death, hell, and does it not only for his friends, but also for his enemies, yea, for none but his enemies, yet he does it so tenderly, that he weeps over those who oppose such work and will not receive him. Hence he leaves nothing undone to blot out their sin, conquer death and hell and make them just and blessed. He retains nothing for himself, and is content that he already has God and is blessed, — thus he serves only us according to the will of his Father who wishes him to do so.

[51] See then how he keeps the law: “Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye unto them.” Is it not true, everyone heartily wishes that another might step between man and his sin, take it upon himself and blot it out, so that it would no more sting his conscience, and deliver him from death and hell? What does everyone desire more deeply than to be free from death and hell? Who would not be free from sin and have a good, joyful conscience before God? Do we not see how all men have striven for this, with prayer, fastings, pilgrimages, donations, monasteries and priesthood? Who urges them? It is sin, death, hell, from which they would be saved. And if there were a physician at the end of the world, who could help here, all lands would become deserted and everyone would hasten to this physician and risk property, body and life to make the journey. And if Christ himself, like we, were surrounded by death, sin and hell, he would wish that someone would help him out of it, take his sin away and give him a good conscience. Since he would have others do this for him, he proceeds and does it for others, as the law says, he takes upon himself our sins, goes into death and overcomes for us sin, death and hell,

so that henceforth all who believe in him, and call upon his name, shall be justified and saved, be above sin and death, have a good, joyful, secure and intrepid conscience forever, as he says in John 8:51: "If a man keep my word, he shall never see death," and John 11:25-26: "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth on me, shall never die."

[52] Behold, this is the great joy, to which the prophet invites, when he says: "Rejoice greatly, O

daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!" This is the righteousness and the salvation for which the Savior and King comes. These are the good works done for us by which he fulfills the law. Hence the death of the believer in Christ is not death but a sleep, for he neither sees nor tastes death, as is said in Psalm 4:8: "In peace will I both lay me down and sleep, for thou, Jehovah, alone makest me dwell in safety." Therefore death is also called asleep in the Scriptures.

[53] But the Papists and their disciples, who would get rid of death, sin and hell by their own works and satisfaction, must remain in them eternally for they undertake to do for themselves what Christ alone did and could do, of whom they should expect it by faith. Therefore they are foolish, deluded people who do works for Christ and his saints, which they should do for their neighbor. Again, what they should expect of Christ by faith they would find in themselves and have gone so far as to spend on stone and wood, on bells and incense what they should spend on their neighbors. They go on and do good to God and his saints, fast for them and dedicate to them prayers, and at the same time leave their neighbor as he is, thinking only, let us first help ourselves! Then comes the pope and sells them his letter of indulgence and leads them into heaven, not into God's heaven, but into the pope's heaven, which is the abyss of hell. Behold, this is the fruit of unbelief and ignorance of Christ, this is our reward for having left the Gospel in obscurity and setting up human doctrine in its place. I repeat it, I wish all pulpits in the world lay in ashes, and the monasteries, convents, churches, hermitages and chapels, and everything were ashes and powder, because of this shameful misleading of souls.

[54] Now you know what good works are. Think of it and act accordingly. As to sin, death and hell, take care that you augment them not,

for you cannot do anything here, your good works will avail nothing, you must have someone else to work for you. To Christ himself such works properly belong, you must consent to it that he who comes is the king of Zion, that he alone is the just Savior. In him and through him you will blot out sin and death through faith. Therefore, if anyone teaches you to blot out your own sin by works, beware of him.

[55] When in opposition to this they quote verses of the Bible like Dan. 4:27: “Break off thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor,” and Peter 4:8: “Love covereth a multitude of sins,” and the like, be not deceived, such passages do not mean that the works could blot out or remove sin, for this would rob Christ of his word and advent, and do away with his whole work; but these works are a sure work of faith, which in Christ receives remission of sins and the victory over death. For it is impossible for him who believes in Christ, as a just Savior, not to love and to do good. If, however, he does not do good nor love, it is sure that faith is not present. Therefore man knows by the fruits what kind of a tree it is, and it is proved by love and deed whether Christ is in him and he believes in Christ. As St. Peter says in 2 Peter 1:10: “Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble,” that is, if you bravely practice good works you will be sure and cannot doubt that God has called and chosen you.

[56] Thus faith blots out sin in a different manner than love. Faith blots it out of itself, while love or good works prove and demonstrate that faith has done so and is present, as St. Paul says, 1 Corinthians 13:2: “And if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” Why? Without doubt, because faith is not present where there is no love, they are not separate the one from the other. See to it then that you do not err, and be misled from faith to works.

[57] Good works should be done, but we should not confide in them, instead of in Christ’s work. We should not touch sin, death and hell with our works, but direct them from us to the Savior, to the king of Zion, who rides upon an ass. He who knows how to treat sin, death and hell, will blot out sin, overcome death, and subdue hell. Do you permit him to perform these works while you serve your neighbor, — you will then have a sure testimony of faith in the Savior who overcame death. So love and good

works will blot out your sin for you that you may realize it; as faith blots it out before God where you do not realize it. But more of this later.

The Lesson Story and the False Notions the Jews Held Concerning the Messiah

[58] In the story of this Gospel we will first direct our attention to the reason why the Evangelist quotes the words of the prophet, in which was described long ago and in clear, beautiful and wonderful words, the bodily, public entrance and advent of our Lord Jesus Christ to the people of Zion or Jerusalem, as the text says. In this the prophet wanted to show and explain to his people and to all the world, who the Messiah is and how and in what manner he would come and manifest himself, and offers a plain and visible sign in this that he says: “Behold, thy king cometh unto thee, meek, and riding upon an ass,” etc., so that we would be certain of it, and not dispute about the promised Messiah or Christ, nor wait for another. He therewith anticipates the mistaken idea of the Jews, who thought, because there were such glorious things said and written of Christ and his kingdom, he would manifest himself in great worldly pomp and glory, as a king against their enemies, especially the Roman empire, to the power of which they were subject, and would overthrow its power and might, and in their place set up the Jews as lords and princes. They thus expected nothing in the promised Christ but a worldly kingdom and deliverance from bodily captivity. Even today they cling to such dreams and therefore they do not believe in Christ, because they have not seen such bodily relief and worldly power. They were led to this notion, and strengthened in it, by their false priests, preachers and doctors, who perverted the Scriptures concerning Christ and interpreted them according to their own worldly understanding as referring to bodily, worldly things, because they would fain be great earthly lords.

[59] But the dear prophets plainly foretold and faithfully gave warning that we should not think of such an earthly kingdom nor of bodily salvation, but look back and pay attention to the promises of a spiritual kingdom and of a redemption from the pernicious fall of mankind in paradise; of which it is said in Genesis 2:17: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” The first prophecy of Christ is also against it, Genesis 3:15: “The seed of woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.” Which means, he shall deliver all mankind from the power of the devil and the captivity of sin and eternal

death and, instead bring justification before God and eternal life. Hence this prophet calls him “just and having salvation.” This truly is a different salvation than that of bodily freedom, bodily power and glory, the end of which is death, and under which everything must abide eternally. They ought to have considered this and rejoiced in it, since the prophets had heartily yearned and prayed for it, and this prophet admonishes to such great joy and gladness. But they and their shameless preachers made a temporal affair out of this misery and unhappiness, as if it were a joke about sin and death or the power of the devil, and considered it the greatest misfortune that they lost their temporal freedom and were made subject to the emperor and required to pay taxes to him.

[60] The Evangelist therefore quotes this saying of the prophet, to punish the blindness and false notions of those who seek bodily and temporal blessings in Christ and his Gospel, and to convince them by the testimony of the prophet, who shows clearly what kind of a king Christ was and what they should seek in him, in that he calls him just and having salvation and yet adds this sign of his coming by which they are to know him: “He cometh to thee meek, and riding upon a colt, the foal of an ass.” As if to say: A poor, miserable, almost beggarly horseman upon a borrowed ass who is kept by the side of its mother not for ostentation but for service. With this he desires to lead them away from gazing and waiting for a glorious entrance of a worldly king. And he offers such signs that they might not doubt the Christ, nor take offense at his beggarly appearance. All pomp and splendor are to be left out of sight, and the heart and the eyes directed to the poor rider, who became poor and miserable and made himself of no kingly reputation that they might not seek the things of this world in him but the eternal, as is indicated by the words, “just and having salvation.”

[61] This verse first clearly and effectively does away with the Jewish dream and delusion of a worldly reign of the Messiah and of their temporal freedom. It takes away all cause and support for excuse, if they do not receive Christ, and cuts off all hope and expectation for another, because it clearly and distinctly announces and admonishes that he would come on this wise and that he has fulfilled everything. We Christians thus have against the Jews a firm ground and certain title and conviction from their own Scripture that this Messiah, who thus came to them, is the Christ

predicted by the prophets and that no other shall come, and that in the vain hope of another's coming they forfeit their temporal and eternal salvation.

III. The Spiritual Interpretation of this Gospel.

[62] This has been said about the history of this Gospel. Let us now treat of its hidden or spiritual meaning. Here we are to remember that Christ's earthly walk and conversation signify his spiritual walk; his bodily walk therefore signifies the Gospel and the faith. As with his bodily feet he walked from one town to another, so by preaching he came into the world. Hence this lesson shows distinctly what the Gospel is and how it is to be preached, what it does and effects in the world, and its history is a fine, pleasing picture and image of how the kingdom of Christ is carried on by the office of preaching. We will consider this point by point. "And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and came unto Bethphage, unto the Mount of Olives."

[63] All the apostles declare that Christ would become man at the end of the world, and that the Gospel would be the last preaching, as is written in 1 John 2:18: "Little children, it is the last hour, and as ye have heard that Antichrist cometh, even now hath there arisen many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour," etc. He mentions here the Antichrist. Antichrist in Greek means he who teaches and acts against the true Christ. Again, 1 Corinthians 10:11: "All these things were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come." As the prophets came to man before the first advent of Christ, so the apostles are the last messengers of God, sent before the last advent of Christ at the last day to preach it faithfully. Christ indicates this by not sending out his apostles to fetch the ass, until he drew nigh unto Jerusalem, where he was now to enter. Thus the Gospel is brought into this world by the apostles shortly before the last day, when Christ will enter with his flock into the eternal Jerusalem.

[64] This agrees with the word "Bethphage," which means, as some say, mouth-house, for St. Paul says in Romans 1:2, that the Gospel was promised afore in the Holy Scriptures, but it was not preached orally and publicly until Christ came and sent out his apostles. Therefore the church is a mouth-house, not a pen-house, for since Christ's advent that Gospel is preached orally which before was hidden in written books. It is the way of

the Gospel and of the New Testament that it is to be preached and discussed orally with a living voice. Christ himself wrote nothing, nor did he give command to write, but to preach orally. Thus the apostles were not sent out until Christ came to his mouth-house, that is, until the time had come to preach orally and to bring the Gospel from dead writing and pen-work to the living voice and mouth. From this time the church is rightly called Bethphage, since she has and hears the living voice of the Gospel.

[65] The sending shows that the kingdom of Christ is contained in the public oral office of preaching, which shall not stand still nor remain in one place, as before it was hidden with the Jewish nation alone in the Scriptures and foretold by the prophets for the future, but should go openly, free and untrammelled into all the world.

[66] The Mount of Olives signifies the great mercy and grace of God, that sent forth the apostles and brought the Gospel to us. Olive oil in Holy Writ signifies the grace and mercy of God, by which the soul and the conscience are comforted and healed, as the oil soothes and softens and heals the wounds and defects of the body. And from what was said above, we learn what unspeakable grace it is that we know and have Christ, the justified Savior and king. Therefore he does not send into the level plain, nor upon a deserted, rocky mountain, but unto the Mount of Olives, to show to all the world the mercy which prompted him to such grace. There is not simply a drop or handful of it, as formerly, but because of its great abundance it might be called a mountain. The prophet also calls in Psalm 36:6, such grace God's mountain and says: "Thy righteousness is like the mountains of God," that is, great and abundant, rich and overflowing. This he can understand who considers what it means that Christ bears our sin, and conquers death and hell and does everything for us, that is necessary to our salvation. He does not expect us to do anything for it, but to exercise it towards our neighbor, to know thereby whether we have such faith in Christ or not. Hence the Mount of Olives signifies that the Gospel was not preached nor sent until the time of grace came; from this time on the great grace goes out into the world through the apostles. "Then Jesus sent two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village that is over against you."

[67] These two disciples represent all the apostles and preachers, sent into the world. The evangelical sermon is to consist of two witnesses, as St. Paul says in Romans 3:21: "A righteousness of God has been

manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.” Thus we see how the apostles introduce the law and the prophets, who prophesied of Christ, so that it might be fulfilled that Moses spoke in Deuteronomy 17:6 and Christ in Matthew 18:16: “At the mouth of two witnesses or three, every word may be established.”

[68] When he says: “Go into the village over against you”, not mentioning the name, it signifies that the apostles are not sent to one nation alone, as the Jews were separated from the Gentiles and alone bore the name “People of God” and God’s word and promise of the future Messiah were with them alone. But now when Christ comes he sends his preachers into all the world and commands them to go straight forward and preach everywhere to all the heathen, and to teach, reprove, without distinction, whomsoever they meet, however great, and wise and learned and holy, they may be. When he calls the great city of Jerusalem a village and does not give her name, he does it for the reason that the name Jerusalem has a holy significance. The kingdom of heaven and salvation are the spiritual Jerusalem, that Christ enters. But the apostles were sent into the world amongst their enemies who have no name.

[69] The Lord here comforts and strengthens the apostles and all ministers, when he calls the great city a village, and adds, she is over against you. As if he would say, like Matthew 10:16: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of the wolves”, I send you into the world, which is against you, and seems to be something great, for there are kings, princes, the learned, the rich and everything that is great in the world and amounts to anything, this is against you. And as he says in Matthew 10:22: “Ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake.” But never fear, go on, it is hardly a village, do not be moved by great appearances, preach bravely against it and fear no one. For it is not possible that he should preach the gospel truth, who fears the multitude and does not despise all that the world esteems highly. It is here decreed that this village is against the apostles, therefore they should not be surprised if the great, high, rich, wise and holy orders do not accept their word. It must be so, the village must be against them; again, the apostles must despise them and appear before them, for the Lord will have no flatterer as a preacher. He does not say: Go around the village, or to the one side of it: Go in bravely and tell them what they do not like to hear.

[70] How very few there are now who enter the village: that is against them. We gladly go into the towns that are on our side. The Lord might have said: Go ye into the village before you. That would have been a pleasing and customary form of speech. But he would indicate this mystery of the ministry, hence he speaks in an unusual way: Go into the village that is over against you. That is: Preach to them that are disposed to prosecute and kill you. You shall merit such thanks and not try to please them, for such is the way of hypocrites and not that of the evangelists. “And straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her; loose them and bring them unto me.”

[71] This is also offered as consolation to ministers that they should not worry as to who would believe or receive them. For it is decreed, Isaiah 55:11: “My word shall not return unto me void.” And St. Paul says, Colossians 1:6: “The Gospel is in all the world bearing fruit.” It cannot be otherwise than that where the Gospel is preached there will be some, who accept it and believe. This is the meaning of the mystery that the apostles shall find the ass forthwith and the colt, if they only go. As if he would say: Only go and preach, care not who they are that hear you. I will care for that. The world will be against you, but be not afraid, you will find such as will hear and follow you. You do not know them yet, but I know them; you preach, and leave the rest to me.

[72] Behold, in this way he consoles them that they should not cease to preach against the world, though it withstands and contradicts them ever so hard, it shall not be in vain. You find people now who believe we should be silent and cause no stir, because it is impossible to convert the world. It is all in vain, they say; pope, priests, bishops and monks reject it and they will not change their lives, what is the use to preach and storm against them? This is the same as if the apostles had said to Christ: Thou tellest us to go into the village that is over against us; if it is against us, what use is it that we enter there, let us rather stay outside. But the Lord refutes this and says: Go ye there and preach, what does it matter if it is against you? You will find there what I say. We should now do likewise. Although the masses storm against the Gospel and there is no hope that they will be better, yet we must preach, there will yet be found those who listen and become converted.

[73] Why does he have them bring two asses or not both young or old ones, since one was enough for him to ride upon? Answer: As the two disciples represent the preachers, so the colt and its mother represent their disciples and hearers. The preachers shall be Christ's disciples and be sent by him, that is, they should preach nothing but Christ's doctrine. Nor should they go to preach except they be called, as was the case with the apostles. But the hearers are old and young.

[74] Here we should remember that man in Holy Writ is divided into two parts, in an inner and an outer man. The outer man is called according to his outward, visible, bodily life and conversation; the inner man, according to his heart and conscience. The outer man can be forced to do the good and quit the bad, by law, pain, punishment and shame, or attracted by favor, money, honor and reward. But the inner man cannot be forced to do out of his own free will, what he should do, except the grace of God change the heart and make it willing. Hence the Scriptures say all men are liars, no man does good of his own free will, but everyone seeks his own and does nothing out of love for virtue. For if there were no heaven nor hell, no disgrace nor honor, none would do good. If it were as great an honor and prize to commit adultery, as to honor matrimony, you would see adultery committed with much greater pleasure than matrimony is now held sacred. In like manner all other sins would be done with greater zeal than virtues are now practiced, Hence all good conduct without grace is mere glitter and semblance, it touches only the exterior man, without the mind and free will of the inner man being reached.

[75] These are the two asses. The old one is the exterior man; he is bound like this one, with laws and fear of death, of hell, of shame, or with allurements of heaven, of life, of honor. He goes forward with the external appearance of good works and is a pious rogue, but he does it unwillingly and with a heavy heart and a heavy conscience. Therefore the apostle calls her "subjugalem," the yoked animal, who works under a burden and labors hard. It is a miserable, pitiable life that is under compulsion by fear of hell, of death and of shame. Hell, death and shame are his yoke and burden, heavy beyond measure, from which he has a burdened conscience and is secretly an enemy to law and to God. Such people were the Jews, who waited for Christ, and such are all who rely upon their own power to fulfill God's commands, and merit heaven. They are tied by their consciences to

the law, they must, but would rather not do it. They are carriers of sacks, lazy beasts of burden and yoked rogues.

[76] The colt, the young ass, of which Mark and Luke write, on which never man rode, is the inner man, the heart, the mind, the will, which can never be subject to law, even if he be tied by conscience and feels the law. But he has no desire nor love for it until Christ comes and rides on him. As this colt was never ridden by anyone, so man's heart has never been subject to the good; but, as Moses says, Genesis 6:5 and Genesis 8:21, is evil continually from his youth.

[77] Christ tells them to loose them, that is, he tells them to preach the Gospel in his name, in which is proclaimed grace and remission of sins, and how he fulfilled the law for us. The heart is here freed from the fetters of conscience and things. Thus man is loose not from the law, that he should and joyful, willing and anxious to do and to leave undone all things. Thus man is loose not from the Law, that he should do nothing, but from a joyless, heavy conscience he has from the law, and with which he was the enemy of the law, that threatens him with death and hell. Now he has a clear conscience under Christ, is a friend of the law, neither fears death nor hell, does freely and willingly, what before he did reluctantly. See, in this way the Gospel delivers the heart from all evil, from sin and death, from hell and a bad conscience through faith in Christ.

[78] When he commands them to bring them to him, he speaks against the pope and all sects and deceivers, who lead the souls from Christ to themselves; but the apostles bring them to Christ; they preach and teach nothing but Christ, and not their own doctrine nor human laws. The Gospel alone teaches us to come to Christ and to know Christ rightly. In this the stupid prelates receive a heavy rebuke at their system of bringing souls to themselves, as Paul says in Acts 20:29-30: "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." But the Gospel converts men to Christ and to none else. Therefore he sends out the Gospel and ordains preachers, that he may draw us all to himself, that we may know him as he says, John 12:32: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." "And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them."

[79] St. Paul, in Galatians 4:2, compares the law to guardians and stewards, under whom the young heir is educated in fear and discipline. The law forces with threats that we externally abstain from evil works, from fear of death and hell, although the heart does not become good thereby. Here are, as Luke writes, the masters of the ass and its colt, speaking to the apostles: What, do ye loose the colt? Where the Gospel begins to loose the conscience of its own works, it seems to forbid good works and the keeping of the law. It is the common speech of all the teachers of the law, and of the scribes and doctors, to say: If all our works amount to nothing and if the works done under the law are evil, we will never do good. You forbid good works and throw away God's law; you heretic, you loose the colt and wish to make bad people free. Then they go to work and forbid to loose the colt and the conscience and to bring it to Christ and say, You must do good works, and keep people tied in bondage to the law.

[80] Our text shows how the apostles should act toward such persons. They should say: "The Lord hath need of them," they should instruct them in the works of the law and the works of grace and should say: We forbid not good works, but we loose the conscience from false good works, not to make them free to do evil deeds, but to come under Christ; their true Master, and under him do truly good works; to this end he needs them and will have them. Of this Paul treats so well in Romans 6, where he teaches that through grace we are free from the law and its works; not so as to do evil, but to do truly good works.

[81] It all amounts to this, that the scribes and masters of the law do not know what good works are; they therefore will not loose the colt, but drive it with unmerciful human works. However, where wholesome instruction is given concerning good works, they let it pass, if they are at all sensible and honest teachers of the law, as they are here represented. The mad tyrants, who are frantic with human laws, are not mentioned in this Gospel. It treats only of the law of God and of the very best teachers of the law. For without grace, even God's law is a chain and makes burdened consciences and hypocrites whom none can help, until other works are taught, which are not ours, but Christ's, and are worked in us by grace. Then all constraint and coercion of the law is ended and the colt is loose. "Now this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken through the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion."

[82] This verse has already been sufficiently explained. The Evangelist introduces it that we may see how Christ has come not for the sake of our merits, but for the sake of God's truth. For he was prophesied long ago before we, to whom he comes, had a being. God out of pure grace has fulfilled the promises of the Gospel to demonstrate the truth that he keeps his promises in order to stir us confidently to trust in his promise, for he will fulfill it. And this is one of the passages, where the Gospel is promised, of which Paul speaks in Romans 1:2: "Which he promised afore through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his Son Jesus Christ," etc. We have heard how in this verse the Gospel, Christ and faith are preached most distinctly and consolingly. "And the disciples went, and did even as Jesus appointed them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their garments, and he sat thereon, (and they set him thereon.)"

[83] These are the ministers who by the Gospel have freed the consciences from the law and its works and led them to the works of grace, who made real saints out of hypocrites, so that Christ henceforth rides upon them.

[84] The question arises here, whether Christ rode upon both animals. Matthew speaks as if the disciples put him on both, while Mark, Luke and John mention only the colt. Some think he sat first on the colt and, because it was too wanton and untamed, he then sat on its mother. These are fables and dreams. We take it that he rode only on the colt. He had them both brought to him on account of the spiritual significance above mentioned. When Matthew says he sat on them as though he rode on both, it is said after the manner of the Scriptures and the common way of speaking by synecdoche, where a thing is ascribed to the community, the whole people, which applies only to a few of them; for example, Matthew writes: the thieves on the cross reviled him, while only one did it, as Luke tells us, Christ says in Matthew 23:37, that the city of Jerusalem stoned the prophets, while only a few of the city did it. You say, the Turks killed the Christians, although they killed only a few. Thus Christ rode on the asses, though he rode only on the colt, because the two are compared to a community. What happened to one is expressed as if it happened to all.

[85] Now consider the spiritual riding. Christ rides on the colt, its mother follows, that is, when Christ lives through faith in the inner man we are under him and are ruled by him. But the outer man, the ass, goes free,

Christ does not ride on her, though she follows in the rear. The outer man, as Paul says, is not willing, he strives against the inner man, nor does he carry Christ, as Galatians 5:17 says: “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary, the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would.” Because the colt carries Christ, that is, the Spirit is willing by grace, the ass, that is, the flesh, must be led by the halter, for the Spirit chastises and crucifies the flesh, so that it becomes subject.

[86] This is the reason Christ rides upon the colt and not upon its mother, and yet uses both for his entrance into Jerusalem, for both body and soul must be saved. If, here upon earth, the body is unwilling, not capable of grace and Christ’s leading, it must bear the Spirit, upon which Christ rides, who trains it and leads it along by the power of grace, received through Christ. The colt, ridden by Christ, upon which no one ever rode, is the willing spirit, whom no one before could make willing, tame or ready, save Christ by his grace. However, the sack-carrier, the burden-bearer, the old Adam, is the flesh, which goes riderless without Christ; it must for this reason bear the cross and remain a beast of burden.

[87] What does it signify that the apostles, without command, put their garments on the colt? No doubt again not all the disciples laid on their garments, nor were all their garments put on, perhaps only a coat of one disciple. But it is written for the spiritual meaning, as if all the garments of all the disciples were used. It was a poor saddle and ornaments, but rich in meaning. I think it was the good example of the apostles, by which the Christian church is covered, and adorned, and Christ is praised and honored, namely, their preaching and confession, suffering and death for Christ’s sake, as Christ says of Peter, that he would glorify God by a like death, John 21:19. Paul says in one of his epistles, we shall put on Christ, by which he doubtless wishes to show that good works are the garments of the Christians, by which Christ is honored and glorified before all people. In the epistle Paul says, Romans 13:12: “Let us put on the armor of light.” By this he means to show that good works are garments in which we walk before the people, honorably and well adorned. The examples of the apostles are the best and noblest above all the saints, they instruct us best, and teach Christ most clearly; therefore they should not, like the rest, lie on the road, but on the colt, so that Christ may ride on them and the colt go

under them. We should follow these examples, praise Christ with our confession and our life and adorn and honor the doctrine of the Gospel as Titus 2:10 says.

[88] Hear how Paul lays his garments on the colt, 1 Corinthians 11:1: “Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ,” and Hebrews 13:7: “Remember them that had the rule over you, men that spake unto you the Word of God; and considering the issue of their life, imitate their faith.” No saint’s example is as pure in faith as that of the apostles. All the other saints after the apostles have an addition of human doctrine and works. Hence Christ sits upon their garments to show that they are true Christian and more faithful examples than others.

[89] That they set him thereon must also signify something. Could he not mount for himself? Why does he act so formal? As I said above, the apostles would not preach themselves, nor ride on the colt themselves. Paul says, 2 Corinthians 1:24: “Not that we have lordship over your faith.” And 2 Corinthians 4:5: “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.” Again, Peter 5:3: “Neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you.” They preached to us the pure faith and offered their examples, that Christ might rule in us, and our faith remain undefiled, that we might not receive their word and work as if it were their own, but that we might learn Christ in their words and works. But how is it today? One follows St. Francis, another St. Dominic, the third this, and the fourth that saint; and in none is Christ alone and pure faith sought; for they belong only to the apostles. “And the most part of the multitude spread their garments in the way; and others cut branches from the trees, and spread them in the way.”

[90] The garments are the examples of the patriarchs and prophets, and the histories of the Old Testament. For, as we shall learn, the multitude that went before, signifies the saints before the birth of Christ, by whom the sermon in the New Testament and the way of faith are beautifully adorned and honored. Paul does likewise when he cites Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Peter cites Sarah, and, in Hebrews 11, many patriarchs are named as examples, and by these are confirmed faith and the works of faith in a masterly way. The branches mean the sayings of the prophets, one of which is mentioned in this Gospel, which are not stories nor examples but the prophecy of God. The trees are the books of the prophets. Those who

preach from these cut down branches and spread them in the way of Christian faith.

[91] All this teaches the character of an Evangelical sermon, a sermon on the pure faith and the way of life. It must first have the word Christ commands the apostles, saying: Go, loose and bring hither. Then the story and example of the apostles must be added which agree with Christ's word and work, these are the garments of the apostles. Then must be cited passages from the Old Testament, these are the garments and branches of the multitude. In this way the passages and examples of both Testaments are brought home to the people. Of this Christ speaks in Matthew 13:52: "Every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." This signifies the two lips of the mouth, the two points of a bishop's hat, the two ribbons on it and some other like figures. But now none of these is kept before the eyes, the devil through the Papists throws sulphur and pitch in the way, himself rides on the colt and banishes Christ.

[92] To spread garments in the way, means that, following the example of the apostles, we should with our confession and our whole life, honor, adorn and grace Christ, by giving up all glory, wisdom and holiness of our own and bowing to Christ in simple faith; also that we turn everything we have, honor, goods, life, power and body to the glory and advancement of the Gospel and relinquish everything for the one thing needful. Kings and lords and the great, powerful and rich should serve Christ with their goods, honor and power; further the Gospel and for its sake abandon everything. The holy patriarchs, prophets and pious kings in the Old Testament did so by their examples. But now everything is turned around, especially among the papal multitudes, who usurp all honor and power against Christ and thus suppress the Gospel.

[93] To cut branches from the trees and spread them in the way means also the office of preaching and the testimony of the Scriptures and the prophets concerning Christ. With this the sermon of Christ is to be confirmed and all the preaching directed to the end that Christ may be known and confessed by it. John writes in 12:13 that they took branches of palm trees and went forth to meet him. Some add, there must have been olive branches also, because it happened on the Mount of Olives. This is not incredible, although the Gospels do not report it.

[94] There is reason why palm branches and olive branches are mentioned. They signify what is to be confessed, preached and believed concerning Christ. It is the nature of the palm tree that when used as a beam, it yields to no weight but rises against the weight. These branches are the words of divine wisdom; the more they are suppressed, the higher they rise. This is true if you firmly believe in those words. There is an invincible power in them, so that they may well be called palm branches, as St. Paul says in Romans 1:16: “The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth;” and as Christ says, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16:18. Death, sin, hell and all evil must bend before the divine Word, or only rise, when it sets itself against them.

[95] Olive branches are named, because they are words of grace, in which God has promised us mercy. They make the soul meek, gentle, joyful, as the oil does the body. The gracious Word and sweet Gospel is typified in Genesis 8:11, where the dove in the evening brought in her mouth an olive branch with green leaves into the ark, which means, that the Holy Spirit brings the Gospel into the Church at the end of the world by the mouth of the apostles. “And the multitudes that went before him, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.”

[96] For this reason they carried palm trees before kings and lords, when they had gained a victory and celebrated their triumph. Again, the carrying of palm branches was a sign of submission, especially of such as asked for mercy and peace, as was commonly done among ancient people. By their pomp before Christ they indicated that they would receive him as their Lord and King, sent by God as a victorious and invincible Savior, showing themselves submissive to him and seeking grace from him. Christ should be preached and made known in all the world, as the victorious and invincible King against sin, death and the power of the devil and all the world for those who are oppressed and tormented, and as a Lord with whom they shall find abundant grace and mercy, as their faithful Priest and Mediator before God. The word of the Gospel concerning this King is a word of mercy and grace, which brings us peace and redemption from God, besides invincible power and strength, as St. Paul in Romans 1:16 calls the Gospel “a power of God unto salvation” and “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” as Christ says in Matthew 16:18.

[97] Paul says, Hebrews 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea, forever.” All who will be saved from the beginning to the end of the world, are and must be Christians and must be saved by faith. Therefore Paul says, 1 Corinthians 10:3-4: “Our fathers did all eat the same spiritual food; and did all drink the same spiritual drink.” And Christ says in John 8:56: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad.”

[98] Hence the multitudes going before signify all Christians and saints before Christ’s birth; those who follow signify all the saints after the birth of Christ. They all believed in and adhered to the one Christ. The former expected him in the future, the latter received him as the one who had come. Hence they all sing the same song and praise and thank God in Christ. Nor may we give anything else but praise and thanks to God, since we receive all from him, be it grace, word, work, Gospel, faith and everything else. The only true Christian service is to praise and give thanks, as Psalm 50:15 says: “Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.”

[99] What does “Hosanna to the son of David” signify? Hosanna in Psalm 118:25-26, means: “Save now, we beseech thee, O Jehovah; O Jehovah, we beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of Jehovah.” This verse was applied to Christ and is a well-wishing as we wish happiness and safety to a new ruler. Thus the people thought Christ should be their worldly king, and they wish him joy and happiness to that end. For Hosanna means: “O, give prosperity;” or: “Beloved, help;” or: “Beloved, save;” or whatever else you might desire to express in such a wish. They add: “To the son of David,” and say: “God give prosperity to the son of David! O God, give prosperity, blessed be,” etc. We would say: O, dear Lord, give happiness and prosperity to this son of David, for his new kingdom! Let him enter in God’s name that he may be blessed and his kingdom prosper.

[100] Mark proves clearly that they meant his kingdom when he writes expressly in Mark 11:10, that they said: “Blessed is the kingdom that cometh, the kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest.” When some in the churches, read it “Osanna”, it is not correct, it should be “Hosanna.” They made a woman’s name out of it, and her whom they should call Susanna they call Osanna. Susanna is a woman’s name and

means a rose. Finally, after making a farce out of baptism, the bishops baptize bells and altars, which is a great nonsense, and call the bells Osanna. But away with the blind leaders! We should learn here also to sing Hosanna and Hazelihana to the son of David together with those multitudes, that is, joyfully wish happiness and prosperity to the kingdom of Christ, to holy Christendom, that God may put away all human doctrine and let Christ alone be our king, who governs by his Gospel, and permits us to be his colts! God grant it, Amen.

Second Sunday in Advent. Christ's Second Coming: or the Signs of the Day of Judgment; and the Comfort Christians Have from Them.

Christ's Return

Text: Luke 21:25-36.

25 And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;

26 Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

27 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

28 And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

29 And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees;

30 When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand.

31 So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.

32 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.

33 Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

34 And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged

with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

35 For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.

36 Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. Luke 21:25-36

I. The Signs of the Day of Judgment

[1] The first thing for us to understand is that although the signs preceding the judgment day are many and great, they will all be fulfilled, even though none or very few men take note of or esteem them as such. For two things must take place according to the Word and prophecy of Christ and the apostles: first, that many and great signs will be made manifest; and secondly, that the last day will come unawares, the world not expecting it, even though that day be at the door. Though men see these signs, yea, be told that they are signs of the last day, still they will not believe, but in their security mockingly say: “Thou fool, hast thou fear that the heavens will fall and that we shall live to see that day?”

[2] Some, indeed, must see it, and it will be those who least expect it. That there will be such security and indifference among men, let us prove by the words of Christ and the apostles. Christ says in the 34th and 35th verses: “Take heed to yourselves, lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare: for so shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of all the earth.” From these words it is clear, that men in great measure will give themselves over to surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and that, drowned as it were in these things, they will rest secure and continue to dwell on the earth as if the dreadful day were far away. For, were there no such security and heedlessness, that day would not break in unawares. But he says, it will come as a snare by which birds and beasts are caught at a time when most concerned about their food and least expecting to be entrapped. In this figure he gives us clearly to understand that the world will continue its carousing, eating and drinking, building and

planting, and diligently seeking after earthly things, and will look upon the day of judgment as yet a thousand and more years off, when, in the twinkling of an eye, they may stand before the terrible judgment bar of God.

[3] The words of Christ in Luke 17:24 say the same: “For as the lightning, when it lighteneth out of the one part under the heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall the Son of man be in his day.” See here again that the day will break upon the world with the utmost suddenness. The same further appears in what follows in Luke 17:26-29: “As it was in the days of Noah, even so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise even as it came to pass in the days of Lot; they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but in the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. After the same manner it shall be in the day that the Son of man is revealed.” These words abundantly show that people will rest so secure and will be so deeply buried beneath the cares of this life, that they will not believe the day is at hand.

[4] There is now no doubt that Christ did not foretell these signs in the expectation that no one would note nor recognize them when they should appear; although few indeed will do so, just as in the days of Noah and Lot but few knew the punishment in store for them. Were this not true, the admonition of Christ would have been in vain: “When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh.” Then, “Lift up your heads, because your redemption draweth nigh.” There must then be some, at least, who do recognize the signs, and lift up their heads and wait for their redemption, although they do not really know on what day that will come. We should be careful, therefore, to note whether the signs are being fulfilled now, or have been or will be in the future.

[5] I do not wish to force anyone to believe as I do; neither will I permit anyone to deny me the right to believe that the last day is near at hand. These words and signs of Christ compel me to believe that such is the case. For the history of the centuries that have passed since the birth of Christ nowhere reveals conditions like those of the present. There has never been such building and planting in the world. There has never been such

gluttonous and varied eating and drinking as now. Wearing apparel has reached its limit in costliness. Who has ever heard of such commerce as now encircles the earth? There have arisen all kinds of art and sculpture, embroidery and engraving, the like of which has not been seen during the whole Christian era.

[6] In addition men are so delving into the mysteries of things that today a boy of twenty knows more than twenty doctors formerly knew. There is such a knowledge of languages and all manner of wisdom that it must be confessed, the world has reached such great heights in the things that pertain to the body, or as Christ calls them, “cares of life”, eating, drinking, building, planting, buying, selling, marrying and giving in marriage, that everyone must see and say either ruin or a change must come. It is hard to see how a change can come. Day after day dawns and the same conditions remain. There was never such keenness, understanding and judgment among Christians in bodily and temporal things as now — I forbear to speak of the new inventions, printing, firearms, and other implements of war.

[7] But not only have such great strides been made in the world of commerce, but also in the spiritual field have there been great changes. Error, sin, and falsehood have never held sway in the world as in these last centuries. The Gospel has been openly condemned at Constance, and the false teachings of the Pope have been adopted as law though he practiced the greatest extortion. Daily mass is celebrated many hundred thousand times in the world, and thereby the greatest sin committed. By confession, sacrament, indulgence, rules and laws, so many souls are driven to condemnation that it seems God has given the whole world over to the devil. In short it is not possible that there should be greater falsehood, more heinous error, more dreadful blindness, and more obdurate blasphemy than have ruled in the church through the bishops, cloisters, and universities. As a result Aristotle, a blind heathen, teaches and rules Christians more than does Christ.

[8] Moreover the pope has attempted to abolish Christ and to become his vicar. He occupies the throne of Christ on earth, would to God he occupied the devil’s throne instead. I forbear to speak of the grosser forms of sin, unchastity, murder, infidelity, covetousness, and the like, which are all practiced without shame or fear. Unchastity has taken forms against nature,

and has affected no station or condition more than the spiritual character of the clergy — shall I call it spiritual, since it is so fleshly and void of all simplicity?

[9] Whatever other signs may appear before Christ's coming, I know that, according to the words of Christ, these will be present: surfeiting and drunkenness, building and planting, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, and other cares of this life. Just as certain to me is also the saying of Christ in Matthew 24:15, where he speaks of the abomination of desolation, the Antichrist, under whose rule gross error, blindness, and sin shall flourish, just as they now flourish under the Pope in the most tyrannical and shameless form. This above all else compels me to believe that Christ will soon come to judgment; for such sins cry to heaven, and so provoke and defy the last day that it must soon break in upon them. If it were only the unchastity of the antediluvian world, or the worldliness of Sodom, I would not believe the last day is so near at hand. But to destroy, root out, condemn and blaspheme divine service, God's Word and the Sacraments, the children of God and everything that belongs to God; and to worship and honor the devil instead and to proclaim his lies for the Word of God — such sins, I am firmly convinced, will put an end to the world before we are aware of it. Amen.

[10] But the apostles have also prophesied concerning this self-security of men as the judgment day approaches. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3: "The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them." Now we know that a thief never comes but when one feels most secure and least expects him. And 2 Peter 3:3-10 we read: "In the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? From the day the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise etc." Who are they that walk after their own lusts but the papal clergy? They wish to be subject neither to God nor to man, but expect the world to recognize it as their right to live as they please and to do what they like. It is these that say, Where is the promise of his coming? Do you think the last day will break in upon us so soon? Things will continue as they have in the past.

[11] We also read in the history of the destruction, of Jerusalem that many signs were fulfilled, yet they would not believe them to be tokens of the coming destruction until judgment was executed. Finally, from the beginning of the world, it has ever been so, that the unbelieving could not believe the day of calamity to be near — they always experienced it before they believed it. This is in fulfillment of Psalm 55:23: “Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days,” for they presume upon the continuance of their days and have no fear, and so the hour must come unawares. So here people are putting off the judgment for yet a thousand years when it may break in upon them in a night. This is the first class of signs which presage the nearness of the day of God. Let us now consider the second class. “And there shall be signs in the sun.”

[12] This sign to be given in the sun is that it will lose its brightness, after the manner in which it has often occurred, as Matthew 24:29, says: “The sun shall be darkened.” I will not trespass here again but express my opinion. Some think that the sun is to be darkened as never to shine again; but this cannot be the meaning, for day and night must continue to the end, as God foretells, Genesis 8:22: “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” This sign must therefore, not interfere with day and night and still be fulfilled before the judgment day, for it is a token of its coming. It cannot, therefore, be more than a darkening of the sun in its accustomed course.

[13] Now at all times such a sign in the sun has been looked upon as foreboding misfortune or disaster, which also often followed, as history abundantly shows. Thus we have had, it seems to me, the last few years more and more frequent eclipses of the sun than in any other like period of time. God has spared us and no great evil has come upon us. For this reason these signs are not noticed. In addition, astronomers have told us, and rightly so, that these eclipses are but natural phenomena. As a result the tokens are still more despised and carnal security increased. Nevertheless God in carrying on his work in silence, gives us security and moves forward in his plans. Whatever the natural course of the heavens may be, these signs are always tokens of his wrath and predict sure disaster for the future. If these are not seen, shall God make other suns and moons and stars and show other signs in them?

[14] The course of the heavens has been so arranged from eternity that before the last day these signs must appear. The heathen say that the comet is a natural product; but God has created none that is not a token of future evil. Thus also the blind leader, Aristotle, writing a book about the phenomena of the heavens, attributes all to nature and declares these are no signs. Our learned men follow him and thus one fool fills the world with fools. Let us know that though the heavenly bodies wander in their courses according to law, God has still made these to be signs or tokens of his wrath. “And in the moon.”

[15] This sign is given in Matthew 24:29, to the effect that “the moon shall not give her light”; that is, it will lose its brightness. The same is to be said of this as of the signs in the sun, no matter how natural it may be. Is it not true that scarcely a year has passed of late in which sun or moon or both have been eclipsed, sometimes one of them twice a year? If these are not signs, then, what are signs? It may be that at other times more were seen than now, but surely not in more rapid succession. When Jerusalem was to be destroyed, some signs preceded which had occurred before, but they were still new tokens. “And in the stars,”

[16] According to Matthew 24:29, “the stars shall fall from heaven.” This is seen almost daily. Whether it was seen as frequently in former days as now, I cannot say. Aristotle again talks about the nature of the thing; but the Gospel, which is the word and wisdom of God, pronounces the falling of the stars a sign and there let the matter rest. Wherefore if the stars fall or the sun and moon fail to give their light, be assured that these are signs of the last day; for the Gospel cannot utter falsehood. While in these years there have been so many showers of stars, they are all harbingers of the last day, just as Christ says; for they must appear often in order that the great day may be abundantly pointed out and proclaimed. These signs appear and pass but no one considers them; so it shall be that they will wait for other signs just as the Jews are waiting for another Christ. “And upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity.”

[17] This is not to be understood that all nations and all people among these nations will so suffer; for you must note that these are to be signs. Stars do not fall from the heavens at all times; the sun does not lose its brightness for a whole year or a month, but for an hour or two; the moon does not refuse to give its light for a whole week or a whole night, but, like

the sun, for an hour or two — that all these may be tokens without changing or perverting the order of things. Hence not many will suffer distress and anxiety, but only a few; and even with these it will be only at times that they be signs to those who despise the idea, and attribute all to the complexion or to the melancholy or to the influence of the planets or to any other natural cause. Meanwhile such clear harbingers of the day pass by unobserved, and there happens what Christ said of the Jews in Matthew 15:14, that though hearing and seeing they do not understand.

[18] “Distress of nations in perplexity” does not refer to the body. For, as we have already heard, there will be peace and joy in abundance. People will eat and drink, build and plant, buy and sell, marry and be given in marriage, dance and play, and wrap themselves up in this present life as if they expected to abide here forever. I take it that it is the condition of agonized conscience. For since the Gospel, by which alone the troubled conscience can be comforted, is condemned, and in its stead there are set up doctrines of men, which teach us to lay aside sin and earn heaven by works; there must come a burdened and distressed conscience, a conscience that can find no rest, that would be pious, do good and be saved, that torments itself and yet does not know how to find satisfaction. Sin and conscience oppress, and however much is done no rest is found. By these the sinner becomes so distressed that he knows not what to do nor whither to flee. Hence arise so many vows and pilgrimages and worship of the saints and chapters for mass and vigils. Some castigate and torture themselves, some become monks, or that they may do more they become Carthusian monks. These are all works of distressed and perplexed consciences, and are in reality the distress and perplexity of which Luke here speaks. He uses two words which suggest this meaning, a man gets into close quarters as though he were cast into a narrow snare or prison; he becomes anxious and does not know how he may extricate himself; he becomes bewildered and attempts this and that and yet finds no way of escape. Under such conditions he would be distressed and perplexed. In such a condition are these consciences; sin has taken them captive, they are in straits and are distressed. They want to escape but another grief o’ertakes them, they are perplexed for they know not where to begin — they try every expedient but find no help.

[19] It is indeed true that the masses do not become so afflicted, but only the few and generally the most sensible, scrupulous, and good-hearted individuals who have no desire to harm anyone and would live honorable lives. It may be they foster some secret sin, as for example unchastity. This burdens them day and night so that they never are truly happy. But this is game for the monks and priests, for here they can practice extortion, especially with women; here people confess, are taught, absolved, and go whithersoever the confessor directs. Meanwhile the people are the Lord's token of the last day. To such the Gospel is light and comfort while it condemns the others.

[20] Neither can anyone deny this sign, for it has been so common these hundreds of years that many have become insane over it, as Gerson informs us. Although at all times there have been people so distressed and perplexed, it was formerly not so common as now. From the beginning of the world no human doctrine exercised, the tenth part or even the hundredth part of the influence, or tortured and seared so many consciences as the doctrines of the pope and his disciples, the monks and priests. Such perplexed hearts will necessarily grow out of the papal doctrine of confession which has never been so earnestly promulgated as now. Therefore this has never been a token of the judgment until now. There must be many and great signs, therefore, and they be despised by most men. "For the roaring of the sea and the billows."

[21] This will take place through the winds, for all roaring of the waters comes by means of the storm. Therefore the Lord would say by these words that many and great storms will arise. By sea, however, is not to be understood simply the ocean, but all gathered waters, according to the language of Scripture, Genesis 1:10: "And the gathering together of the waters called he seas," be they oceans, seas or lakes. Rivers on the other hand are changeable flowing waters.

[22] It is not to be supposed that all waters, streams, lakes, seas, oceans, will, at the same time and in the same way, be come stormy and boisterous. Some seas are thus to be moved and this is to be the sign unto us. For as not all stars fall and not all nations are distressed in perplexity, so shall not all waters roar nor all places be visited by the storm.

[23] Here heathen art will sit in the schools and with wide open mouth will say, “Did you see the storm or hear the sea and the waves roaring? Aristotle clearly teaches that these are but natural phenomena.” Let us pass these by and know that God’s Word and tokens are despised by the wisdom of the gods. Do you hold fast to the Gospel — this teaches you to believe that storms and detonations in the sea are signs and tokens. And however many times such signals have been given in other days, they shall nevertheless become more numerous and terrible as the day of doom approaches.

[24] It seems to me that within the space of ten or twelve years, there have been such storms and tempests and waters roaring as have never before been seen or heard. We are to consider, therefore, that although in former times these signs came singly and at less frequent intervals, now they appear many and frequent. In our time both sun and moon are darkened, stars fall, distress of nations is present, winds and waves are roaring, and many other signs are being fulfilled. They are all coming in a heap. 25. We have lately also seen so many comets and so many calamities have fallen from the skies and there has arisen the hitherto unknown disease, syphilis. Also how many signs and wonders have been seen in the heavens, as suns, moons, stars, rainbows, and many other strange sights. Dear hearer, let them be signs, great signs, tokens that mean much; so that neither the astronomers nor heathen astrologers can say they simply follow the ordinary course of nature, for they knew nothing of them before nor did they prophesy of them.

[26] No astronomer will say that the course of the heavens foretold the coming of the terrible beast which the Tiber threw up a few years ago; a beast with the head of an ass, the breast and body of a woman, the foot of an elephant for its right hand, with the scales of a fish on its legs, and the head of a dragon in its hinder parts, etc. This beast typifies the papacy and the great wrath and punishment of God. Such a mass of signs presages greater results than the mind of man can conceive. Before proceeding further it might be well to consider the testimony concerning the last day which the celebrated teacher, Latantius Firmianus, gave about A.D. 320, in his work entitled “Divinarum Institutionum”, in the seventh book and fifteenth chapter: When the end of the world draws near, the condition of human affairs must materially change and take on a more wicked form.

Then will malice and wickedness prevail to such a degree that our age, in which malice and wickedness have almost reached their highest pitch, will be looked upon as happy and treasured as golden in comparison with that time when no one will be able to help or give advice. Then will righteousness become practically unknown, and blasphemy, covetousness, impure desires, and unchastity become common. Then will the godly become a prey to the most wicked and be vexed and grieved by them. At the same time, only the wicked will be rich and well to do, while the godly will be driven hither and thither in shame and poverty. Justice will be perverted, law will be overthrown, and no one will have aught else but that which he can secure by his own strength. Daring and strength will possess all. There will be neither faith nor confidence left in man, neither peace, nor loveliness, nor shame, nor truth, and as a result, no safety, no government, no rest of any kind from the reprobate. For all lands will become rebellious, everywhere men will rage and war with one another, the whole world will be in arms, and bring destruction to itself. “Men fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world.”

[27] Here, again it is not the profligate mass, who disregard God’s tokens and refer all to natural causes, that shall realize these, but rather the better class, and the most distinguished, who take these things to heart and are given to reflection. By “men fainting for fear” is to be understood that they shall be frightened to death, or the next thing to death; and that their fear shall consume them and rob them of their strength. What do they fear and wait for? Christ says: “The things which are coming on the world;” that is, the last day, the terrible judgment, hell fire, and eternal death. Why do they fear and look for these things, and not the world upon whom they will come rather than upon them? Because these are the tokens of God which are to be despised and rejected by the world.

[28] I am not yet able to say who these people are, unless it be those who are exposed to and have to do with the temptations of death and hell, concerning whom Tauler writes. For such temptations consume flesh and blood, yea, bone and marrow, and are death itself. No one can endure them except he be miraculously sustained. A number of patriarchs have tasted them, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David; but near the end of the world they will be more common. This token will then greatly increase, although it is present now more than is generally known. There are individuals who

are in the perils of death and are wrestling with him; they feel that which will come over the whole world and fear that it will come upon and abide with them. It is to be hoped, however, that such people are in a state of grace. For Christ speaks as if he would separate the fear and the thing which they fear; and so divides these that he gives to them the fear and to the world that which they fear. It is to be presumed that by this fear and anxiety, they are to have their hell and death here, while the world, which fears nothing, will have death and hell hereafter. “For the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.”

[29] By the powers of heaven some understand the angels of heaven. But since Christ speaks of signs, and says we shall see them and in them recognize the coming of the last day, they must surely be visible tokens and be perceived with the bodily senses. For those people whose consciences are in distress and whose hearts are failing from fear, though this be an affection of the soul, yet manifest it by word and countenance. Therefore these powers of heaven must be such as can be really shaken and so perceived.

[30] But the Scriptures speak in a two-fold way concerning the powers of heaven. At one time they are spoken of as the powerful heavens or the heavens which are among all creatures the most powerful, as is written, Genesis 1:8, “And God called the firmament” — that is, expanse or fortress

— ”heaven”; for every creature under heaven is ruled and strengthened by the light, heat and movements of the heavens. What would the earth be without the heavens but a dark and desert waste? Like princes and nobles in the world, the Scriptures call the heavens powerful because they rule over the bodies beneath them.

[31] At another time the powers of heaven signify the hosts of heaven, as Psalm 83:6 says: “By the word of Jehovah were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.” And Genesis 2:1: “And the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” It is the common custom of the Scriptures to speak in this way of the powers of heaven. And it is clear from these passages that the hosts or powers of heaven include all that is in them; in the heavens, the sun, moon, stars, and other heavenly bodies; on earth, man and beast, birds and fish, trees, herbs and whatever else lives upon it.

[32] The passage before us may therefore mean the powers of heaven in both senses, probably chiefly the hosts of heaven. Christ would say that all creatures shall be shaken and shall serve as tokens of that day; sun and moon with darkening, the stars with falling, the nations with wars, men with hearts failing from fear, the earth with earthquakes, the waters with winds and roaring, the air with infection and pestilence, and the heavens with their hosts.

[33] I do not know just what is meant by the moving of the hosts of heaven unless it be manifestations like those of the great constellation of the planets in 1524. For the planets are certainly among the most important of the powers and hosts of heaven, and their remarkable gathering together into one constellation is surely a token for the world. Christ does not say that all the hosts of heaven will be moved, but some of them only; for not all stars shall fall from their places, nor all men be overcome with fear, nor all waters at the same time be in noisy commotion, nor sun and moon be every day darkened; for these are to be but signs, which can only occur at particular times and in a few places, that they may be something special, and singled out as tokens from the great mass which are not such. It is quite probable, therefore, that these movements of the powers of heaven are such movements of the constellations of the planets. Astrologers interpret them to signify the coming of another flood; God grant that they may rather presage the coming of the last day.

[34] Let us not be mistaken, however, and think that these constellations are the product of the natural course of the heavenly bodies. As such Christ calls them signs and desires us to take special note of them, appearing, as they do, not alone but with a multitude of other tokens. Let the unbeliever doubt and despise God's tokens and speak of them as simply natural; but let us hold fast to the Gospel.

[35] There are many other signs elsewhere described in the Scriptures, such as earthquakes, famine, pestilence, and wars as in Luke 17:20 and Matthew 24:7. We have seen much of these for they have been common at all times. Still they are tokens appearing by the side of others. It is a known fact also that wars at the present time are of such a character as to make former wars appear as mere child's play. But since our Gospel of today does not speak of these, let us not consider them further. Only let us consider them as signs, great signs, signifying great things; alas, they are already

despised and forgotten! “And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

[36] Here power may again signify the hosts of angels, saints, and all creatures that will come with Christ to judgment (I believe this is the correct interpretation); or it may mean the special power and might which will characterize this coming of Christ in contradistinction to his first coming. He says not only that he will come, but that they shall see him come. At his birth he came also, but men did not recognize him. He comes now through the Gospel in a spiritual manner, into the hearts of believers. This also is not by observation. But his last coming will be such that all must see him as Revelation 1:7 says, “And every eye shall see him.” And they shall see that he is none other than the man Christ Jesus, in bodily form, as he was born of the virgin Mary and walked upon this earth. He might have said they shall see me, but that would not have clearly indicated his bodily form. But when he says: “They shall see the Son of man,” he dearly indicates that it will be a bodily coming, a bodily seeing in bodily form; a coming in great power and glory, accompanied by the hosts of heaven. He shall sit upon the clouds and be accompanied by all the saints. The Scriptures speak much of that (lay and everywhere point to the same. This, then, is said concerning the signs. The Savior adds words of comfort for Christians in the presence of these signs.

II. The Comfort Christians Have When these Signs Appear.

“And when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh.”

[37] Here you may say, who can lift up his head in the face of such terrible wrath and judgment? If the whole world is filled with fear at that day, and lets fall its head and countenance out of terror and anxiety; how shall we look up and lift up our heads, which evidently means, how shall we manifest any joy in and longing for these signs? In answer I would say that all this is spoken only to those who are really Christians and not to heathen and Jews. True Christians are so afflicted with all manner of temptations and persecutions that in this life they are miserable. Therefore they wait and long and pray for redemption from sin and all evil; as we also pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come”, and “Deliver us from

evil.” If we are true Christians we will earnestly and heartily join in this prayer. If we do not so pray, we are not yet true Christians.

[38] If we pray aright, our condition must truly be such that, however terrible these signs may be, we will look up to them with joy and earnest desire, as Christ admonishes: “When these things begin to come to pass, look up.” He does not say, Be filled with fear or drop your heads; for there is coming that for which we have been so earnestly praying. If we really wish to be freed from sin and death and hell, we must look forward to this coming of the Lord with joy and pleasure. St. Paul also says, in 2 Timothy 4:8, “Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day: and not only to me, but also to all them that have loved his appearing.” If he gives the crown to those who love his appearing, what will he give to those who hate and dread it? Without doubt, to enemies, eternal condemnation. Titus 2:13 says, “Looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the Great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” And Luke 12:36, “And be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast.”

[39] But what do those do who are filled with fear and do not desire to have him come, when they pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done . . . deliver us from the evil one?” Do they not stand in the presence of God and lie to their own hurt? Do they not strive against the will of God who will have this day for the redemption of the saints? It is necessary, therefore, that we exercise great care lest we be found to hate and to dread that day. Such dread is a bad omen and belongs to the damned, whose cold minds and hard hearts must be terrified and broken, if perchance they might reform.

[40] But to believers that day will be comforting and sweet. That day will be the highest joy and safety to the believer, and the deepest terror and anguish to the unbeliever; just as also in this life the truths of the Gospel are exceedingly sweet to the godly and exceedingly hateful to the wicked. Why should the believer fear and not rather exceedingly rejoice, since he trusts in Christ who comes as judge to redeem him and to be his everlasting portion.

[41] But you say I would indeed await his coming with joy, if I were holy and without sin. I should answer, what relief do you find in fear and flight? It would not redeem you from sin if you were to be filled with terror

for a thousand years. The damned are eternally filled with fear of that day, but this does not take away their sin; yea, this fear rather increases sin and renders man unfit to appear without sin on that day when it comes. Fear must pass out of the soul and there must enter in a desire for righteousness and for that day. But if you really desire to be free from sin and to be holy, then give thanks to God and continue to desire to be more free from sin. Would to God that such desire were so sincere and powerful in you as to bring you to your death.

[42] There is no one so well prepared for the judgment day as he who longs to be without sin. If you have such desire, what do you fear? You are then in perfect accord with the purpose of that day. It comes to set free from sin all who desire it, and you belong to that number. Return thanks to God and abide in that desire. Christ says his coming is for our redemption. But do not deceive yourself and be satisfied, perhaps, with the simple desire to be free from sin and to await the coming of the day without fear. Perhaps your heart is false and you are filled with fear, not because you would be free' from sin, but because in the face of that day you cannot sin free and untrammelled. See to it that the light within you be not darkness. For a heart that would be truly free from sin will certainly rejoice in the day that fulfills its desire. If the heart does not so rejoice there is no true desire to be loosed from its sin.

[43] Therefore we must above all things lay aside all hatred and abhorrence of this day, and exercise diligence that we may really desire to have our sins taken away. When this is done, we may not only calmly await the day, but with heartfelt desire and joy pray for it and say, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done." In this you must cast aside all feelings and conceit, hold fast to the comforting words of Christ, and rest in them alone.

[44] Could he admonish, comfort, and strengthen you in a more delicate and loving manner? In the first place he says, You will hear of wars, but you should have no fears. And when he tells you to have no fears, what else does he mean than that he commands you to be of good cheer and to discern the signs with joy? Secondly, he tells you to look up; thirdly, to lift up your heads; and fourthly, he speaks of your redemption. What can comfort and strengthen you if such a word does not? Do you think he would deceive you and try to lead you into a false confidence? My dear hearer, let such a word not have been said in vain: thank God and trust in it — there is no other

comfort or advice if you cast this to the winds. It is not your condemnation but your redemption of which Christ speaks. Will you turn his words around and say, It is not your redemption but your condemnation? Will you flee from your own salvation? Will you not greet and thank your God who comes out to meet and to greet you?

[45] He has no doubt also spoken this word for the faint hearted who, although they are devout and prepared for the last day, are yet filled with great anxiety and are hindered in taking part in his coming with that desire which should be found at the end of the world; therefore he calls attention to their redemption. For when at the end of the world sin will hold such sway, and by the side of sin the punishment for sin with pestilence, war and famine, it will be necessary to give to believers strength and comfort against both evils, sin and its punishment. Therefore he uses the sweet and comforting word redemption which is so dear to the heart of man. What is redemption? Who would not be redeemed? Who would have a desire to abide in the desert of sin and punishment? Who would not wish an end to such miser)-and woe, such perils for souls, such ruin for man? Especially should this be the case when the Savior allures, invites and comforts us in such an endearing way.

[46] The godless fanatical preachers are to be censured who in their sermons deprive people of these words of Christ and faith in them, who desire to make people devout by terrifying them and who teach them to prepare for the last day by relying upon their good works as satisfaction for their sins. Here despair, fear and terror must remain and grow and with it hatred, aversion and abhorrence for the coming of the Lord, and enmity against God be established in the heart; for they picture Christ as nothing but a stern judge whose wrath must be appeased by works, and they never present him as the Redeemer, as he calls and offers himself, of whom we are to expect that out of pure grace he will redeem us from sin and evil.

[47] Such is always the result where the Gospel is not rightly proclaimed. When hearts are only driven by commands and threats, they will only be estranged from God and be led to abhor him. We ought to terrify, but only the obstinate and hardened; and when these have become terrified and dejected also, we ought to strengthen and comfort.

[48] From all this we learn how few there are who pray the Lord's Prayer acceptably even though it is prayed unceasingly in all the world. There are few who would not rather that the day would never come. This is nothing else than to desire that the kingdom of God may not come. Therefore the heart prays contrary to the lips, and while God judges according to the heart, they judge according to the lips. For this reason they institute so many prayers, fill all the churches with their bawling and think they pray aright when in reality their prayer is: "May thy kingdom not come, or not just yet." Tell me, is not such a prayer blasphemy? Is it not of such a prayer that the Psalmist speaks in Psalm 109:7, "Let his prayer be turned into sin." How men are applying all the wealth of the world to fill every nook and corner of it with such blasphemy, and then are calling it a divine service!

[49] Yet he who feels such fear must not despair, but rather use it wisely. He uses it wisely who permits such fear to urge and admonish him to pray for grace that this fear might be taken away and he be given joy and delight in that day. Christ has promised, Matthew 7:8, "Everyone that asketh receiveth." Therefore those who are fearful are nearer their salvation than the hard-hearted and reprobate, who neither fear nor find comfort in that day. For though they do not have a desire for it, they have a something within which admonishes them to pray for such a desire.

[50] On the other hand, he uses fear unwisely who allows it to increase and abides in the same, as though he could thereby be cleansed from sin. This leads to nothing good. Not fear, which, as John says, 1 John 4:18, must be cast out, will remain in that day, but love which, St. Paul says in Corinthians 13:8, must abide. Fear is to be a power to drive us to seek such love and pray for it. Where fear is not cast out it opposes the will of God and antagonizes your own salvation; it thus becomes a sin against the Holy Spirit. It is, however, not necessary to say that the individual must be altogether without fear, for we still have human nature abiding in us. This is weak and cannot exist altogether without the fear of death and the judgment; but the spirit must be uppermost in the mind, as Christ says, Matthew 26:41, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." "And he spake to them a parable: Behold the fig tree, and all the trees: when they now shoot forth, ye see it and know of your own selves that the summer is

now nigh. Even so ye also, when ye see these things coming to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh.”

[51] Pure words of comfort are these. He does not put forth a parable from the fall or winter season when all the trees are bare and the dreary days begin; but a parable from the spring and summer season, when everything is joyous, when all creation buds forth and rejoices. By this he clearly teaches that we are to look forward to the last day with as much joy and delight as all creation shows in spring and summer. What is the meaning of this parable if in it he does not teach us this? He could have found others that were not so joyous.

[52] In applying it, he does not say your hell or condemnation is at hand, but the kingdom of God. What else does it signify that the kingdom of God is at hand than that our redemption is near? The kingdom of God is but ourselves, as Christ says, Luke 17:21, “For lo, the kingdom of God is within you ;” therefore, it draweth nigh when we are nearing our redemption from sin and evil. In this life it begins in the spirit; but since we must still battle with sin and suffer much evil, and since death is still before us, the kingdom of God is not yet perfect in us. But when once sin and death and all evil are taken away, then will it be perfect. This the last day will bring and not this life.

[53] Therefore, my dear hearer, examine your life, probe your heart to ascertain how it is disposed toward this day. Do not put your trust in your own good life, for that would soon be put to shame; but think of and strengthen your faith in order that the day may not be a terror to you as to the damned, but be your joy as the day of your salvation and of the kingdom of God in you. Then when you think or hear of the same, your heart will leap for joy and earnestly long for its coming. If you do not wish to pronounce judgment upon yourself, then do not think that you would be able to stand in that day even with the meritorious deeds of all the saints. “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all things be accomplished. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.”

[54] Why does the Lord so fortify his Word and confirm it beyond measure by parables, oaths, and tokens of the generation which shall remain though heaven and earth pass away? This all happens because, as was said

above, all the world is so secure and with open eyes despises the signs to such a degree that perhaps no word of God has been so despised as this which foretells and characterizes the judgment day. It will appear to the world that there are no signs; and even though people should see them, they will still not believe. Even the very elect of God may doubt such words and tokens, in order that the day may come when the world is never so secure and thus be suddenly overwhelmed in its security, as St. Paul said above.

[55] Therefore Christ would assure us and wake us up to look for the day when the signs appear. We are to realize that though the signs be uncertain, those are not in danger who look upon them as tokens, while those who despise them are in the greatest danger. Hence let us play with certainties and consider the above-named signs as truly such lest we run with the unspiritual. If we are mistaken, we have after all hit the mark; if they are mistaken, it is a mistake for eternity with them.

[56] Jesus calls the Jews “this generation.” This passage, therefore, clearly indicates that the common saying is not true which holds that all the Jews will become Christians; and that the passage, John 10:16, “And they shall become one flock and one shepherd,” is not fulfilled when the Jews go over to the heathen, but when the heathen came to the Jews and became Christians at the time of the apostles, as St. Augustine often explains. Christ’s words in John 10:16 indicate the same, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and they shall become one flock and one shepherd.” Note that he speaks clearly of the heathen who have come to the Jewish fold; therefore the passage has been long since fulfilled. But here he says, “This generation shall not pass away” till the end come; that is, the Jews who crucified Christ must remain as a token. And although many will be converted, the generation and Jewish character must remain.

[57] Some have also been concerned about how heaven and earth will pass away, and they again call Aristotle to their aid. He must interpret the words of Christ for them, and he says, that heaven and earth will not pass away as to their essence but only as to their form. How much they think they are saying! If they so understood it that heaven and earth will continue to be something, they would indeed be right. But let us suffer the blind to go, and know that just as our bodies will be changed as to their essence, and yet be remade according to their essence, so heaven and earth at the last day

with all the elements will be melted with fervent heat and turned to dust, together with the bodies of men, so that there will be nothing but fire everywhere. Then will everything be new-created in greatest beauty; our bodies will shine in brilliancy, and the sun be much more glorious than now. Peter speaks of this day, in 2 Peter 3:10-13, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Paul also testifies to the same in 1 Corinthians 3:13, that "the last day shall be revealed in fire." And Isaiah 30:26, "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold as the light of seven days, in the day that Jehovah bindeth up the hurt of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound." Likewise Isaiah 65:17, "For, behold I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create." Therefore this passing away is not only according to form but also as to essence; unless it be that you do not want to call it a passing away, if things turn to dust until no trace of them can be found, as the burned body turns to ashes and passes away.

[58] But where do our souls dwell when the abode of every creature is afire and there is no earthly dwelling place? Answer: My dear hearer, where is the soul now? Or where is it when we sleep and are not conscious of what is taking place in our bodies and in the world around us? Do you think that God cannot so preserve or hold the souls of men in his hand that they will never know how heaven and earth passed away? Or do you think that he must have a bodily home for the soul, just as a shepherd has a stable for his sheep? It is enough for you to know that they are in God's hands and not in the care of any creature. Though you do not understand how it happens, do not be led astray. Since you have not yet learned what happens to you when you fall asleep or awaken, and can never know how near you are to waking or sleeping, though you daily do both, how do you expect to understand all about this question? The Scripture says, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," and so let it be. Meanwhile there will arise a new heaven and a new earth, and our bodies will be revived again to eternal salvation. Amen. If we knew just how the soul would be kept, faith would be at an end. But

now we journey and know not just whither; yet we put our confidence in God, and rest in his keeping, and our faith abides in all its dignity.

III. The Spiritual Interpretation of these Gospel Signs.

[59] Finally, we must find also a hidden or spiritual meaning in this Gospel. The sun is Christ, the moon is the church, the stars are Christians, the powers of heaven are the prelates or planets of the church. Now these earthly signs surely signify what has long since taken place and is now taking place among Christians; for they follow the service of sin and threaten and manifest the punishment resting upon them.

[60] That the sun is darkened no doubt signifies that Christ does not shine in the Christian church; that is, that the Gospel is not preached and that faith is expiring from the lack of divine service. This has come about through the teaching and works of men. The pope sits in the churches in the place of Christ and shines like dirt in a lantern — he with his bishops, priests, and monks. It is these that have darkened the sun for us, and instead of the true worship of God have set up idolatry and image worship with their tonsure and hoods and vestments and pipes and lutes and singing and playing etc. Oh what darkness! What darkness!

[61] From this it necessarily follows that neither the moon gives any light; that is, when faith died out, love had to die out also, so that no real Christian deeds are any more seen, no example is found in which one Christian serves another; but all the people have been led into idolatry, and

.image worship, and there have been instituted mass, vigils, altars, chapels, purifications, bells, and impostures. Again what darkness!

[62] I interpret the falling of the stars to mean the falling of man who has been baptized and become a Christian and then became a priest or monk. Whoever wants to believe me, may; whoever does not want to, need not do so, but I know what I am talking about. I do not say that they will all be lost; God can save even from the fire whom he will. But this I say, whoever becomes a priest or monk in the belief that he is taking up a holy estate falls from Christian faith into unbelief; for the falling of the stars does not signify the gross forms of sin, murder, adultery, theft, but a falling from faith. Priests and monks (unless God does wonders) are by virtue of their

position renegade and apostate Christians, worse than whom no people dwell on the earth.

[63] The Turks also are no Christians; but in two senses they are better than the Papists: first, they have never been Christians or stars, therefore have not fallen from the faith; secondly, they do not sin against the sacrament of the Lord's body and blood. But the Papists make a sacrifice out of the mass and a meritorious work and do it daily and continually. This is certainly the most sacrilegious perversion upon which the sun has yet shined. In short he who desires to become holy and be saved by works and holy orders, falls from the faith, falls from heaven; for the blood of Jesus Christ alone is able to save us. Therefore, whenever you see a star fall, then know that it signifies someone has become a priest, a monk, or a nun.

[64] That men's hearts failed them for fear signifies the torments which the pope's saints and fallen stars suffer, for while they do great things their consciences are never at rest. The Scriptures say they are weary and heavy laden.

[65] The roaring winds and seas are the worldly estates, both high and low There is no ruler or land at peace with the other, no faith or trust in one another, everyone is looking only to his own interests. Neither is there reproof or discipline or fear upon the earth; and the whole world is so engaged in eating, drinking, unchastity, and the lusts of the flesh, that it moans and roars.

[66] The powers of heaven are our planets, our spiritual squires and tyrants, popes, bishops, and their companions, the universities, which are all so deeply sunk in worldly affairs, property, honor, and pleasures, that they think they are not planets, that is, errorists, for planeta in Greek means an errorist, one who does not travel on the right way, but travels backward and to both sides as the planets also do in the heavens. This the Germans express in a proverb, "the more learned, the more perverse;" in other words, the spiritual government is only planets. But now when the Gospel shines forth and shows them their virtue and colors it with its own hue, and shows that they are unlearned idolators and soul-deceivers, they get angry, begin to move, and form a constellation. They gather together, try to shelter themselves behind bulls and edicts, and threateningly predict a great flood.

But it will do them no good, the day will come and its light cannot be placed under a bushel like a candle.

[67] The parable of the fig tree seems to me to signify that the fig tree is the Holy Scriptures which have so long been hidden in obscurity. They are now budding forth and taking leaves, their word is breaking forth into fruitage. For twelve centuries it has not been so well known, nor have its languages been so well known. There is no doubt in my mind, however, that the Scriptures are a fig tree which is easily preserved. It was fig leaves with which Adam and Eve covered their nakedness; for the old Adam always uses the Scriptures to adorn himself. Therefore the book must come forth, its leaves must become green, in spite of all the movements of the planets. The summer is not far distant — would to God that the fruit would also follow the leaves. I fear that there will be nothing but leaves, for we talk much about true faith but bring forth no fruit.

[68] Enough has now been said concerning these signs; if anyone desires to consider the matter further, to him has been given here the impulse and a start. But the planets with their factious spirit will not believe in them, in order that the Scriptures may still be true in this, that they give these people great security and contempt for the word, works, and signs of God.

Third Sunday in Advent. John in Prison: or Christ's Answer to John's Question; His Praise of John; and the Application of This Gospel.

John Baptized Jesus

Text: Matthew 11:2-10.

2 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,

3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:

5 The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

6 And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

7 And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Matthew 11:2-10

I. The Question John Puts to Christ.

[1] The most I find on this Gospel treats of whether John the Baptist knew that Jesus was the true Christ, although this question is unnecessary and of little import. St. Ambrose thinks John asked this question neither in ignorance nor in doubt; but in a Christian spirit. Jerome and Gregory write that John asked whether he should be Christ's forerunner also into hell, an opinion that has not the least foundation, for the text plainly says, "Art thou he that cometh or look we for another?" This looking or waiting for Christ, according to the words, relates to his coming on earth and pertains to the Jewish people, otherwise John ought to have asked, or do those in hell look for thee? And since Christ with his works answered that he had come, it is certain that John inquired about Christ's bodily coming, as Christ himself thus understood it and answered accordingly, although I do not deny that Christ also descended into hell, as we confess in our creed.

[2] Hence it is evident John knew very well that Jesus was he that should come, for he had baptized him and testified that Christ was the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, and he had also seen the Holy Spirit descending upon him as a dove, and heard the voice from heaven' "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." All is fully related by all four Evangelists. Why then did John ask this question? Answer- It was not done without good reasons In the first place, it is certain that John asked it for the sake of his disciples, as they did not yet hold Christ to be the one he really was. And John did not come in order to make disciples and draw the people to himself, but to prepare the way for Christ, to lead everybody to Christ and to make all the people subject to him.

[3] Now the disciples of John had heard from him many excellent testimonies concerning Christ, namely, that he was the Lamb of God and the Son of God, and that Christ must increase while he must decrease. All this his disciples and the people did not yet believe, nor could they understand it, as they themselves and all the people thought more of John than of Christ. For this reason they clung so strongly to John, even to the

extent that they for his sake became jealous and dissatisfied with Christ when they saw that he also baptized, made disciples and drew the people to himself. They complained to John about this because they feared that their master would grow less in esteem, as we read in John 8:26, “And they came unto John and said to him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond the Jordan, to whom thou hast borne witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.”

[4] To this error they were led by two reasons, first, because Christ was not yet known to the people, but only to John; neither had he as yet performed any miracle, and no one was held in high esteem but John. Hence it appeared so strange to them that he should point them and everybody else away from himself and to someone else, inasmuch as there was no one living beside John who had gained a great name and enjoyed great fame. The other reason was because Christ appeared so very humble and common, being the son of a poor carpenter and of a poor widow. Neither did he belong to the priesthood, nor to the learned; but was only a layman and a common apprentice. He had never studied, was brought up as a carpenter apprentice just like other laymen; hence it seemed as though the excellent testimony of John concerning Christ and the common layman and apprentice, Jesus of Nazareth, did not at all harmonize with each other. Therefore, though they believed that John told the truth, they still reasoned: Perhaps it will be someone else than this Jesus; and they looked for one who might appear among them in an imposing way, like a highly learned leader among the priests, or a mighty king. From such delusion John could not deliver them with his words. They clung to him, and regarded Christ as being much inferior, meanwhile looking for the glorious appearing of the great person of whom John spoke. And should he really be Jesus, then he had to assume a different attitude; he must saddle a steed, put on bright spurs, and dash forward like a lord and king of Israel, just as the kings aforetime had done. Until he should do this they would cling to John.

[5] But when Jesus began to perform miracles and became famous, then John thought he would point his disciples away from himself and lead them to Christ, in order that they might not think of establishing a new sect and becoming Johnites; but that all might cling to Christ and become Christians, John sends them to Christ so that from now on they might learn not only from the witness he bore of Christ, but also from the words and deeds of

Christ himself that he was the one of whom John had spoken. It should not be expected that the works and coming of Christ would be attended by drums and bugles and like worldly pomp; but by spiritual power and grace, so that there would be no riding and walking on streets paved and carpeted; but that by virtue of such power and grace the dead would be raised up, the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, and all kinds of bodily and spiritual evil be removed. That should be the glory and coming of this king, the least of whose works could not be performed by all the kings, all the learned and all the rich in the world. This is the meaning of the text. "Now when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent by his disciples and said unto him, art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?"

[6] As though John would say to his disciples: There you hear of his works, such as I never accomplished, nor anyone else before him. Now go to him and ask him, whether or not he is the one that cometh. Put away the gross worldly deception that he would ride on steeds in armor. He is increasing, but I must now decrease; my work must cease, but his must continue; you must leave me and cling to him.

[7] How necessary it was for John to point his disciples away from himself to Christ is very clear. For what benefit would it have been to them if they had depended a thousand times on John's piety and had not embraced Christ? Without Christ there is no help or remedy, no matter how pious men may be. So at the present day what benefit is it to the monks and nuns to observe the rules of St. Benedict, St. Bernard, St. Francis, St. Dominic and St. Augustine, if they do not embrace Christ and him only, and depart also from their John? All Benedictines, Carthusians, Barefoot-Friars, Ecclesiasts, Augustinians, Carmelites, all monks and nuns are surely lost, as only Christians are saved. Whoever is not a Christian even John the Baptist cannot help, who indeed, according to Christ, was the greatest of all saints.

[8] However, John deals kindly with his disciples, has patience with their weak faith till they shall have grown strong. He does not condemn them because they do not firmly believe him. Thus we should deal with the consciences of men ensnared by the examples and regulations of pious men, until they are freed from them.

II. Christ's Answer, Given in Words and Deeds.

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, go and tell John the things which you hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me.”

[9] Christ answered John also for the sake of his disciples. He answers in a twofold way: First, by his works; secondly, by his words. He did the same thing when the Jews surrounded him in the temple and asked him, “If thou art the Christ, tell us plainly,” John 10:24. But he points them to his works saying, “I told you, and ye believe not, the works that I do in my Father’s name, these bear witness of me,” John 10:25. Again, “Though ye believe not me, believe the works,” John 10:38. Here Christ first points them to the works, and then also to the words saying “And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me.” With these words he does not only confess that he is the Christ, but also warns them against finding occasion of stumbling in him. If he were not the Christ, then he who finds no occasion of stumbling in him could not be blessed. For one can dispense with all the saints, but Christ is the only one that no man can dispense with. No saint can help us, none but Christ.

[10] The answer of his works is more convincing, first, because such works were never before accomplished either by John or by anyone else; and secondly, because these works were predicted by the prophets. Therefore, when they saw that it came to pass just as the prophets had foretold, they could and should have been assured. For thus Isaiah had said of these works: “The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me, because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the weak; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound,” Isaiah 61:1. When Isaiah says, “He hath anointed me,” he thereby means that Jesus is the Christ and that Christ should do all these works, and he who is doing them must be the Christ. For the Greek word Christ is Messiah in Hebrew, Unctus in Latin, and Gesalbter (anointed in German). But the kings and priests were usually anointed for the kingdom and priesthood. But this anointed king and priest, Isaiah says, shall be anointed by God himself, not with real oil, but with the Holy Spirit that should come upon him, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me.” That is my anointment with

which the Spirit anointed me. Thus he indeed preaches good tidings to the weak, gives sight to the blind, heals all kinds of sickness and proclaims the acceptable year, the time of grace, etc. Again Isaiah says: "Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing," etc. Isaiah 85:4-5. Now, if they would compare the Scriptures with these works, and these works with the Scriptures, they would recognize John's witness by Christ's works, that he was the true Messiah. Luke says that Christ at that time, when John's disciples asked him, healed many of their diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and bestowed sight on many that were blind. Luke 7:21.

[11] But here we must take to heart the good example of Christ in that he appeals to his works, even as the tree is known by its fruits, thus rebuking all false teachers, the pope, bishops, priests and monks to appear in the future and shield themselves by his name, saying, "We are Christians;" just as the pope is boasting that he is the vicar of Christ. Here we have it stated that where the works are absent, there is also no Christ. Christ is a living, active and fruit-bearing character who does not rest, but works unceasingly wherever he is. Therefore, those bishops and teachers that are not doing the works of Christ, we should avoid and consider as wolves.

[12] But they say, Why it is not necessary for everyone to do these works of Christ. How can all the pious give sight to the blind, make the lame walk and do other miracles like those of Christ? Answer: Christ did also other works, he exercised himself in patience, love, peace, meekness, etc.; this everybody should do. Do these works, and then we also shall know Christ by his works.

[13] Here they reply: Christ says, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe; but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not. Matthew 23:2-3. Here Christ commanded to judge the doctrine, but not the life. Answer: What do I hear? Have you now become Pharisees and hypocrites, and confess it yourselves? If we would say this about you then you would indeed become angry. Be it so, if you are such hypocrites and apply these words of Christ to yourselves, then you must also apply to yourselves all the other words Christ speaks against the Pharisees. However, as they wish

to shield themselves by these words of Christ and put to silence the ignorant, we will further consider the same, inasmuch as the murderers of Christians at the Council of Constance also attacked John Huss with this passage, claiming that it granted them liberty for their tyranny, so that no one dared to oppose their doctrine.

[14] It must, therefore, be observed that teaching is also a work, yea, even the chief work of Christ, because here among his works he mentions that to the poor the Gospel is preached. Therefore, just as the tyrants are known by their works, so are they known by their teachings. Where Christ is, there surely the Gospel will be preached; but where the Gospel is not preached, there Christ is not present.

[15] Now in order to grant our Pharisees that not the life, but the doctrine should be judged, be it so, let them teach, and we will gladly spare their lives; but then they are a great deal worse than the Pharisees who taught Moses' doctrine, though they did not practice it. But our blockheads are idols, there is neither letting nor doing, neither life nor doctrine. They sit on Christ's seat and teach their own lies and silence the Gospel. Hence this passage of Christ will not shield them, they must be wolves and murderers as Christ calls them, John 10:1.

[16] Thus Christ here wants them to hear the Pharisees; but only on Moses' seat; that is, if they taught the law of Moses, the Commandments of God. In the same place Christ forbids to do according to their works he mentions their teachings among their works, saying: "Yea, they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger." Matthew 23:4. Observe here that Christ first of all forbids among their works their teachings grievous to be borne, as being of chief import, so that finally the meaning of the passage is: All that they teach according to Moses, you should keep and do; but whatever they teach and do besides, you should not observe. Even so should we listen to our Pharisees on Christ's seat only when they preach the Gospel to the poor, and not hear them nor do what they otherwise teach or do.

[17] Thus you perceive how skillfully the rude Papists made this passage the foundation of their doctrine, lies and tyranny, though no other passage is more strongly against them and more severely condemns their teachings

than this one. Christ's words stand firm and are clear; do not follow their works. But their doctrine is their own work, and not God's. They are a people exalted only to lie and to pervert the Scriptures. Moreover, if one's life is bad, it would be strange indeed if he should preach right; he would always have to preach against himself, which he will hardly do without additions and foreign doctrines. In short, he who does not preach the Gospel, identifies himself as one who is sitting neither on Moses' nor on Christ's seat. For this reason you should do neither according to his words nor according to his works, but flee from him as Christ's sheep do, John 10:4-5: "And the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but flee from him." But if you wish to know what their seat is called, then listen to David: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of the sinner, nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers, Psalm 1:1. Again: "Shall the throne of wickedness have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by statute? Psalm 94:20.

[18] But what does it mean when Christ says: "The poor have good tidings preached to them?" Is it not preached also to the rich and to the whole world? Again, why is the Gospel so great a thing, so great a blessing as Christ teaches, seeing that so many people despise and oppose it? Here we must know what Gospel really is, otherwise we cannot understand this passage. We must, therefore, diligently observe that from the beginning God has sent into the world a two-fold word or message, the Law and the Gospel. These two messages must be rightly distinguished one from the other and properly understood, for besides the Scriptures there never has been a book written to this day, not even by a saint, in which these two messages, the Law and the Gospel, have been properly explained and distinguished, and yet so very much depends on such an explanation.

The Difference between the Law and the Gospel.

[19] The Law is that word by which God teaches what we shall do, as for instance, the Ten Commandments. Now, if human nature is not aided by God's grace, it is impossible to keep the law, for the reason that man, since the fall of Adam in Paradise is depraved and full of sinful desires, so that he cannot from his heart's desire find pleasure in the law, which fact we all experience in ourselves. For no one lives who does not prefer that there were no law, and everyone feels and knows in himself that it is difficult to

lead a pious life and do good, and, on the other hand, that it is easy to lead a wicked life and to do evil. But this difficulty or unwillingness to do the good is the reason we do not keep the Law of God. For whatever is done with aversion and unwillingness is considered by God as not done at all. Thus the Law of God convicts us, even by our own experience, that by nature we are evil, disobedient, lovers of sin. and hostile to God's laws.

[20] From all this either self-confidence or despair must follow. Self-confidence follows when a man strives to fulfill the law by his own good works, by trying hard to do as the words of the law command, he serves God, he swears not, he honors father and mother, he kills not, he does not commit adultery, etc. But meanwhile he does not look into his heart, does not realize with what motives he leads a good life, and conceals the old Adam in his heart. For if he would truly examine his heart, he would realize that he is doing all unwillingly and with compulsion, that he fears hell or seeks heaven, if he be not prompted by things of less importance, as honor, goods, health and fear of being humiliated, of being punished or of being visited by a plague. In short, he would have to confess that he would rather lead a wicked life if it were not that he fears the consequences, for the law only restrains him. But because he does not realize his bad motives he lives securely, looks only at his outward works and not into his heart, prides himself on keeping the law of God perfectly, and thus the countenance of Moses remains covered to him, that is, he does not understand the meaning of the law, namely, that it must be kept with a happy, free and willing mind.

[21] Just as an immoral person, if you should ask him why he commits adultery, can answer only that he is doing it for the sake of the carnal pleasure he finds in it. For he does not do it for reward or punishment, he expects no gain from it, nor does he hope to escape from the evil of it. Such willingness the law requires in us, so that if you should ask a virtuous man why he leads a chaste life, he would answer: Not for the sake of heaven or hell, honor or disgrace, but for the sole reason that he considers it honorable, and that it pleases him exceedingly, even if it were not commanded. Behold, such a heart delights in God's law and keeps it with pleasure. Such people love God and righteousness, they hate and fear naught but unrighteousness. However, no one is thus by nature. The unrighteous love reward and profit, fear and hate punishment and pain; therefore they also hate God and righteousness, love themselves and

unrighteousness. They are hypocrites, disguisers, deceivers, liars and self-conceited. So are all men without grace, but above all, the saints who rely on their good works. For this reason the Scriptures conclude, “All men are liars,” Psalm 116:11. “Every man at his best estate is altogether vanity,” Psalm 39:5. “There is none that doeth good, no, not one,” Psalm 14:3.

[22] Despair follows when man becomes conscious of his evil motives, and realizes that it is impossible for him to love the law of God, finding nothing good in himself; but only hatred of the good and delight in doing evil. Now he realizes that the law cannot be kept only by works hence he despairs of his works and does not rely upon them. He should have love; but he finds none, nor can have any through his own efforts or out of his own heart. Now he must be a poor, miserable and humiliated spirit whose conscience is burdened and in anguish because of the law, commanding and demanding payment in full when he does not possess even a farthing with which to pay. Only to such persons is the law beneficial, because it has been given for the purpose of working such knowledge and humiliation; that is its real mission. These persons well know how to judge the works of hypocrites and fraudulent saints, namely, as nothing but lies and deception. David referred to this when he said, “I said in my haste, all men are liars,” Psalm 116:11.

[23] For this reason Paul calls the law a law unto death, saying, “And the commandment, which was unto life, this I found to be unto death,” Romans 7:10; and a power of sin. 1 Corinthians 15:56: “And the power of sin is the law,” and in 2 Corinthians 3:6 he says, “For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.” All this means, if the law and human nature be brought into a right relation, the one to the other, then will sin and a troubled conscience first become manifest. Man, then, sees how desperately wicked his heart is, how great his sins are, even as to things he formerly considered good works and no sin. He now is compelled to confess that by and of himself he is a child of perdition, a child of God’s wrath and of hell. Then there is only fear and trembling, all self-conceit vanishes, while fear and despair fill his heart. Thus man is crushed and put to naught, and truly humbled. Inasmuch as all this is caused only by the law, St. Paul truly says, that it is a law unto death and a letter that killeth, and that through the commandment sin becomes exceedingly sinful, Romans 7:13, provoking God’s wrath. For the law gives

and helps us in no way whatever; it only demands and drives and shows us our misery and depravity.

Concerning the Gospel

[24] The other word of God is neither law nor commandments, and demands nothing of us. But when that has been done by the first word, namely, the law, and has worked deep despair and wretchedness in our hearts, then God comes and offers us his blessed and life-giving word and promises; he pledges and obligates himself to grant grace and help in order to deliver us from misery, not only to pardon all our sins, but even to blot them out, and in addition to this to create in us love and delight in keeping his law.

[25] Behold, this divine promise of grace and forgiveness of sin is rightly called the Gospel. And I say here, again, that by the Gospel you must by no means understand anything else than the divine promise of God's grace and his forgiveness of sin. For thus it was that Paul's epistles were never understood, nor can they be understood by the Papists, because they do not know what the Law and the Gospel really mean. They hold Christ to be a lawmaker, and the Gospel a mere doctrine of a new law. That is nothing else than locking up the Gospel and entirely concealing it.

[26] Now, the word Gospel is of Greek origin and signifies in German Froehliche Botschaft, that is glad tidings, because it proclaims the blessed doctrine of life eternal by divine promise, and offers grace and forgiveness of sin. Therefore, works do not belong to the Gospel, as it is not a law; only faith belongs to it, as it is altogether a promise and an offer of divine grace. Whosoever now believes the Gospel will receive grace and the Holy Spirit. This will cause the heart to rejoice and find delight in God, and will enable the believer to keep the law cheerfully, without expecting reward, without fear of punishment, without seeking compensation, as the heart is perfectly satisfied with God's grace, by which the law has been fulfilled.

[27] But all these promises from the beginning are founded on Christ, so that God promises no one this grace except through Christ, who is the messenger of the divine promise to the whole world. For this reason he came and through the Gospel brought these promises into all the world, which before this time had been proclaimed by the prophets. It is, therefore,

in vain if anyone, like the Jews, expects the fulfillment of the divine promises without Christ. All is centered and decreed in Christ. Whosoever will not hear him shall have no promises of God. For just as God acknowledges no law besides the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets, so he makes no promises, except through Christ alone.

[28] But you may reply, is there not also much law in the Gospel and in the Epistles of Paul? And, again, many promises in the writings of Moses and the Prophets? I answer: There is no book in the Bible in which both are not found. God has always placed side by side both law and promise. For he teaches by the law what we are to do, and by the promises whence we shall receive power to do it.

[29] But the New Testament especially is called the Gospel above the other books of the Bible, because it was written after the coming of Christ, who fulfilled the divine promises, brought them unto us and publicly proclaimed them by oral preaching, which promises were before concealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. Therefore, hold to this distinction, and no matter what books you have before you, be they of the Old or of the New Testament, read them with a discrimination so as to observe that when promises are made in a book, it is a Gospel-book; when commandments are given, it is a law-book. But because in the New Testament the promises are found so abundantly, and in the Old Testament so many laws, the former is called the Gospel, and the latter the Book of the Law. We now come back to our text. "And the poor have good tidings preached unto them."

[30] From what has just been said it is easily understood that among the works of Christ none is greater than preaching the Gospel to the poor. This means nothing else than that to the poor the divine promise of grace and consolation in and through Christ is preached, offered and presented, so that to him who believes all his sins are forgiven, the law is fulfilled, conscience is appeased and at last life eternal is bestowed upon him. What more joyful tidings could a poor sorrowful heart and a troubled conscience hear than this? How could the heart become more bold and courageous than by such consoling, blissful words of promise? Sin, death, hell, the world and the devil and every evil are scorned, when a poor heart receives and believes this consolation of the divine promise. To give sight to the blind and to raise up the dead are but insignificant deeds, compared with preaching the

Gospel to the poor. Therefore Christ mentions it as the greatest and best among these works.

[31] But it must be observed that Christ says: “The Gospel is preached to none but to the poor only, thus without doubt intending it to be a message for the poor only. For it has always been preached unto the whole world, as Christ says, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation,” Mark 16:15. Surely these poor are not the beggars and the bodily poor, but the spiritually poor, namely, those who do not covet and love earthly goods; yes, rather those poor, broken-hearted ones who in the agony of their conscience seek and desire help and consolation so ardently that they covet neither riches nor honor. Nothing will be of help to them, unless they have a merciful God. Here is true spiritual weakness. They are those for whom such a message is intended, and in their hearts they are delighted with it. They feel that they have been delivered from hell and death.

[32] Therefore, though the Gospel is heard by all the world, yet it is not accepted but by the poor only. Moreover, it is to be preached and proclaimed to all the world, that it is a message only for the poor, and that the rich men cannot receive it. Whosoever would receive it must first become poor, as Christ says, Matthew 9:13, that he came not to call the righteous but only sinners, although he called all the world. But his calling was such that he desired to be accepted only by sinners, and all he called should become sinners. This they resented. In like manner all should become poor who heard the Gospel, that they might be worthy of the Gospel; but this they also resented. Therefore the Gospel remained only for the poor. Thus God’s grace was also preached before all the world to the humble, in order that all might become humble, but they would not be humble.

[33] Hence you see who are the greatest enemies of the Gospel, namely, the work-righteous saints, who are self-conceited, as has been said before. For the Gospel has not the least in common with them. They want to be rich in works, but the Gospel wills that they are to become poor. They will not yield, neither can the Gospel yield, as it is the unchangeable word of God. Thus they and the Gospel clash, one with another, as Christ says, “And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust.” Matthew 21:44. Again, they condemn the Gospel as being error and heresy; and we observe it comes to pass daily,

as it has from the beginning of the world, that between the Gospel and the work-righteous saints there is no peace, no good will and no reconciliation. But meanwhile Christ must suffer himself to be crucified anew, for he and those that are his must place themselves, as it were, into this vise, namely, between the Gospel and the workrighteous saints, and thus be pressed and crushed like the wheat between the upper and nether millstones. But the lower stone is the quiet, peaceable and immovable Gospel, while the upper stone is the works and their masters, who are ranting and raging.

[34] With all this John contradicts strongly the fleshly and worldly opinion his disciples entertained concerning Christ's coming. They thought that the great king, whom John extolled so highly, namely, that the latchet of whose shoe he was not worthy to unloose (John 1:27), would enter in such splendor that everything would be gold and costly ornaments, and immediately the streets would be spread with pearls and silks. As they lifted up their eyes so high and looked for such splendor, Christ turns their look downward and holds before them the blind, lame, deaf, dumb, poor and everything that conflicts with such splendor, and contrariwise he presents himself in the state of a common servant rather than that of a great king, whose shoe's latchet John considered himself unworthy to unloose, as though Christ would say to them: "Banish your high expectations, look not to my person and state, but to the works I do. Worldly lords, because they rule by force, must be accompanied by rich, high, healthy, strong, wise and able men. With them they have to associate, and they need them, or their kingdom could not exist; hence they can never attend to the blind, lame, deaf, dumb, dead, lepers and the poor. But my kingdom, because it seeks not its own advantage, but rather bestows benefits upon others, is sufficient of itself and needs no one's help; therefore, I cannot bear to be surrounded by such as are already sufficient of themselves, such as are healthy, rich, strong, pure, active, pious, and able in every respect. To such I am of no benefit; they obtain nothing from me. Yea, they would be a disgrace to me, because it would seem that I needed them and were benefited by them, as worldly rulers are by their subjects. Therefore, I must do otherwise and keep to those who can become partakers of me, and I must associate with the blind, the lame, the dumb, and all kinds of afflicted ones. This the character and nature of my kingdom demand. For this reason I must appear in a way that such people can feel at home in my company.

[35] And now very aptly follow the words, “And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me.” Why? Because Christ’s humble appearance and John’s excellent testimony of Christ seemed to disagree with each other. Human reason could not make them rhyme. Now all the Scriptures pointed to Christ, and there was danger of misinterpreting them. Reason spoke thus: Can this be the Christ, of whom all the Scriptures speak? Should he be the one, whose shoe’s latchet John thought himself unworthy to unloose, though I scarcely consider him worthy to clean my shoes? Therefore, it is surely true that it is a great blessing not to find occasion of stumbling in Christ, and there is here no other help or remedy than to look at his works and compare them with the Scriptures. Otherwise it is impossible to keep from being offended at Christ.

Two Kinds of Offenses

[36] Here you observe that there are two kinds of offenses, one of doctrine, and the other of life. These two offenses must be carefully considered. The offense of doctrine comes when one believes, teaches or thinks of Christ in a different way than he should, as the Jews here thought of and taught Christ to be different than he really was, expecting him to be a temporal king. Of this offense the Scriptures treat mostly. Christ and Paul always dwell upon it, scarcely mentioning any other. Note well, that Christ and Paul speak of this offense.

[37] It is not without reason that men are admonished faithfully to remember this. For under the reign of the pope this offense has been hushed entirely, so that neither monk nor priest knows of any other offense than that caused by open sin and wicked living, which the Scripture does not call an offense; yet they thus construe and twist this word. On the contrary, all their doings and all their teachings by which they think to benefit the world, they do not consider to be an offense, but a great help; and yet these are dangerous offenses, the like of which never before existed. For they teach the people to believe that the mass is an offering and a good work, that by works men may become pious, may atone for sin and be saved, all of which is nothing else than rejecting Christ and destroying faith.

[38] Thus the world today is filled with offenses up to the very heavens, so that it is terrible to think of it. For no one now seeks Christ among the

poor, the blind, the dead, etc.; but all expect to enter heaven in a different way, which expectation must surely fail.

[39] The offense of life is, when one sees an openly wicked work done by another and teaches it. But it is impossible to avoid this offense, inasmuch as we have to live among the wicked, nor is it so dangerous, since everybody knows that such offense is sinful, and no one is deceived by it, but intentionally follows the known evil. There is neither disguise nor deception. But the offense of doctrine is that there should be the most beautiful religious ceremonies, the noblest works, the most honorable life and that it is impossible for common reason to censure or discern it; only faith knows through the spirit that it is all wrong. Against this offense Christ warns us, saying, “But whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea,” Matthew 18:6.

[40] Whosoever does not preach Christ, or who preaches him otherwise than as one caring for the blind, the lame, the dead and the poor, like the Gospel teaches; let us flee from him as from the devil himself, because he teaches us how to become unhappy and to stumble in Christ; as it is now done by the pope, the monks and the teachers in their high schools. All their doings are an offense from head to foot, from the skin to the marrow, so that the snow is scarcely anything but water; nor can these things exist without causing great offense, inasmuch as offense is the nature and essence of their doings. Therefore, to undertake to reform the pope, the convents, and the high schools and still maintain them in their essence and character, would be like squeezing water out of snow and still preserving the snow. But what it means to preach Christ among the poor, we shall see at the end of our text.

III. How and Why Christ Praises John.

“And as these went their way, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out in the wilderness to behold? a reed shaken by the wind? But what went ye out to see? a man clothed in soft raiments? Behold, they that wear soft raiment are in kings’ houses. But

wherefore went ye out? to see a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.”

[41] Inasmuch as Christ thus lauds John the Baptist, because he is not a reed, nor clothed in soft raiment, and because he is more than a prophet, he gives us to understand by these figurative words, that the people were inclined to look upon John as a reed, as clad in soft raiment, and as a prophet. Therefore we must see what he means by them, and why he censures and rejects these opinions of theirs. Enough has been said, that John bore witness of Christ, in order that the people might not take offense at Christ's humble appearance and manner.

[42] Now, as it was of great importance for them to believe John's witness and acknowledge Christ, he praised John first for his steadfastness, thus rebuking their wavering on account of which they would not believe John's witness. It is as though he would say: You have heard John's witness concerning me, but now you do not adhere to it, you take offense at me and your hearts are wavering; you are looking for another, but know not who, nor when and where, and thus your hearts are like a reed shaken by the wind to and fro; you are sure of nothing, and would rather hear something else than the truth about me. Now do you think that John should also turn his witness from me and, as is the lease with your thoughts, turn it to the winds and speak of another whom you would be pleased to hear? Not so. John does not waver, nor does his witness fluctuate; he does not follow your swaying delusion; but you must stay your wavering by his witness, and thus adhere to me and expect none other.

[43] Again, Christ lauds John because of his coarse raiment, as though to say: Perhaps you might believe him when he says that I am he that should come as to my person; but you expect him to speak differently about me, saying something smooth and agreeable, that would be pleasant to hear. It is indeed hard and severe that I come so poor and despised. You desire me to rush forth with pomp and flourish of trumpets. Had John thus spoken of me, then he would not appear so coarse and severe himself. But do not think thus. Whoever desires to preach about me, must not preach different than John is doing. It's to no purpose, I will assume no other state and manner. Those who teach different than John, are not in the wilderness, but in kings' houses. They are rich and honored by the people. They are teachers of man-made doctrines, teaching themselves, and not me.

[44] Christ lauds John, thirdly, because of the dignity of his office, namely, that he is not only a prophet, but even more than a prophet, as though to say: In your high-soaring fluctuating opinion you take John for a prophet, who speaks of the coming of Christ, just as the other prophets have done, and thus again your thoughts go beyond me to a different time when you expect Christ to come, according to John's witness, so that you will in no case accept me. But I say to you, your thoughts are wrong. For just as John warns you not to be like a shaken reed, and not to look for any other than myself, nor to expect me in a different state and manner from that in which you see me, he also forbids you to look for another time, because his witness points to this person of mine, to this state and manner, and to this time, and it opposes your fickle ideas in every way and binds you firmly to my person.

[45] Now, if you want to do John justice, then you must simply accept his witness and believe, that this is the person, the state and manner and the time that you should accept, and abandon your presumption and your waiting for another person, state and time. For it is decreed that John should be no shaken reed, not a man of soft raiment, and above all, not a prophet pointing to future times, but a messenger of present events. He will not write as did the prophets, but will point out and orally announce him, who has been predicted by the prophets, saying: "This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare the way before thee."

[46] What else can this mean than that you dare not wait for another, neither for another manner of mine, neither for another time. Here I am present, the one of whom John speaks. For John is not a prophet, but a messenger. And not a messenger that is sent by the master who stays at home, but a messenger that goes before the face of his master and brings the master along with him, so that there is but one time for the messenger and for the master. Now if you do not accept John as such a messenger, but take him for a prophet who only proclaims the coming of the Lord, as the other prophets have done, then you will fail to understand me, the Scriptures, and everything else.

[47] Thus we see Christ pleads, mainly for them to take John as a messenger, and not as a prophet. To this end Christ quotes the Scriptures referring to the passage in Malachi 3:1, "Behold, I send my messenger, and

he shall prepare the way before me,” which he does not do in reference to the other points, namely, his person and manner. For to this day it is the delusion of the Jews, that they look for another time; and if they then had believed that the time was at hand and had considered John a messenger and not a prophet, then everything could easily have been adjusted as to the person and manner of Christ, inasmuch as they at last had to accept his person and manner, at least after the expired time. For there should be no other time than the days of John, the messenger and preparer of the way for his Master. But as they do not heed the time, and look for another time, it is scarcely possible to convince them by his person and manner. They remain shaken reeds and soft-raiment-seekers as long as they take John for his prophet, and not for his messenger.

[48] We must accustom ourselves to the Scriptures, in which angel (angelus) really means a messenger; not a bearer of messages or one who carries letters, but one who is sent to solicit orally for the message. Hence in the Scriptures this name is common to all messengers of God in heaven and on earth, be they holy angels in heaven, or the prophets and apostles on earth. For thus Malachi speaks of the office of the priest. “For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger (angel) of Jehovah of hosts.” Malachi 2:7. Again: “Then spake Haggai, Jehovah’s messenger (angel) in Jehovah’s message unto the people,” Haggai 1:13. And again: “And it came to pass, when the days were well nigh come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers (angels) before his face,” Luke 9:51. Thus they are called God’s angels or messengers and solicitors, who proclaim his word. From this is also derived the word gospel, which means good tidings. But the heavenly spirits are called angels chiefly because they are the highest and most exalted messengers of God.

[49] Thus John is also an angel or word-messenger, and not only such a messenger, but one who also prepares the way before the face of the Master in a manner that the Master himself follows him immediately, which no prophet ever did. For this reason John is more than a prophet, namely, an angel or messenger, and a forerunner, so that in his day the Lord of all the prophets himself comes with this messenger.

[50] The preparing here means to make ready the way, to put out of the way all that interferes with the course of the Lord, just as the servant clears

the way before the face of his master by removing wood, stones, people and all that is in the way. But what was it that blocked the way of Christ, and John was to remove? Sin, without doubt, especially the good works of the haughty saints; that is, he should make known to everybody that the works and deeds of all men are sin and iniquity and that all need the grace of Christ. He who knows and acknowledges this thoroughly is himself humble and has well prepared the way for Christ. Of this we shall speak in the following Gospel. Now is the opportunity for us to receive a blessing from this Gospel lesson.

IV. The Application of this Gospel: The Doctrine of Faith and Good Works.

[51] As we have said touching the other Gospels, that we should learn from them the two doctrines of faith and love, or accepting and bestowing good works, so we should do here, extol faith and exercise love. Faith receives the good works of Christ, love bestows good works on our neighbor.

[52] In the first place, our faith is strengthened and increased when Christ is held forth to us in his own natural works, namely, that he associates only with the blind, the deaf, the lame, the lepers, the dead and the poor; that is, in pure love and kindness toward all who are in need and in misery, so that finally Christ is nothing else than consolation and a refuge for all the distressed and troubled in conscience. Here is necessary faith that trusts in the Gospel and relies upon it, never doubting that Christ is just as he is presented to us in this Gospel, and does not think of him otherwise, nor let anyone persuade us to believe otherwise. Then surely we learn Christ as we believe and as this Gospel speaks of him. For as you believe, so you will have it. And blessed is he, who finds here no occasion of stumbling in Christ.

[53] Here you must with all diligence beware of taking offense. Who stumble at Christ? All that teach you to do works, instead of teaching you to believe. Those who hold forth Christ to you as a lawmaker and a judge, and refuse to let Christ be a helper and a comforter, torment you by putting works before and in the way of God in order to atone for your sins and to merit grace. Such are the teachings of the pope, priests, monks and their high schools, who with their masses and religious ceremonies cause you to

open your eyes and mouth in astonishment, leading you to another Christ. and withholding from you the real Christ. For if you desire to believe rightly and to possess Christ truly, then you must reject all works that you intend to place before and in the way of God. They are only stumbling blocks, leading you away from Christ and from God. Before God no works are acceptable but Christ's own works. Let these plead for you before God, and do no other work before him than to believe that Christ is doing his works for you and is placing them before God in your behalf. In order to keep your faith pure, do nothing else than stand still, enjoy its blessings, accept Christ's works, and let him bestow his love upon you. You must be blind, lame, deaf, dead, leprous and poor, otherwise you will stumble at Christ. That Gospel which suffers Christ to be seen and to be doing good only among the needy, will not belie you.

[54] This means to acknowledge Christ aright and to embrace him. This is true and Christian believing. But those who intend to atone for sins and to become pious by their own works, will miss the present Christ and look for another, or at least they will believe that he should do otherwise, that first of all he should come and accept their works and consider them pious. These are, like the Jews, lost forever. There is no help for them.

[55] In the second place, Christ teaches us rightly to apply the works and shows us what good works are. All other work, except faith, we should apply to our neighbor. For God demands of us no other work that we should do for him than to exercise faith in Christ. With that he is satisfied, and with that we give honor to him, as to one who is merciful, longsuffering, wise, kind, truthful and the like. After this think of nothing else than to do to your neighbor as Christ has done to you, and let all your works together with all your life be applied to your neighbor. Look for the poor, sick and all kinds of needy, help them and let your life's energy here appear, so that they may enjoy your kindness, helping whoever needs you, as much as you possibly can with your life, property and honor. Whoever points you to other good works than these, avoid him as a wolf and as Satan, because he wants to put a stumbling block in your way, as David says, "In the way wherein I walk have they hidden a snare for me," Psalm 142:3.

[56] But this is done by the perverted, misguided people of the Papists, who with their religious ceremonies set aside such Christian works, and teach the people to serve God only and not also mankind. They establish

convents, masses, vigils, become religious, do this and that. And these poor, blind people call that serving God, which they have chosen themselves. But know that to serve God is nothing else than to serve your neighbor and do good to him in love, be it a child, wife, servant, enemy, friend; without making any difference, whoever needs your help in body or soul, and wherever you can help in temporal or spiritual matters. This is serving God and doing good works. O, Lord God, how do we fools live in this world, neglecting to do such works, though in all parts of the world we find the needy, on whom we could bestow our good works; but no one looks after them nor cares for them. But look to your own life. If you do not find yourself among the needy and the poor, where the Gospel shows us Christ, then you may know that your faith is not right, and that you have not yet tasted of Christ's benevolence and work for you.

[57] Therefore, behold what an important saying it is, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me." We stumble in two respects. In faith, because we expect to become pious Christians in a different way than through Christ, and go our way blindly, not acknowledging Christ. In love we stumble, because we are not mindful of the poor and needy, do not look after them, and yet we think we satisfy the demands of faith with other works than these. Thus we come under the judgment of Christ, who says: "For I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat, I was thirsty, and yet ye gave me no drink," Matthew 25:42. Again: "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me," Matthew 25:45. Why is this judgment right, if not for the reason, that we do not unto our neighbor as Christ has done to us? He has bestowed on us needy ones his great, rich, eternal blessings, but we will not bestow our meager service on our neighbors, thus showing that we do not truly believe, and that we have neither accepted nor tasted his blessings. Many will say, "Did we not do wonders in thy name, did we not speak and cast out devils?" But he will answer them, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity," Matthew 7:23, and why? Because they did not retain their true Christian faith and love.

[58] Thus we see in this Gospel how difficult it is to acknowledge Christ. There is a stumbling block in the way, and one takes offense at this, another at that. There is no headway, not even with the disciples of John, though they plainly see Christ's works and hear his words.

[59] This we also do. Though we see, hear, understand and must confess that Christian life is faith in God and love to our needy neighbor, yet there is no progress. This one clings to his religious ceremonies and his own works, that one is scraping all to himself and helps no one. Even those who gladly hear and understand the doctrine of pure faith do not proceed to serve their neighbor, as though they expected to be saved by faith without works: they see not that their faith is not faith, but a shadow of faith, just as the picture in the mirror is not the face itself, but only a reflection of the same, as St. James so beautifully writes, saying, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was,” James 1:22-25. So also there within themselves many behold a reflection of true faith when they hear and speak of the Word, but as soon as the hearing and speaking are done, they are concerned about other affairs and are not doing according to it, and thus they always forget about the fruit of faith, namely, Christian love, of which Paul also says, “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power,” 1 Corinthians 4:20.

Fourth Sunday in Advent. The Witness and Confession of John the Baptist; and the Spiritual Meaning of His Witness.

Christ is the Way

Text: John 1:19-28.

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

I. The Witness and Confession of John the Baptist

[1] With many words the Evangelist describes and magnifies the testimony of John. Although it would have been sufficient if he had written of him, "He confessed," he repeats it and says, "He confessed and denied not." This was surely done in order to extol the beautiful constancy of John in a sore trial, when he was tempted to a flagrant denial of the truth. And now consider the particular circumstances.

[2] First, there are sent to him not servants or ordinary citizens, but priests and Levites from the highest and noblest class, who were Pharisees, that is to say, the leaders of the people. Surely a distinguished embassy for a common man, who might justly have felt proud of such an honor, for the favor of lords and princes is highly esteemed in this world.

[3] Secondly, they sent to him not common people, but citizens of Jerusalem, to wit, the capital, the sanhedrim, and the leaders of the Jewish nation. So it was as if the entire people came and did honor to him. What a

wind that was! and how he might have been inflated, had he possessed a vain and worldly heart!

[4] Thirdly, they do not offer him a present, nor ordinary glory, but the highest glory of all, the kingdom and all authority, being ready to accept him as the Christ. Surely a mighty and sweet temptation! For, had he not perceived that they wished to regard him as the Christ, he would not have said, "I am not the Christ." And Luke 8:15-16, also writes that, when everybody thought he was the Christ, John spoke, "I am not he who you think I am, but I am being sent before him."

[5] Fourthly, when he would not accept this honor they tried him with another, and were ready to take him for Elijah. For they had a prophecy in the last chapter of the prophet Malachi, where God says: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

[6] Fifthly, seeing that he would not be Elijah, they go on tempting him and offer him the homage due to an ordinary prophet, for since Malachi they had not had a prophet. John, however, remains firm and unshaken, although tried by the offer of so much honor.

[7] Sixthly and lastly, not knowing of any more honors, they left him to choose, as to who or what he wished to be regarded, for they greatly desired to do him homage. But John will have none of this honor, and gives only this for an answer, that he is a voice calling to them and to everybody. This they do not heed. — What all this means we shall hear later on. Let us now examine the text. "And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent unto him from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask him, Who art thou?"

[8] They sent to him, why did they not come themselves? John had come to preach repentance to the entire Jewish people. This preaching of John they did not heed; it is clear therefore, that they did not send to him with good and pure intentions, offering him such honor. Neither did they truly believe him to be the Christ, or Elijah, or a prophet; otherwise they would have come themselves to be baptized, as did the others. What then did they seek of him? Christ explains this, John 5:33-35, "Ye have sent unto John, and he hath borne witness unto the truth. He was the lamp that burneth and

shineth, and ye were willing to rejoice for a season in his light.” From these words it is clear they looked for their own honor in John, desiring to make use of his light,” his illustrious and famous name, in order to adorn themselves before the people. For if John had joined them and accepted their proffered honor, they also would have become great and glorious before all the people, as being worthy of the friendship and reverence of so holy and great a man. But would not hereby all their avarice, tyranny, and rascality have been confirmed and declared holy and worthy? Thus John, with all his holiness, would have become a sponsor for vice; and the coming of Christ would justly have been regarded with suspicion, as being opposed to the doings of the priests and tyrants, with whom John, this great and holy man, would have taken sides.

[9] Thus we see what rascality they practice and how they tempt John to betray Christ and become a Judas Iscariot, in order that he might confirm their injustice and they might share his honor and popularity. What; cunning fellows they are, thus to fish for John’s honor! They offer him an apple for a kingdom, and would exchange counters for dollars. But he remained firm as a rock, as is shown by the statement: “And he confessed, and denied not; and he confessed, I am not the Christ.” To John’s confession comprises two things: First, his confessing, and secondly, his not denying. His confessing is his declaration about Christ, when he says, “I am not the Christ.” To this belongs also that he confesses to be neither Elijah nor a prophet. His not denying is declaration of what he really is, when he calls himself a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord. Thus his confession is free and open, declaring not only what he is, but also what he is not. For if someone declares what he is not, such a confession is still obscure and incomplete, since one cannot know what is really to be thought of him. But here John openly says, what is to be thought of him, and what not, this giving the people a certain assurance in confessing that he is not the Christ, and not denying that he is the voice preparing his advent.

[11] Yet someone might say, The Evangelist contradicts himself in calling it a confession when John declares himself not to be Christ, whereas this is rather a denial, for he denies that he is Christ. To say, “Nay” is to deny, and the Jews wish him to confess that he is Christ, which he denies; yet the Evangelist says that he confessed. And again, it is rather a confession when he says, “I am the voice in the wilderness.” But the

Evangelist considers this matter and describes it as it is before God, and not as the words sound and appear to men. For the Jews desired him to deny Christ, and not to confess what he really was. But since he confesses what he is and firmly insists upon what he is not, his act is before God a precious confession and not a denial. “And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elijah? and he saith, I am not.”

[12] The Jews, as said above, had the prophecy concerning Elijah, that he was to come before the day of the Lord, Malachi 4:5. It is therefore also among Christians a current belief that Elijah is to come before the last day. Some add Enoch, others St. John the Evangelist. Of this we shall have something to say.

[13] In the first place, all depends upon whether the prophet Malachi speaks of the second coming of the Lord on the last day, or of his first coming into flesh and through the Gospel. If he speaks of the last day, then we have certainly yet to expect Elijah; for God cannot lie. The coming of Enoch and St. John, however, has no foundation in Scripture, and is therefore to be considered as a fable. If, on the other hand, the prophet speaks of Christ’s coming in the flesh and through the Word, then assuredly Elijah is no more to be expected, but John is that same Elijah announced by Malachi.

[14] I am of the opinion that Malachi spoke of no other Elijah than John, and that Elijah the Tishbite, who went up to heaven with the chariot of fire, is no more to be expected. To this opinion I am forced first and foremost by the words of the angel Gabriel, Luke 1:17, who says to John’s father, Zacharias: “And he shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to walk in the wisdom of the just.” With these words the angel manifestly refers to the prophecy of Malachi, adducing even the words of the prophet, who also says that Elijah is to turn the hearts of fathers to children, — as cited above. Now then, if Malachi had meant another Elijah, the angel doubtless would not have applied these words to John.

[15] In the second place, the Jews themselves of old understood Malachi to speak of Christ’s coming into the flesh. Therefore they here ask John whether he is Elijah, who is to come before the Christ. But they erred in thinking of the original and bodily Elijah. For the purport of the text is

indeed that Elijah is to come beforehand, but not that same Elijah. We do not read, Elijah the Tishbite is to come, as the Bible calls him in 1 Kings 17:1 and 2 Kings 1:13 but merely Elijah, a prophet. This Gabriel, Luke 1:17, explains as meaning, “In the spirit and power of Elijah,” saying, as it were, He will be a real Elijah. Just as we now say of one who has another’s manner and carriage, He is a true!; as I may say e.g., The Pope is a real Caiaphas; John was a real St. Paul. In the same manner does God through Malachi promise one who is to be a true Elijah, i.e. John the Baptist.

[16] Yet would I not trust the interpretation of the Jews alone, were it not confirmed by Christ, Matthew 10:10ff. When, on Mount Tabor, the disciples saw Elijah and Moses, they said to the Lord, “Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come?” They meant to say, “You have already come; yet Elijah has not come first, but only now, after you: and was it not said that he was to come before you?” This interpretation was not rejected, but confirmed by Christ, who said, “Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you that Elijah is come already; and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed.” Then the disciples understood, says St. Matthew, that he spoke of John the Baptist. St. Mark likewise says, Mark 13, “But I say unto you that Elijah is come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they would, even as it is written of him.”

[17] Now there is no other prophecy concerning Elijah’s coming but this one of Malachi, and Christ himself applies it to John. Thus it has no force if someone were to object, Christ says that Elijah is to come first and restore all things, for Christ interprets his own words by saying, “But I tell you that Elijah is come” etc. He means to say, It is right and true what you have heard about Elijah, that he is to come first and restore all things; thus it is written and thus it must come to pass. But they do not know of which Elijah this is said, for he is come already. With these words, therefore, Christ confirms the Scriptures and the interpretation concerning the coming Elijah, but he rejects the false interpretation concerning an Elijah other than John.

[18] Most strongly, however, does Christ assert, Matthew 11:13ff., that no other Elijah is coming. He says, “All the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you will receive it, this is Elijah, that is to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Here it is made clear that but one Elijah was to come. Had there been another he would not have said, “John is Elijah who was to come,” but he would have had to say, “John is

one of the Elijahs,” or simply, “He is Elijah.” But by calling John that Elijah whom everybody expects, who, doubtless, was announced to come, he makes it sufficiently clear that the prophecy of Malachi is fulfilled in John, and that after this no other Elijah is to be expected.

[19] We insist, therefore, that the Gospel, through which Christ has come into all the world, is the last message before the day of judgment; before this message and advent of Christ John came and prepared the way. And although all the prophets and the law prophecy until John, it is not allowed to apply them, neglecting John, to another Elijah who is yet to come. Thus also the prophecy of Malachi must fit the times of John. He carries the line of the prophets down to John’s times and permits no one to pass by. — And so we conclude with certainty that no other Elijah is to come, and that the Gospel will endure unto the end of the world. “Art thou the prophet? And he answered, No.”

[20] Some think the Jews here asked concerning that prophet of whom Moses writes in Deuteronomy 18:15: “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me, etc.” But this passage St. Peter in Acts 3:22 and St. Stephen in Acts 7:37 apply to Christ himself, which is the correct interpretation. The Jews also certainly held this prophet in equal esteem with Moses, above Elijah, and therefore understood him to be Christ. They asked John whether he was an ordinary prophet, like the others, since he was neither Christ nor Elijah. For they had had no prophet since the days of Malachi, who was the last and concluded the Old Testament with the above mentioned prophecy concerning the coming of Elijah. John therefore is the nearest to and first after Malachi, who in finishing his book points to him. — The Jews then asked whether he was one of the prophets. Christ likewise says of him, Matthew 11:9: “Wherefore went ye out? to see a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.” And Matthew says in Matthew 21:26, “All hold John as a prophet.”

[21] Now the question arises, Did John really confess the truth when he denied that he was Elijah or a prophet, whereas Christ himself called him Elijah and more than a prophet? He himself knew that he had come in the spirit and power of Elijah, and that the Scriptures called him Elijah. To say, therefore, that he did not consider himself a prophet because he was more than a prophet, is disgraceful and makes him an empty boaster. The truth of

the matter is, that he simply and in a straightforward manner confessed the truth, namely, that he was not that Elijah about whom they asked, nor a prophet. For the prophets commonly led and taught the people, who sought advice and help from them. Such a one John was not and would not be, for the Lord was present, whom they were to follow and adhere to. He did not desire to draw the people to himself, but to lead them to Christ, which was needful before Christ himself came. A prophet foretells the coming of Christ. John, however, shows him present, which is not a prophet's task. Just so a priest in the bishop's presence would direct the people away from himself to the bishop, saying, "I am not a priest; yonder is your priest"; but in the bishop's absence he would rule the people in the place of the bishop.

[22] John likewise directs the people away from himself to Christ. And although this is a higher and greater office than that of a prophet, yet it is not so on account of his merit, but on account of the presence of his Master. And in praising John for being more than a prophet, not his worthiness but that of his Master, who is present, is extolled. For it is customary for a servant to receive greater honor and reverence in the absence of his master than in his presence.

[23] Even so the rank of a prophet is higher than that of John, although his office is greater and more immediate. For a prophet rules and leads the people, and they adhere to him; but John does no more than direct them away from himself to Christ, the present Master. Therefore, in the simplest and most straightforward manner, he denied being a prophet, although abounding in all the qualities of a prophet. This he did for the sake of the people, in order that they might not accept his testimony as the foretelling of a prophet and expect Christ in other, future times, but that they might recognize him as a forerunner and guide, and follow his guidance to the Lord, who was present. Witness the following words of the text: "They said therefore unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said Isaiah the prophet."

[24] This is the second part of his confession, in which he declares what he is, after having denied that he was Christ, or Elijah, or a prophet. As though he were to say, Your salvation is much too near for a prophet to be required. Do not strain your eyes so far out into the future, for the Lord of

all the prophets is himself here, so that no prophet is needed. The Lord is coming this way, whose forerunner I am; he is treading on my heels. I am not prophesying of him as a seer, but crying as a courier, to make room for him as he walks along. I do not say, as the prophets, "Behold, he is to come"; but I say, "Behold, he is coming, he is here. I am not bringing word about him, but pointing to him with my finger. Did not Isaiah long ago foretell that such a crying to make room for the Lord should go before him? Such I am, and not a prophet. Therefore, step aside and make room, permit the Lord himself to walk among you bodily, and do not look for any more prophecies about him."

[25] Now this is the answer which no learned, wise, and holy men can bear; therefore John must surely be a heretic and be possessed of the devil. Only sinners and fools think him a holy, pious man, listen to his crying and make room for the Lord, removing whatsoever obstructs his way. The others, however, throw logs, stones and dirt in his way, aye, they even kill both the Lord and his forerunner for presuming to say such things to him. And why? John tells them to prepare the way of the Lord. That is to say, they have not the Lord nor his way in them. What have they then? Where the Lord is not, nor his way, there must be man's own way, the devil, and all that is evil. Judge then, whether those holy wise people are not justly incensed at John, condemn his word, and finally slay both him and his Master! Shall he presume to hand such holy people over to the devil, and denounce all their doings as false, wicked and damnable, claiming that their ways are not the Lord's ways, that they must first of all prepare the Lord's ways, and that they have lived all their holy lives in vain?

[26] Yet, if he quietly wrote it on a tablet, they might still hear it in patience. But he gives utterance to it, yea, he cries it aloud, and that not in a corner, but openly under the sky, in the wilderness, before all the world, utterly disgracing before everybody those saints with all their doings and discrediting them with all the people. Thus they lose all honor and profit which their holy life formerly brought them. This certainly such pious men cannot bear, but for God's and justice's sake they cannot damn that false doctrine, in order that the poor people may not be misled and the service of God be not corrupted; aye, finally, they will have to kill John and his Master, to serve and obey God the Father.

[27] This, then, is the preparation of Christ's way and John's proper office. He is to humble all the world, and proclaim that they are all sinners — lost, damned, poor, miserable, pitiable people; that there is no life, work, or rank however holy, beautiful and good it may appear, but is damnable unless Christ our God dwell therein, unless he work, walk, live, be and do everything through faith in him; in short, that they all need Christ and should anxiously strive to share his grace. Behold, where this is practiced, namely, that all man's work and life is as nothing, there you have the true crying of John in the wilderness and the pure and clear truth of Christianity, as St. Paul shows, Romans 8:23: "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." This is truly to humiliate man, to cut out and annihilate his presumption. Aye, this is indeed to prepare the way of the Lord, to give room and to make way.

[28] Now here are found two kinds of people: some believe the crying of John and confess it to be what he says. These are the people to whom the Lord comes, in them his way is prepared and made even, as St. Peter says in 1 Peter 5:5: "God giveth grace to the humble"; and the Lord himself says in Luke 18:14: "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." You must here diligently learn, and understand spiritually what the way of the Lord is, how it is prepared, and what prevents him from finding room in us. The way of the Lord, as you have heard, is that he does all things within you, so that all our works are not ours but his, which comes by faith.

[29] This, however, is not possible if you desire worthily to prepare yourself by praying, fasting, self-mortification, and your own works, as is now generally and foolishly taught during the time of Advent. A spiritual preparation is meant, consisting in a thoroughgoing knowledge and confession of your being unfit, a sinner, poor, damned, and miserable, with all the works you may perform. The more a heart is thus minded, the better it prepares the way of the Lord, although meanwhile possibly drinking fine wines, walking on roses, and not praying a word.

[30] The hindrance, however, which obstructs the Lord's way, is formed not only in the coarse and palpable sin of adultery, wrath, haughtiness, avarice, etc., but rather in spiritual conceit and pharasaical pride, which thinks highly of its own life and good works, feels secure, does not condemn itself, and would remain uncondemned by another. Such, then, is the other class of men, namely, those that do not believe the crying of John,

but call it the devil's, since it forbids good works and condemns the service of God, as they say. These are the people to whom most of all and most urgently it is said, "Prepare the way of the Lord," and who least of all accept it.

[31] Therefore John speaks to them with cutting words in Luke 3:7-8: "Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance." But, as said above, the more just people are urged to prepare the Lord's way, the more they obstruct it and the more unreasonable they become. They will not be told that their doings are not the Lord's, and finally, to the glory and honor of God, they annihilate the truth and the word of John, himself and his Master to boot.

[32] Judge, then, whether it was not a mighty confession on the part of John, when he dared to open his mouth and proclaim that he was not Christ, but a voice to which they did not like to listen, chiding the great teachers and leaders of the people for not doing that which was right and the Lord's pleasure. And as it went with John, so it still goes, from the beginning of the world unto the end. For such conceited piety will not be told that it must first and foremost prepare the way of the Lord, imagining itself to sit in God's lap and desiring to be petted and flattered by having long ago finished the way, before God even thought of finding a way for them — those precious saints! The pope and his followers likewise have condemned the crying of John to prepare the Lord's way. Aye, it is an intolerable crying — except to poor, penitent sinners with aggrieved consciences, for whom it is the best of cordials.

[33] But isn't it a perverse and strange manner of speaking to say, "I am the voice of one crying"? How can a man be a voice? He ought to have said, I am one crying with a voice! — But that it speaking according to the manner of the Scriptures. In Exodus 4:16 God spoke to Moses: "Aaron shall be to thee a mouth." And in Job 29:15 we read: "I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame." Similarly we say of a man that gold is his heart and money his life. So here, "I am the voice of one crying" means: I am one who cries, and have received my name from my office; even as Aaron is called a mouth because of his speaking, I am a voice because of my crying. And that which in Hebrew reads *vox clamantis*, the voice of one crying, would be translated into Latin: *vox clamans*, a crying voice. Thus St. Paul

in Romans 15:26 says *pauperes sanctorum*, the poor of the saints, instead of *pauperes sancti*, the poor saints; and 1 Timothy 3:16: *mysterium pietatis* (the mystery of godliness) instead of *mysterium pium* (the godly mystery). Instead of saying: The language of the Germans, I had better say, the German language. Thus “a voice of one crying” means “a crying voice.” In Hebrew there are many similar phrases. And they had been sent from the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him: Why then baptizest thou if thou be not the Christ, nor Elijah, neither the prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water; in the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not, even he that cometh after me is preferred before me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose.

[34] It seems as though the Evangelist had omitted something in these words, and as if John’s complete answer ought to be: “I baptize with water; but he has come among you who baptizes with fire.” Thus Luke 3:16 says: ‘I baptize you with water: but he shall baptize you with fire.’ And in Acts 1:5 we read, “John baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.” But, although he here says nothing of this other baptism, he sufficiently indicates that there is to be another baptism, since he speaks of another who is coming after him and who, undoubtedly, will not baptize with water.

[35] Now begins the second onset, whereby John was tried on the other side. For not being able to move him by allurements they attack him with threats. And here is uncovered their false humility, manifesting itself as pride and haughtiness. The same they would have done had John followed them, after they had had enough of him. Learn therefore here to be on your guard against men, particularly when they feign to be gentle and kind; as Christ says. Matthew 10:16-47: “Beware of men, be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” That is to say, Do not trust those that are smooth, and do no evil to your enemies.

[36] Behold, these Pharisees, who professed their willingness to accept John as the Christ, veer around when things turn out as they desired, and censure John’s baptism. They say, as it were, “Since you are not Christ, nor Elijah, nor a prophet, you are to know that we are your superiors according to the law of Moses and you are therefore to conduct yourself as our subordinate. You are not to act independently, without our command, our knowledge and without our permission. Who has given you power to

introduce something new among our people with your baptizing? You are bringing yourself into trouble with your criminal disobedience.”

[37] John however, as he had despised their hypocrisy, likewise scorns their threats, remains firm, and confesses Christ as before. Moreover he boldly attacks them and charges them with ignorance, saying, as it were: “I have no authority from you to baptize with water. But what of that? There is another from whom I have power; him you do not know, but he is amply sufficient for me. If you knew him, or wished to know him, you would not ask whence I have power to baptize, but you would come to be baptized yourselves. For he is so much greater than I, that I am not worthy to unloose his shoes’ latchet.

[38] John’s words, “He it is who, coming after me, is preferred before me,” three times quoted by the Evangelist in this chapter, have been misinterpreted and obscured by some who referred them to Christ’s divine and eternal birth, as though John meant to say that Christ had been born before him in eternity. But what’s remarkable is the fact that he was born before John in eternity, seeing that he was born before the world and all other things? Thus he was also to come not only after him, but after all things, since he is the first and the last (Revelation 1:11). Therefore, his past and his future agree. John’s words are clear and simple, referring to Christ when he already was a man. The words “He will come after me” cannot be taken to mean that he would be born after him; John like Christ, was at that time about thirty years old.

[39] These words then evidently apply to his preaching. He means to say: “I have come — that is, I have begun to preach but I shall soon stop, and another will come and preach after me.” Thus St. Luke says, Acts 1:22, that Christ began from the baptism of John; and, Luke 3:23, that Jesus was thirty years old when he began. And Matthew 11:3: “Art thou he that should come,” that is, he who should begin to preach; for Christ’s office does not begin till after his baptism, at which his Father had acknowledged and glorified him. Then also began the New Testament and the time of grace, not at the birth of Christ, as he himself says, Mark 1:15: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.” Had he not begun to preach, his birth would have been of no use; but when he did begin to act and to teach, then were fulfilled all prophecies, all Scriptures, then came a new light, and a new world.

[40] So we see what he means by saying, “He will come after me.” But the meaning of the words, “He is preferred before me; he was before me,” is not yet clear, some referring them to Christ’s eternal birth. We maintain in all simplicity that those words also were spoken concerning their preaching. Thus the meaning is: “Although he is not yet preaching, but is coming after me, and I am preaching before him: nevertheless he is already at hand, and so close by that, before I began to preach, he has already been there and has been appointed to preach. The words “before me”

therefore point to John’s office, and not to his person. Thus, “he has been before my preaching and baptism for about thirty years; but he has not yet come, and has not yet begun. John thereby indicates his office, namely, that he is not a prophet foretelling the coming of Christ, but one who precedes him who is already present, who is so near that he has already been in existence so many years before his beginning and coming.

[41] Therefore he also says: “In the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not.” He means to say: “Do not permit your eyes to wander off into future ages. He of whom the prophets speak has been among you in the Jewish nation for well nigh thirty years. Take care and do not miss him. You do not know him, therefore I have come to point him out to you.” The words, “In the midst of you standeth one,” are spoken after the manner of the Scriptures, which say, A prophet will arise or stand up. Thus Matthew 24:24, “There shall arise false prophets.” Deuteronomy 18:15 God says, “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet.” John now wishes to show that this “raising up, arising, standing,” etc. was fulfilled in Christ, who was already standing among them, as God had prophesied; the people however knew him not.

[42] This then is the other office of John and of every preacher of the Gospel, not alone to make all the world sinners, as we have heard above (Section 24ff.); but also to give comfort and show how we may get rid of our sins; this he does in pointing to him who is to come. Hereby he directs us to Christ, who is to redeem us from our sins, if we accept him in true faith. The first office says: “You are all sinners, and are wanting in the way of the Lord.” When we believe this, the other office follows and says; “Listen, and accept Christ, believe in him, he will free you of your sins.” If we believe this, we have it. Of this we shall say more anon. These things were done in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

[43] So diligently does the Evangelist record the testimony of John, that he also mentions the places where it happened. The confession of Christ is greatly dependent on testimony, and there are many difficulties in the way. Undoubtedly, however, he wished to allude to some spiritual mystery of which we shall now speak.

II. The Spiritual Meaning of this Gospel Story.

[44] This is the sum and substance of it: In this Gospel is pictured the preacher's office of the New Testament, what it is, what it does, and what happens to it.

[45] First, it is the voice of one calling, not a piece of writing. The Law and the Old Testament are dead writings, put into books, and the Gospel is to be a living voice. Therefore John is an image, and a type, and also a pioneer, the first of all preachers of the Gospel. He writes nothing, but calls out everything with his living voice.

[46] Secondly, the Old Testament or the Law was preached among the tents at Mount Sinai, to the Jews alone. But John's voice is heard in the wilderness, freely and openly, under the heavens, before all the world.

[47] Thirdly, it is a calling, clear and loud voice, that is to say, one that speaks boldly and undauntedly and fears no one, neither death, hell, life nor the world, neither devil, man, honor, disgrace nor any creature. Thus Isaiah says in 40:6ff: "The voice of one saying, cry. And one said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever." And further: "O

thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up on a high mountain; lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid." The world cannot bear the Gospel, and hence there must be a strength, which scorns it and can call against it without fear.

[48] Fourthly, John's raiment is of camel's hair and has a leather girdle (Matthew 3:4). This means the strict and chaste life of preachers, but above all it points to the manner of the preachers of the Gospel. It is a voice not given to soft phrases, neither does it deal in hypocrisy and flattery. It is a sermon of the gross, a hard, rough sharp speech for the natural man, and

girds the loins for spiritual and bodily chastity. This is taken from the life and words of the patriarchs of old, who like camels have borne the burden of the Law and of the cross. "He eats locusts and wild honey." This means those that accept the Gospel, namely, the humble sinners, who take the Gospel unto and into themselves.

[49] Fifthly, John is on the other side of the Jordan. "Jordan" really means the Holy Scriptures, which have two sides. One, the left side, is the external meaning which the Jews sought in Holy Writ; here John is not. For this interpretation does not produce sinners, but saints proud of their works. The right side is the true spiritual understanding, which discards and kills all works, in order that faith alone may remain, in all humility. This meaning is brought out in the Gospels, as St. Paul does, Romans 3:23, saying: "All have sinned."

[50] Sixthly, here begins the dispute between true and false preachers. The Pharisees cannot bear to hear John's voice, they despise his teaching and baptism, and remain obdurate in their doings and teachings. On account of the people however they pretend to think highly of him. But because he opposes their will, he must be possessed of the devil, they say, and finally he must be beheaded by Herod. So it is now and so it has always been. No false teacher wishes it to be said of him that he preaches without or against the Gospel, but on the contrary that he thinks highly of it and believes in it. Nevertheless he does violence to it, making it conform to his meaning. This the Gospel cannot permit, for it stands firm and never lies. Then it is reviled as heresy and error, aye as a devilish doctrine, and finally they apply violence prohibiting it and striking off its head so that it may nowhere be preached or heard. This was done by the pope in the case of John Huss.

[51] Thus he is a truly Christian preacher who preaches nothing but that which John proclaimed, and firmly insists upon it. First, he must preach the Law so that the people may learn what great things God demands of us; of these we cannot perform any because of the impotence of our nature which has been corrupted by Adam's fall. Then comes the baptism in Jordan. The cold water means the teaching of the Law, which does not kindle love but rather extinguishes it. For through the Law man learns how difficult and how impossible of fulfillment the Law is. Then he becomes hostile to it, and his love for it cools; he feels that he heartily hates it. This of course is a grievous sin, to be hostile to God's commands. Therefore man must humble

himself, and confess that he is lost and that all his works are sins, aye, that his whole life is sinful. Herewith then John's baptism has been accomplished, and he has been, not only besprinkled, but properly baptized. Then he sees why John says, "Repent ye." He understands that John is right, and that everyone must needs become a better man and repent. But Pharisees and those holy in their works do not arrive at this knowledge, nor do they permit themselves to be baptized. They imagine that they do not need repentance, and therefore John's words and baptism are foolishness in their eyes.

[52] Furthermore, when the first teaching, that of the Law, and baptism are over and man, humiliated by the knowledge of himself, is forced to despair of himself and his powers; then begins the second part of John's teaching, in which he directs the people from himself to Christ and says: "Behold the Lamb of God that takes upon itself the sin of the world." By this he means to say: "First I have, by my teaching, made you all sinners, have condemned your works and told you to despair of yourselves. But in order that you may not also despair of God, behold, I will show you how to get rid of your sins and obtain salvation. Not that you can strip off your sins or make yourselves pious through your works; another man is needed for this; nor can I do it, I can point him out, however. It is Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. He, he, and no one else either in heaven or on earth takes our sins upon himself. You yourself could not pay for the very smallest of sins. He alone must take upon himself not alone your sins, but the sins of the world, and not some sins, but all the sins of the world, be they great or small, many or few." This then is preaching and hearing the pure Gospel, and recognizing the finger of John, who points out to you Christ, the Lamb of God.

[53] Now, if you are able to believe that this voice of John speaks the truth, and if you are able to follow his finger and recognize the Lamb of God carrying your sin, then you have gained the victory, then you are a Christian, a master of sin, death, hell, and all things. Then your conscience will rejoice and become heartily fond of this gentle Lamb of God. Then will you love, praise, and give thanks to our heavenly Father for this infinite wealth of his mercy, preached by John and given in Christ. And finally you will become cheerful and willing to do his divine will, as best you can, with all your strength. For what lovelier and more comforting message can be

heard than that our sins are not ours any more, that they no more lie on us, but on the Lamb of God. How can sin condemn such an innocent Lamb? Lying on him, it must be vanquished and made to nothing, and likewise death and hell, being the reward of sin, must be vanquished also. Behold what God our Father has given us in Christ.

[54] Take heed, therefore, take heed, I say, lest you presume to get rid of the smallest of your sins through your own merit before God, and lest you rob Christ, the Lamb of God, of his credit. John indeed demands that we grow better and repent; but that he does not mean us to grow better of ourselves and to strip off our sins by our own strength, this he declares powerfully by adding, “Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” As we have said above (Section 29), he means that each one is to know himself and his need of becoming a better man; yet he is not to look for this in himself, but in Jesus Christ alone. — Now may God our Father according to his infinite mercy bestow upon us this knowledge of Christ, and may he send into the world the voice of John, with great numbers of evangelists! Amen.

Christmas. The Story of the Birth of Jesus; and the Angels' Song. The Flight into Egypt.

Text: Luke 2:1-14.

1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host

praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Luke 2:1-14

I. The Birth of Jesus

[1] It is written in Haggai 2:6-7, that God says: “I will shake the heavens; and the precious things of all nations shall come.” This is fulfilled today, for the heavens were shaken, that is, the angels in the heavens sang praises to God. And the earth was shaken, that is, the people on the earth were agitated; one journeying to this city, another to that throughout the whole land, as the Gospel tells us. It was not a violent, bloody uprising, but rather a peaceable one awakened by God who is the God of peace. It is not to be understood that all countries upon earth were so agitated; but only those under Roman rule, which did not comprise half of the whole earth. However, no land was agitated as was the land of Judea, which had been divided among the tribes of Israel, although at this time the land was inhabited mostly by the race of Judah, as the ten tribes led captive into Assyria never returned.

[2] This taxing, enrollment, or census, says Luke, was the first; but in the Gospel according to Matthew 17:24, and at other places we read that it was continued from time to time, that they even demanded tribute of Christ, and tempted him with the tribute money, Matthew 22:17. On the day of his suffering they also testified against him, that he forbade to give tribute to Caesar. The Jews did not like to pay tribute, and unwillingly submitted to the taxing, maintaining that they were God’s people and free from Caesar. They had great disputes as to whether they were obliged to pay the tribute, but they could not help themselves and were compelled to submit. For this reason they would have been pleased to draw Jesus into the discussion and bring him under the Roman jurisdiction. This taxing was therefore nothing else but a common decree throughout the whole empire that every individual should annually pay a penny, and the officers who collected the tribute were called publicans, who in German are improperly interpreted notorious sinners.

[3] Observe how exact the Evangelist is in his statement that the birth of Christ occurred in the time of Caesar Augustus, and when Quirinius was governor of Syria, of which the land of Judea was a part, just as Austria is a part of the German land. This being the very first taxing, it appears that this tribute was never before paid until just at the time when Christ was to be born. By this Jesus shows that his kingdom was not to be of an earthly character nor to exercise worldly power and lordship, but that he, together with his parents, is subject to the powers that be. Since he comes at the time of the very first enrollment, he leaves no doubt with respect to this, for had he desired to leave it in doubt, he might have willed to be born under another enrollment, so that it might have been said it just happened so, without any divine intent.

[4] And had he not willed to be submissive, he might have been born before there was any enrollment decreed. Since now all the works of Jesus are precious teachings, this circumstance cannot be interpreted otherwise than that he by divine counsel and purpose will not exercise any worldly authority; but will be subject to it. This then is the first rebuke to the pope's government and every- thing of that character, that harmonizes with the kingdom of Christ as night does with day.

[5] This Gospel is so clear that it requires very little explanation, but it should be well considered and taken deeply to heart; and no one will receive more benefit from it than those who, with a calm, quiet heart, banish everything else from their mind, and diligently look into it. It is just as the sun which is reflected in calm water and gives out vigorous warmth. but which cannot be so readily seen nor can it give out such warmth in water that is in roaring and rapid motion. Therefore, if you would be enlightened and warmed, if you would see the wonders of divine grace and have your heart aglow and enlightened, devout and joyful, go where you can silently meditate and lay hold of this picture deep in your heart, and you will see miracle upon miracle. But to give the common person a start and a motive to contemplate it, we will illustrate it in part, and afterwards enter into it more deeply.

[6] First, behold how very ordinary and common things are to us that transpire on earth, and yet how high they are regarded in heaven. On earth it occurs in this wise: Here is a poor young woman, Mary of Nazareth, not highly esteemed, but of the humblest citizens of the village. No one is

conscious of the great wonder she bears, she is silent, keeps her own counsel, and regards herself as the lowliest in the town. She starts out with her husband Joseph; very likely they had no servant, and he had to do the work of master and servant, and she that of mistress and maid, They were therefore obliged to leave their home unoccupied, or commend it to the care of others.

[7] Now they evidently owned an ass, upon which Mary rode, although the Gospel does not mention it, and it is possible that she went on foot with Joseph. Imagine how she was despised at the inns and stopping places on the way, although worthy to ride in state in a chariot of gold. There were, no doubt, many wives and daughters of prominent men at that time, who lived in fine apartments and great splendor, while the mother of God takes a journey in mid-winter under most trying circumstances. What distinctions there are in the world! It was more than a day's journey from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in the land of Judea. They had to journey either by or through Jerusalem, for Bethlehem is south of Jerusalem while Nazareth is north.

[8] The Evangelist shows how, when they arrived at Bethlehem, they were the most insignificant and despised, so that they had to make way for others until they were obliged to take refuge in a stable, to share with the cattle, lodging, table, bed chamber and bed, while many a wicked man sat at the head in the hotels and was honored as lord. No one noticed or was conscious of what God was doing in that stable. He lets the large houses and costly apartments remain empty, lets their inhabitants eat, drink and be merry; but this comfort and treasure are hidden from them. O what a dark night this was for Bethlehem, that was not conscious of that glorious light! See how God shows that he utterly disregards what the world is, has or desires; and furthermore, that the world shows how little it knows or notices what God is, has and does.

[9] See, this is the first picture with which Christ puts the world to shame and exposes all it does and knows. It shows that the world's greatest wisdom is foolishness, her best actions are wrong and her greatest treasures are misfortunes. What had Bethlehem when it did not have Christ? What have they now who at that time had enough? What do Joseph and Mary lack now, although at that time they had no room to sleep comfortably?

[10] Some have commented on the word “diversorum”, as if it meant an open archway, through which everybody could pass, where some asses stood, and that Mary could not get to a lodging place. This is not right. The Evangelist desires to show that Joseph and Mary had to occupy a stable, because there was no room for her in the inn, in the place where the pilgrim guests generally lodged. All the guests were cared for in the inn or caravansary, with room, food and bed, except these poor people who had to creep into a stable where it was customary to house cattle. This word “diversorium”, which by Luke is called “katalyma” means nothing else than a place for guests, which is proved by the words of Christ, Luke 22:11, where he sent the disciples to prepare the supper, “Go and say unto the master of the house, The Teacher saith unto thee, Where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?” So also here Joseph and Mary had no room in the katalyma, the inn, but only in the stable belonging to the innkeeper, who would not have been worthy to give shelter to such a guest. They had neither money nor influence to secure a room in the inn, hence they were obliged to lodge in a stable. O world, how stupid! O man, how blind thou art!

[11] But the birth itself is still more pitiful. There was no one to take pity on this young wife who was for the first time to give birth to a child; no one to take to heart her condition that she, a stranger, did not have the least thing a mother needs in a birth-night. There she is without any preparation, without either light or fire, alone in the darkness, without anyone offering her service as is customary for women to do at such times. Everything is in commotion in the inn, there is a swarming of guests from all parts of the country, no one thinks of this poor woman. It is also possible that she did not expect the event so soon, else she would probably have remained at Nazareth.

[12] Just imagine what kind of swaddling clothes they were in which she wrapped the child. Possibly her veil or some article of her clothing she could spare. But that she should have wrapped him in Joseph’s trousers, which are exhibited at Aix-la-Chapelle, appears entirely too false and frivolous. It is a fable, the like of which there are more in the world. Is it not strange that the birth of Christ occurs in cold winter, in a strange land, and in such a poor and despicable manner?

[13] Some argue as to how this birth took place, as if Jesus was born while Mary was praying and rejoicing, without any pain, and before she was conscious of it. While I do not altogether discard that pious supposition, it was evidently invented for the sake of simple minded people. But we must abide by the Gospel, that he was born of the virgin Mary. There is no deception here, for the Word clearly states that it was an actual birth.

[14] It is well known what is meant by giving birth. Mary's experience was not different from that of other women, so that the birth of Christ was a real natural birth, Mary being his natural mother and he being her natural son. Therefore her body performed its functions of giving birth, which naturally belonged to it, except that she brought forth without sin, without shame, without pain and without injury, just as she had conceived without sin. The curse of Eve did not come on her, where God said: "In pain thou shalt bring forth children," Genesis 3:16; otherwise it was with her in every particular as with every woman who gives birth to a child.

[15] Grace does not interfere with nature and her work, but rather improves and promotes it. Likewise Mary, without doubt, also nourished the child with milk from her breast and not with strange milk, or in a manner different from that which nature provided, as we sing: *ubere de coelo pleno*, from her breast being filled by heaven, without injury or impurity. I mention this that we may be grounded in the faith and know that Jesus was a natural man in every respect Just as we, the only difference being in his relation to sin and grace, he being without a sinful nature. In him and in his mother nature was pure in all the members and in all the operations of those members. No body or member of woman ever performed its natural function without sin, except that of this virgin; here for once God bestowed special honor upon nature and its operations. It is a great comfort to us that Jesus took upon himself our nature and flesh. Therefore we are not to take away from him or his mother anything that is not in conflict with grace, for the text clearly says that she brought him forth, and the angels said, unto you he is born.

[16] How could God have shown his goodness in a more sublime manner than by humbling himself to partake of flesh and blood, that he did not even disdain the natural privacy but honors nature most highly in that part where in Adam and Eve it was most miserably brought to shame? So

that henceforth even that can be regarded godly, honest and pure, which in all men is the most ungodly, shameful and impure. These are real miracles of God, for in no way could he have given us stronger, more forcible and purer pictures of chastity than in this birth. When we look at this birth, and reflect upon how the sublime Majesty moves with great earnestness and inexpressible love and goodness upon the flesh and blood of this virgin, we see how here all evil lust and every evil thought is banished.

[17] No woman can inspire such pure thoughts in a man as this virgin; nor can any man inspire such pure thought in a woman as this child. If in reflecting on this birth we recognize the work of God that is embodied in it, only chastity and purity spring from it.

[18] But what happens in heaven concerning this birth? As much as it is despised on earth, so much and a thousand times more is it honored in heaven. If an angel from heaven came and praised you and your work, would you not regard it of greater value than all the praise and honor the world could give you, and for which you would be willing to bear the greatest humility and reproach? What exalted honor is that when all the angels in heaven cannot restrain themselves from breaking out in rejoicing, so that even poor shepherds in the fields hear them preach, praise God, sing and pour out their joy without measure? Were not all joy and honor realized at Bethlehem, yes, all joy and honor experienced by all the kings and nobles on earth, to be regarded as only dross and abomination, of which no one likes to think, when compared with the joy and glory here displayed?

[19] Behold how very richly God honors those who are despised of men, and that very gladly. Here you see that his eyes look into the depths of humility, as is written, "He sitteth above the cherubim" and looketh into the depths. Nor could the angels find princes or valiant men to whom to communicate the good news; but only unlearned laymen, the most humble people upon earth. Could they not have addressed the high-priests, who it was supposed knew so much concerning God and the angels? No, God chose poor shepherds, who, though they were of low esteem in the sight of men, were in heaven regarded as worthy of such great grace and honor.

[20] See how utterly God overthrows that which is lofty! And yet we rage and rant for nothing but this empty honor, as we had no honor to seek

in heaven; we continually step out of God's sight, so that he may not see us in the depths, into which he alone looks.

[21] This has been considered sufficiently for plain people. Everyone should ponder it further for himself. If every word is properly grasped, it is as fire that sets the heart aglow, as God says in Jeremiah 23:29, "Is not my Word like fire?" And as we see, it is the purpose of the divine Word, to teach us to know God and his work, and to see that this life is nothing. For as he does not live according to this life and does not have possessions nor temporal honor and power, he does not regard these and says nothing concerning them, but teaches only the contrary. He works in opposition to these temporal things, looks with favor upon that from which the world turns, teaches that from which it flees and takes up that which it discards.

[22] And although we are not willing to tolerate such acts of God and do not want to receive blessing, honor and life in this way, yet it must remain so. God does not change his purpose, nor does he teach or act differently than he purposed. We must adapt ourselves to him, he will not adapt himself to us. Moreover, he who will not regard his word, nor the manner in which he works to bring comfort to men, has assuredly no good evidence of being saved. In what more lovely manner could he have shown his grace to the humble and despised of earth, than through this birth in poverty, over which the angels rejoice, and make it known to no one but to the poor shepherds?

[23] Let us now look at the mysteries set before us in this history. In all the mysteries here two things are especially set forth, the Gospel and faith, that is, what is to be preached and what is to be believed, who are to be the preachers, and who are to be the believers. This we will now consider.

II. The Birth of Jesus Considered in its Spiritual Meaning.

A. The Teaching Concerning Faith.

[24] Faith is first, and it is right that we recognize it as the most important in every word of God. It is of no value only to believe that this history is true as it is written; for all sinners, even those condemned believe that. The Scripture, God's Word, does not teach concerning faith, that it is a natural work, without grace. The right and gracious faith which God demands is, that you firmly believe that Christ is born for you, and that this birth took

place for your welfare. The Gospel teaches that Christ was born, and that he did and suffered everything in our behalf, as is here declared by the angel: “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for there is born to you this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” In these words you clearly see that he is born for us.

[25] He does not simply say, Christ is born, but to you he is born, neither does he say, I bring glad tidings, but to you I bring glad tidings of great joy. Furthermore, this joy was not to remain in Christ, but it shall be to all the people. This faith no condemned or wicked man has, nor can he have it; for the right ground of salvation which unites Christ and the believing heart is that they have all things in common. But what have they?

[26] Christ has a pure, innocent, and holy birth. Man has an unclean, sinful, condemned birth; as David says, Psalm 51:5, “Behold I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Nothing can help this unholy birth except the pure birth of Christ. But Christ’s birth cannot be distributed in a material sense neither would that avail anything; it is therefore imparted spiritually, through the Word, as the angel says, it is given to all who firmly believe so that no harm will come to them because of their impure birth. This is the way and manner in which we are to be cleansed from the miserable birth we have from Adam. For this purpose Christ willed to be born, that through him we might be born again, as he says John 3:3, that it takes place through faith; as also St. James says in James 1:18: “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.”

[27] We see here how Christ, as it were, takes our birth from us and absorbs it in his birth, and grants us his, that in it we might become pure and holy, as if it were our own, so that every Christian may rejoice and glory in Christ’s birth as much as if he had himself been born of Mary as was Christ. Whoever does not believe this, or doubts, is no Christian.

[28] O, this is the great joy of which the angel speaks. This is the comfort and exceeding goodness of God that, if a man believes this, he can boast of the treasure that Mary is his rightful mother, Christ his brother, and God his father. For these things actually occurred and are true, but we must believe. This is the principal thing and the principal treasure in every Gospel, before any doctrine of good works can be taken out of it. Christ

must above all things become our own and we become his, before we can do good works. But this cannot occur except through the faith that teaches us rightly to understand the Gospel and properly to lay hold of it. This is the only way in which Christ can be rightly known so that the conscience is satisfied and made to rejoice. Out of this grow love and praise to God who in Christ has bestowed upon us such unspeakable gifts. This gives courage to do or leave undone, and living or dying, to suffer everything that is well pleasing to God. This is what is meant by Isaiah 9:6, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,” to us, to us, to us is born, and to us is given this child.

[29] Therefore see to it that you do not find pleasure in the Gospel only as a history, for that is only transient; neither regard it only as an example, for it is of no value without faith; but see to it that you make this birth your own and that Christ be born in you. This will be the case if you believe, then you will repose in the lap of the virgin Mary and be her dear child. But you must exercise this faith and pray while you live, you cannot establish it too firmly. This is our foundation and inheritance, upon which good works must be built.

[30] If Christ has now thus become your own, and you have by such faith been cleansed through him and have received your inheritance without any personal merit, but alone through the love of God who gives to you as your own the treasure and work of his Son; it follows that you will do good works by doing to your neighbor as Christ has done to you. Here good works are their own teacher. What are the good works of Christ? Is it not true that they are good because they have been done for your benefit, for God’s sake, who commanded him to do the works in your behalf? In this then Christ was obedient to the Father, in that he loved and served us.

[31] Therefore since you have received enough and become rich, you have no other commandment to serve Christ and render obedience to him, than so to direct your works that they may be of benefit to your neighbor, just as the works of Christ are of benefit and use to you. For the reason Jesus said at the Last Supper: “This is my commandment that ye love one another; even as I have loved you.” John 18:34. Here it is seen that he loved us and did everything for our benefit, in order that we may do the same, not to him, for he needs it not, but to our neighbor; this is his commandment, and this is our obedience. Therefore it is through faith that Christ becomes

our own, and his love is the cause that we are his. He loves, we believe, thus both are united into one. Again, our neighbor believes and expects our love, we are therefore to love him also in return and not let him long for it in vain. One is the same as the other; as Christ helps us so we in return help our neighbor, and all have enough.

[32] Observe now from this how far those have gone out of the way who have united good works with stone, wood, clothing, eating and drinking. Of what benefit is it to your neighbor if you build a church entirely out of gold? Of what benefit to him is the frequent ringing of great church bells? Of what benefit to him is the glitter and the ceremonies in the churches, the priests' gowns, the sanctuary, the silver pictures and vessels? Of what benefit to him are the many candles and much incense. Of what benefit to him is the much chanting and mumbling, the singing of vigils and masses? Do you think that God will permit himself to be paid with the sound of bells, the smoke of candles, the glitter of gold and such fancies? He has commanded none of these, but if you see your neighbor going astray, sinning, or suffering in body or soul, you are to leave everything else and at once help him in every way in your power and if you can do no more, help him with words of comfort and prayer. Thus has Christ done to you and given you an example for you to follow.

[33] These are the two things in which a Christian is to exercise himself, the one that he draws Christ into himself, and that by faith he makes him his own, appropriates to himself the treasures of Christ and confidently builds upon them; the other that he condescends to his neighbor and lets him share in that which he has received, even as he shares in the treasures of Christ. He who does not exercise himself in these two things will receive no benefit even if he should fast unto death, suffer torture or even give his body to be burned, and were able to do all miracles, as St. Paul teaches, 1 Corinthians 13ff.

B. The Spiritual Meaning of the Doctrine of this Gospel

[34] The other mystery, or spiritual teaching, is, that in the churches the Gospel only should be preached and nothing more. Now it is evident that the Gospel teaches nothing but the foregoing two things, Christ and his example and two kinds of good works, the one belonging to Christ by which we are saved through faith, the other belonging to us by which our

neighbor receives help. Whosoever therefore teaches anything different from the Gospel leads people astray; and whosoever does not teach the Gospel in these two parts, leads people all the more astray and is worse than the former who teaches without the Gospel, because he abuses and corrupts God's Word, as St. Paul complains concerning some. 2 Corinthians 2:17.

[35] Now it is clear that nature could not have discovered such a doctrine, nor could all the ingenuity, reason and wisdom of the world have thought it out. Who would be able to discover by means of his own efforts, that faith in Christ makes us one with Christ and gives us for our own all that is Christ's? Who would be able to discover that no works are of any value except those intended to benefit our neighbor? Nature teaches no more than that which is wrought by the law. Therefore it falls back upon its own work, so that this one thinks he fulfills the commandment by founding some institution or order, that one by fasting, this one by the kind of clothes he wears, that one by going on pilgrimages; this one in this manner, that one in that manner; and yet all their works are worthless, for no one is helped by them. Such is the case at the present time in which the whole world is blinded and is going astray through the doctrines and works of men, so that faith and love along with the Gospel have perished.

[36] Therefore the Gospel properly apprehended, is a supernatural sermon and light which makes known Christ only. This is pointed out first of all by the fact that it was not a man that made it known to others, but that an angel came down from heaven and made known to the shepherds the birth of Jesus, while no human being knew anything about it.

[37] In the second place it is pointed out by the fact that Christ was born at midnight, by which he indicates that all the world is in darkness as to its future and that Christ cannot be known by mere reason, but that knowledge concerning him must be revealed from heaven.

[38] In the third place, it is shown by the light that shined around the shepherds, which teaches that here there must be an entirely different light than that of human reason. Moreover, when St. Luke says, Gloria Dei, the glory of God, shone around them, he calls that light a brightness, or the glory of God. Why does he say that? In order to call attention to the mystery and reveal the character of the Gospel. For while the Gospel is a heavenly light that teaches nothing more than Christ, in whom God's grace

is given to us and all human merit is entirely cast aside, it exalts only the glory of God, so that henceforth no one may be able to boast of his own power; but must give God the glory, that it is of his love and goodness alone that we are saved through Christ. See, the divine honor, the divine glory, is the light in the Gospel, which shines around us from heaven through the apostles and their followers who preach the Gospel. The angel here was in the place of all the preachers of the Gospel, and the shepherds in the place of all the hearers, as we shall see. For this reason the Gospel can tolerate no other teaching besides its own; for the teaching of men is earthly light and human glory; it exalts the honor and praise of men, and makes souls to glory in their own works; while the Gospel glories in Christ, in God's grace and goodness, and teaches us to boast of and confide in Christ.

[39] In the fourth place this is represented by the name Judea and Bethlehem, where Christ chose to be born. Judea is interpreted, confession or thanksgiving; as when we confess, praise and thank God, acknowledging that all we possess are his gifts. One who so confesses and praises is called Judaeus. Such a king of the Jews is Christ, as the expression is: "Jesus Nazarenus Rex Judaeorum," Jesus the Nazarene, the king of the Jews, of those confessing God. By this is shown that no teaching whatever can make such a confession except the Gospel, which teaches Christ.

[40] Beth means house; Lehem means bread, Bethlehem, a house of bread. The city had that name because it was situated in a good, fruitful country, rich in grain; so that it was the granary for the neighboring towns, or as we would call it, a fertile country. In olden times the name of the city was Ephrata, which means fruitful. Both names imply that the city was in a fruitful and rich land. By this is represented that without the Gospel this earth is a wilderness and there is no confession of God nor thanksgiving.

[41] Moreover where Christ and the Gospel are, there is the fruitful Bethlehem and the thankful Judea. There everyone has enough in Christ, and overflows with thanksgiving for the divine grace. But while men are thankful for human teachings, they cannot satisfy, but leave a barren land and deadly hunger. No heart can ever be satisfied unless it hears Christ rightly proclaimed in the Gospel. In this a man comes to Bethlehem and finds him, he also comes to and remains in Judea and thanks his God eternally; here he is satisfied, here God receives his praise and confession,

while outside of the Gospel there is nothing but thanklessness and starvation.

[42] But the angel shows most clearly that nothing is to be preached in Christendom except the Gospel, he takes upon himself the office of a preacher of the Gospel. He does not say, I preach to you, but “glad tidings I bring to you.” I am an Evangelist and my word is an evangel, good news. The meaning of the word Gospel is, a good, joyful message, that is preached in the New Testament. Of what does the Gospel testify? Listen! the angel says: “I bring you glad tidings of great joy”, my Gospel speaks of great joy. Where is it? Hear again: “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

[43] Behold here what the Gospel is, namely, a joyful sermon concerning Christ, our Savior. Whoever preaches him rightly, preaches the Gospel of pure joy. How is it possible for man to hear of greater joy than that Christ has been given to him as his own? He does not only say Christ is born, but he makes his birth our own by saying, to you a Savior.

[44] Therefore the Gospel does not only teach the history concerning Christ; but it enables all who believe it to receive it as their own, which is the way the Gospel operates, as has just been set forth. Of what benefit would it be to me if Christ had been born a thousand times, and it would daily be sung into my ears in a most lovely manner, if I were never to hear that he was born for me and was to be my very own? If the voice gives forth this pleasant sound, even if it be in homely phrase, my heart listens with joy for it is a lovely sound which penetrates the soul. If now there were any thing else to be preached, the evangelical angel and the angelic evangelist would certainly have touched upon it.

C. The Spiritual Meaning of the Signs, the Angel, and the Shepherds.

[45] The angel says further: “And this is the sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.” The clothes are nothing else than the holy Scriptures, in which the Christian truth lies wrapped, in which the faith is described. For the Old Testament contains nothing else than Christ as he is preached in the Gospel. Therefore we see how the apostles appeal to the testimony of the Scriptures and with them prove everything that is to be preached and believed concerning Christ. Thus St. Paul says, Romans 3:21, That the faith of Christ through which we

become righteous is witnessed by the law and the prophets. And Christ himself, after his resurrection, opened to them the Scriptures, which speak of him. Luke 24:27. When he was transfigured on the mount, Matthew 17:3, Moses and Elijah stood by him; that means, the law and the prophets as his two witnesses, which are signs pointing to him. Therefore the angel says, the sign by which he is recognized is the swaddling clothes, for there is no other testimony on earth concerning Christian truth than the holy Scriptures.

[46] According to this Christ's seamless coat which was not divided and which during his sufferings was gambled off and given away, John 19:23-24, represents the New Testament. It indicates that the pope, the Antichrist, would not deny the Gospel, but would shut it up violently and play with it by means of false interpretation, until Christ is no longer to be found in it. Then the four soldiers who crucified the Lord are figures of all the bishops and teachers in the four quarters of the earth, who violently suppress the Gospel and destroy Christ and his faith by means of their human teachings, as the pope with his Papists has long since done.

[47] From this we see that the law and the prophets cannot be rightly preached and known unless we see Christ wrapped up in them. It is true that Christ does not seem to be in them, nor do the Jews find him there. They appear to be insignificant and unimportant clothes, simple words, which seem to speak of unimportant external matters, the import of which is not recognized; but the New Testament, the Gospel, must open it, throw its light upon it and reveal it, as has been said.

[48] First of all then the Gospel must be heard, and the appearance and the voice of the angel must be believed. Had the shepherds not heard from the angel that Christ lay there, they might have seen him ten thousand times without ever knowing that the child was Christ. Accordingly St. Paul says, 2 Corinthians 3:16, that the law remains dark and covered up for the Jews until they are converted to Christ. Christ must first be heard in the Gospel, then it will be seen how beautiful and lovely the whole Old Testament is in harmony with him, so that a man cannot help giving himself in submission to faith and be enabled to recognize the truth of what Christ says in John 5:46, "For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me, for he wrote of me."

[49] Therefore let us beware of all teaching that does not set forth Christ. What more would you know? What more do you need, if indeed you know Christ, as above set forth, if you walk by faith in God, and by love to your neighbor, doing to your fellow man as Christ has done to you. This is indeed the whole Scripture in its briefest form, that no more words or books are necessary, but only life and action.

[50] He lies in the manger. Notice here that nothing but Christ is to be preached throughout the whole world. What is the manger but the congregations of Christians in the churches to hear the preaching? We are the beasts before this manger; and Christ is laid before us upon whom we are to feed our souls. Whosoever goes to hear the preaching, goes to this manger; but it must be the preaching of Christ. Not all mangers have Christ neither do all sermons teach the true faith. There was but one manger in Bethlehem in which this treasure lay, and besides it was an empty and despised manger in which there was no fodder. Therefore the preaching of the Gospel is divorced from all other things, it has and teaches nothing besides Christ; should anything else be taught, then it is no more the manger of Christ, but the manger of war horses full of temporal things and of fodder for the body.

[51] But in order to show that Christ in swaddling clothes represents the faith in the Old Testaments, we will here give several examples. We read in Matthew 8:4, when Christ cleansed the leper, that he said to him: "Go, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them." Here you perceive that the law of Moses was given to the Jews for a testimony, or sign, as the angel also here says, namely, that such law represents something different from itself. What? Christ is the priest, all men are spiritual lepers because of unbelief; but when we come to faith in him he touches us with his hand, gives and lays upon us his merit and we become clean and whole without any merit on our part whatever. We are therefore to show our gratitude to him and acknowledge that we have not become pious by our own works, but through his grace, then our course will be right before God. In addition, we are to offer our gifts, that is, give of our own to help our fellow man, to do good to him as Christ has done to us. Thus Christ is served and an offering is brought to the rightful priest, for it is done for his sake, in order to love and praise him. Do you here see how, figuratively speaking, Christ and the faith are wrapped up in

the plain Scriptures? It is here made evident how Moses in the law gave only testimony and an interpretation of Christ. The whole Old Testament should be understood in this manner, and should be taken to be the swaddling clothes as a sign pointing out and making Christ known.

[52] Again, it was commanded that the Sabbath should be strictly observed and no work should be done, which shows that not our works but Christ's works should dwell in us; for it is written that we are not saved by our works but by the works of Christ. Now these works of Christ are twofold, as shown before. On the one hand, those that Christ has done personally without us, which are the most important and in which we believe. The others, those he performs in us, in our love to our neighbor. The first may be called the evening works and the second the morning works, so that evening and morning make one day, as it is written in Genesis 1:5, for the Scriptures begin the day in the evening and end in the morning, that is, the evening with the night is the first half, the morning with the day is the second half of the whole natural day. Now as the first half is dark and the second half is light, so the first works of Christ are concealed in our faith, but the others, the works of love, are to appear, to be openly shown toward our fellow man. Here then you see how the whole Sabbath is observed and hallowed.

[53] Do you see how beautifully Christ lies in these swaddling clothes? How beautifully the Old Testament reveals the faith and love of Christ and of his Christians? Now, swaddling clothes are as a rule of two kinds, the outside of coarse woolen cloth, the inner of linen. The outer or coarse woolen cloth represents the testimony of the law, but the linen are the words of the prophets. As Isaiah says in 7:14, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel", and similar passages which would not be understood of Christ, had the Gospel not revealed it and shown that Christ is in them.

[54] Here then we have these two, the faith and the Gospel, that these and nothing else are to be preached throughout Christendom. Let us now see who are to be the preachers and who the learners. The preachers are to be angels, that is, God's messengers, who are to lead a heavenly life, are to be constantly engaged with God's Word that they under no circumstances preach the doctrine of men. It is a most incongruous thing to be God's messenger and not to further God's message. Angelus means a messenger,

and Luke calls him God's messenger (Angelus Domini). The message also is of more importance than the messenger's life. If he leads a wicked life he only injures himself, but if he brings a false message in the place of God's message, he leads astray and injures everyone that hears him, and causes idolatry among the people in that they accept lies for the truth, honor men instead of God, and pray to the devil instead of to God.

[55] There is no more terrible plague, misfortune or cause for distress upon earth than a preacher who does not preach God's Word; of whom, alas, the world today is full; and yet they think they are pious and do good when indeed their whole work is nothing but murdering souls, blaspheming God and setting up idolatry, so that it would be much better for them if they were robbers, murderers, and the worst scoundrels, for then they would know that they are doing wickedly. But now they go along under spiritual names and show, as priest, bishop, pope, and are at the same time ravening wolves in sheeps' clothing, and it would be well if no one ever heard their preaching.

[56] The learners are shepherds, poor people out in the fields. Here Jesus does what he says, Matthew 11:5, "And the poor have good tidings preached to them", and Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Here are no learned, no rich, no mighty ones, for such people do not as a rule accept the Gospel. The Gospel is a heavenly treasure, which will not tolerate any other treasure, and will not agree with any earthly guest in the heart. Therefore whoever loves the one must let go the other, as Christ says, Matthew 6:24: "You cannot serve God and mammon." This is shown by the shepherds in that they were in the field, under the canopy of heaven, and not in houses, showing that they do not hold fast and cling to temporal things; and besides they are in the fields by night, despised by and unknown to the world which sleeps in the night, and by day delights so to walk that it may be noticed; but the poor shepherds go about their work at night. They represent all the lowly who live on earth, often despised and unnoticed but dwell only under the protection of heaven; they eagerly desire the Gospel.

[57] That there were shepherds, means that no one is to hear the Gospel for himself alone, but everyone is to tell it to others who are not acquainted with it. For he who believes for himself has enough and should endeavor to bring others to such faith and knowledge, so that one may be a shepherd of

the other, to wait upon and lead him into the pasture of the Gospel in this world, during the night time of this earthly life. At first the shepherds were sore afraid because of the angel; for human nature is shocked when it first hears in the Gospel that all our works are nothing and are condemned before God, for it does not easily give up its prejudices and presumptions.

[58] Now let everyone examine himself in the light of the Gospel and see how far he is from Christ, what is the character of his faith and love. There are many who are enkindled with dreamy devotion, when they hear of such poverty of Christ, are almost angry with the citizens of Bethlehem, denounce their blindness and ingratitude, and think, if they had been there, they would have shown the Lord and his mother a more becoming service, and would not have permitted them to be treated so miserably. But they do not look by their side to see how many of their fellow men need their help, and which they let go on in their misery unaided. Who is there upon earth that has no poor, miserable, sick, erring ones, or sinful people around him? Why does he not exercise his love to those? Why does he not do to them as Christ has done to him?

[59] It is altogether false to think that you have done much for Christ, if you do nothing for those needy ones. Had you been at Bethlehem you would have paid as little attention to Christ as they did; but since it is now made known who Christ is, you profess to serve him. Should he come now and lay himself in a manger, and would send you word that it was he, of whom you now know so much, you might do something for him, but you would not have done it before. Had it been positively made known to the rich man in the Gospel, to what high position Lazarus would be exalted, and he would have been convinced of the fact, he would not have left him lie and perish as he did.

[60] Therefore, if your neighbor were now what he shall be in the future, and lay before you, you would surely give him attention. But now, since it is not so, you beat the air and do not recognize the Lord in your neighbor, you do not do to him as he has done to you. Therefore God permits you to be blinded, and deceived by the pope and false preachers, so that you squander on wood, stone, paper, and wax that with which you might help your fellow man.

III. Explanation of the Angels' Song of Praise

[61] Finally we must also treat of the angels' song, which we use daily in our service: Gloria in excelsis Deo. There are three things to be considered in this song, the, glory to God, the peace to the earth, and the good will to mankind. The good will might be understood as the divine good will God has toward men through Christ. But we will admit it to mean the good will which is granted unto men through this birth, as it is set forth in the words thus, "en anthropis eudokia, hominibus beneplacitum."

[62] The first is the glory to God. Thus we should also begin, so that in all things the praise and glory be given to God as the one who does, gives and possesses all things, that no one ascribe anything to himself or claim any merit for himself. For the glory belongs to no one but to God alone, it does not permit of being made common by being shared by any person.

[63] Adam stole the glory through the evil spirit and appropriated it to himself, so that all men with him have come into disgrace, which evil is so deeply rooted in all mankind that there is no vice in them as great as vanity. Everyone is well pleased with himself and no one wants to be nothing, and they desire nothing, which spirit of vanity is the cause of all distress, strife and war upon earth.

[64] Christ has again brought back the glory to God, in that he has taught us how all we have or can do is nothing but wrath and displeasure before God, so that we may not be boastful and self-satisfied, but rather be filled with fear and shame, so that in this manner our glory and self-satisfaction may be crushed, and we be glad to be rid of it, in order that we may be found and preserved in Christ.

[65] The second is the peace on earth. For just as strife must exist where God's glory is not found, as Solomon says, Proverbs 13:10, "By pride cometh only contention;" so also, where God's glory is there must be peace. Why should they quarrel when they know that nothing is their own, but that all they are, have and can desire is from God; they leave everything in his hands and are content that they have such a gracious God. He knows that all he may have, is nothing before God, he does not seek his own honor, but thinks of him who is something before God, namely Christ.

[66] From this it follows that where there are true Christians, there is no strife, contention, or discord; as Isaiah says in Isaiah 2:4, "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore!”

[67] Therefore our Lord Christ is called a king of peace, and is represented by king Solomon, whose name implies, rich in peace, that inwardly he may give us peace in our conscience toward God through faith; and outwardly, that we may exercise love to our fellow men, so that through him there may be everywhere peace on earth.

[68] The third is good will toward men. By good will is not meant the will that does good works, but the good will and peace of heart, which is equally submissive in everything that may betide, be it good or evil. The angels knew very well that the peace, of which they sang, does not extend farther than to the Christians who truly believe, such have certainly peace among themselves. But the world and the devil have no reproof, they do not permit them to have peace but persecute them to death; as Christ says, John 16:33, “In me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation.”

[69] Hence it was not enough for the angels to sing peace on earth, they added to it the good will toward men, that they take pleasure in all that God does, regard all God’s dealing with them as wise and good, and praise and thank him for it. They do not murmur, but willingly submit to God’s will. Moreover since they know that God, whom they have received by faith in Christ as a gracious Father, can do all things, they exult and rejoice even under persecution as St. Paul says, Romans 5:3, “We also rejoice in our tribulations.” They regard all that happens to them as for the best, out of the abundant satisfaction they have in Christ.

[70] Behold, it is such a good will, pleasure, good opinion in all things whether good or evil, that the angels wish to express in their song; for where there is no good will, peace will not long exist. The unbelieving put the worst construction on everything, always magnify the evil and double every mishap. Therefore God’s dealings with them does not please them, they would have it different, and that which is written in Psalm 18:25-26 is fulfilled: “With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful, with the perfect man thou wilt show thyself perfect; with the pure thou wilt show thyself pure”, that is, whoever has such pleasure in all things which thou doest, in him thou, and all thine, will also have pleasure,” and with the

perverse thou wilt show thyself froward, that is, as thou and all thou doest, does not please him, so he is not well pleasing to thee and all that are thine.

[71] Concerning the good will St. Paul says: 1 Corinthians 10:33, “Even as I also please all men in all things.” How does he do that? If you are content and satisfied with everything, you will in turn please everybody. It is a short rule: If you will please no one, be pleased with no one; if you will please everyone, be pleased with everyone; in so far, however, that you do not violate God’s Word, for in that case all pleasing and displeasing ceases. But what may be omitted without doing violence to God’s Word, may be omitted, that you may please everyone and at the same time be faithful to God, then you have this good will of which the angels sing.

[72] From this song we may learn what kind of creatures the angels are. Don’t consider what the great masters of art dream about them, here they are all painted in such a manner that their heart and their own thoughts may be recognized. In the first place, in that they joyfully sing, ascribing the glory to God, they show how full of his light and fire they are, not praising themselves, but recognizing that all things belong to God alone, so that with great earnestness they ascribe the glory to him to whom it belongs. Therefore if you would think of a humble, pure, obedient and joyful heart, praising God, think of the angels. This is their first step, that by which they serve God.

[73] The second is their love to us as has been shown. Here you see what great and gracious friends we have in them, that they favor us no less than themselves; rejoice in our welfare quite as much as they do in their own, so much so that in this song they give us a most comforting inducement to regard them as the best of friends. In this way you rightly understand the angels, not according to their being, which the masters of art attempt fearlessly to portray, but according to their inner heart, spirit and sense, that though I know not what they are, I know what their chief desire and constant work is; by this you look into their heart. This is enough concerning this Gospel. What is meant by Mary, Joseph, Nazareth will be explained in Luke 1.

The Armor of Gospel

[74] In this Gospel is the foundation of the article of our faith when we say: “I believe in Jesus Christ, born of the virgin Mary.” Although the same article is founded on different passages of Scripture, yet on none so clearly as on this one. St. Mark says no more than that Christ has a mother, the same is also the case with St. John, neither saying anything of his birth. St. Matthew says he is born of Mary in Bethlehem, but lets it remain at that, without gloriously proclaiming the virginity of Mary, as we will hear in due time. But Luke describes it clearly and diligently.

[75] In olden times it was also proclaimed by patriarchs and prophets; as when God says to Abraham, Genesis 22:17: “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Again he says to David, Psalm 89:4, and Psalm 132:11: “Jehovah hath sworn unto David in truth; he will not return from it; of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.” But those are obscure words compared with the Gospel.

[76] Again it is also represented in many figures, as in the rod of Aaron which budded in a supernatural manner, although a dry piece of wood, Numbers 7:5. So also Mary, exempt from all natural generation, brought forth, in a supernatural manner, really and truly a natural son, just as the rod bore natural almonds, and still remained a natural rod. Again by Gideon’s fleece, Judges 6:37, which was wet by the dew of heaven, while the land around it remained dry, and many like figures which it is not necessary to enumerate. Nor do these figures conflict with faith, they rather adorn it; for it must at first be firmly believed before I can believe that the figure serves to illustrate it.

[77] There is a great deal in this article, of which, in time of temptation, we would not be deprived, for the evil spirit attacks nothing so severely as our faith. Therefore it is of the greatest importance for us to know where in God’s Word this faith is set forth, and in time of temptation point to that, for the evil spirit cannot stand against God’s Word.

[78] There are also many ethical teachings in the Gospel, as for example, meekness, patience, poverty and the like; but these are touched upon enough and are not points of controversy, for they are fruits of faith and good works.

Second Christmas Day. The Fruits and Signs of the Power of the Word of God. The Angel of the Lord and Shepherds.

Text: Luke 2:15-20.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. Luke 2:15-20

I. The Fruits and Signs of the Power of the Word of God

[1] In the light of the exposition of the preceding Gospel this text is easily understood for it cites an example and the putting into practice of the doctrine taught there, in that the shepherds did, and found, all just as the angels had told them. Consequently, it teaches what the results and fruit of the Word of God are, and what the marks are, by which we know whether the Word of God is established in our hearts and whether it is doing its work there.

[2] The first and principal fruit of the power of the Word is faith. For had not these shepherds believed the angel they would never have gone to Bethlehem, they would moreover never have done one of the things related of them in this Gospel.

[3] One, however, might say: Yes, I would also gladly believe if an angel thus from heaven were to preach to me. This is very foreign to the subject. Whoever does not receive the Word for its own sake, will never receive it for the sake of the preacher, even if all the angels preached it to him. And he who receives it because of the preacher does not believe in the Word, neither in God through the Word, but he believes the preacher and in the preacher, Hence the faith of such persons does not last long. But whoever believes the Word, does not care who the person is that speaks the Word, and neither will he honor the Word for the sake of the person; but on the contrary, he honors the person because of the Word, and always subordinates the person to the Word. And if the preacher perishes, or even falls from his faith and preaches differently, he will forsake the person of the preacher rather than the Word of God. He abides by what he has heard, although the person of the preacher may be what he will, and come and go as he may.

[4] The true difference between godly faith and human faith consists also in this, that human faith cleaves to the person of the preacher, believes, trusts and honors the Word for the sake of him who spake it. But godly faith, on the other hand, cleaves to the Word, which is God himself; he believes, trusts and honors the Word, not because of him who preaches it; but because he feels it so surely the truth that no one can ever turn him again from it, even if the same preacher were to try to do it. This was proved by the Samaritans, John 4:42, when they had heard first of Christ from the heathen woman and upon her word they went out of the city to Christ. After they themselves heard Christ, they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

[5] Moreover, all who believed Christ because of his person and his miracles, fell from their faith when he was crucified. So it is in our day and so has it always been. The Word itself, without any regard to persons, must be enough for the heart, it must include and lay hold of man, so that he, as if taken captive, feels how true and right it is, even if the world, all the angels,

all the princes of hell said differently, yea, if God himself spake otherwise; as he at times tempts his own elect and appears as if he were different than he had before declared. So it was with Abraham when commanded to offer his son Isaac; with Jacob, while wrestling with the angel; and with David, when persecuted by his son Absalom; and other like examples.

[6] This faith triumphs in life and death, in hell and heaven, and nothing is able to overthrow it; because it rests upon nothing but the Word without any regard whatever to persons.

[7] These shepherds possessed such faith; for they agree with and cleave to the Word so fully that they forget the angels who declared it to them. They do not say, Let us go and see the word that the angels made known to us, but the word that the Lord hath made known unto us. The angels were soon forgotten and the Word of God only seized and retained. In like manner St. Luke speaks in the text of Mary, that she kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart. Without doubt she did not let the humble appearance of the shepherds trouble her, but esteemed all as the Word of God. Not only Mary, but all the others who heard these words from the shepherds, and wondered, as the text says. All clung to the Word.

[8] And although it is the idiom of the Hebrew language that when it speaks of an historic fact, it says, “they wish to see the word”, as St. Luke says here (because the history is embodied in words and is made known by means of words); so is it therefore thus provided by God that faith should be expressed as that which cleaves to the words and relies upon the words spoken concerning the history. For if Christ’s life and sufferings were not embodied in the words by which faith is anchored, they would have been of no use, because all who saw them with their eyes received no benefit from them, or very little.

[9] The second fruit is the unity in the spirit. For it is the nature of Christian faith to unite hearts into one, that they be of one mind and of one will, as Psalm 68:6 says: “God, the Lord, Christ our God, setteth the solitary in families.” St. Paul speaks of the unity of the Spirit in many places as in Romans 12:18; 1 Corinthians 12:4; and Ephesians 4:3, where he says: “Be ever diligent that ye be of one mind, of one will.” Such unity is not possible apart from faith, for everyone is well pleased with his own ways, therefore is the land, as the proverb runs, full of fools. Here one sees in his own

experiences how the various orders, callings, and sects are divided among themselves. Everyone esteems his order, his calling, his character, his work, his plans the best, and the right road to heaven. He disparages the things of others and rejects them; as we see at present among the priests, monks, bishops and all who profess to be spiritual.

[10] However, those who have the true faith know that it depends only upon faith, in which they unanimously agree. Therefore they are never divided and disunited because of any outward calling, conduct or work. To them all external matters, however different they may be, are the same. Thus the shepherds here are of one mind, of one will, speak the same thought among themselves, use the same form of words and say: "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem", etc.

[11] The third fruit is humility, in that they acknowledge themselves to be human. Therefore the Evangelist adds "The shepherds", etc. For faith immediately teaches that everything human is nothing before God. Hence they despise self and think nothing of themselves. This is true, fundamental humility and self-knowledge. Humility then brings with it that it does not inquire about things great and high in the world. They consider themselves a humble poor and despised people, as St. Paul teaches in Romans 12:16, when he says: "Set not your mind on high things, but condescend to them that are lowly." As Psalm 15:4 also teaches: "In the eyes of the righteous the reprobate is despised, but he honoreth them that fear Jehovah."

[12] Out of all this follows peace. For he who esteems nothing of all the external and great things, easily lets them pass and never quarrels with anyone about them. He experiences something better inwardly in the faith of his heart. Unity, peace, and humility are also found among murderers, public sinners, even among hypocrites. It is however a unity of the flesh and not of the spirit; as Pilate and Herod became reconciled to one another and exercised a peaceful and humble spirit toward each other. Likewise the Jews, according to Psalm 2:2: "The Kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together." In like manner are, the pope, monks and priests one when they contend against God, who at other times are nothing but mere sects among themselves. Hence this is called a unity, humility and peace of the spirit, in that it is above and in spiritual things, that is, in Christ.

[13] The fourth is love to your neighbor and a renouncing of self. The example of the shepherds proves this in that they leave their sheep and go forth, not to the great and high lords in Jerusalem, not to the aldermen in Bethlehem, but to the little company in the stable. They present themselves to the lowly and do whatever is required of them. Had they not had faith they would not have thus left their sheep; and they would not have abandoned their work, had not the angels before commanded them to do so. They did it of their own free will and of their own counsel, as the text teaches. They conferred with one another about it and came with haste, and the angels did not command them, but only pointed out what they would find, and left it to their own free will, whether they would go and seek.

[14] Love acts in like manner. It knows no command, it does everything by virtue of its own impulse, it hastens and delays not, it is enough that its attention is only called to a thing, it needs no taskmaster, neither will it tolerate one. Oh, much might be said on this thought! So should the Christian live more freely in love, forget self and the things of self, only think and hasten to his neighbor, as St. Paul in Philippians 2:4 says: "Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others." And Galatians 6:2: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

[15] However, the pope and his bishops and priests have filled the world with laws and constraint, and there is nothing now in the whole world but mere driving and alarming. No voluntary order or calling exists any longer, since it has been proclaimed that love should be extinguished and the world be mined by human doctrines.

[16] The fifth is joy. This appears in the words that we gladly speak and hear about the things faith in the heart has received. So here the shepherds converse with one another joyously and kindly about that which they had heard and believed. They use very many words, as if they were talking to no purpose. They are not satisfied by saying: Let us go unto Bethlehem and see the saying that has come to pass; they add, which the Lord did and hath made known unto us. Is it not unnecessary talk that they say: What has come to pass there, that God has done? Could they not have easily spoken in fewer words thus: Let us see the saying, God has done there.

[17] But the spirit's joy bubbles over with cheery words, and still none are useless, yea, all is too little, and the soul cannot pour forth itself as it gladly would desire, like Psalm 45:1 says: "My heart overfloweth with a goodly matter," as if he were to say, I would gladly tell it forth, but I cannot; it is greater than I can express, so that my speaking is hardly a hiccough. Hence the saying in Psalm 51:17 and other places: "My tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness," that is, proclaim, sing and speak it forth with rejoicing and jumping. And Psalm 119:171: "Let my lips utter praise", like a boiling pot wells and bubbles forth.

[18] The sixth fruit: they follow with acts. For it is as St. Paul says in Corinthians 4:20: "For the Kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." Thus here the shepherds do not only say, Let us go and see, but they also went, yea, they do more than they say. For the text says, "They came in haste," that is more than merely going, as they agreed to do, so faith and love always do more than they promise, and their affairs are alive, intertwined, active, bubbling over. So a Christian should be a man of few words and of many deeds, as he will surely be, if he is a true Christian. If he is not such a man then he is not yet a real Christian.

[19] The seventh fruit is, they freely confess and publicly preach the Word that was spoken to them concerning this child, which is the highest work in the Christian life. In this we are to risk our body and life, our wealth and honor. For to believe right and live a good life quietly and with yourself is not attacking the wicked spirit very hard; but when we go forth and publish the same abroad, confess, preach and praise for the sake of the welfare of others: that he will not permit. Therefore Luke adds here that the shepherds did not only come and see, but they also preached about this child what they heard in the field, not only before Mary and Joseph, but before everybody.

[20] Do you not think there were many who thought they were fools and insane people, in that they attempted, as coarse and unschooled laymen, to speak of the angels' song and sermon? But the shepherds, full of faith and joy cheerfully became fools in the eyes of men for God's sake. A Christian also does the same. For God's Word must be considered as foolishness and falsehood in this world.

[21] The eighth fruit is Christian liberty. This is bound by no work, but all works are alike to a Christian as they come to his notice. For these shepherds run to no desert, put on no hood, never shave their heads, never change clothing, time, food, drink nor any external work, they return again to their sheep cots and there serve their God. For a Christian character consists not in outward conduct, neither does it change anyone as to his outward calling or position, but as to his inner state, that is, he possesses another heart, another mind, will and impulse that does even the work, which any person without such a mind and will does. For a Christian knows that all depends entirely upon faith; therefore he goes, stands, eats, drinks, clothes himself, works and lives as an ordinary man in his calling, so that one cannot see his Christianity; as Christ says in Luke 17:20-21: “The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here ! or, there ! for lo the kingdom of God is within you.”

[22] Against this liberty the pope and his spiritual offices contend with their laws and chosen dress, food, prayers, sacred places and persons; they take themselves and every person captive by their soul snares with which they filled the world, as St. Anthony saw in a dream. For they thought it depended upon our nature and works that we are saved. They call other people worldly, although they themselves are seven-fold more worldly, since all their affairs are the doings of man, concerning which God has commanded nothing.

[23] The ninth and last fruit of the Word is praising and thanking. For we are not able to give God any work or service for all the kindness and grace he bestows upon us, except praise and thanks which also spring from the heart, and do not need many organs, bells, and loud voices. Faith truly teaches such praise and thanks as are here related of the shepherds, in that they returned to their flocks glorifying and praising God. They are indeed contented, although they have not become wealthier, although they are not more highly honored, although they do not eat and drink better, and are not obliged to do their daily duties better.

[24] See, in this Gospel you have a picture of a true Christian life, first according to its outward character, so that it glitters outwardly not at all, or very little in the eyes of the people, yea, is falsehood and the work of fools in the eyes of most people; but inwardly it is nothing but light, joy and salvation. Hence we see what the apostle means, when in Galatians 5:22 he

relates the fruits of the Spirit and says: “The fruits of the Spirit,” that is, the works of faith,” are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control ;” here there is no mention of persons, seasons, food, clothing, places or like chosen works of human device as we see swarming in the life of the Papists.

II. The Spiritual Interpretation of the Gospel

[25] But what it is to find Christ in such poverty, and what his swaddling clothes and manger signify, are explained in the previous Gospel; that his poverty teaches how we should find him in our neighbors, the lowliest and the most needy; and his swaddling clothes are the holy Scriptures; that in actual life we should incline to the needy; and in our studies and contemplative life only to the Scriptures; in order that Christ alone may become the man of both lives and that he may everywhere stand before us. We should shun the books of Aristotle, of the pope, and of all men, or read them in a way that we do not seek the edification of the soul in them; but with them make use of the time and this life, as one teaches a trade or civil law. However it is not in vain that St. Luke places Mary before Joseph, and both of them before the child and says: “And they found both Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger.”

[26] Now we said before, Mary is the Christian church, Joseph, the servants of the church, as the bishops and pastors should be if they preach the Gospel. Here the church is preferred before the prelates of the church, as Christ also says in Luke 22:26: “He that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger,” although that is now reversed; it is also no wonder, since they rejected the Gospel and exalted the prattle of men. The Christian church retains now all the words of God in her heart and ponders them, compares them with one another and with the Scriptures. Therefore he who would find Christ must first find the Church. How should we know where Christ and his faith were, if we did not know where his believers are? And he who would know anything of Christ must not trust himself nor build a bridge to heaven by his own reason; but he must go to the Church, attend and ask her.

[27] Now the Church is not wood and stone, but the company of believing people; one must hold to them, and see how they believe, live and

teach; they surely have Christ in their midst. For outside of the Christian church there is no truth, no Christ, no salvation.

[28] From this it follows that it is unsafe and false that the pope or a bishop wishes to have himself alone believed, and that he poses as a master; for they all err and are inclined to err. But their teaching should be subject to the congregation of believers. The congregation should decide and judge what they teach; their judgment should stand, in order that Mary may be found before Joseph, the church be preferred to the preachers. For it was not Joseph but Mary who retains the words in her heart, ponders them, gathers them together and compares them. The apostle also taught this in 1 Corinthians 14:29-30 when he says: “And let not the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discern. But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence.”

[29] But at present the pope and his followers have become tyrants, have reversed this Christian, godly and apostolic order, established an entirely heathen and Pythagorean order of things, that they may say, *lulaffen* and *alfenzen*, that is, they talk silly about whatever they wish. No one criticizes them, no one will oppose them, no one tells them to be quiet. And in this way they have quenched the Spirit so that among them one finds neither Mary, nor Joseph nor Christ; nothing but the rats, mice, vipers and serpents of their poisonous doctrines and hypocrisy.

[30] This is not a Gospel of strife; for it teaches Christian morals and works, it does not clearly and publicly establish the different articles of faith. Although in its spiritual teachings, as has been shown, it is strong enough; but the spiritual teachings do not strive and contend. There must be clear, public passages that plainly publish the articles of our faith.

Third Christmas Day or Principal Service. Christ's Titles of Honor; His Coming; His Incarnation; and the Revelation of His Glory; All Things Were Made by God.

Text: John 1:1-14.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 The same was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John 1:1-14

Christ's Titles of Honor and His Attributes.

[1] This is the most important of all the Gospels of the church year, and yet it is not, as some think, obscure or difficult. For upon it is clearly founded the important article of faith concerning the divinity of Christ, with which all Christians ought to be acquainted, and which they are able to understand. Nothing is too great for faith. Therefore let us consider this Gospel lesson in the simplest manner possible, and not as the scholastics did with their fabricated subtleties, conceal its doctrine from the common people and frighten them away from it. There is no need of many fine and sharp distinctions, but only of a plain, simple explanation of the words of the text.

[2] In the first place, we should know that all that the apostles taught and wrote, they took out of the Old Testament; for in it all things are proclaimed that were to be fulfilled later in Christ, and were to be preached, as Paul says in Romans 1:2: "God promised afore the Gospel of his son Jesus Christ through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures." Therefore all their preaching is based upon the Old Testament, and there is not a word in the New Testament that does not look back into the Old, where it had been foretold. Thus we have seen in the Epistle how the divinity of Christ is confirmed by the Apostle from passages in the Old Testament. For the New Testament is nothing more than a revelation of the Old. Just as one receives a sealed letter which is not to be opened until after the writer's death, so the Old Testament is the will and testament of Christ, which he has had opened after his death and read and everywhere proclaimed through the Gospel, as it is declared in Revelation 5:5, where the Lamb of God alone is able to open the book with the seven seals, which no one else could open, neither in heaven, nor on earth, nor under the earth.

I. Christ's First Title of Honor and Attribute: He is the Word.

[3] That this Gospel may be clearer and more easily understood, we must go back to the passages in the Old Testament upon which it is founded, namely, the beginning of the first chapter of Genesis. There we read, Genesis 1:1-3: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light, and there was light," etc. Moses continues how all things were created in like manner as the light, namely, by speaking or the Word of God. Thus: "And God said, Let there be a firmament." And again: "God said, Let there be sun, moon, stars," etc.

[4] From these words of Moses it is clearly proved that God has a Word, through which or by means of which he spoke, before anything was created; and this Word does not and cannot be anything that was created, since all things were created through this divine utterance, as the text of Moses clearly and forcibly expresses it, when it says: "God said, Let there be light, and there was light." The Word must therefore have preceded the light, since light came by the Word; consequently it was also before all other creatures, which also came by the Word, as Moses writes.

[5] But let us go farther. If the Word preceded all creatures, and all creatures came by the Word and were created through it, the Word must be a different being than a creature, and was not made or created like a creature. It must therefore be eternal and without beginning. For when all things began it was already there, and cannot be confined in time nor in creation, but is above time and creation; yea, time and creation are made and have their beginning through it. Thus it follows that whatever is not temporal must be eternal; and that which has no beginning cannot be temporal; and that which is not a creature must be God. For besides God and his creatures there is nothing. Hence we learn from this text of Moses, that the Word of God, which was in the beginning and through which all things were made and spoken, must be God eternal and not a creature.

[6] Again, the Word and he that speaks it, are not one person; for it is not possible that the speaker is himself the Word. What sort of speaker would he be who is himself the Word? He must needs be a mute, or the word must needs sound of itself without the speaker. But Scripture here speaks in

strong and lucid words: “God said.” And thus God and His Word must be two distinct things. If Moses had written: “There was an utterance,” it would not be so evident that there were two, the Word and the Speaker. But when he says: “God said,” and names the speaker and his word, he forcibly states that there are two; that the speaker is not the word, and the word is not the speaker, but that the word comes from the speaker, and has its existence not of itself but from the speaker. But the speaker does not come from the word, nor does he have his existence from it, but from himself. Thus, the words of Moses point conclusively to the fact that there are two persons in the Godhead from eternity, before all creatures, that the one has its existence from the other, and the first has its existence from nothing but itself.

[7] Again, the Scriptures firmly and everlastingly maintain that there is only one God, as Moses begins, saying: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” And Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel; Jehovah our God is one God.” Thus the Scriptures proceed in simple, comprehensible words, and teach such exalted things so plainly that everyone may well understand them, and so forcibly that no one can gainsay them. Who is there that cannot here understand from these words of Moses, that there must be two persons in the Godhead, and yet but one God, unless he wishes to deny the plain Scriptures?

[8] Again, who is there so subtle as to be able to contradict this doctrine? He must distinguish or keep apart the Word from God, the speaker; and he must confess that it was before all creatures, and that the creatures were made by it. Consequently he must surely admit it to be God, for besides the creatures there is nothing but God; he must also admit that there is only one God. Thus the Scriptures forcibly conclude that these two persons are one perfect God, and that each one is the only true, real, and perfect God, who has created all things; that the Speaker has his being not from the Word, but that the Word has its being from the Speaker, yet he has his being eternally and from eternity, and outside of all creation.

[9] The Arian heretics intended to draw a mist over this clear passage and to bore a hole into heaven, since they could not surmount it, and said that this Word of God was indeed God, not by nature, however, but by creation. They said that all things were created by it, but it had also been created previously, and after that all things were created by it. This they said

from their own imagination without any authority from the Scriptures, because they left the simple words of the Scriptures and followed their own fancies.

[10] Therefore I have said that he who desires to proceed safely on firm ground, must have no regard for the many subtle and hair-splitting words and fancies, but must cling to the simple, powerful, and explicit words of Scripture, and he will be secure. We shall also see how St. John anticipated these same heretics and refuted them in their subterfuges and fabrications.

[11] Therefore we have here in the Books of Moses the real goldmine, from which everything that is written in the New Testament concerning the divinity of Christ has been taken. Here you may see from what source the gospel of St. John is taken, and upon what it is founded; and therefore it is easy to understand. This is the source of the passage in Psalm 83:6: "By the Word of Jehovah the heavens were made." Solomon in beautiful words describes the wisdom of God, Proverbs 3:22, saying that this wisdom had been in God before all things; and he takes his thoughts from this chapter of Moses. So almost all the prophets have worked in this mine and have dug their treasures from it.

[12] But there are other passages by this same Moses concerning the Holy Ghost, as for example in Genesis 1:22: "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Thus the Spirit of God must also be something different from him who breathes him into existence, sends him forth, and yet he must be before all creatures. Again, Moses says in Genesis 1:28-31: "God blessed the creatures, beheld them, and was pleased with them." This benediction and favorable contemplation of the creatures point to the Holy Ghost, since the Scriptures attribute to him life and mercy. But these passages are not so well developed as those which refer to the Son; consequently they are not so prominent. The ore is still halfway in the mines, so that these passages can easily be believed, if reason is so far in subjection as to believe that there are two persons. If anyone will take the time and trouble to compare the passages of the New Testament referring to the Holy Ghost with this text of Moses, he will find much light, as well as pleasure.

[13] Now we must open wide our hearts and understanding, so as to look upon these words not as the insignificant, perishable words of man, but

think of them as being as great as he is who speaks them. It is a Word which he speaks of himself, which remains in him, and is never separated from him. Therefore according to the thought of the Apostle, we must consider how God speaks with himself and to himself, and how the Word proceeds from within himself. However, this Word is not an empty sound, but brings with it the whole essence of the divine nature. Reference has been made in the Epistle to the brightness of his glory and the image of his person, which constitute the divine nature, so that it accompanies the image in its entirety and thus becomes the very image itself. In the same manner God of himself also utters his Word, so that the whole Godhead accompanies the Word and in its nature remains in, and essentially is, the Word.

[14] Behold, here we see whence the Apostle has taken his language, when he calls Christ an image of the divine essence, and the brightness of divine glory. He takes it from this text of Moses, when he says that God spoke the Word of himself; this can be nothing else than an image that represents him, since every word is a sign which means something. But here the thing signified is by its very nature in the sign or in the Word, which is not in any other sign. Therefore he very properly calls it a real image or sign of his nature.

[15] The word of man may also in this connection be used in a measure as an illustration; for by it the human heart is known. Thus we commonly say: I understand his heart or intentions, when we have only heard his words; as out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks, and from the word the heart is known, as though it were in the word. In consequence of this experience the heathen had a saying: *Qualis quisque est talia loquitur*. (As a man speaks, so is he). Again: *Orotio est character animi* (Speech is an image of the heart). When the heart is pure it utters pure words, when it is impure it utters impure words. With this also corresponds the gospel of Matthew 12:34, where Christ says: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." And again: "How can ye, being evil, speak good things?" Also John the Baptist says, John 3:31: "He that is of the earth is of the earth, and of the earth he speaketh." The Germans also have a proverb: "Of what the heart is full, overfloweth out of the mouth." The bird is known by its song, for it sings according to its nature. Therefore all the world knows that nothing represents the condition of the heart so perfectly and so

positively as the words of the mouth, just as though the heart were in the word.

[16] Thus it is also with God. His word is so much like himself, that the Godhead is wholly in it, and he who has the word has the whole Godhead. But this comparison has its limits. For the human word does not carry with it the essence or the nature of the heart, but simply its meaning, or is a sign of the heart, just as a woodcut or a bronze tablet does not carry with it the human being, but simply represents it. But here in God, the Word does not only carry with it the sign and picture, but the whole being, and is as full of God as he whose word or picture it is. If the human word were pure heart, or the intention of the heart, the comparison would be perfect. But this cannot be; consequently the Word of God is above every word, and without comparison among all creatures.

[17] There have indeed been sharp discussions about the inner word in the heart of man, which remains within, since man has been created in the image of God. But it is all so deep and mysterious, and will ever remain so, that it is not possible to understand it. Therefore we shall pass on, and we come, now to our Gospel, which is in itself clear and manifest. “In the beginning was the Word.”

[18] What beginning does the Evangelist mean except the one of which Moses says: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ?” That was the beginning and origin of creation. Other than this there was no beginning, for God had no beginning, but is eternal. It follows, therefore, that the Word is also eternal, because it did not have its origin in the beginning, but it was already in the beginning, John says. It did not begin, but when other things began it was already in existence; and its existence did not begin when all things began, but it was then already present.

[19] How prudently the Evangelist speaks; for he does not say: “In the beginning the Word was made,” but it was there,” and was not made. The origin of its existence is different from the beginning of creation. Furthermore he says: “In the beginning.” Had he been made before the world, as the Arians maintain, he would not have been in the beginning, but he would have himself been the beginning. But John firmly and clearly maintains: “In the beginning was the Word,” and he was not the beginning. Whence has St. John these words? From Moses, Genesis 1,3 “God said, Let

there be light.” From this text evidently come the words: “In the beginning was the Word.” For if God spoke, there had to be a Word. And if he spoke it in the beginning, when the creation began, it was already in the beginning, and did not begin with the creation.

[20] But why does he not say: Before the beginning was the Word? This would have made the matter clearer, as it would seem; thus St. Paul often says: Before the creation of the world, etc. The answer is, because, to be in the beginning, and to be before, the beginning, are the same, and one is the consequence of the other. St. John, as an Evangelist, wished to agree with the writings of Moses, wished to open them up, and to disclose the source of his own words, which would not have been the case had he said: “Before” the beginning. Moses says nothing of that which was before the beginning, but describes the Word in the beginning, in order that he can the better describe the creation, which was made by the Word. For the same reason he also calls him a word, when he might as well have called him a light, life or something else, as is done later; for Moses speaks of a word. Now not to begin and to be in the beginning are the same as to be before the beginning. But if the Word had been in the beginning and not before the beginning, it must have begun to be before the beginning, and so the beginning would have been before the beginning, which would be a contradiction, and would be the same as though the beginning were not the beginning. Therefore it is put in a masterly way: In the beginning was the Word, so as to show that it has not begun, and consequently must necessarily have been eternal, before the beginning. “And the Word was with God.”

[21] Where else should it have been? There never was anything outside of God. Moses says the same thing when he writes: “God said, Let there be light.” Whenever God speaks the word must be with him. But here he clearly distinguishes the persons, so that the Word is a different person than God with whom it was. This passage of John does not allow the interpretation that God had been alone, because it says that something had been with God, namely, the Word. If he had been alone, why would he need to say: The Word was with God? To have something with him, is not to be alone or by himself. It should not be forgotten that the Evangelist strongly emphasizes the little word “with.” For he repeats it, and clearly expresses the difference in persons to gainsay natural reason and future heretics. For

while natural reason can understand that there is but one God, and many passages of Scripture substantiate it, and this is also true, yet the Scriptures also strongly oppose the idea that this same God is only one person.

[22] Thus arose the heresy of Sabellius, who said: The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are only one person. And again Arius, although he admitted that the Word was with God. would not admit that he was true God. The former confesses and teaches too great a simplicity of God; the latter too great a multiplicity. The former mingles the persons; the latter separates the natures. But the true Christian faith takes the mean, teaches and confesses separate persons and an undivided nature. The Father is a different person from the Son, but he is not another God. Natural reason cannot comprehend this; it must be apprehended by faith alone. Natural reason produces error and heresy; faith teaches and maintains the truth; for it clings to the Scriptures, which do not deceive nor lie. "And God was the Word."

[23] Since there is but one God, it must be true that God himself is the Word, which was in the beginning before all creation. Some change the order of the words and read: And the Word was God, in order to explain that this Word not only is with God and is a different person, but that it is also in its essence the one true God with the Father. But we shall leave the words in the order in which they now stand: And God was the Word; and this is also what it means; there is no other God than the one only God, and this same God must also essentially be the Word, of which the Evangelist speaks; so there is nothing in the divine nature which is not in the Word. It is clearly stated that this Word is truly God, so that it is not only true that the Word is God, but also that God is the Word.

[24] Decidedly as this passage opposes Arius, who teaches that the Word is not God, so strongly it appears to favor Sabellius; for it speaks as though it mingled the persons, and thereby revokes or explains away the former passage, which separates the persons and says: The Word was with God. But the Evangelist intentionally arranged his words so as to refute all heretics. Here therefore he overthrows Arius and attributes to the Word the true essential of the Godhead by saying: And God was the Word; as though he would say: I do not simply say, the Word is God, which might be understood as though the Godhead was only asserted of him, and were not essentially his, as you, Arius, claim; but I say: And God was the Word, which can be understood in no other way than that this same being which

everyone calls God and regards as such, is the Word. Again, that Sabellius and reason may not think that I side with them, and mingle the persons, and revoke what I have said on this point, I repeat it and say again: “The same was in the beginning with God.”

[25] The Word was with God, with God, and yet God was the Word. Thus the Evangelist contends that both assertions are true: God is the Word, and the Word is with God; one nature of divine essence, and yet not one person only. Each person is God complete and entire, in the beginning and eternally. These are the passages upon which our faith is founded and to which we must hold fast. For it is entirely above reason that there should be three persons and each one perfect and true God, and yet not three Gods but one God.

[26] The Scholastics have argued much pro and con with their numerous subtleties, to make this doctrine comprehensible. But if you do not wish to become entangled in the meshes of the enemy, ignore their cunning, arrogance, and subtleties, and hold to these divine words. Press into them and remain in them, like a hare in a rocky crevice. If you come out and deign to listen to human talk, the enemy will lead you on and overcome you, so that you will at last not know where reason, faith, God, or even yourself are.

[27] Believe me, as one who has experienced and tried it, and who does not talk into an empty barrel; the Scriptures are not given us for naught. If reason could have kept on the right road, the Scriptures would not have been given us. Take an example in the case of Arius and Sabellius. Had they clung to the Scriptures and disregarded reason, they would not have originated so much trouble in the church. And our Scholastics might have been Christians, had they ceased fooling with their subtleties and had clung to the Scriptures. “All things were made through him.”

[28] Has this not been put clearly enough? Who would be surprised, if stubborn men reject every effort to convince them of their error, however plainly and earnestly the truth may be told them, when the Arians could evade this clear and explicit passage and say: All things are made by the Word, but the Word was itself first made, and afterwards all things were made by it? And this in opposition to the direct words: “All things were made through him.” And there is no doubt that he was not made and cannot

be counted among the things that were made. For he who mentions all things excludes nothing, as St. Paul also explains Psalm 8:6, when he says, in Hebrews 2:8: “Thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he subjected all things unto him, he left nothing that is not subjected to him.” Again, 1 Corinthians 15:27: “For he put all things in subjection under his feet. It is evident that he is expected who did subject all things unto him.” So also the words, “All things were made through him,” must certainly be understood to except him by whom all things were made, and without whom is nothing that is made. This passage is also based upon the first chapter of Genesis, Genesis 1:7, where all created things are mentioned which God had made, and in each case it is said: “And God said, and it was so,” in order to show that they were all made by the Word. But St. John continues and explains himself still more fully when he says: “And without him was not anything made that hath been made.”

[29] If nothing was made without him, much less is he himself made without whom nothing was made; accordingly the error of Arius should never have attracted any attention, and yet it did. There is no need of comment to explain that the Word is God and the real Creator of all created things, since without him nothing was made that ever was made.

[30] Some have been in doubt about the order of the words in this text; the words “that was made”, they take with the following words, in this way: “That which was made, was in him life.” Of this opinion was St. Augustine. But the words properly belong to the preceding words as I have given them, thus: “And without him was not anything made that hath been made.” He means to say that none of the things that are made, are made without him; so that he may the more clearly express that all things were made through him, and that he himself was not made. In short, the Evangelist firmly maintains that the Word is true God, yet not of himself, but of the Father. Therefore we say: Made through him, and Begotten of the Father.

II. Christ’s Second Title and Attribute: In Him was Life.

[31] On this passage there is generally much speculation, and it is often taken to mean something hard to understand in reference to the twofold existence of creation; in this the Platonic philosophers are famous. They maintain that all creation has its being first in its own nature and kind, as it

was created. Secondly, all creation has its being in divine Providence from eternity, in that he has resolved in himself to create all things. Therefore as he lives so all things are living in him; and this creative existence in God, they say, is nobler than the existence in its own kind and nature. For in God things do live which in themselves have no life, as stones, earth, water, and the like. And therefore Saint Augustine says that this Word is an image of all creation, and like a bed-chamber is hung with images which are called Ideas (Greek for images), according to which the created things were made, each one according to its own image. Concerning these John is to have said: "In him was life." Then they connect these words with the preceding ones, thus: That which was made was life in him, that is, all that was ever created, before it was created, had had its life in him.

[32] But this is going too far and is a forced interpretation of this passage. For John speaks very simply and plainly, and does not mean to lead us into such hair-splitting, subtle contemplations. I do not know that the Scriptures anywhere speak of created beings in this way. They do say that all things were known, elected, and even ready and living in the sight of God, as though creation had already taken place, as Christ says of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Luke 20:38: "He (God) is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto him." But we do not find it written in this sense that all things live in him.

[33] This passage also implies something more than the life of the creature, which was in him before the world. It signifies in the simplest manner that he is the fountain and cause of life, that all things which live, live by him and through him and in him, and besides him there is no life, as he himself says in John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Again, John 11:25: "I am the resurrection and the life." Consequently John calls him in 1 John 1:1. "The Word of Life ;" and he speaks especially of the life which man receives by him, that is, eternal life; and it was for this very life that John set out to write his Gospel.

[34] This is also apparent from the context. For he himself explains the life of which he speaks, when he says: "And the life was the light of men." By these words he undoubtedly shows that he speaks of the life and the light Christ gives to man through himself. For this reason also he refers to John the Baptist as a witness of that light. It is therefore evident how John the Baptist preached Christ, not in lofty terms of speculation, as some fable;

but he taught in a plain, simple way how Christ is the light and the life of all men for their salvation.

[35] Therefore it is well to remember that John wrote his Gospel, as the historians tell us, because Cerinthus, the heretic, arose in his day and taught that Christ did not exist before his mother Mary, thus making a simple human being or creature of him. In opposition to this heretic, he begins his Gospel in an exalted tone and continues thus to the end, so that in almost every letter he preaches the divinity of Christ, which is done by none of the other Evangelists. And so he also purposely introduces Christ as acting strangely towards his mother, and “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” he said to her in John 2:4. Was not this a strange, harsh expression for a son to use in addressing his mother? So also on the cross he said: “Woman, behold thy son,” John 19:26. All this he does in order to set forth Christ as true God over against Cerinthus; and this he does in language so as not only to meet Cerinthus, but also Arius, Sabellius and all other heretics.

[36] We read also that this same pious John saw Cerinthus in a bathing-house and said to his followers: “Let us flee quickly hence that we be not destroyed with this man.” And after John had come out, the bathing-house is said to have collapsed and destroyed this enemy of the truth. He thus points and directs all his words against the error of Cerinthus, and says: Christ was not only before his mother, nay, he was in the beginning the Word of which Moses writes in the very beginning, and all things were made by him, and he was with God and the Word was God, and was in the beginning with God; and thus he strikes Cerinthus as with thunderbolts.

[37] Thus we take the meaning of the Evangelist in this passage to be simply and plainly this: He who does not recognize and believe Christ to be true God, as I have so far described him, that he was the Word in the beginning with God, and that all things were made by him; but wishes to make him only a creature of time, coming after his mother, as Cerinthus teaches, is eternally lost, and cannot attain to eternal life; for there is no life without this Word and Son of God; in him alone is life. The man Christ, separate from, and without, God, would be useless, as he says himself in John 6:55 “The flesh profiteth nothing. My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.” Why does the flesh profit nothing, and yet my flesh is the only true meat? The plain reason is, because I am not mere flesh and simply man, but I am God’s son. My flesh is meat not because it is flesh,

but because it is my flesh. This is as much as to say: He who believes that I, who am man, and have flesh and blood like other men, am the Son of God, and God, finds in me true nourishment, and will live. But he who believes me to be only man, is not profited by the flesh, for to him it is not my flesh or God's flesh. He also says: "Ye shall die in your sins, except ye believe that I am he," John 8:24. Again: "If the son shall therefore make you free, ye shall be free indeed." This is also the meaning of the following passage, "In him was life." The Word of God in the beginning, who is himself God, must be our life, meat, light, and salvation. Therefore we cannot attribute to Christ's human nature the power of making us alive, but the life is in the Word, which dwells in the flesh and makes us alive by the flesh.

[38] This interpretation is simple and helpful. Thus St. Paul is wont to call the doctrine of the Gospel "*doctrina pietatis*," a doctrine of piety — a doctrine that makes men rich in grace. However, the other interpretation which the heathen also have, namely, that all creatures live in God, does indeed make subtle disputants and is obscure and difficult; but it teaches nothing about grace, nor does it make men rich in grace. Wherefore the Scriptures speak of it as "idle." Just as we interpret the words of Christ, when he says: "I am the life," so also should we interpret these words, and say nothing philosophically of the life of the creatures in God; but on the contrary, we should consider how God lives in us, and makes us partakers of his life, so that we live through him, of him, and in him. For it cannot be denied that through him natural life also exists, which even unbelievers have from him, as St. Paul says: "In him we live, and move, and have our being; for we are also his offspring." Acts 17:28.

[39] Yes, natural life is a part of eternal life, its beginning, but on account of death it has an end, because it does not acknowledge and honor him from whom it comes; sin cuts it off so that it must die forever. On the other hand, those who believe in him, and acknowledge him from whom they have their being, shall never die; but this natural life of theirs will be extended into eternal life, so that they will never taste death, as John says, John 8:51: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my word, he shall never see death." And again, John 11:25: "He that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live." These and similar passages are well understood when we rightly learn to know Christ, how he has slain death and has brought us life.

[40] But when the Evangelist says: “In him was life,” and not, “In him is life,” as though he spoke of things past, the words must not be taken to mean the time before creation, or the time of the beginning; for he does not say: “In the beginning life was in him,” as he has just before said of the Word, which was in the beginning with God; but these words must be referred to the time of Christ’s life or sojourn upon earth, when the Word of God appeared to men and among men; for the Evangelist proposes to write about Christ and that life in which he accomplished all things necessary for our life. Just as he says of John the Baptist: “There came a man, sent from God;” and again: “He was not the Light, etc. ;” even so he afterward speaks of the Word: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us ;” “He was in the world ;” “He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not,” etc. In the same manner does Christ also speak of John the Baptist: “He was the lamp that burneth and shineth,” John 5:35.

[41] So he says also here: “In him was life;” and Christ says of himself: “When I am in the world, I am the light of the world,” John 9:5. The words of the Evangelist therefore simply refer to the sojourn of Christ on earth. For as I said at first, this Gospel is not as difficult as some think; it has been made difficult by their looking for great, mysterious, and mighty things in it. The Evangelist has written it for ordinary Christians, and has made his words perfectly intelligible. For whoever will disregard the life and sojourn of Christ upon earth, and will wish to find him in some other way, as he now sits in heaven, will always fail. He must look for him as he was and as he sojourned while upon earth, and he will then find life. Here Christ was made our life, light and salvation; here all things occurred that we are to believe concerning him. It has really been said in a most befitting manner: “In him was life,” not, that he is not our life now, but that he does not now do that which he then did.

[42] That this is the meaning can be seen from the words of the text when it says: “John the Baptist came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him.” It is sufficiently clear that John came solely to bear witness of Christ, and yet he has said nothing at all of the life of the creatures in God supporting the above philosophical interpretation; but all his teaching and preaching were concerning the life of Christ upon earth, whereby he became the Life and Light of men. Now follows:

III. Christ's Third Title of Honor and Attribute: He was the Light.

A. Christ was the Light of Men.

“And the Life was the Light of men.”

[43] Just as the word “life” was interpreted differently from the meaning intended by the Evangelist, so was also the word “light.” There has been much foolish speculation as to how the Word of God in its divinity could be a light, which naturally shines and has always given light to the minds of men even among the heathen. Therefore the light of reason has been emphasized and based upon this passage of Scripture.

[44] These are all human, Platonic, and philosophical thoughts, which lead us away from Christ into ourselves; but the Evangelist wishes to lead us away from ourselves into Christ. For he would not deal with the divine, almighty and eternal Word of God, nor speak of it, otherwise than as flesh and blood, that sojourned upon earth. He would not have us diffuse our thoughts among the creatures which he has created, so as to pursue him, search for him, and speculate about him as the Platonic philosophers do; but he wishes to lead us away from those vague and highflown thoughts and bring us together in Christ. The Evangelist means to say: Why do you make such extensive excursions and search for him so far away? Behold, in the man Christ are all things. He has made all things; in him is life, and he is the Word by whom all things were made. Remain in him and you will find all; he is the life and the light of all men. Whoever directs you elsewhere, deceives you. For he has offered himself in this flesh and blood, and he must be sought and will be found there. Follow the testimony of John the Baptist; he will show you no other life or light than this man, who is God himself. Therefore this light must mean the true light of grace in Christ, and not the natural light, which also sinners, Jews, heathen, and devils have, who are the greatest enemies of the light.

[45] But let no one accuse me of teaching differently from St. Augustine, who interpreted this text to mean the natural light. I do not reject that interpretation, and am well aware that all the light of reason is ignited by the divine light; and as I have said of the natural life, that it has its origin in, and is a part of, the true life, when it has come to the right knowledge, so also the light of reason has its origin in, and is part of, the true light, when it

recognizes and honors him by whom it has been ignited. It however does not do this of itself, but remains separate and by itself, becomes perverted, and likewise perverts all things; therefore it must become extinguished and die out. But the light of grace does not destroy the natural light. To the light of nature it is quite clear that two and three make five. That the good is to be encouraged and the evil avoided is also clear to it; and thus the light of grace does not extinguish the light of nature, but the latter never gets so far as to be able to distinguish the good from the evil. It is with him as one who wishes to go to Rome with Rome behind his back; for he himself well knew that whoever would go to Rome must travel the right way, but he knew not which was the right road. So it is also with the natural light; it does not take the right road to God, nor does it know or recognize the right way, although it knows well that one must get on the right road. Thus reason always prefers the evil to the good; it would never do this if it fully realized with a clear vision that the good only should be chosen.

[46] But this interpretation is out of place in this connection, because only the light of grace is preached here. St. Augustine was only a man, and we are not compelled to follow his interpretation, since the text here clearly indicates that the Evangelist speaks of the light of which John the Baptist bore witness, which is ever the light of grace, even Christ himself.

[47] And since this is an opportunity, we shall further describe this deceptive natural light, which causes so much trouble and misfortune. This natural light is like all the other members and powers of man. Who doubts that man with all his powers has been created by the eternal Word of God like all other things, and is a creature of God? But yet there is no good in him, as Moses says, Genesis 6:5: "Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually."

[48] Although the flesh was created by God, yet it is not inclined to chastity, but to unchastity. Although the heart was created by God, it is not inclined to humility, nor to the love of one's neighbor, but to pride and selfishness, and it acts according to this inclination, where it is not forcibly restrained. So it is with the natural light; although it is naturally so bright as to know that only good is to be done, it is so perverted that it is never sure as to what is good; it calls good whatever is pleasing to itself, is taken up with it, and only concludes to do what it has selected as good. Thus it continues to pursue the evil instead of the good.

[49] We shall prove this by examples. Reason knows very well that we ought to be pious and serve God; of this it knows how to talk, and thinks it can easily beat all the world. Very well, this is true and well said; but when it is to be done, and reason is to show how and in what way we are to be pious and serve God, it knows nothing, is purblind, and says one must fast, pray, sing, and do the works of the law; it continues to act the fool with works, until it has gone so far astray as to imagine that people are serving God in building churches, ringing bells, burning frankincense, whining, singing, wearing hoods, shaving their heads, burning candles, and other innumerable tomfoolery, of which all the world is now full and more than full. In this monstrously blind error reason continues, even while the bright light shines on, that enjoins piety and service to God.

[50] When now Christ, the light of grace, comes and also teaches that we are to be pious and serve God, he does not extinguish this natural light, but opposes the way and manner of becoming pious and serving God as taught by reason. He says: To become pious is not to do works; no works are good without faith.

[51] Then begins the fight. Reason rises up against grace, and cries out against its light, accuses it of forbidding good works, protests against not having its own way and standard of becoming pious, being thus set aside; but continually rages about being pious and serving God, and so makes the light of grace foolishness, nay error and heresy, and persists in persecuting and banishing it. See, this is the virtue of the light of nature, that it raves against the true light, is constantly boasting of piety, piety, and is always crying “Good works !” “Good works !” but it cannot and will not stand to be taught what piety is and what good works are; it insists that which it thinks and proposes must be right and good.

[52] Behold, here then you have the cause and origin of all idolatry, of all heresy, of all hypocrisy, of all error, of which all the prophets have spoken, on account of which they were killed, and against which all the Scriptures protest. All this comes from the stubborn, self-willed arrogance and delusion of natural reason, which is self-confident and puffed up because it knows that we ought to be pious, and serve God; it will neither listen to, nor suffer, a teacher to teach them, thinks it knows enough, and would find out for itself what it is to be pious and serve God, and how it may do so. Therefore divine truth cannot and must not submit to reason; for

this would be the greatest mistake and be contrary to God's honor and glory. In this way contentions and tribulations arise.

[53] Therefore it is clear, I think, that John does not speak here of the false light, nor of that bright natural light, which rightly claims that we must be pious, for it is already here, and Christ did not come to bring it, but to dim and blind this false, self-willed arrogance, and to set in its place the light of grace, to wit, faith. And this also the words themselves indicate. when they say: "The life was the light of men." If it is the light of men, it must be a different light from the one that is in men, since man already has the light of nature in him, and whatever enlightens man, enlightens the light of nature in man, and brings another light, which surpasses the light that is in man. He does not say, that it is the light of irrational animals, but of man, who is a rational being. For there is not a man found in whom there is not the natural light of reason, from which cause alone he is called man and is worthy to be a man. If the Evangelist would have us understand by this light the natural light of reason, he would have said: The life was a light of darkness; as Moses writes in Genesis 1:2: "And darkness was upon the face of the deep." Therefore this light must be that which was revealed in Christ on earth.

[54] Notice also the order of the words. John puts the Life before the Light. He does not say: "The light was the life of men ;" but on the contrary: "The life was the light of men ;" for the reason that in Christ there is reality and truth, and not simply appearance as in men. St. Luke speaks of Christ's external life thus, Luke 24:19: "He was a prophet mighty in deed and word ;" and Acts 1:1: "Jesus began both to do and teach," where "doing" precedes the "teaching"; for where there is only teaching without doing there is hypocrisy. Thus John says of John the Baptist, "He was the lamp that burneth and shineth," John 5:35; for to be simply shining and not burning is deceptive. In order, therefore, that Christ may here also be recognized as the true, unerring light, John says that all things were life in him, and this same life afterwards was the light of men.

[55] It follows then that man has no other light than Christ, God's son in the flesh. And whosoever believes that Christ is true God, and that in him is life, will be illumined and quickened by this life. The light supports him, so that he may remain where Christ is. As the Godhead is an eternal life, this

same light is an eternal light; and as this same life can never die so also this light can never be extinguished; and faith in it cannot perish.

[56] We may also especially notice that the Evangelist assigns life to Christ, as the eternal Word, and not to Christ the man; for he says: "In him," eminently in the Word, "was the life." Although Christ died as man, yet he ever remained alive; for life could not and cannot die; and consequently death was overcome and was swallowed up in life, so much so that his humanity soon again became alive. This same Life is the light of men; for he who recognizes and believes in such a life in Christ, indeed passes through death, yet never dies, as has been stated above. For this Light of life protects him, so that death cannot harm him. Although the body must die and decay, the soul will not feel this death, because it is in that light, and through that light, that it is entirely comprehended in the life of Christ. But he who does not believe this, remains in darkness and death; and although his body is united to him, even as it will be forever at the day of judgment, yet the soul will nevertheless taste and feel death, and will die eternally.

[57] From this we may realize how great was the harm which Cerinthus threatened, and which all do who believe and teach that Christ is only man and not true God. For his humanity would profit us nothing if the divinity were not in it. Yet, on the other hand, God will not and cannot be found, save through and in his humanity, which he has set up as an ensign for the nations, gathering together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth, Isaiah 11:12.

[58] See now, if you will believe that in Christ there is such life that remains even in death, and has overcome death, this light will lighten you aright, and will remain a light and life within you even at the time of your death. It follows then that such Life and Light cannot be mere creatures, for no creature can overcome death, either in itself or in another. Behold, how easy and becoming this interpretation of the light is, and how much better it is for our salvation; but how very far they are from it who wish to make of this light only the natural light of reason. For this latter light does not improve anyone, nay, it leads only farther away from Christ into creation and to false reason. We must enter into Christ, and not look at the lights which come from him, but gaze at his light, which is the origin of all lights. We must follow the streams which lead to the source and not away from it.

B. Christ was the Light that Shineth in the Darkness.

“And the light shineth in the darkness and the darkness apprehended it not.”

[59] This passage has also been interpreted with such lofty ideas, and made to mean that reason has a natural light, as I have just mentioned, and that the same is kindled by God; and yet reason does not recognize, understand, nor feel him, the real Light, by whom it is kindled; therefore it is in darkness, and does not behold the Light from which nevertheless it receives all its vision.

[60] O, that this interpretation, that reason has a natural light, were rooted out of my heart! How deeply it is seated there. Not that it is false or wrong in itself, but because it is out of place and untimely in this Gospel connection, and it will not allow these blessed and comforting words of the Gospel to remain simple and pure in their true meaning. Why do they not thus speak also of the natural life? For even the natural life is surely quickened by the divine life, just as much as the light of reason is kindled by the divine light. They might just as well say that life quickens the dead and the dead apprehend it not, as to say that the light illumines dark reason and reason apprehends it not. I might also say that the eternal will makes the unwilling willing, and the unwilling do not apprehend it; and in like manner we might speak of all our other natural gifts and powers. But how does reason and its light fall on such speculations? The Platonic philosophers with their useless and senseless prating first led Augustine to his interpretation. The glitter was so fascinating that they were even called the divine philosophers. Augustine then carried us all with him.

[61] What more can their talk teach than this, that reason is illumined by God, who is inconceivable and incomprehensible light? Just so life is given by God, who is inconceivable life, and all our powers are made powerful by God, who is inconceivable power. And as he is near to the light of reason with his inconceivable life, and to the powers with his inconceivable power, as St. Paul says, “In him we live, and move, and have our being”, Acts 17:28. Again, “Am I a God at hand, saith Jehovah, and not a God afar off? Do not I fill heaven and earth?” Jeremiah 23:23,24. Thus we have just heard in the Epistle that “He upholds all things by the word of his power,” Hebrews 1:3. Therefore he is not only near to the light of reason and

illuminates it, but he is near also to all creatures, and flows and pours into them, shines and works in them, and fills all things. Accordingly we are not to think that St. John speaks here of the light of reason; he simply sets mankind before him, and tells what kind of light they have in Christ, aside from and above the light of nature.

[62] It is also a blind and awkward expression to say of the natural light that the darkness apprehended it not. What else would this be than to say that reason is illumined and kindled by the divine light, and yet, remains in darkness and receives no light? Whence comes this natural light? There can never be darkness where a light is kindled; although there is darkness from the want of the light of grace. But here they are not speaking of the light of grace, and so they cannot refer to like or spiritual darkness. Therefore it is a contradiction of terms to say that the light illumined the darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not, or the darkness remained. One might as well say that life is given to a dead person, and the dead person does not apprehend it nor receive it, but remains dead.

[63] But if someone should say that we are not able to apprehend him who gives light and life, then I really hear, what angel does apprehend him? What saint apprehends the one who offers him grace? Verily he remains concealed and unapprehended: but this does not mean, as the Evangelist here says, that the Light is not apprehended in darkness; but as the words read, it means: The Light shineth into the darkness, but the darkness remains darkness and is not illuminated; the Light shines upon the darkness, and yet the darkness remains; just as the sun shines upon the blind, and yet they do not perceive it. Behold how many words I must waste in order to remove this foreign and false interpretation of our text!

[64] Therefore let us cling to the simple meaning the words convey when we do no violence to them. All who are illumined by natural reason apprehend the light, each one being illumined according to his talent and capacity. But this Light of grace, which is given to men aside from and above the natural light, shines in darkness, that is, among men of the world, who are blind and without grace; but they do not accept it, yea, they even persecute it. This is what Christ means when he says, John 8:19: "And as this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light." Behold, Christ was upon earth and among men before he was publicly preached by John the Baptist; but no one took

notice of him. He was the Life and Light of men. He lived and did shine; yet there was nothing but darkness, and the darkness did not perceive him. Everybody was worldly blind and benighted. Had they apprehended who he was, they would have given him due honor, as St. Paul says: “Had the rulers of this world known the wisdom of God, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory,” 1 Corinthians 2:8.

[65] Thus Christ has always been the Life and Light, even before his birth, from the beginning, and will ever remain so to the end. He shines at all times in all creatures, in the Holy Scriptures, through his saints, prophets, and ministers, in his word and works; and he has never ceased to shine. But in whatever place he has shone, there was great darkness, and the darkness apprehended him not.

[66] St. John may have indeed directed these words thus against the followers of Cerinthus, so that they saw the plain Scriptures and the truth that enlightened them, yet they did not apprehend their darkness. So it is at all times, and even now. Although the Scriptures are explained to blind teachers so that they may apprehend the truth, yet they do not apprehend it, and the fact remains that the light shineth in the darkness and the darkness apprehends it not.

[67] It is especially to be observed that the Evangelist here says the light shineth, *phaenei*, that is, it is manifest and present to the eyes in the darkness. But he who receives nothing more from it remains in darkness; just as the sun shines for the blind man, but he does not on that account see any better. So it is the nature of this light that it shines in darkness, but the darkness does not on that account become brighter. In believers, however, it not only shines, but it makes them transparent and seeing, it lives in them, so that it can properly be said that “The life is the light of men.” On the other hand, light without life is a shining of darkness; therefore no light is of any use to unbelievers, for however clear the truth is presented and shown to them, they still remain in darkness.

[68] Let us then understand all these sayings of the Evangelist as common attributes and titles of Christ, which he wishes to have preached in the Church as a preface and introduction of that which he proposes to write of Christ in his whole Gospel, namely, that he is true God and true man, who has created all things, and has been given to man as Life and Light,

although but a few of all those to whom he is revealed receive him. This is what our Gospel lesson contains and nothing more. In the same manner St. Paul also composes a preface and introduction to his Epistle to the Romans, Romans 1:1. Now follows the actual beginning of this Gospel:

C. Christ was the Light of which John Bore Witness.

“There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John.”

[69] St. Mark and St. Luke also begin their gospels with John the Baptist, and they should begin with him; as Christ himself says: “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence,” Matthew 11:12. And St. Peter says that Jesus began from the baptism of John, by whom he was also called and ordained to be a minister, Acts 1:22. And St. John the Baptist himself testifies, “I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven,” John 1:32, and he heard the Father’s voice saying. “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” Matthew 3:17. Then Christ was made a teacher, and his public ministry began; then only began the Gospel of Christ. For no one except Christ himself was allowed to begin the exalted, blessed, comforting mission of the Word. And for his sake John must first come and prepare the people for his preaching, that they might receive the Life and the Light.

[70] For, as we have heard, Christ is everywhere the Light which shines in the darkness and is not apprehended; so he was especially and bodily in his humanity present among the Jews, appeared to them; but he was not recognized by them. Therefore his forerunner, John, came for the sole purpose of preaching him, in order that he might be recognized and received. This passage therefore fittingly follows the former one. Since Christ, the shining Light, was not recognized, John came to open the eyes of men and to bear witness of the ever present, shining light, which afterwards was to be received, heard, and recognized itself without the witness of John.

[71] It is my opinion that we have now passed through the most difficult and most glorious part of this Gospel; for what is said henceforth is easy, and is the same as that which the other Evangelists write of John and of Christ. Although, as I have said, this part is in itself not difficult, yet it has been purposely made so by natural and human interpretations. A passage naturally becomes difficult when a word is taken from its ordinary meaning

and given a strange one. Who would not wish to know what a man is, and would not imagine all manner of wonderful things, if he were told that a man is something different from what all the world thinks? This is what happened here to the clear, simple words of the Evangelist.

[72] Still John uses a peculiar style, since he always, because of Cerinthus, directs the testimony of John the Baptist to the divinity of Christ, which is not done by the other Evangelists, who only refer to Christ, without especially emphasizing his divinity. But here he says, John came to bear witness of the Light, and to preach Christ as the Life, the Light, and as God, as we shall hear.

[73] What, therefore, was said about John the Baptist in Advent, is also to be understood here, namely that, like as he came before Christ and directed the people to him, so the spoken word of the Gospel is simply to preach and point out Christ. It was ordained by God for this purpose alone, just as John was sent by God. We have also heard that John was a voice in the wilderness, signifying by his office the oral preaching of the Gospel. Since the darkness was of itself unable to apprehend this Light, although it was present, John must needs reveal it and bear witness of it. And even now the natural reason is not able of itself to apprehend it, although it is present in all the world: the oral word of the Gospel must reveal it and proclaim it.

[74] We see now that through the Gospel this light is brought to us, not from a distance, nor do we need to go far to obtain it; it is very near us and shines in our hearts; nothing more is needed than that it be pointed out and preached. And he who now hears it preached, and believes, finds it in his heart; for as faith is only in the heart, so also this light is alone in faith. Therefore I say it is near at hand and within us, but of ourselves we cannot apprehend it; it must be preached and believed. This is also what St. Paul means when he says, referring to Deuteronomy 30:11-14: "Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down), or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach." Romans 10:6-8. Behold this is the light which shineth in darkness, and is not recognized until John and the Gospel come and reveal it. Then man is enlightened by it, and apprehends it; and yet it changes neither time, nor place, nor person, nor age, but only the heart.

[75] Again, as John did not come of himself, but was sent by God, so neither the Gospel nor any sermon on this Light can come of itself or from human reason; but they must be sent by God. Therefore the Evangelist here sets aside all the doctrines of men; for what men teach will never show Christ, the Light, but will only obstruct it. But whatsoever points out Christ is surely sent by God, and has not been invented by man. For this reason the Evangelist mentions the name and says: His name was John. In Hebrew John means grace or favor, to signify that this preaching and message was not sent on account of any merit of ours; but was sent purely out of God's grace and mercy, and brings to us also God's grace and mercy. Thus St. Paul says: "How shall they preach, except they be sent?" Romans 10:15.

[76] From all this we learn that the Evangelist speaks of Christ in a manner that he may be recognized as God. For if he is the light which is everywhere present and shines in darkness, and it needs nothing more than that it be revealed through the Word, and recognized in the heart through faith, it must surely be God. No creature can to such a degree be so near in all places, and shine in all hearts. And yet the Light is God in a way as to be still man, and be preached in and by man. The words follow: "The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the Light, that all might believe through him."

[77] From what has now been said, it is clear that the Gospel proclaims only this Light, the man Christ, and causes the darkness to apprehend it, yet not by reason or feeling, but by faith. For he says: "That all might believe through him." Again: "He came for a witness, that he might bear witness." The nature of bearing witness is that it speaks of that which others do not see, know, or feel; but they must believe him that bears testimony. So also the Gospel does not demand a decision and assent according to reason, but a faith which is above reason, for in no other way can this light be recognized.

[78] It was said plainly enough above, in what way the light of reason is in conflict with and rages against this Light, to say nothing of its being adhered to or apprehended by it. For it is positively written: "The darkness apprehendeth the light not;" therefore reason with its light must be taken captive and blinded; as is said in Isaiah 60:19: "The sun," that is, thy reason, "shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but Jehovah will be unto thee an everlasting light

and thy God thy glory,” that is, through the Gospel or Word of God, or through the witness of John, which demands faith, and makes a fool of reason. Consequently witness is borne of this Light through the Word, that reason may keep silent and follow this testimony; then it will apprehend the Light in faith, and its darkness will be illumined. For if reason were able to apprehend this Light of itself, or adhere to it, there would be no need of John or his testimony.

[79] Therefore the aim of the Gospel is to be a witness for reason’s sake, which is self-willed, blind and stubborn. The Gospel resists reason and leads it away from its own light and fancy to faith, through which it can apprehend this living and eternal Light. “He was not the Light, but came that he might bear witness of the Light.”

[80] Dearly beloved, why does he say this, and repeat the words that John was only a witness of the Light? O, what necessary repetition! First of all to show that this Light is not simply a man, but God himself; for, as I have said, the Evangelist greatly desires to preach the divinity of Christ in all his words. If John, the great Saint, be not that Light, but only a witness of it, then this Light must be something far different from everything that is holy, whether it be man or angel. For if holiness could make such a light, it would have made one of John. But it is above holiness, and must therefore be above the angels, who are not more than holy.

[81] In the second place, to resist wicked preachers of man, who do not bear witness of Christ, the Light, but of themselves. For it is true indeed, that all who preach the doctrines of men make man the light, lead men away from God to themselves, and set themselves up in the place of the true Light, as the pope and his followers have done. Therefore he is the Antichrist, that is, he is against Christ, the true Light.

[82] This gospel text allows of no other doctrine beside it; it desires only to testify of Christ and lead men to him, who is the Light. Therefore, O Lord God, these words, “He was not the Light,” are truly worthy to be capitalized and to be well remembered against the men who set themselves up as the light and give to men doctrines and laws of their own fabrication. They pretend to enlighten men, but lead them with themselves into the depths of hell; for they do not teach faith, and are not willing to teach it; and

no one teaches it except John, who is sent of God, and the holy Gospel. Truly much could be said on this point.

[83] In short, he who does not preach the Gospel to you, reject and refuse to hear him. He, however, preaches the Gospel who teaches you to believe and trust in Christ, the eternal Light, and not to build on any of your own works. Therefore beware of everything told you that does not agree with the Gospel; do not put your trust in it, nor accept it as something external, as you regard eating and drinking, which are necessary for your body, and which you may use at your pleasure or at the pleasure of another; but by no means as something necessary to your salvation. For this purpose nothing is necessary or of use to you except this Light.

[84] O, these abominable doctrines of men, which are now so prevalent and which have almost banished this Light! They all wish to be this light themselves, but not to be witnesses of it. They advocate themselves and teach their own fancies, but are silent about this Light, or teach it in a way as to preach themselves along with it. This is worse than to be entirely silent; for by such teaching they make Samaritans who partly worship God and partly worship idols, 2 Kings 17:33.

D. He was the Light that Lighteth Everyone.

“There was the true Light, which lighteth every man, coming into the world.”

[85] Neither John nor any saint is the Light; but John and all evangelical preachers testify of the true Light. For the present enough has been said of this Light, what it is, how it is recognized by faith, and how it supports us eternally in life and death, so that no darkness can ever harm us. But what is remarkable is, that he says: “It lighteth every man, coming into the world.” If this be affirmed of the natural light it would be contradicted when he says that it is: “the true Light.” He had said before: “The darkness apprehends it not”; and all his words are directed toward the Light of grace. Then follow the words: “He was in the world, and the world knew him not,” and “His own received him not.” But he whom the true Light lighteth, is illumined by grace, and recognizes the Light.

[86] Again, that he does not speak of the light of grace is evident when he says: “It lighteth every man, coming into the world.” This manifestly

includes all men who are born into the world. St. Augustine says it means that no man is illumined except by this Light; it is the same as though we were to say of a teacher in a place where there is no other teacher: This teacher instructs all the city, that is, there is no other teacher in that city; he instructs all the pupils. By it is not said that he teaches all the people in the city, but simply that he is the only teacher in the city, and none are taught but by him. So here the Evangelist would have us know that John is not the Light, nor any man, nor any creature; but that there is only one Light that lighteth all men, and that no man comes into the world who can possibly be illumined by any other light.

[87] And I cannot reject this interpretation; for St. Paul also speaks in like manner in Romans 5:18: "As through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men unto justification of life." Although all men are not justified through Christ, he is, nevertheless, the only man through whom justification comes. So it is also here. Although all men are not illumined, nevertheless this is the only light through which all illumination comes. The Evangelist has used this manner of speech freely, and had no fear that some might take offense because he says "all men." He thought he would anticipate all such offense, and explains himself before and afterwards, and says: "The darkness apprehended him not, and his own received him not." These words are sufficient proof to prevent anyone from saying that the Evangelist meant to say that all men are illumined; but he did wish to say that Christ is the only Light that lighteth all men, and without him no man is lighted.

[88] If this were said of the natural light of reason, it would have little significance, since it not only enlightens all men who come into the world, but also those who go out of the world, and even devils. For this light of reason remains in the dead, in devils, and in the condemned, yea, it becomes brighter, that they may be all the more tormented by it. But since only human beings who come into this world are mentioned, the Evangelist indicates that he is speaking of the Light of faith, which lightens and helps only in this life; for after death no one will be illumined by it. The illuminating must take place in this life through faith in the man Christ, yet by his divinity. After this life we shall clearly see his divinity without the humanity and without faith.

[89] Therefore the Evangelist is careful to form his words so as not by any means to reject the man Christ, and yet so as to declare his divinity. For this reason it was necessary for him to say “all men,” so as to preach only one light for all, and to warn us not to accept in this life the lights of men or any other lights. One man is not to lighten another, but this light alone is to lighten all men; and ministers are to be only forerunners and witnesses of this Light to men, that all may believe in this Light. Therefore, when he had said: “Which lighteth every man,” he realized that he had said too much, and so he added: “coming into the world,” so that he might make Christ the Light of this world. For in the world to come this light will cease and will be changed into eternal glory, as St. Paul says: “When he shall deliver up the kingdom to God,” 1 Corinthians 15,24; but now he rules through his humanity. When he delivers up the kingdom, he will also deliver up the Light; not as though there were two kinds of light, or as though we were to see something different from what we now see; but we shall see the same Light and the same God we now see in faith, but in a different manner. Now we see him in faith darkly, then we shall see him face to face. Just as though I beheld a gilded picture through a colored glass or veil, and afterwards looked at it without these. So also St. Paul says: “Now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face,” Corinthians 13:12.

[90] Behold, you now know of what the Evangelist speaks, when he says that Christ is the Light of men through his humanity, that is, in faith, by means of which his divinity is reflected as by a mirror, or is seen as in a glass or as the sun shines through bright clouds. But let us remember that the Light is attributed to his divinity, not to his humanity; and yet his humanity, which is the cloud or curtain before the Light, must not be thought lightly of.

[91] This language is sufficiently plain and he who has faith understands very well what is the nature and character of this Light. It matters not if he who does not believe does not understand it. He is not to understand it, for it is better that he knew nothing of the Bible and did not study it, than that he deceive himself and others with his erroneous light; for he imagines it to be the light of Scripture, which, however, cannot be apprehended without true faith. For this Light shines in the darkness, but is not apprehended by it.

[92] This passage may also mean that the Evangelist has in mind the preaching of the Gospel and of faith in all the world, and so that this Light

shines upon all men throughout the world, just as the sun shines upon all men. St. Paul says: "Be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel which ye heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven," Colossians 1:23. Christ himself says: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation," Mark 16:15. The Psalmist also says: "His going forth is from the end of the heavens, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof," Psalm 19:6. How this is to be understood has been explained in the sermon on the Epistle for Christmas. Isaiah 9:2.

[93] By this easy and simple interpretation we can readily understand how this Light lighteth every man, coming into the world, so that neither Jews nor anyone else should dare to set up their own light anywhere. And this interpretation is well suited to the preceding passages. For even before John or the Gospel bore witness of the Light, it had shone in darkness and the darkness apprehended it not; but after it has been proclaimed and publicly witnessed to, it shines as far as the world extends, unto all men, although all men will not receive it; as follows: 147

I. The Coming of Christ.

"He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world knew him not."

[94] All this is said of Christ as man and refers especially to the time after his baptism, when he began to give light according to John's testimony. He was ever in the world. But what place of the world knew it? Who received him? He was not even received by those with whom he was personally associated, as the following shows: "He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not."

[95] This also is said of his coming as a preacher, and not of his being born into the world. For his coming is his preaching and illumining. The Baptist says: "He it is who coming after me is preferred before me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose," Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; Mark 1:7; John 1:27. On account of this coming John is also called his forerunner, as Gabriel said to his father Zacharias: "He shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah; to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him," Luke 1:17. For, as has been said, the Gospels begin with

the baptism of Christ. Then he began to be the Light and to do that for which he came. Therefore it is said that he came into the world to his own people and his own received him not. If this were not said of his coming to give light by preaching, the Evangelist would not thus reprove them for not having received him.

[96] Who could know that it was he, if he had not been revealed? Therefore it is their fault that they did not receive him; for he came and was revealed by John and by himself. Therefore John says, "That he should be made manifest to Israel, for this cause came I baptizing with water," John 1:31. And he says himself, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive," John 5:43. This is also evidently said of the coming of his preaching and of his revelation.

[97] He calls the Jews his own people because they were chosen out of all the world to be his people, and he had been promised to them through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. For to us heathens or Gentiles there was no promise of Christ. Therefore we are strangers and are not called "his own"; but through pure grace we have been adopted, and have thus become his people; though, alas, we also allow him to come daily through the Gospel and do not esteem him. Therefore we must also suffer that another, the Pope, comes in his place and is received by us. We must serve the bitter foe because we will not serve our God.

[98] But we must not forget in this connection that the Evangelist refers twice to the divinity of Christ. First, when he says: "The world was made through him." Secondly, when he says: "He came unto his own." For it is the nature only of the true God to have his own people. The Jews were always God's own people, as the Scriptures frequently declare. If then they are Christ's own people, he must certainly be that God to whom the Scriptures assign that people.

[99] But the Evangelist commends to every thoughtful person for consideration, what a shame and disgrace it is that the world does not recognize its Creator, and that the Jewish people do not receive their God. In what stronger terms can you reprove the world than by saying that it does not know its Creator? What base wickedness and evil report follow from this fact alone! What good can there be where there is nothing but

ignorance, darkness and blindness? What wickedness where there is no knowledge of God! O, woe! What a wicked and frightful thing the world is! The one who knew the world and duly pondered this, would fall the deeper into perdition. He could not be happy in this life, of which such evil things are written. “But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believed on his name.”

[100] We see now what kind of a Light that is of which the Evangelist has hitherto been speaking. It is Christ, the comforting light of grace, and not the light of nature or reason. For John is an Evangelist and not a Platonist. All who receive the light of nature and reason receive him according to that light; how could they receive him otherwise? Just as they receive the natural life from the divine life. However, that light and that life do not give them any power to become the children of God. Yea, they remain the enemies of this Light, do not know it, nor acknowledge it. Therefore there can be no reference in this Gospel to the light of nature, but only to Christ, that he may be acknowledged as true God.

[101] From now on this Gospel is familiar to all, for it speaks of faith in Christ’s name, that it makes us God’s children. These are excellent words and powerfully refute the teachers of the law, who preach only good works. Good works never bring about a change of heart. Therefore, although the work righteous are ever changing and think they are improving their deeds, in their hearts they remain the same, and their works only become a mantle for their shame and hypocrisy.

[102] But, as has often been said, faith changes the person and makes out of an enemy a child, so mysteriously that the external works, walk and conversation remain the same as before, when they are not by nature wicked deeds. Therefore faith brings with it the entire inheritance and highest good of righteousness and salvation, so that these need not be sought in works, as the false teachers of good works would have us believe. For he who is a child of God has already God’s inheritance through his sonship. If then faith gives this sonship, it is manifest that good works should be done freely, to the honor of God, since they already possess salvation and the inheritance from God through faith. This has been amply explained heretofore in the sermon on the second Epistle for this day. “Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

[103] To explain himself, the Evangelist here tells us what faith does, and that everything is useless without it. Here he not only does not praise nature, light, reason, and whatever is not of faith, but forcibly overthrows each. This sonship is too great and noble to originate from nature or to be required by it.

[104] John mentions four different kinds of sonship: one of blood, another of the will of the flesh, a third of the will of man, the fourth of this will of God. It is evident that the sonship of blood is the natural sonship. With this he refutes the Jews who boasted that they were of the blood of Abraham and the patriarchs, relying on the passages of Scripture in which God promises the blessing and the inheritance of eternal salvation to the seed of Abraham. Therefore they claim to be the only true people and children of God. But here he says, there must be more than mere blood, else there is no sonship of God. For Abraham and the patriarchs received the inheritance, not for blood's sake but for faith's sake, as Paul teaches in Hebrews 11:8. If mere blood-relationship were sufficient for this sonship, then Judas, the betrayer, Caiaphas, Ananias, and all the wicked Jews who in times past were condemned in the wilderness, would have a proper right to this inheritance. For they were all of the blood of the patriarchs. Therefore it is said, they were born, "not of blood, but of God."

[105] The other two relationships or sonships, to wit, "of the will of the flesh." and "of the will of man" I do not yet sufficiently understand myself. But I see very well that the Evangelist thereby wishes to reject everything which is of nature and which nature can accomplish, and that he would retain the birth by God alone. Therefore there is no danger in whatever manner we explain these two parts and variously attribute them to nature outside of grace. It is all the same. Some understand the sonship of the will of the flesh to come not of blood, but through the law of Moses. He commanded that the nearest kin to the wife of a deceased husband marry the widow, and raise a name and heir to the deceased one, that the name of his friend be not put out of Israel. To this interpretation belongs also the step-relationship, which comes of the will of the flesh, and not of blood-relationship.

[106] But the Evangelist here calls by the name of flesh man, as he lives in the flesh, which is the common Scriptural designation. Therefore the meaning is: not as men have children outside of their own line of descent,

which is carnal and human, and takes place in accordance with man's free will. But what is born in the line of ancestral blood, takes place without the free will, according to nature, whether a man wills it or not.

[107] The third kind of sonship mentioned is "of the will of man." This is taken to mean the sonship of strangers, commonly called "adoption," as when a man chooses and adopts a strange child as his own. Though you were Abraham's or David's real child, or step-child, or you had been adopted, or you were a stranger, it would all be of no benefit to you unless you were born of God. Even Christ's own friends and relatives did not believe in him, as we are told, John 7:5.

[108] But those who wish may explain this relationship as follows: "Those born of blood" may mean all those who belong to the blood-relationship, whether it be a full or a step-relationship; "those born of the will of the flesh" may include all those who are not born of blood, or those who have been adopted into the relationship. But "those who are born of the will of man" are spiritual children of those who are the disciples or followers of a teacher. Thus the Evangelist rejects everything that might be accomplished by blood, flesh, nature, reason, art, doctrine, law, free will, with all their powers, so that no one may presume to help another by means of his own doctrine, work, art, or free will, or be allowed to help any man upon earth to the kingdom of God; he is to reject everything, except the striving after the divine birth. I am also inclined to think that "man" in the Scriptures usually means a superior, who rules, leads, and teaches others. These are properly and before all others rejected, since no relationship is more stubborn, more insolently presumptuous, and confides more in itself than this, and does most strenuously oppose grace at all times, and persecutes the Lord of grace. In this respect let everyone have his opinion, as long as he bears in mind that nothing avails which is not born of God. For if something else would have availed anything, the Evangelist would without doubt have put it side by side with the divine birth, especially as he looks for it so carefully, and would not have exalted only this divine birth.

[109] The divine birth is therefore nothing else than faith. How can this be? It has been explained above how the light of grace opposes and blinds the light of reason. If now the Gospel comes and bears witness to the light of grace, that man must not live and do according to his fancy, but must reject, put away, and destroy the light of nature, if this man accepts and

follows such testimony, gives up his own light and fancy, is willing to become a fool, allows himself to be led, taught and enlightened he will be entirely changed, that is, in his natural light. His old light is extinguished and a new light, to wit, faith is kindled. He follows this new light in life and in death, clings solely to the witness of John or the Gospel, even should he be compelled to abandon all he had and could do before. Behold, he is now born again of God through the Gospel, in which he remains, and lets go his own light and fancy, as St. Paul says: "For in Christ Jesus I begat you through the Gospel," 1 Corinthians 4:15; again, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures," James 1:18. Therefore St. Peter calls us "new born babes," 1 Peter 2:2.. It is for this reason also that the Gospel is called the womb of God, in which we are conceived, carried and born as a woman conceives, carries and bears a child in her womb. Isaiah says: "Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, that have been borne by me from their birth, that have been carried from the womb," Isaiah 46:3.

[110] But this birth properly shows its power in times of temptation and death. There it becomes evident who is born again, and who is not. Then the old light, reason, struggles and wrestles and is loath to leave its fancies and desires, is unwilling to consider and resort to the Gospel, and let go its own light. But those who are born again, or are then being born again, spend their lives in peace and obedience to the Gospel, confide in and cling to the witness of John, and let go, their light, life, property, honor, and all they have. Therefore they come to the eternal inheritance, as real children.

[111] But when this light, reason and man's old conceit are dead, dark, and changed into a new light, then the life and all powers of man must be changed and be obedient to the new Light. For where the will goes reason follows, and love and pleasures follow the will. And so the whole man must be hid in the Gospel, become a new creature and put off the old Adam, as the serpent puts off its old skin. When the skin becomes old the serpent seeks a narrow crevice in the rock, crawls through it, sheds its old skin, and leaves it on the outside. Thus man must resort to the Gospel and to God's Word, confidently trusting their promises, which never fail. In this way he puts off the old Adam, sets aside his own light and conceit, his will, love, desire, speech, and his deeds, and becomes an entirely new man, who sees

everything in a different manner than before, judges differently, thinks differently, wills differently, speaks and loves and desires differently, acts and conducts himself differently than he did before. He now understands whether all the conditions and works of men are right or wrong, as St. Paul says: "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man," Corinthians 2:15.

[112] He now sees clearly what great fools they are who pretend to become pious through their good works. He would not give one farthing for all the preachers, monks, popes, bishops, tonsures, cowls, incense, illuminations, burning of candles, singing, organs, prayers, with all their external performances; for he sees how all this is simple idolatry, and foolish dissimulation, just as the Jews prayed to Baal, Astaroth, and the calf in the wilderness, which they looked upon as precious things in the old light of stubborn, self-conceited reason.

[113] From this it is evident that no blood, nor relationship, nor command, nor doctrine, nor reason, nor free will, nor good works, nor exemplary living, nor Carthusian orders, nor any religious orders, though they were angelic, are of any use or help to this sonship of God; but they are only a hindrance. For where reason is not first renewed and in agreement with the new birth, it takes offense, becomes hardened and blinded, so that it will scarcely, if ever, be able to be righted; but thinks its doings and ways are right and proper, storming and raving against all who disregard and reject its doings. Therefore the old man remains the enemy of God and of grace, of Christ and of his light, beheads John and destroys his testimony, the Gospel, and sets up his own human doctrines. Thus the game goes on even now, in full splendor and power, in the doings of the pope and his clergy, who together know nothing of this divine birth. They prattle and speak nonsense in their doctrines and commandments of certain good works, with which they hope to attain grace, though still clad in the old Adam.

[114] But what is here said remains unchangeable: Not of blood, not of the will of the flesh nor of man, but of God, is this new birth. We must despair of our own will, works, and life, which have been poisoned by the false, stubborn, selfish light of reason; in all things listen to the voice and testimony of the Baptist; believe and obey it. Then the true Light, Christ,

will enlighten us, renew us, and give us power to become the sons of God. For this reason he came and was made man, as follows:

II. Christ's Incarnation.

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the Only Begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

[115] By “flesh” we understand the whole man, body and soul, according to the Scriptures, which call man “flesh,” as above, when it is said: “Not of the will of the flesh”; and in the Creed we say: “I believe in the resurrection of the body” (German: flesh), that is, of all men. Again Christ says: “Except those days had been shortened, there would be no flesh saved,” that is, no man, Matthew 24:22. Again: “He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again,” Psalm 78:39. Again: “Thou gavest him authority over all flesh, that to all whom thou hast given him, he should give eternal life,” John 17:2.

[116] I speak of this the more fully because this passage has occasioned so much offense on the part of heretics at the time when there were learned and great bishops. Some, as Photinus and Appollinaris, taught that Christ was a man without a soul, and that the divine nature took the place of the soul in him. Manichaeus taught that Christ did not have true, natural flesh, but was only an apparition, passing through his mother, Mary, without assuming her flesh and blood, just as the sun shines through a glass, but does not assume its nature. In opposition to all these the Evangelist uses a comprehensive word, and says: “He became flesh,” that is, a man like every other man, who has flesh and blood, body and soul.

[117] Thus the Scriptures, one part after another, had to be tried and confirmed, until the time of the Antichrist, who suppressed them not in parts, but in their entirety. For it has been prophesied that at the time of Antichrist all heresy should be united into one parasitic whole and devour the world. This could not have happened at a better time than when the Pope set aside the whole Scriptures, and in their place set up his own law. Therefore bishops are now no more heretics, nor can they become heretics; for they have no part of the book by which heretics are made, to wit, the Gospel. They have piled up all heresy within and among themselves.

[118] In times past, heretics, however bad they were, still remained in the Scriptures, and left some parts intact. But what is left since this divine birth and faith are no more acknowledged and preached, and in their stead only human law and works? What matters it, whether Christ is God or not God, whether he was flesh or a mere apparition, whether he had a soul or not, whether he had come before or after his mother, or whether all error and heresy which have ever been would prevail? We would have no more of him than all those heretics and do not need him. He seems to have become man in vain, and all things written about him seem to be to no purpose, because we have ourselves found a way by which we may by our own works come to the grace of God!

[119] Therefore there is no difference between our bishops and all heretics that have ever lived, except this that we name Christ with our mouth and pen, for the sake of appearance. But among ourselves we speak of him, and are as little benefited by him, as though he were one with whom all heretics might play the fool. Thus St. Peter has prophesied and said: "These shall be false teachers among you, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them." (2 Peter 2:1).

[120] What does it profit, though Christ be not what the heretics make him, if he is no more to us than to them, and does no more for us? What does it profit to condemn the heretics, and know Christ aright, if we have no different faith in him than they had? I see no reason for the need of Christ, if I am able to attain grace by my works. It is not necessary for him to be God and man. In short all that is written about him is unnecessary; it would be sufficient to preach God alone, as the Jews believe, and then obtain his grace by means of my works. What more would I want? What more would I need?

[121] Christ and the Scriptures are not necessary, as long as the doctrine of the pope and his schools exist. Therefore I have said that pope, bishops, and schools are not good enough to be heretics; but they surpass all heretics, and are the dregs of all heresies, errors, and idolatry from the beginning, because they entirely suppress Christ and the Word of God, and only retain their names for appearance's sake. This no idolator, no heretic, no Jew has ever done, not even the Turk with all his violent acts. And although the heathen were without the Scriptures and without Christ before

his birth, yet they did not oppose him and the Scriptures, as these do. Therefore they were far better than the Papists.

[122] Let us be wise in these times in which Anti-Christ is powerful, and let us cling to the Gospel, which does not teach us that reason is our light, as men teach us, but which presents Christ as indispensable to our salvation, and says: The Word, by which all things were made, is life, and the life is the light of men. Firmly believe that Christ is the Light of men, that without him all is darkness in man, so that he is unable to know what to do or how to act, to say nothing about being able to attain the grace of God by his own works, as the foolish schools with their idol, the Pope, teach and deceive all the world.

[123] He came that he might become the Light of men, that is, that he might become known; he showed himself bodily and personally among men and was made man. He is the light on the candle-stick. The lost piece of money did not of itself and with light in hand go after and seek the lighted candle, but the candle with its light sought the piece of money and found it; it has swept the house of this whole world in every nook and corner with its broom; and it continues to seek, sweep and find even until the last day.

[124] But that the Word and not the Father was made flesh, and that both are one complete, true God, is a great mystery. Yet faith apprehends it all, and it is proper that reason should not apprehend it; it happened and is written that reason should not apprehend it, but become altogether blind, dazzled and stupefied, changing from its old false light into the new light.

[125] Yet this article is not opposed to the light of reason, which says that we must serve God, believe, and be pious, which accords with this article. But if reason is called on to say exactly who this God is, it is startled and says: "This is not God," and so makes a God according to its fancy. Therefore when it is informed that this Word is God and that the Father is the same God, it doubts, hesitates and imagines the article to be wrong and untrue, continues in its conceit and fancy, and thinks it knows better what God is and who he is than anyone else.

[126] Thus the Jews continue in their opinion, and do not doubt at all that God is to be believed and honored; but who this God is, they explain according to their own fancy, claim to be masters themselves, and even

make God a liar. See then, thus reason does to all of God's works and words, continues to cry that God's work and Word are to be honored, but claims that it is its privilege and judgment to say what is God's work and Word. It would judge God in all his works and words, but is unwilling to be judged by him. What God is or is not, must be according to its caprice.

[127] Consider whether God does not justly express his anger in the Scriptures against such immeasurable wickedness, whether he does not rightly prefer open sinners to such saints. What would you think more vexatious than such wicked presumptuous? I say this that we may recognize the delicious fruit to which the pope and his schools attribute so much, and which of itself and by its own exertions, without Christ, provides the grace of God. They are God's greatest enemies, and would annihilate him, in order that they might be God themselves, and succeed in making men believe that the grace of God is obtained as they prescribe. This surely is real darkness.

[128] See, in this way reason must make idols, and cannot do otherwise; it knows very well how to talk of God's honor, but goes and bestows the same honor on him whom it fancies to be God. Such a one is certainly not God, but is reason's fancy and error, of which the prophets in various ways complained. Nor does it improve the matter, if anyone were to say, as the Jews do: "Yes, I mean the God who has created the heavens and the earth; here I cannot be mistaken, and must be right." In Isaiah 48:1 God himself answers: "Hear ye this, who swear by the name of Jehovah, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness." And Jeremiah 5:2 says: "And though they say, as Jehovah liveth; surely they swear falsely."

[129] How is this to be accounted for? It happens thus that he who does not accept God in the particular manner in which God has revealed himself, will profit nothing, if he afterwards accepts God in the manner which he has selected for himself. If Abraham had said that it was neither God nor God's work that commanded him to sacrifice his son Isaac, but would have followed his reason and have said he would not sacrifice his son, but would serve the God who made heaven and earth in some other way, what would it have profited him? He would have lied; for he would in that very thing have rejected the God who created the heavens and the earth, and would have devised another God, under the name of the God who had created the

heavens and the earth, and would have despised the true God, who had given him the command.

[130] Behold, thus they all lie who say, they mean the true God who created the heavens and the earth, and yet do not accept his work and Word, but exalt their own opinion above God and his Word. If we truly believed in the God who had created heaven and earth, they would also know that the same God is a creator of their imagination, makes, breaks and judges it as he pleases. But as they do not allow him to be a creator of themselves and their fancies even in a small degree, it cannot be true that they believe him to be the creator of all creation.

[131] Perhaps you will say: What if I were deceived, and he were not God? I answer: Do not worry, dear soul; a heart that does not trust in its own fancy God will not allow to be deceived; for it is not possible that he should not enter such a heart and dwell there. Mary says: "He hath filled the hungry with good things," Luke 1:53. The Psalmist says: "He satisfieth the longing soul," Psalm 107:9. But if any is deceived it is certain that he trusted in his own fancy, either secretly or openly. Therefore a hungry soul always stands in fear in those things that are uncertain, whether they be of God. But self-conceited persons are immediately taken with them, thinking it sufficient if the things glitter and take their fancy. Again what is certain to be of God, the simple accept at once, but the arrogant persecute it.

[132] Now there is no surer sign of a thing of God than that it is against or beyond our fancy. Likewise the arrogant think, there is no surer sign that a thing is not of God than that it is against their fancy. For they are makers and masters of God, and so make those things God and of God which accord with their fancy. Therefore all those who depend upon themselves must be deceived, and all those who are simple-minded, and not preoccupied with themselves, are safe; they are they who keep the true Sabbath. Where this fancy goes so far as to employ the Word of God in defense of its arrogance and to apply the Scriptures according to its own light, there is neither hope nor help. Such people think the Word of God on their side, and they must safeguard it. This is the last fall, and is the real mischief of Lucifer, of whom Solomon speaks: "A righteous man falleth seven times, and riseth up again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity." Proverbs 24:16.

[133] Of this there is now enough; let us come back again to the Gospel. John says: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us ;" that is, he lived among men upon earth, as other men do. Even though he was God, he became a citizen of Nazareth and Capernaum, and conducted himself as other men did. Thus St. Paul says: "Who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being man equality with a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." Philippians 2:6-8.

[134] Now this "likeness" and "dwelling" of Christ must not be understood of his human nature, in which he has been made like unto men. But these words must be understood as referring to his external being and mode of living such as eating, drinking, sleeping, walking, working, resting, hearth and home, walking, and standing, and all human conduct and deportment, by which no one could recognize him as God, had he not been so proclaimed by John in the Gospel.

III. The Revelation of Christ's Glory.

[135] He says further: "We behold his glory," that is, his divinity through his miracles and teachings. The word "glory" we have heard before in the Epistle, where it was said of Christ, that Christ is the "brightness of the Father's glory," which means his divinity. Our word "glory" comes from the Latin "gloria." The corresponding word in Hebrew is "Cabod" and the Greek word is "Doxa." Thus we speak of a ruler or a great man having achieved an accomplishment with great glory, and that everything passed off gloriously, when it has passed off well, successfully, and bravely. Glory does not only mean a great repute, or far-famed honor, but it means also the things which give occasion for the fame, such as costly houses, vessels, clothes, servants, and the like, as Christ says of Solomon: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these," Matthew 6:28-29. In the book of Esther we read: "King Ahasuerus made a great feast when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom," Esther 1:3-4. Thus we say: This is a glorious thing, a glorious manner, a glorious deed, "gloriosa res." This is also what the Evangelist means when he says: "We have seen his glory," to wit, his glorious being

and deeds, which are not an insignificant, common glory, but the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.

[136] Here he expresses who the Word is, of whom he and Moses have been speaking, namely, the only begotten Son of God, who has all the glory of the Father. He calls him the only begotten, so as to distinguish him from all the children of God, who are not natural children as this one is. With these words is shown his true divinity; for if he were not God, he could not in preference to others be called the only begotten Son, which is to say that he and no other is the Son of God. This cannot be said of angels and pious men. For not one of them is the Son of God, but are all brethren and creatures of a like creation, children elected by grace, and not children born out of God's nature.

[137] But the expression, "We beheld his glory", does not refer only to bodily sight; for the Jews also saw his glory, but did not regard it as the glory of the only begotten Son of God: it refers to the sight of the faithful, who believe it in their hearts. Unbelievers, who beheld only the worldly glory, did not notice this divine glory. Nor can these two tolerate each other. He that would be glorious before the world for God's sake, will be glorious before God. "Full of Grace and Truth."

[138] These two words are commonly used together in the Scriptures. "Grace" means that whatsoever Christ does is ever pleasing and right. Furthermore, in man there is only disfavor and guile; all that he does is displeasing to God. In fact, he is fundamentally untrue and puts on a vain show, as the Psalmist says: "All men are liars" Psalm 116:11. And again: "Surely every man at his best estate is altogether vanity." Psalm 39:5.

[139] This passage is opposed to the presumptuous Papists and Pelagians, who find something outside of Christ, which they claim is good and true; and yet in Christ alone is grace and truth. It is indeed true, as has been said above, that there are some things outside of Christ which are true and pleasing, as the natural light, which teaches that three and two are five, that God should be honored, and the like. But this light never accomplishes its end; for as soon as reason is to act, and make use of its light, and exercise it, it confuses everything, calls that which is good bad, and that which is bad good; calls that the honor of God which is his dishonor, and

vice versa. Therefore man is only a liar and vain, and unable to make use of this natural light except against God, as we have already said.

[140] It is unnecessary to look for the armor in this Gospel; it is all armor and the chief part, upon which is founded the article of faith that Christ is true God and true man, and that without Grace, nature, free will, and works are nothing but deception, sin, error and heresy in spite of Papists and Pelagians.

St. Stephen's Day. The Christian Teaching Concerning Reason and Faith. God's Warning. The Teaching Concerning Reason and Natural Light.

Text: Matthew 23:34-39.

34 Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:

35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Matthew 23:34-39

[1] This Gospel is severe against the persecutors of faith. Yet, the severer it is against them, the more comforting it is to the believers who are persecuted. It teaches how obstinate the natural light, our own fancy and reason is; for when it falls into works and commands, it no longer listens to anyone, as is set forth in the following Gospel. But the work and fancy of reason claim to be in the right, and it does not matter how much is preached, how many prophets God sends to her; all must be persecuted and put to death, that oppose the great red murderess, as she is pictured in Revelation of St. John 17:4. Here she is called Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots, arrayed in purple and scarlet, sitting upon a beast, that was also red, and having in her hand a golden cup full of the abominations and the unclean things of her fornications, that is, the teachings of men, by which she leads pure believing souls from faith and puts them to shame and strangles everyone that tries to restrain her.

[2] Such stiff-necked murderous obstinacy is set forth in this Gospel; first, in that God tries to convert her in every way possible, sends to her all kinds of preachers, who are mentioned by three names; prophets, wise men, and scribes.

[3] The prophets are those who preach, being moved only by the Holy Spirit, who have not taken their sermon from the Scriptures or from human reason, as were Moses and Amos. And these men are the highest and the best, they are wise, and they make others wise, write Scriptures, and explain them. Such were nearly all the fathers before and at the time of Moses, and also many after him, especially the apostles, who were laymen and common uneducated people, as Luke says in Acts 4:13: They were unlearned in the Scriptures.

[4] The wise men are those who have received their message not only from God but also through the Scriptures and of men, and they are the disciples and followers of the prophets, but they themselves also preach and teach with their mouth and in living words. Such an one was Aaron, who spoke everything that Moses told him as we read in Exodus 4:15-16, that God says to Moses: "Thou shalt put my words in his mouth; and he shall be thy spokesman unto the people, and thou shalt be to him as God." So also all the priests are to be wise men, as we read in the eleventh chapter of Zechariah.

[5] The writers or scribes are those who teach by means of writings and books, when they cannot teach in person or by the word of their mouth. Such men were also the apostles, and before them the Evangelists and their followers, and also the holy fathers; however, they do not write about or treat of their own imaginations, but of God's Word, which they have learned from the wise men and out of the Scriptures. These now are the three ways by which the truth may be revealed: by writing, by word, by thought; by the writing in books, by the words of their mouth, by thoughts of the heart. One cannot in any other way grasp instruction save with the heart, the mouth, and writings.

[6] Now all this is of no avail with obstinate reason; she listens neither to words, writings, nor to enlightenment, with which God tries to convert her. The writings and books she suppresses and burns as the King Jehudi did with the books of Jeremiah, Jeremiah 36:23. Reason forbids, silences and condemns words; enlightenment she banishes and slays together with the prophets. And it is remarkable that no prophet has been slain, banished, or persecuted, because he reproved the coarse sins of the people except John the Baptist, whom Herodias permitted to be put to death, because he had reproved the sin of her adultery. Such a great man had to die for the most disgraceful reason. Still the Jews also did not hate him because of this one fact, but because he had reproved their sins also, and therefore they said that he had a devil.

[7] In like manner there has ever been numberless disputes about true and false worship. Abel was slain by Cain in order that his worship might not be acknowledged by God. In like manner have all the prophets, the wise and the educated, reproved that worship of God as idolatry, which springs from reason and human works, being without any faith; natural reason came and said that this worship was done for the honor of God and was right. Therefore the prophets had to die as such who prohibited and reproved the service and honor of God and good works; as Christ says in John 16:2, "Yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service unto God." In like manner all the idolatry of the Old Testament was started by them not because they wished to bow down to wood and stones, but because they thereby wished to worship the true God. Since, however, God had forbidden this, and since this had been a creation of their own fancy, independent of faith, it was certainly of Satan and not of

God. Therefore the prophet said that this was not a service of God but one of idols. This, however, they would not suffer nor listen to, and so, according to God's command, the prophets did not dare to be silent, hence they therefore had to die, be banished, and persecuted.

[8] Therefore the whole dispute consists in this, that the false saints quarrelled with the true saints about the worship of God and good works, the former saying this is divine worship; the latter saying no, it is idolatry and unbelief. Thus it has been from the beginning, and it will also continue unto the end.

[9] This same thing we see even in our day; the Papists themselves have devised good works and divine worship with their outward deeds and laws, all of which, however, are faithless things, founded only upon works and without God's command, mere human prattle. So we say, they do not serve God, but themselves and Satan, as is the case with all idolatry; and they only mislead the people from their Christian faith and common brotherly love; but they will not suffer us to say that, and thus begins the misery that reigns now. Both agree that they are to serve God and do good works; but as to the definition, what is the service of God and good works, they will never agree. For these say, faith is nothing, nature with her works is good and right. Moreover, they also agreed that the open coarse sins, as murder, adultery, and robbery are not right; but in the principal works that pertain to divine worship, there they separate as far from one another as winter is from summer. The first hold to God and his mercy, and fear him; the others run to wood and stones, food and clothing, days and seasons and wish to win the favor of God by building, by bequests, by fastings, by their blaring voices and by their shaven heads. They fear nothing, are impudent and full of every kind of presumption. Oh! what a holy, wise, learned people, for whom God himself is neither sufficiently holy, wise nor learned, with all his prophets, wise men and scribes.

I. Four Questions.

[10] There are several questions which arise in this Gospel that we must examine. The first is, Why does Christ say that all the righteous blood from Abel on shall come upon the Jews, since they have not shed it all?

[11] The answer is, that the words of Christ are directed to the whole multitude and to the whole generation of all those who from the beginning on have persecuted the prophets. This is proved by the fact that he addressed not only those of his own time but entire Jerusalem: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together,” etc. This applies not only to the present, but also to the previous inhabitants of Jerusalem. Likewise, when he says, ye slew Zachariah between the sanctuary and the altar, yet, this Zachariah was slain by the King Joash (2 Chronicles 24:21) over 800 years before Christ’s birth, and still he says, you have slain him. Likewise, they have also put to death Abel and will put to death the prophets and the wise men. As if he would say they are one people, one class, one generation; as the fathers so also the children. For the stiffneckedness that contended against God and his prophets in the time of the fathers, also contends in their children; the mouse is like its mother. And when the Lord says that all the righteous blood shall come upon them, he means to say as much as, the people must shed all righteous blood, it is their nature to do so, they cannot do otherwise. All blood that is shed, they shed, therefore will all blood come upon them.

[12] But why does he cite only these two, Abel and Zachariah? Zachariah was not the last whose blood was shed, but after him Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Uriah, and Micah, and nearly all those who received a divine call in the Scriptures. And indeed, Zachariah is the first among the prophets whose martyrdom is mentioned by name in the Scriptures. However, Christ does not speak here only of the prophets, but of the blood of all the righteous, of whom there were many under King Saul; likewise many prophets, whose names are not mentioned, were put to death under King Ahab.

[13] In answer to this question I can say nothing except that Christ here holds to the usage of Scripture and places before us an example how we ought not to speak, hold, or mention what is not founded in the Scriptures. For although Isaiah and other prophets have been put to death, yet we find no mention in the Scriptures of the manner of death of anyone after Zachariah. And thus, though he was not the last whose blood was shed, yet he is the last who is described by name how he preached in his days and suffered death. Thus Christ cites the first and the last righteous person,

mentioned in the Scriptures, and thereby other righteous blood that was not mentioned, yet was shed before and after them. It has indeed been written of Uriah the prophet in Jeremiah 26:23, that he was slain by King Jehoiakim long after Zachariah, but this is told by others as a story which occurred long ago. But at his time the Scriptures say nothing about him, they do not even mention that he ever lived, although they describe the time and history of the same king in the history of 2 Chronicles 36:4ff; 2 Kings 24:1ff. Therefore the Lord does not speak of him.

[14] It is also asked: Why does Christ mention the son of Barachiah, since the Scriptures call him the son of Jehoiada; for thus the text reads in Chronicles 24:20-21, “And the Spirit of God came upon Zachariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people, and said unto them. Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of Jehovah, so that ye cannot prosper?

because ye have forsaken Jehovah, he hath also forsaken you, And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of Jehovah.” When he died he said, “Jehovah, look upon it, and require it.” He also was killed, because he reproveth the worship they had established.

[15] St. Jerome thinks he was called the son of Zachariah for spiritual reasons, because Zachariah means in Latin benedictus, the blessed. But others speak more lightly and say, that his father Jehoiada received the additional name of Barachiah because he did great good to the King and the people. Therefore they called him the blessed and after his death, out of gratitude, put his son to death; as is the way of the world according to the saying: Whoever helps another off the gallows him the other will help on again. Thus it happened to the Son of God. After God had done nothing but good for the whole world, they crucified his dear beloved Son, as is typified in this story.

[16] Finally it is asked: No one can withstand God’s will, why then does he say: “How often would I have gathered thy children together, and ye would not?” This passage has been interpreted in various ways. Some have founded it upon the free will and its ability, so that it really appears that not free will but obstinate will is reproveth, and that it is base liberty that is only contrary to God, and is so severely condemned and reproveth.

[17] St. Augustine forces the words to apply to reason, as if the Lord means to say very much, thus: “As many of thy children as I have gathered I have gathered against thy will. But such an interpretation of this simple passage is too forced. It could be much more easily understood, if one said: Christ speaks here as a man, who has taken all human care upon himself. He did very much as to his human nature that did not become his divinity; for example, that he had to eat, drink, sleep, walk, weep, suffer, and die. So one could say here that he spoke after the manner of our human nature and its emotions: I would, but ye would not.

[18] For, as I have often said, we must give special attention to the words of Christ, some of which refer to his divine, others only to his human nature. But here he introduces himself to us as God, since he says, “I send unto you prophets” etc.; for the sending of prophets is a work that belongs to God alone. And Luke 11:49 says he spoke thus: “Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send unto them prophets” etc. Moreover, his words read as if he not only wished to gather his children at the present time, but had also often wished to do so in the past, so that this is to be understood as referring to the divine will. Therefore we shall answer thus: These words are to be understood in the plainest and simplest manner as referring to the divine will, according to the usage of Scripture, which speaks of God as of a man for the sake of the simple minded; as we read in Genesis 6:6 that it repented Jehovah that he had made man on the earth, and yet there is no repentance in God. Also, that he was angry, yet in God there is no human anger. Likewise Genesis 11:5, that he came down from heaven and saw the building of the tower at Babylon, yet he remains ever sitting on his throne. And in Psalm 59:5-6, the prophet often says: “Awake, why sleepest thou so long?” Again: Arise, come to me, and similar passages; and yet he sleeps not, lies not down, is not far away. Again, Psalm 1:6: “Jehovah knoweth not the way of the unrighteous,” yet he knows all things. All these passages are uttered in harmony with our feelings and fancy, and not according to the real state of the divine nature. Therefore they are not to be perverted by lofty speculation as utterances of the divine nature; but should be understood as spoken to common people here upon earth according to our human understanding. For we are to feel that he does just as the words read; and this is a beautiful and comforting way to think of God, one which is neither terrifying nor difficult to understand. Thus also: “How often would I,” is also to be understood as meaning that he acted so that no one could

think or feel otherwise than that he would gladly gather them, did gather them, as a man might do who eagerly wished to do such a thing. Therefore dismiss high things and remain by the milk and simple meaning of the Scriptures

II. The Teaching Concerning Faith.

[19] In order, however, that we may all take our doctrine out of the Gospel, the Lord has given us here a lovely picture and parable of what he does for the sake of faith and believers so that I do not know of a more beautiful passage in all the Scriptures. He spoke in his anger and indignation very severe words to the Jews in this chapter, and pronounced his terrible woe upon their unbelief; therefore he does, as angry men are accustomed to do, and speaks to those ungrateful of his good acts and good will in the strongest terms possible; namely thus: I would gladly have imparted the heart in my body to them etc. Thus also the Lord here, in the most hearty way possible, emphasizes his good will and favor to the Jews, and says he would have gladly been their mother hen had they wished to be his little chickens.

[20] Oh man! note well these words and this parable, how he pours it forth with great earnestness and with his whole soul. In this picture you will see, how you are to conduct yourself towards Christ and to what end he is of benefit to you, how you should make use of him and enjoy him. Behold the hen and her chickens, and there you see Christ and yourself painted and portrayed better than any painter can portray them.

[21] In the first place, it is certain that our souls are the chickens; and Satan and wicked spirits are the buzzards in the air; with only this exception that we are not as wise as the chickens to flee under our hen. The spirits of Satan are more subtle to rob us of our souls than the buzzards are to steal the chickens. Now it was said before in an Epistle how it is not sufficient that we are pious, do good works, and live in grace. For our righteousness cannot stand before God's eyes and judgment, much less our unrighteousness. Therefore I have said: Faith, if it is true faith, is of such a nature that it does not rely upon itself nor upon the faith; but holds to Christ, and takes refuge under his righteousness; and he lets this righteousness be its shield and protection just like the little chicken never

trusts in its own life and efforts, but takes refuge under the body and wings of the hen.

[22] It is not sufficient for one who is to stand before the judgment of God, to say, I believe and have grace; for all that is within him is not able to protect him; but he proffers to this judgment Christ's own righteousness which he permits to plead for him at the judgment seat of God. This stands in all honor before him forever, as Psalm 111:3, and Psalm 112:3, say: "His righteousness endureth forever." Under this righteousness he creeps, crouches, and stoops, he confides in Christ's righteousness and believes without the least doubt that it will sustain him and so it really comes to pass that he will be sustained by the same faith, not for his sake nor for the sake of such faith, but for the sake of Christ and his righteousness under which he takes refuge. Moreover faith that does not this, is not true faith. See that is the meaning of the Scriptures when they say in Psalm 91:1-7, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of Jehovah, he is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust. For he will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover thee with his pinions, and under his wings shalt thou take refuge; his truth is a shield and a buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day; for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee."

[23] Behold all this is spoken concerning faith in Christ, how it alone will stand and protect us from all danger and ruin, false doctrine, bodily and spiritual temptations of Satan, on the right hand and on the left, so that all others must fall and perish, because they do not take refuge under the wing and shoulders of Christ and there find shelter and anchor their trust. In like manner Malachi 4:2, says: "But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings;" therefore St. Paul calls him in Romans 13:25, our propitiation, the throne of grace, and teaches everywhere how we must be sustained through him and under him. If then believers and saints are in need of such a great shield, what will become of those who go ahead with their own free will and their own good works, independent of Christ? Oh! we must remain in Christ, upon Christ and under Christ, never stray from our mother hen, or all is lost. St. Peter says in

his first Epistle 4:8: “The righteous is scarcely saved;” so hard it is to abide under this hen. For many different temptations, temporal and spiritual, tear us from her; as the Psalm above points out.

[24] Now notice how the natural clucking hen acts; hardly any other creature is so anxious about her young. She changes her natural voice and takes a pitiable and complaining voice; she seeks, scratches, and calls her little chickens; when she finds anything, she does not eat it herself, she leaves it for her little ones; with all earnestness she battles and cries against the buzzard, and spreads her wings out so willingly and lets her chicks crawl under and upon her, and gladly suffers them to stay there. This is indeed a lovely picture. So it is also with Christ. He has changed his voice to a pitiable tone, has sighed for us and preached repentance, pointed out to everyone their sins and misery, he scratches in the Scriptures and calls us unto them and permits us to eat; he spreads his wings with all his righteousness, merit and grace over us, and takes us so lovingly under his protection, warms us with his own natural heat, that is, with his Holy Spirit, who alone comes through him, and fights for us against the devil in the air.

[25] Where and how does he do this? Without doubt he does it not bodily, but spiritually. His two wings are the two Testaments of the holy Scriptures; they spread over us his righteousness and bring us under his protection. This takes place in that the Scriptures teach this and nothing else, how Christ is such a mother hen, how we are to be sustained in faith under him and through his righteousness. Therefore the Psalm mentioned above, explains the wings and shoulders, and says; “his faithfulness or truth”, that is, the Scriptures embraced by faith “are a shield and a buckler” against all fear and danger. For we must lay hold of Christ in his Word and in the preaching of it and cleave to the same with a firm faith that he is just as is spoken now of him; then we are certainly in him, under his wings and truth, and shall be also well sustained under him 26. This Gospel therefore is also his wings or truth as well as all other Gospels; for they all teach Christ in this manner, yet in some places clearer than in others. Heretofore he was called a light and life; also a Lord and helper, now he is called a mother hen, and the emphasis is continually laid upon faith. Thus his body is himself, or the Christian church; his warmth, his grace and the Holy Spirit.

[27] Behold, the church is the most loving hen, who is always anxious to gather us under her protection; she spreads her wings out and calls, that is, she preaches and lets both Testaments be preached, sends out prophets, wise men, and scribes to Jerusalem, yea into all the world. But what happens? We will not be her chickens; above all, the proud saints, who contended against her especially with their good works, who had no desire to know anything about faith, that it is so greatly needed and so blessed; and who neither know anything of their danger nor admit their doings to be unrighteous; yea, they themselves therefore become buzzards and swine, they devour and persecute the chickens along with their mother, tear their wings and body, slay the prophets, and stone those who are sent unto them. But what will be their reward? Listen, terrible things: “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”

[28] Oh! a terrible visitation! which is also illustrated in the instance of the Jews. They killed the prophets so long that God sent them no more; he suffered them to be without any preaching, without any prophets 1,500 years, he took his Word from them and his wings he drew to himself. And thus their house is left desolate and no one builds up their souls, God no longer dwells among them. It has happened to them as they wished; as Psalm 109:17 says concerning them: “Yea, he loved cursing, and it came unto him; and he delighted not in blessing, and it was far from him.” Here all the righteous blood shed upon the earth is come upon them, and this Gospel is fulfilled in them.

[29] In like manner also Isaiah 5:5-6, speaks of them: “And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; I will break the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor hoed; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.” Terrible words! What can it mean that no rain shall come upon them, except that they should not hear the Gospel and learn of faith? They shall be neither pruned nor cultivated. What can this mean, except that no one shall punish them in their error and make manifest their transgressions? Therefore the vineyard is left to the doctrines of men, these tear and trample it underfoot so that it must remain desolate, brings forth nothing but briars and thorns, that is, work-righteous people, who are

without faith. They bear no fruit of the Spirit, but they grow and are prepared only for eternal fire.

[30] However, all this we Gentiles may also take well to heart. We have also persecuted our mother hen and have not continued in faith. Therefore it has also happened to us that God has left our house lie desolate and our vineyard is forsaken. There is no longer any rain in all the world, the Gospel and faith are put to silence; here there is neither pruning nor grubbing; no one preaches against false works and the doctrines of men, and prunes off such unnecessary things; but he permits us to be torn and trodden under foot by the pope, bishops, priests and monks of whom the whole world is full, full, full; and yet they do no more than trample down and tear to pieces the vineyard. One who teaches this, another that, one treads down this place and another that; everyone wishes to establish his own sect, his own order, his own calling, his own doctrine, his own point, his own works. By these we are so trodden underfoot that there is no longer any knowledge of faith, no Christian life, no love, no fruit of the Spirit; but mere firefuel, briars, and thorns, that is dissemblers, who by virtue of their vigils, masses, endowments, bells, churches, psalms, rosaries, saint-worship, celebrations, hoods, shaven-heads, clothing, fastings, pilgrimages and numberless other foolish works, presume to be Christians.

[31] O, Lord God, we are too greatly torn to atoms, too sorely crushed; O, Christ, our Lord, we poor miserable people are too desert-like and too forsaken in these last days of thy wrath. Our shepherds are wolves, our watchmen traitors, our protectors enemies, our fathers murderers, and our teachers mislead us, Oh! Oh! Oh! When, when, when will thy severe wrath have an end?

[32] Finally comfort is spoken here to the Jews, when the Evangelist adds: "Verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Christ spake these words on Tuesday, after Palm Sunday, and they form the conclusion and the last words of his preaching upon earth; hence they are not yet fulfilled but they must be fulfilled. True they did once receive him on Palm Sunday, but these words were not fulfilled on that occasion. "Ye shall not see me henceforth" is not to be understood in the sense that they never saw him afterwards in the body, because they did, in that they afterwards crucified him. He means, they shall not see him again as a preacher and as Christ, to

which end he was sent; his office and he in his office were never seen again by them. In this he gave them his last, his farewell, sermon, and his office, for which he came, was now closed.

[33] Thus it is certain, that the Jews must yet say to Christ, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” This very truth Moses proclaimed in Deuteronomy 4:30-31: “In the latter days thou shalt return to Jehovah thy God, and hearken unto his voice; for Jehovah thy God is a merciful God; he will not fail thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them.” It was also preached in Hosea 3:4-5: “The children of Israel shall abide many days without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice, and without pillar, and without ephod or teraphim: afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek Jehovah their God, and David their king, and shall come with fear unto Jehovah and to his goodness in the latter days.” Likewise Azariah declared this truth in 2 Chronicles 15:2-5 thus: “If ye forsake Jehovah, he will forsake you. Now for a long season Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law: but when in their distress they turned unto Jehovah, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them.” This passage cannot be understood as referring to the Jews of the present time: They were never before without princes, without prophets, without priests, and without teachers and the law, St. Paul in Romans 11:25-26 agrees with this thought and says: “A hardening in part hath befallen Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved.” God grant that this time may be near at hand, as we hope it is. Amen.

**Day of St. John the Evangelist.
Everyone Should Honor His
Calling and Be Content in It.
The Lord’s Supper.**

Text: John 21:19-24.

19 This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

20 Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?

21 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?

22 Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.

23 Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?

24 This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. John 21:19-24

Two Doctrines, and the Spiritual Meaning of the Gospel.

[1] When Christ asked Peter three times whether he loved him, and Peter answered three times, “Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee,” he commended unto him three times his sheep and said: “Feed my sheep.” Immediately afterwards he announced to Peter his death, and says: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.” Closely joined to this is to-day’s Gospel: “Follow thou me,” as if to say: Since this is to be your lot, ponder it well and follow thou me and yield willingly to death. It is evident enough that this following signifies his death, and all the disciples understood it so, and it is a lucid and easy Gospel.

[2] However as some were greatly worried to know whether St. John was dead or still alive, the Evangelist shows clearly enough that Christ did not wish to let us know, therefore we should not pry into the matter. He says: Jesus did not say he should not die, neither does he say that he should die. He thus lets it hang in doubt. If Christ had said: I will that he tarry till I come, it might have been understood that he would die on the last day. But

that he says, “If I will, that he tarry”, it is still much more in the dark, in that he does not say right out whether he will or will not.

[3] But in doing thus Christ taught us a beautiful and touching lesson for the sake of which Christ dismissed Peter in this manner.

The Teaching of this Gospel.

The teaching is as follows: Notwithstanding the examples and lives of all the saints every person should attend to the work entrusted to him and guard the honor of his calling. Oh, this is truly a needed and wholesome teaching. “It is very misleading, and it is almost universal, that we so highly esteem the works and lives of the saints. If we wish to imitate them, we think it to be a very precious work to do so. The useless babblers aid and urge this, who preach the lives of the holy saints and present them to the people for examples in the wrong way.

[4] Here Christ works and speaks against this very thing. Peter is a type of such wild wanderers; when Christ had commanded him at once to follow him, he turns about and looks after another, worries as to where he is going whom Jesus had loved. Just so these persons do, they let drop what has been commanded them, and look after the lives and works of those God loved, namely his saints, therefore Christ reproves Peter, and says: What is that to thee, where he is wandering? Follow thou me, I will attend to him; how, if I wish him to tarry, wilt thou also tarry? Do you imagine I wish the same from you as from him? No, not so; you attend to your duties. I desire to have many kinds of servants, but not all to be at the same work.

[5] Alas, many persons are found, who like Peter do everything except what is commanded them. Many a one hears that certain saints made pilgrimages, for which they are praised; then he like a fool starts off, leaves wife and children sitting, who are entrusted to him by God, and trots to St. Jacob, or here and there, not knowing that his calling and mission are quite different from that of the saint he is imitating. In the same way they do with their bequests, fastings, clothing, holidays, priestcraft, monasteries and cloisters. All that is nothing but looking around to the saints Christ loved, and turning their backs to the commission and calling to follow Christ. Then they boast they did well, in that they followed the saints.

[6] Therefore take heed, that the way of God leads into the right road, First, it tolerates no human doctrine and way or command, secondly, it does not allow of any works, sought and devised by self. Thirdly, God's way cannot recognize the examples of the saints; but its anxiety is to be faithful, as God leads, in what he requires of us; as the prophet says in Psalm 25:8-12: "God shall instruct him in the way that he shall choose." Likewise: "And the weak will he teach his way," etc.

[7] Then you may reply: But how if I am not called, what shall I do then? Answer: How is it possible that you are not called? You have always been in some state or station; you have always been a husband or wife, or boy or girl, or servant. Picture before you the humblest state. Are you a husband, and you think, you have not enough to do in that sphere to govern your wife, children, domestics and property so that all may be obedient to God and you do no one any wrong? Yea, if you had five heads and ten hands, even then you would be too weak for your task, so that you would never dare to think of making a pilgrimage or doing any kind of saintly work.

[8] Again: are you a son or daughter, and do you think you have not enough work with yourself, to continue chaste, pure and temperate during your youth, obey your parents, and offend no one by word or deed? Yea, since the custom of honoring such commands and callings has been abandoned, people go and pray with their rosaries and do like things, not belonging to their station in life, and no one ever thinks he is not faithful in his state or station.

[9] Again: Are you a domestic or servant, and do you think you would go idle if you were to serve your lord or mistress with all faithfulness as your station and orders require, and also keep your youth under control as with a bridle?

[10] And again: Are you a prince, a lord, spiritual or secular; who has more to do than you, in order that your subjects may do right, preserve peace, and wrong is done by no one? Why, do you think, the proverb originated: A prince or lord is a wild deer in the heavens? Only because they have their office and wish to rule far off when they cannot govern even themselves; afterwards they wish to atone for their folly by masses,

bequests, rosaries, prayers and indulgences, as if God were a dealer in old clothes, or a child that permits himself to be fooled with a penny.

[11] The very same way the bishop and spiritual prelates also act, who should feed the sheep of Christ and follow Christ, and even suffer death for their sake; instead, they observe their seven canonical hours for prayers, hold mass, and then allow themselves to be called pious people. But if one of the bishops enters heaven then a different heaven must be created. All bishops at present are nothing but fireworks of hell, in that they do not administer their office, not even a hair's breadth of it.

[12] See, as now no one is without some commission and calling, so no one is without some kind of work, if he desires to do what is right. Everyone therefore is to take heed to continue in his calling, look to himself, faithfully do what is commanded him, and serve God and keep his commandments; then he will have so much to do that all time will be too short, all places too cramped, all resources of help too weak. For the evil spirit furiously attacks this way and makes it bitter for man so that it is all he can do to continue in it. But if Satan brings man to this point that he forgets and lets go his calling, then he no longer attacks him so hard, he has brought him out of the public highway, and he lets him at times hunt a prairie or timber path, that is, do a startling good little deed. Then the fool thinks he is on the right road and anticipates a great reward in heaven. The longer he wanders the farther he strays from the highway until he comes into the most pernicious delusions that he thinks we are to deal with God by means of his works, like King Saul did. Oh no, beloved mortal, God is not concerned about your works, but about your obedience, as Samuel 15:22 says; "To obey is better than sacrifice." Hence it is, that if a pious maid-servant goes forth with her orders, and sweeps the yard or cleans the stable; or a man-servant in the same spirit plows and drives a team: they travel direct to heaven in the right road; while another who goes to St. Jacob or to church, and lets his office and work lie, travels straight to perdition.

[18] Therefore we must close our eyes, not look at our works, whether they be great, small, honorable, contemptible, spiritual, temporal or what kind of an appearance and name they may have upon earth; but look to the command and to the obedience in the works. Do they govern you, then the work also is truly right and precious, and completely godly, although it springs forth as insignificant as a straw. However, if obedience and God's

commandments do not dominate you, then the work is not right, but damnable, surely the devil's own doings, although it were even so great a work as to raise the dead. For it is decreed that God's eyes look not to the works, but to the obedience in the works. Therefore it is his will, that we look to his command and our calling, of which St. Paul says in Corinthians 7:17: "As God hath called each, so let him walk." And St. Peter says, Ye are to be as faithful, good shepherds or administrators of the manifold grace of God; so that each one may serve the other, and be helpful to him by means of what he has received, 1 Peter 4:10. See, here Peter says the grace and gifts of God are not one but manifold, and each is to tend to his own, develop the same and through them be of service to others.

[14] What a glorious state of things would reign, if it were thus that each tended to his own affairs and yet thereby served others, and thus traveled together to heaven in one flock in the right road. St. Paul also writes in Romans 12:4-6 and 1 Corinthians 12:12: "The body has many members, but all have not the same office." Since we are many members of one congregation, but all have not the same office, no one should administer the office of another, but each his own, and all in childlike obedience and in the many offices and manifold works walk in unity and harmony.

[15] Do you then reply: Alas, shall we not follow the lives and examples of the holy saints? Why are they then preached? Answer: One should preach them so as to praise God in them, to stir up one another, and to comfort one another by his goodness and grace and not show forth their works, but their obedience in their works. However in our days they let obedience lie and lead us so deeply into works, that we have completely drifted from obedience, and we gape at works and despise our own mission and calling. Hence there is no doubt it is Satan's own doings that divine worship is confined only to churches, altars, masses, singing, reading, offerings and the like, as if all other works were vain or of no use whatever. How could Satan mislead us more completely from the right way than when he confines God's worship within such narrow limits, only to the church and whatever is done in it?

[16] Be on your guard, look in front of you, Christ will not suffer Peter to look around, not even to the disciple he still loves. Do you think it was for naught that the very disciple, whom Jesus loved, was preferred here to all the other disciples? It was for some purpose that he was not mentioned

by name. He might indeed have said: Peter turned and saw John; but he said, “whom Jesus loved” etc. But he wished to meet this evil and banish from their sight the works of the saints, in order that nothing but pure obedience might always abide there, and no one might glory or excuse himself in that he had followed the example of the saints.

[17] Notice, we also read in the Scriptures that God did not wish David to build his church, although David took it in hand to do so; because there was no command before that he should build it; but he wished Solomon to build it, and to him he also gave a command to this end. It has been the spring of all kinds of idolatry that the people had respect to the works of the saints and not to their obedience. They witnessed how Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob offered to God upon altars; they heedlessly went ahead and desired to imitate them, and idolatry was the result. The Scriptures typify such persons by the monkeys. They are an animal with a nature that looks only to works, they wished to imitate everything, still nothing is commanded them.

[18] Therefore let us well grasp the words: “Follow thou me.” Thou, thou; let others attend to their affairs, you attend to yours, they will indeed come. For it is not in vain that there is added in this Gospel, that the disciple whom Peter saw, was also following; but he was following without Peter’s looking. This whole gospel lesson has been written for the sake of these words and their teaching; for it does not contain much on the doctrine of faith, but on the following and the works of faith. In the person of Peter Christ here lectures all spiritual prelates and instructs them in their office; of this the whole Gospel ought to be made to treat, but these prelates wish perhaps to be untaught by us. Therefore we must pass it by, and stick to our own duties.

I. The Second Teaching.

Each should be Content in his own Calling.

[19] The other lesson from this Gospel is, that everyone should be satisfied with his own part and not begrudge another anything, nor murmur although he is unlike him. For here, although John alone is called the disciple Jesus loves, still none of them murmured, neither did anyone envy him. in like manner, that he should not die, as they thought, grieved no one,

and not a murmur went forth from them; but as the text says: “This saying therefore went forth among the brethren,” they, (we understand all the disciples and Christians) spoke of this as brethren and wished him well.

[20] And this is no mean virtue; for even the holy patriarchs were lacking in this virtue and they could not stand the government of Joseph, their brother.

[21] Moreover it is a common plague that no one can be satisfied with his own lot, so that the heathen say: How does it happen that there is always better fruit in another’s field, and that the neighbor’s cow gives more milk than our own? Again, —how does it come that no one allows himself to be content with his own state, each thinking that of another is better than his own? Whoever is a merchant praises the lot of a mechanic, that he sits at home and rests, while he must wander around in the country as if going astray. On the other hand, the mechanic praises the lot of the merchant, because he is rich and is out among the people, and so on. Every person is tired of his own lot and sighs for a change. Is one married, then he praises the state of the one who has no wife; has he none, then he praises the married state. Is he in a spiritual calling, then he likes the secular; is he in a secular calling, then he prefers the spiritual; and so it is impossible for God to deal with them so that they are satisfied. If they serve God in the lot God gave them, it would be neither bitter nor heavy for them; but now they are tired and no one burdens them but themselves. Without the least need or cause they themselves make their lives bitter.

[22] And if God allowed one to change his lot with all his will, to atone for his dissatisfied state; even then he would be like everyone else, yea, become more tired and at last stay with his own. Hence one must not think of changing his lot, but of changing his spirit of discontent. Cast aside and change your restless spirit, then the lot of one would be like that of another, and all would be prized alike, as you have experienced that you neither needed nor wished a change.

[23] Thus some heathen have thought if the evils of all people were brought together on a heap, and one then distributed them equally, it would come to the point that everyone would prefer to retain his own. God rules the world so very evenly, that to every advantage is attached a like disadvantage. Every person sees no more than how sleek the shoe fits on

another, but does not see where it pinches him; on the other hand the one who wears the shoe, thinks not how neatly it fits, but how sorely it pinches. The world rushes on in the folly that everyone looks only at his own evil and another's good; but when he beholds only his own good and also another's evil, then he will thank God, be satisfied in a most resigned manner, however humble and bad it may be about him.

[24] To avoid such unrest, discontent and disgust in one's self, is helpful and necessary to faith, which is of the firm conviction, that God governs all alike, places each one in the lot, that is the most useful and suitable for him, and that it could not be better arranged, even if he did it himself. This faith brings rest, contentment, peace and banishes the tired spirit. But where it does not exist, and man judges according to his own feelings, thoughts and experiences, behold, there is a weary and discontented spirit, for he experiences only the evil of his own lot and not that of his neighbor; on the other hand, he does not see his own good side nor the bad side of his neighbor. Hence there follows out of this feeling weariness, dislike, worry and labor, and he becomes thereby impatient and dissatisfied with God. Then praise, love and thanks to God are silenced in him, and he remains his whole life a secret murmurer against God, like the Jews in the wilderness. Yet, the only thing he reaps from it, is that he makes his own life bitter, and merits hell thereby besides.

[25] Hence you see, how faith is needed in everything and how it makes everything easy, good and sweet, even if you were in prison or in death, as the martyrs prove. And without faith all things are difficult, evil and bitter, although you possessed the pleasure and joy of the whole world, as all the great lords and wealthy prove, who at all times lead the most wretched lives.

[26] Some say: Yes, if I knew that neither my folly nor Satan had led me, and I were assured that God himself took care of me, I would gladly be joyful, satisfied and contented. Answer: That is a foolish and unchristian pretense, which reveals a faithless heart. Christ says in Matthew 6:28: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow." Again, not a leaf falls from the tree without the will of your heavenly Father, and not a bird comes upon the earth without his will; of how much more value are you than birds, you who are of much more value than they; the very hair of your head are all numbered, Matthew 10:29.

[27] If then your existence is a state that in itself is not sinful, although you have come into it through sin and folly, the same existence or state will not therefore be the less displeasing to God; for God takes pleasure in all things, as Genesis 1:31 says, except sin. Therefore, where you are in a calling that is not sinful in itself, you are certainly placed there by God, and in the state that is pleasing to God; be only on your guard and do not sin in it. If you fall from a loft and break a bone the room or the bed therefore is not the worse or God more displeasing, into which the fall brought you and constrained you to remain, although another came there without such a fall.

[28] When I speak of a calling, not sinful in itself, I do really mean pleasing to God, if you experience his disgust and displeasure; God is surely present there, he lets the wicked spirit attack and try you, if you are wavering or steadfast, or not, and offers your faith an occasion to battle and to exercise itself.

[29] When I speak of a calling, which in itself is not sinful, I do not mean that we can live on the earth without sin. All callings and estates sin daily; but I mean the calling God has instituted or its institution is not opposed to God, as for example, marriage, man-servant, maid-servant, lord, wife, superintendent, ruler, judge, officer, farmer, citizen etc., I mention as sinful stations in life; robbery, usury, public women, and as they are at present, the pope, cardinals, bishops, priests, monks and nuns, who neither preach nor listen to preaching. For these callings are surely against God, where they only say mass and sing, and are not busy with God's Word, so that an ordinary woman may much sooner enter heaven than one of these.

[30] To be spiritual and not busy with God's Word, which should be your special work, is like being married and never being together; but one running out here, the other there, to dissipate. Hence in order to lead such a life many chapters and cloisters have become houses of harlots and houses of villains for the service of Satan, to be pious in the body and outwardly, but in the soul there is nothing but sin.

II. The Spiritual or Mysterious Interpretation.

[31] With these two lessons we shall be satisfied for the present. St. Augustine, however, playfully as it were, interprets the two apostles, Peter and John, as two sorts of lives. St. Peter as the life of reality, and

St. John as the contemplative life. He adds: our real life must follow Christ and die, whereas the life contemplative remains forever.—This notion is beautiful and ingenious; but some, by writing too much about these two kinds of lives, have obscured the whole matter and no longer know what life is real or contemplative.

[32] But I, in my coarse manner of thinking, take it that the life of reality must not only cease bodily, but also die spiritually; that is, it must be discarded by the world, and man must not rely on his works, however good and necessary they be, but live alone by faith and rely on Christ; thus he will be the disciple whom Christ loves. Here the Gospel, so to speak, bursts open and pours forth the rays of its spiritual meaning too numerous for me to catch. Christ by his Word and life urges the performance of good works, but in reality has in view only faith.

[33] Let us then take John to mean faith, or the inner life of the soul in faith; St. Peter, works, or the outer life in works —taking care, however, not to separate the two from each other in one person. Thus we shall behold mysterious things and understand the lives real and contemplative, with their death or continuance.

[34] Firstly, we read that this was the disciple whom Christ loved. This means that faith alone makes the truly beloved disciples of Christ, who receive the Holy Spirit through this very same faith, not through their works. Works indeed also make disciples, but not beloved disciples: only temporal hypocrites who do not persevere. God's love does not uphold and keep them, for the reason that they do not believe.

[35] Secondly, this is the disciple who at the supper leaned back on Christ's breast. It is surely something great and admirable that faith owns the heart of Christ, that is, it possesses all that Christ has and all right understanding. I have often said before that faith makes Christ and the believer one, both having the same things in common. That which Christ is and has becomes the property of the believer; and again, as St. Paul says, Romans 8:32. "God has delivered up his son for us all; how shall he not also freely with him give us all things?" Therefore a Christian believer relies on Christ, takes comfort from him, and leans on him as on his own, given to him by God. Even so did St. John lean back on Christ's breast, as on his couch, safe and secure.

[36] Behold what abundant treasures the faith in Christ is and contains: it leans ever on Christ, bedding then safely and most gently, so that they fear nothing, neither sin, death, hell, the world, nor the devil; for they rest on life, on grace, and on eternal bliss, possessing all things in heaven and on earth—only in faith, however not manifestly as yet. This is indicated by the fact that St. John leans back on Christ’s breast not after his resurrection or in the morning, but before the resurrection and at supper, that is to say in this life, which is an evening-meal, denoting the end of the world, when souls are nourished by the Gospel and the Easter-Lamb, that is prepared, served and eaten by faith and through the preaching of the Word.

[37] Thirdly, he particularly mentions the breast, not the lap or the arms, indicating thereby that faith possesses all the wisdom of God and understands all things rightly. The same is also said by St. Paul, Corinthians 2:15-16: “We have the mind of Christ ;”and furthermore: “He that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man.” And 2 Corinthians 3:16 we read: “Whensoever it (the heart) shall turn to the Lord, the evil is taken away”, so that he knows all things. Therefore the believer can rightly judge all estates, all works, all doctrines, seeing what is good and right, and never failing.

[38] Behold, thus through faith in Christ man not only possesses all things, but also rightly, certainly and wisely understands, knows and judges all things. This is typified by Moses in the law, Leviticus 9:31, where it is taught that of all animal offerings the breast is due and belongs to the priest. Priests however are all believers and Christians as we are told in 1 Peter 2:9. And therefore faith gives them all treasures and all wisdom, so that because of their treasures they are rich kings and have plenty, and that because of their wisdom they are great priests who can judge, distinguish and teach all the world.

[39] Fourthly, this is the disciple who said to Jesus: “Lord, who is he that betrayeth thee?” What does this signify? Judas the traitor was a type of the pope, the bishops and all those priests who abandon the Word of God and prefer their own doctrines and works, at the same time uprooting all Christian truth. Yet their life has a fine spiritual semblance with all their religious doings and carrying on, and natural reason cannot comprehend how they can be mistaken, aye it even praises and supports them.

[40] Now, since true faith and boastful works never go together, and since no one may rely on God's grace and lean on the breast of Christ who relies on his works and doings; therefore grace and truth, when boastful works are exalted, decline equally much. Thus it comes about that through these traitors, the priests, truth steadily and secretly declines, so secretly in fact that true believers do not become aware of it, unless they diligently seek after truth. Has not Christ told us, Matthew 24:24, that even the elect, if possible, may be led astray? And therefore John is not content with leaning on the breast of Christ but anxiously and urgently he requires who may be the traitor.

[41] Thus do the true believers, by exploring Christian truths and divine grace, learn who is the traitor; for noticing, as they do, that only grace—that is, Christ—and nothing but grace affords any help and that nothing else is to be relied upon, they easily see, by thus comparing and balancing grace and nature, that everything except grace is misleading. Then grace assures them and they behold that all such are traitors as set aside and uproot grace, who, in opposition to grace, establish doctrines and works, claiming thereby to make people religious and pious.

[42] The betrayers of Christ therefore are the hypocrites who walk about with the semblance of a holy life and a spiritual estate, while at the same time they annihilate within themselves and in everybody else the truth of Christianity and the light of grace, leaving nothing but human folly. This is recognized only by such as have true faith, and even by such only when they pay special attention to it, investigate, examine and compare one with the other; otherwise they also will allow such works to pass, thinking in their simplicity that they are done in good faith, since, forsooth, they so closely resemble genuine Christian works. And for this the traitor's name is Judas Iscariot. Judas means "confessor," for all such saints confess Christ, do not openly deny him and even, in their lives, appear better than the true confessors. Iscariot however means "reward," for such saints are only hirelings, egotists and seekers after pay; everything that they do they do for themselves and nothing freely, for the honor of God, even as Judas with his carrying of the purse only looked out for his advantage. Behold, thus the world abounds with religious people who, at heart, are nothing but Judas Iscariots, advantage-seekers and profit-servers, who with their outward semblance lead all the world astray and away from the right path of faith,

despising and selling Christ, that is to say Christian truth and grace. Of this more anon during Lent.

[43] Now you see why St. John does not mention his own name. For faith neither makes sects and differences, as works do, nor has it any particular works by which it desires to be mentioned; it performs all sorts of works, as they happen to be required, one as well as the other. But Judas Iscariot's band is divided according to their works, without reference to faith. One is called a bishop by mitre and crosier, not by faith; another, a Franciscan or Barefooted Friar, by his cowl and pattens; a third, an Augustinian, by his black cowl and so on. But faith, through all works and estates remains entirely nameless and that is why it makes disciples whom Christ loves. Peter indeed also has a name, for faith is not wholly destitute of works; but his is a name that Christ has given to him, not the cause of his being a beloved disciple.

[43] Now we see what it means that this disciple is to remain and Peter to follow as said above. Faith remains until Christ comes, then it ceases; but works must perish and be despised. The world can take all things from us and destroy them, even our good works and good lives; but our faith it must permit to remain in our hearts, and it will remain even unto the last day. From all this it follows that St. John has not written such things concerning himself for his glory, as though he wished to be especially esteemed above all others. But he desired to describe the mysterious and abundant virtue of faith; nor did he fully understand till after the ascension of Christ that the Lord therefore caused such things to be done.

[45] It is likewise a good sign that St. Peter turned to look at St. John, and not contrariwise. For the works are to look to faith, where it stands; not faith to the works.—Many more meanings could be found in this lesson by him who had time and the desire to look for them.

Sunday after Christmas. Simeon; Anna; and the Childhood of Jesus. Jesus in the Temple.

Text: Luke 2:33-40.

33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.

34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

39 And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. Luke 2:33-40

[1] It is very probable that today's Epistle has been selected by a pure misunderstanding, the one who appointed it for this Sunday probably thinking that it refers to the infant Christ, because it speaks of a young heir

who is lord of all. Many other Epistles and Gospels have been selected for inappropriate days from similar misunderstandings. Nothing however depends upon the order of selection; it amounts to the same thing what is preached at the different seasons, if only the right meaning is preserved. Thus the events of this Gospel happened on the day of Candlemas, when Mary brought the child into the temple, and yet it is read on this Sunday. I mention all this, that nobody may be confused by the chronological order, or prevented from correctly understanding the Gospel. We will divide it into two parts, the one treating of Simeon, and the other of Anna. It is indeed a rich Gospel and well arranged: first, the man Simeon; second, the woman Anna, both aged and holy.

I. Of Simeon

“And his father and his mother were marveling at the things which were spoken concerning him.”

[2] What are those wonderful things spoken concerning him? They are the things concerning which St. Simeon had spoken immediately before, when in the temple he took the child Jesus upon his arms, saying: ‘Now lettest thou thy servant depart, Lord according to thy word, in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.’ At these things, St. Luke says, they marveled, namely, that this aged and holy man stood there before them in the temple, took the child in his arms and spoke of him so exultingly, calling him the light of the world, a Savior of all nations, a glory of all the people of Israel; Simeon himself thinking so highly of him that he would now fain depart this life after he had seen the child.

[3] Now it must indeed excite wonder that such things were proclaimed openly by Simeon in that public and sacred place with reference to that poor and insignificant child, whose mother was so humble and lowly and whose father Joseph was not wealthy. How could such a child be considered the Savior of all men, the light of the Gentiles and the glory and honor of all Israel? At present, after we have had so many proofs of Christ’s greatness, these words do no longer seem so wonderful; but then, when nothing as yet was known of Jesus, they were indeed marvelous, and this lowly child was

very unlike the great and mighty being portrayed by Simeon. But Joseph and Mary believed it nevertheless, and just therefore they marveled. If they had not believed it, the words of Simeon would have appeared to them insignificant, untrue and worthless, and not at all wonderful. Therefore, the fact that they were marveling, shows that Joseph and Mary possessed a strong and sublime faith.

[4] But someone might say: why then do they marvel at this? Had not the angels told them before that this child was Christ and the Savior, and had not the shepherds also spoken glorious things concerning him? It was also very wonderful that the kings or wise men had come from distant lands to worship him with their offerings. Mary knew well that she had conceived him of the Holy Spirit, and that wonderful events had attended his birth. Moreover, the angel Gabriel had said that he should be great and be called the Son of the Most High. In short, all the preceding events had been marvelous, up to this time; now nothing wonderful occurs, but only those things are announced and proclaimed concerning him which have not happened and are not yet seen.

[5] It seems to me that in this case we need not look very far for an explanation. The Evangelist does not deny that they had also marveled before this. He simply desires to relate here what they did when St. Simeon spoke such glorious things concerning the child. He means to say: When St. Simeon spake thus, the child's parents did not despise his words, but believed them firmly. Therefore they remained and listened to him and marveled at his utterances; what could they have done in addition to this? Thus it is not denied here that previously they marveled just as much, if not more.

[6] We shall inquire later into the spiritual significance of this wonderment; now we are concerned about the literal sense, serving as an example of our faith and teaching us how wonderful are the works of God concerning us; for the end is very unlike the beginning. The beginning is nothing, the end is everything; just as the infant Christ here appears to be very insignificant, and yet he finally became the Savior and light of all nations.

[7] If Joseph and Mary had judged according to outward appearances, they would have considered Christ more than a poor child. But they

disregard the outward appearance and cling to the words of Simeon with a firm faith, therefore they marvel at his speech. Thus we must also disregard all the senses when contemplating the works of God, and only cling to his words, so that our eyes and our senses may not offend us.

[8] The fact that they were marveling at the words of Simeon is also mentioned to teach us that the Word of God is never preached in vain, as we read in Isaiah 55:11: “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth” (i.e. out of the mouth of God’s messengers): “it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” Thus the Evangelist would say that Simeon delivered a warm-hearted, beautiful sermon, preaching the pure Gospel and the Word of God. For the Gospel is nothing but a sermon whose theme is Christ, declaring him to be the Savior, light and glory of all the world. Such preaching fills the heart with joy and wonder at this great grace and comfort, if it is received in faith.

[9] But although this sermon was very beautiful and comforting, there were only a few who believed; nay people despised it as being foolish, going hither and thither in the temple. Some prayed, others did something else, but they did not give heed to the words of Simeon. Yet, as the Word of God must produce results, there were indeed some who received it with joy and wonder, namely Joseph and Mary. The Evangelist here also rebukes the unbelief of the Jews, for as this occurred publicly in the temple, there were many present, and yet they would not believe, the fact that the Savior was only a child causing them all to stumble. Thus we learn here that we should hear the Word of God gladly, for it will invariably produce good fruits.

The Spiritual Meaning of this Gospel Concerning Simeon.

[10] This leads us to the spiritual significance of this astonishment of Joseph and Mary. The temple is an abode of God, therefore signifying every place where God is present. Among others it also signifies the Holy Scriptures, where God may be found as in his proper place. To bring Christ into the temple, means nothing else than to follow the example of the people mentioned in Acts 17:11. After they had received the Word with all readiness of mind, they went into the Scriptures, daily examining them whether these things were so.

[11] Now we find in this same temple Simeon, who in his person represents all the prophets filled with the Holy Spirit, just as St. Luke says of Simeon. They have spoken and written as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and have waited for the coming of Christ, just like Simeon. They have never ceased to do this till Christ came, as St. Peter says in Acts 3:24 that all the prophets have spoken of the days of Christ. And Christ himself says, Matthew 11:13, that all the prophets and the law prophesied until John, i.e. till the baptism of Christ, when he began to show himself as the Savior and light of all the world.

[12] All this is signified by Simeon, who was not to die till he had seen Christ. For this reason he is called Simeon, which means “one who hears”, for the prophets had only heard of Christ as of him who was as yet unborn and would come after them. Therefore, having him in their wake, as it were, they heard him. Now if we thus come into the temple with Christ and the Gospels and contemplate the Scriptures, all the sayings of the prophets are so kind to him, take him in their arms, so to speak, and declare all with great joy: This is indeed the Man of whom we have spoken, and now our utterances concerning him have come to their goal in peace and joy. And now they begin to give the most beautiful testimonies concerning him, as being Christ, the Savior, the light, the comfort and the glory of Israel; and all this Simeon here declares and announces regarding him. St. Paul speaks of this in Romans 1:2, where he says that God promised the Gospel afore through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures; which shows us what is meant by Simeon and by the temple. We also refer to Romans 3:21: “But now apart from the law a righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets,” also to the words of Christ in John 5:39: “Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me; and in verse 46: “For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of me.” This might be proved by examples, but we have no time here. From the Epistle and Gospel for Christmas we have seen what beautiful and very appropriate testimonies the apostles gathered from Holy Scripture. We have also discussed this in explaining the Christmas Gospel, when we spoke of the swaddling clothes in which the child was wrapped.

[13] For the present the prophecy of Moses may suffice, which we find in Deuteronomy 18:15 and which is quoted by the apostles in Acts 8:22 and

7:37, and in many other places, and reads as follows: “Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.” Here Moses declares that the people will no longer hearken to him, and that his teaching will end when this prophet Christ appears to whom they should hearken thenceforth. This also demonstrates that Christ was to be a light and Savior after Moses, and no doubt better than Moses; for otherwise Moses would not have declared that his teaching and guiding would terminate, but that it would continue along with that of Christ. Isaiah also says, 28:16: “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not be in haste.” Behold, how beautifully these and other passages of Holy Writ agree with the Gospel, declaring of Christ what the apostles preached concerning him and what is proclaimed continually by all the Holy Scriptures.

[14] Therefore Simeon had to be an aged man, so that he might completely and suitably represent the prophets of old. He does not take the child in his hands nor in his lap, but in his arms. There is a deeper meaning in this, but suffice it to say now that the prophecies and passages of Scriptures do not keep Christ to themselves, but exhibit and offer him to everybody, just as we do with those things we carry in our arms. St. Paul refers to this in Romans 4:23 and 15:4, when he says that all was written not for their sake, but for our learning. And in 1 Peter 1:12 we read that the prophets have not ministered these things unto themselves, but unto us, to whom they have been announced.

[15] For this reason St. Luke does not say that Joseph and Mary were marveling at the words of Simeon, but “at the things which were spoken concerning him.” He passes over the name of Simeon in silence, deliberately diverting our attention from Simeon to this spiritual significance, so that thereby we might understand the sayings of Scripture.

[16] Only his father and his mother were marveling at these things. It is remarkable that the Evangelist here does not mention the names of Joseph and Mary, but calls them father and mother, thereby giving no cause to point out the spiritual significance. Who is meant by the spiritual father and mother of Christ? He himself mentions his spiritual mother in Mark 3:34-35 and Luke 8:21: “For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” St. Paul calls himself a father in 1

Corinthians 4:15: “For though ye have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I begat you through the Gospel.” It is therefore clear that the Christian church, that is to say all those who believe, the spiritual mother of Christ, and all the apostles and teachers of the people who preach the Gospel, are his spiritual father. As often as faith is created in a man, Christ is born anew in him. These are the people who are marveling at the sayings of the prophets; for how beautifully and precisely do these apply to Christ and how gloriously do they speak of him, demonstrating in a masterly manner the truth of the whole Gospel. There is no greater delight in this life than to perceive and experience this in reading the Scriptures.

[17] But the great multitude of unbelievers despise this Simeon, scoff at him and pervert his words as those of a fool, carrying on their apish tricks and buffoonery in the temple and even rearing idols and the altar of Damascus there, as did King Ahab, 1 Kings 16:32-33. These are the people who wantonly pervert the Scriptures and bring them into discredit; they judge them according to their human understanding and elevate their favorite idol, reason, thereby making of the Scriptures a doctrine of works and human laws. Finally they desecrate and destroy this temple of the Scriptures altogether and carry on in it their sin and shame, as the pope with his decrees and the great seats of learning with their devotion to Aristotle have done and are still doing. At the same time they are very devout and consecrate many churches, chapels and altars of wood and stone, show their indignation against the Turks who desecrate and destroy these churches, and believe that God ought to reward them for desecrating and devastating ten thousand times more badly his most precious temple, which is immeasurably better and eternal. They are a blind, mad, clumsy people; let them go in their blindness to eternal destruction.

[18] Some simple-minded people might be surprised that Luke calls Joseph the father of Christ, in spite of the fact that Mary was a virgin. But he speaks thus according to the custom which prevailed among the people, and in keeping with the tradition of the law, according to which stepfathers, were also called fathers, which indeed is the general custom everywhere and always. Moreover Joseph is properly called his father, because he was the affianced husband of his mother. The Evangelist had sufficient reason to speak thus, for he had previously written very plainly about the virginity of

Mary, so that he probably thought nobody would get the impression that Joseph was the real father of Christ. As there was consequently no danger, because of the precautions he had taken, he could write in this manner without any reserve. For the preceding narrative abundantly convinces us that Mary was his real mother and Joseph was his real father only in the conventional sense of the word; and thus it is true that he had both a father and a mother.

And Simeon Blessed Them.

[19] This blessing means nothing else but that he wished them happiness and joy, honor and all prosperity. Luke relates that he did not bless only the child, but everyone of them, the child, his father and his mother.

[20] This blessing seems to be a useless and trivial matter, for people generally do this and wish each other all that is good. But to bless Christ and his parents is a great and exceptional deed, for the reason that Christ and our nature are entirely opposed to each other. Christ condemns all that the world elects, gives us the cross to bear and to suffer all evil, deprives this world of all its pleasures, possessions and honors, and teaches that men deal in those things which are altogether foolish and sinful. And behold, nobody will nor can take this from him. Then they begin to execrate, blaspheme and persecute Christ and all his disciples, and there are only a few Simeons who bless him; but the whole world is full of those who curse him and wish him all evil, disgrace and misfortune. For he who is not disposed willingly to despise all things and to suffer everything, will not bless and praise Christ very long, but will speedily stumble.

[21] There are indeed some who praise him, because he does what they desire and leaves them as they are. But then he is not Christ and does not do the works of Christ with them, but he is what they are and desire. When however he begins to be Christ to them and they are required to forsake their works and to let him alone dwell within them, there is nothing but flight, blasphemy and execration.

[22] There are also some who believe that, if they were to see the infant Christ before them with his mother, as did Simeon, they would also joyously bless him. But they lie; for his childhood and poverty and his contemptible appearance would certainly cause them to stumble. They

prove it by disregarding, hating and persecuting such poverty and humble appearance in the members of Christ, and yet they might still find daily among them Christ their head. If they then shun the cross now and hate its contemptible appearance, they would certainly do the same thing if they were still to see him with their eyes. Why are they not showing such honor to the poor? Why will they not honor the truth? But Simeon was of a different mind. Outward appearances did not cause him to stumble but on the contrary, he confessed that the Savior was to be a sign which is spoken against, and is pleased that Christ rejects the appearance of worldly greatness and exhibits the cross. Therefore he does not bless Christ alone, but also his members, father and mother.

[23] Thus Simeon, as a preacher and lover of the cross and an enemy of the world, in blessing the child, gave a remarkable example of exalting and honoring Christ, who was then despised, cursed and rejected in his own person, and is now treated in the same manner in his members, who for his sake endure poverty, disgrace, death and all ignominy. Yet nobody will come to their relief, receive and bless them, but people want to be pious Christians by praying and fasting, and by bequests and good works. The Significance of the Blessing upon Christ's Mother and Father 24. Explaining this figuratively, we find that the spiritual Christ, or his spiritual father and mother, that is to say the Christian church, with its apostles and followers, is subjected on earth to all ignominy, being made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things, as St. Paul says in Corinthians 4:13. Therefore it is indeed necessary that they receive blessing and consolation from some other source, from Simeon in the temple, which means from the prophets in Holy Scripture, as St. Paul says in Romans 15:4: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope."

[25] A Christian must therefore not imagine, nor endeavor to bring it about, that he may be praised and blessed by the people of this world. No, it has already been decided that he must expect reproach and contempt and willingly submit to it. A blessing he can only expect from Simeon in the temple. The Scriptures are our comfort, praising and blessing all who are reproached by the world for Christ's sake. This is the whole teaching of Psalm 87, also of Psalm 9 and many others, which tell us that God will

rescue all those who suffer in this world. Thus Moses writes in Genesis 4:9 that God takes such great care of pious Abel after his death as to be moved to vengeance solely by his blood, without having been petitioned for it, doing more for him after his death than while he was still living. This shows that he cannot forsake even the dead, nay, he will remember his believers more when they are dead than while they are living. Again, after Cain had been slain, he was silent, showing no interest in him.

[26] These and similar passages of Scripture are our comfort and blessing, if we are Christians; to them we must cling and with them we must be satisfied. Here we see how blessed are those who suffer reproach, and how wretched are those who persecute us. The former God will never forget nor forsake, and the latter he will not acknowledge nor remember. Could we desire a more abundant, a greater comfort and blessing? What is the blessing and comfort of this world compared with this consolation and blessing of Simeon in the temple? “And he said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the falling and rising of many in Israel; and for a sign which is spoken against: yea a sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.

[27] Why does he not say this to the father also, and why does he call the mother by name? He desires here to address himself to the real mother, and not to the father. As Jesus was her own child, all that happened to him naturally also happened to her and caused her genuine and real pain. Simeon perhaps also addressed Mary alone for the reason that Joseph was not to live until the time of the sufferings of Christ, which the mother would experience alone; and in addition to all this sorrow she was to be a poor and lonely widow, and Christ was to suffer as a poor orphan. This is a situation unspeakably pitiable, and God himself according to the Scriptures takes great interest in widows and orphans, calling himself a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows.

[28] For Mary lived in all three estates, in the state of virginity, in that of matrimony, and in that of widowhood, the latter being the most pitiable, without any protection or aid. A virgin has her parents, a wife her husband, but the widow is alone. And in this pitiful condition Simeon announces to her such great sorrow, thereby showing and explaining to her that his blessing is a blessing of God and not of the world. For in the sight of the world all was to be reversed and she was not only to be not blessed, but her

child also should become the target and aim of everybody's curses, just as bows and arrows are aimed at the target. Behold, this in my opinion means to be blessed in the temple. It was indeed necessary that she should be strengthened and comforted by a spiritual and divine benediction against the arrows of future curses, for her soul alone was to bear and endure this great tempest of the execration of her child.

[29] Simeon declares in the first place that Christ is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel. This then is the first consolation which his mother was to experience in him and for which she was to educate him, namely, that many were to be offended in him, even in Israel, the chosen people. This is a poor comfort in the judgment of men, that she is the mother of a son who is to cause many to stumble and fall, even in Israel. Some have explained this text thus, that many have been stirred up by Christ and their pride has fallen, so that they might rise again in humility; just as St. Paul fell and rose again, and all the self-righteous must fall, despair of their own strength and rise again in Christ, if they would be saved. This is a good interpretation, but not exhaustive here. Simeon says of Christ that many Jews would take offense at him and stumble, thereby falling into unbelief, just as it has happened in the past and as it still occurs. It was indeed a dark picture and a terrible announcement to which this holy mother had to listen.

[30] Not Christ however is the cause of this fall, but the presumption of the Jews. It happened in this wise. Christ came to be a light and Savior of all the world, as Simeon said, so that all might be justified and saved by faith in him. If this is to be brought about, all other righteousness in ourselves, sought for outside of Christ with works, must be rejected. The Jews would not hear of this, as St. Paul says in Romans 10:3: "For being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." Thus they take offense at faith, fall deeper and deeper into unbelief and become hardened in their own righteousness, so that they have even persecuted with all their might all who believed.

[31] All those who would be saved by their own righteousness must do the same thing. They depend upon their works, and when faith in Christ is demanded they stumble and fall, burning, condemning and persecuting all who reject their works or consider them useless. Such people are the pope,

the bishops, the Scholastics and all the Papists. And this they do under the impression that they are earnestly serving God, defending the truth and preserving Christianity, just as the Jews also pretended to preserve the true service of God and the law of Moses when they killed the apostles and other Christians and persecuted them.

[32] Therefore, as Simeon here tells the mother of Christ that not all the people of Israel will receive him as their light and Savior, and that not only a few, but many will take offense at him and fall, so also the spiritual mother of Christ, that is to say, the Christian Church, must not be surprised when many false Christians, even among the clergy, will not believe. For such are the people who depend upon works and seek their own righteousness, who stumble and fall because Christ demands faith, and who persecute and kill those that oppose them. This has been prophesied long ago by the spiritual Simeon, namely the prophets, who almost with one accord have spoken of this fall. In Isaiah 8:11-15 we read as follows: “For Jehovah spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, A conspiracy, concerning all whereof this people shall say, A conspiracy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be in dread thereof. Jehovah of hosts, him shall ye sanctify; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a square to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble thereon, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.” There are many more passages from which it can be shown that Christ must be a rock against which the best and greatest will stumble, as we read in Psalm 78:31: “And he slew of the fattest of them, and smote down the young men of Israel.” For Christ is set as a Savior and cannot yield nor change. But these arrogant people are headstrong and obstinate, will not give up their vanity, and run their head against Christ, so that one of the two must break and fall. Christ however must remain and cannot fall; consequently they fall.

[33] Again, as firmly as he stands over against the legalists and will not yield before them, so immovably he stands also for all who would found their faith on him, as we read in Isaiah 28:16: “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not be in haste.” And in Matthew 16:18 he says

himself: “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Now, as by the falling and breaking spoken of in this connection, nothing else is meant but unbelief and dependence upon works, so rising and being built upon this rock means nothing but to believe and disregard his works. This is done by the believers, for the rising of whom alone Christ is set. And as in the times of Christ, many among the people of Israel rose in him, so it will be until the end of the world, for nobody can rise through his works, or through the doctrines of men, but only through Christ. This is brought about by faith, as has often been said, without any merit or works, the works will only follow after we have risen.

[34] You will perceive therefore how the whole Scriptures speak only of faith, and reject works as useless, nay, as standing in the way of justification and preventing us from rising. For Christ will alone be set for the rising of many, and those who will not rise must fall. Nothing can be set beside him by which we might rise. Is not the life of the Papists and priests abominable? For they run their heads against this rock, and their conduct is so directly opposed to Christianity that it may indeed be called the sway and government of the Antichrist. The spiritual Simeon also speaks of this rising to the spiritual mother of Christ. For all the prophets teach the Christian Church that only in Christ can all men rise, and St. Paul in Romans 1:17 and Hebrews 10:38 quotes the passage from Habakkuk 2:4: “But the righteous shall live by his faith,”

[35] We see therefore this falling and rising by Christ must be understood spiritually, and that the falling and rising apply to different classes of people. The falling applies only to those who are great, learned, mighty and holy, and who trust too much in themselves. Thus the Gospel tells us that Christ never had a disagreement nor a conflict with sinners, but he treated them with the utmost kindness. But with the select people, the scribes and high-priests he cannot get along, neither is he gracious to them. If then only those can fall who are standing up, only those can rise who have fallen and are lying prostrate. These are the people who know their poverty and long for grace, who realize that they are nothing and Christ is everything.

[36] It is noticeable that Simeon adds the word “Israel.” For Christ had been promised by all the prophets only to the people of Israel. At the same time it was announced that many among that people would fall away only

on account of their self-righteousness. This is indeed a terrible example to us Gentiles, to whom nothing has been promised; but out of pure grace we have unexpectedly been brought into the kingdom and have risen through Christ, as St. Paul tells us in Romans 15:9 and as we have said in explaining the Epistle for the second Sunday in Advent. For this reason the example of Israel's fall should touch our hearts, as the apostle exhorts us in Romans 11:20, that we may not also fall, or perhaps fall more grievously than the Jews and Turks, being seduced by Antichrist and bearing the name of Christ to the dishonor of God and our own harm.

[37] In the second place Simeon says that Christ is set for a sign which is spoken against. Is it not a great pity that the Savior and light of the world must be spoken against, condemned and rejected, he whom the whole world ought to desire and seek? This shows us the character of the world, and how our human nature uses the freedom of the will. This world is the kingdom of Satan and the enemy of God, and does not only transgress the commandments of God, but with senseless rage also persecutes and kills the Savior, who would help them to keep God's commandments. But one sin leads to another; those who take offense at him must also speak against him, and cannot do otherwise. On the other hand, those who rise through him must confess him, testify and preach of him, and they also cannot do otherwise. But a sword shall pierce through their souls, as we shall now see.

[38] Now give heed to the text. Simeon does not say that Christ shall be spoken against, but that he is set for a sign which is spoken against; just as a butt or target is set for the marksman, so that all bows and guns, arrows and stones may be aimed at it. Such a target is set up that the shots may be directed only at it and nowhere else. Thus Christ is the mark which is noticed by everybody and all opposition is directed toward him. And although the opponents are at variance with each other, yet they become united when they oppose Christ. This is proved by Luke 23:12, where we read that Pilate and Herod became friends in their opposition against Christ, while before they were at enmity between themselves. The Pharisees and Sadducees could never agree, but in their opposition to Christ they were united. David speaks of this and expresses his astonishment in Psalm 2:12: "Why do the nations rage, and the people meditate a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together, against Jehovah, and against his anointed."

[39] In the same manner the heretics, however strongly they differed with each other and opposed each other, were nevertheless united in their opposition against the one Christian Church. Even now, when all the bishops, religious establishments, orders and monasteries are at variance with each other, so that there are nearly as many sects and different opinions as heads, yet they are unanimous in their opposition against the Gospel. Asaph also writes in Psalm 83:6-8, that many nations conspired against the people of Israel, namely Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagarenes, Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre, and Assyria, yet they were at enmity among one another. Wickedness and falsehood are at variance with themselves, but they are united against truth and righteousness, every attack and opposition being directed toward this mark. They believe to have good reason for this. For every faction fights against its own adversary, Pilate against Herod, the Pharisees against the Sadducees, Arius against Sabellius, the monks against the priests. But every faction has its adherents and friends, and their discord or harmony is only partial.

[40] But Christ is very impolite and unreasonable, rebuking them all, Pilate being as much to him as Herod, and the Pharisees as much as the Sadducees, so that he does not take the part of any of them. Therefore, as he is against all of them, so they are all against him. Thus truth is opposed to all lies and falsehoods, and therefore all lies are united against the truth and make of it a sign which is spoken against. It must needs be so. For Christ and the truth find not a single man pious and pleasing to God, as we read in Psalm 116:11: "All men are liars." Therefore Christ must rebuke them indiscriminately and reject their works, so that they all may feel the need of his grace and long for it. But only a few will believe and accept this.

[41] Thus we have here two Simeons. The literal Simeon tells Mary that Christ in his own person is set for a sign which is spoken against. In these words he indicates what the spiritual Simeon, that is to say the prophets, would teach the church concerning our Christian faith, namely that this faith and Gospel, the living word of truth is a rock at which many will stumble and by the help of which many will rise, and that it finally is a sign which is spoken against. Thus Isaiah expresses his surprise when he says in chapter 53:1: "Who hath believed our message?" just as if he would declare that not many believe it. In Isaiah 8:15 and Isaiah 28:13 we also read that

many will stumble at this word, so that hardly the dregs of the people will be saved. The prophets have written copiously of this falling, rising, and speaking against.

[42] Simeon has declared before that Christ is the light and Savior of all the world, which has also been declared by the prophets. This shows us the character of Christ and his attitude toward the world. But when Simeon speaks of falling, rising, and speaking against, he shows what Christ will achieve, what is the character of the world, and what attitude it takes toward Christ. Thus it appears that Christ is indeed willing and qualified to be the light and Savior of all the world, and abundantly demonstrates himself as such. But the world will not receive him and becomes only worse, opposing and persecuting him with all its strength.

[43] This shows us that this world is the kingdom of Satan, not only full of wickedness and blindness, but also loving these things, as Christ says in John 3:19: "The light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light." Behold, how we sojourn on earth among devils and the enemies of God, so that indeed this life ought to be a horror for us.

[44] From this we learn to be assured that we may comfort ourselves and cheerfully bear up when many people stumble at our Word and speak against our faith, especially the great, the learned, and the priests. This is a sign that our message and faith is right, for it receives the treatment foretold by Simeon and all the prophets. They must take offense at it, stumble over it, rise by it, and speak against it; it cannot be otherwise. He who would have it otherwise must look for another Christ. Christ is set for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which is spoken against; consequently his members, or every Christian, must be like him on account of his faith and his message. He is called "antilegumenous," he who is spoken against. His doctrine must be rejected, condemned and execrated as the worst heresy, error and foolishness. It is treated rightly when this is done; but when this does not take place, then we have neither Christ, nor his mother, nor Simeon, nor the prophets, nor faith, nor the Gospel nor any Christians. For what does speaking against mean but to deny, blaspheme, curse, condemn, reject, prohibit and persecute with all disgrace and ignominy as the worst heresy?

[45] But we find still another consolation in our text. Simeon says that Christ is a sign which is spoken against, which however will not be overthrown or exterminated. The whole world may condemn my faith and my Word, call it heresy and misrepresent and pervert it in the most shameful manner, but they must let it remain and cannot take it from me. With all their rage and fury they will accomplish nothing, but can only speak against me, and I must be their mark and target. Yet they will fall, and I shall stand. Let them speak against me as much as they desire, God will also oppose them and with his deeds contend against their words. We shall see who will win the victory. Here are the deeds of God, which establish this sign firmly and solidly upon a good foundation. A goal is set up by God, who will upset it? But the others have no more than fleeting words and an impotent breath of the mouth. The flies make a great fluttering with their wings and sharpen their bills, but they only defile the wall and must let it stand.

[46] From this it follows that the doctrine and faith of the pope, the bishops, the religious establishments, the monasteries and the universities is of the world and of the devil, for no one takes offense at them or speaks against them, neither do they suffer any harm. They reap nothing but honor, power, riches, peace and pleasure, and fatten themselves at the crib, with the exception of a few that may sometimes be found who are tormented by the devil with spiritual temptations concerning their faith and hope. For where Christ is and his faith, there is also opposition, otherwise it is not Christ. If men do not oppose openly, devils do it secretly. These are sore temptations to unbelief, despair and blasphemy. Such people may be preserved and saved. The great multitude however lives without Christ, without Mary, without Simeon, without the least truth, but meanwhile they read many masses, sing high and low, wear tonsures and ecclesiastical vestments and are the apes of Solomon and like Indian cats. As they will not suffer to be spoken against and are not worthy of it, have nothing and do nothing that would call forth opposition, they become opponents themselves. What else could they do? It is their work to condemn, forbid, curse and persecute the truth.

[47] I mention all this because I want to do my duty and point out to every Christian his danger, so that all may beware of the pope, the scholastics and the priests and shun them as they shun the kingdom of

Satan, for the Word of God does not prevail among them. Cling to the Gospel and find out where there is opposition and where there is praise. Where you find no opposition, there Christ is not present; and here we do not mean opposition from the Turks, but from our nearest neighbors. Christ is not a sign set for the falling of many in Babylon or Assyria, but in Israel, that is to say among the people in the midst of whom he dwells and who boast to be his own.

[48] In the third place Simeon says to Mary: “A sword shall pierce through thine own soul.” This does not mean an actual sword, but must be understood figuratively, just like Psalm 107:10: “Such as sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron,” also Deuteronomy 4:20: “Jehovah hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnaces.” It means that her heart was to be filled with great sorrow and grief, although her body would not be tortured. Everybody knows how this happened. Thus we must take these words as a Hebrew figure of speech, expressing great sorrow and grief, just as we speak of a “heart-rending sorrow,” or use expressions like “my heart is breaking” or “my heart will burst.”

[49] We shall speak more about this during the Passion season, when we consider the sufferings of Christ. At present we can only notice how Simeon interprets his blessing by predicting such sorrow, in order that it might not be understood as a worldly blessing. But what does it signify that Simeon here speaks only to Mary, the mother, and not to Joseph? It signifies that the Christian Church, the spiritual virgin Mary, will remain on earth and will not be exterminated although the preacher and their faith and the Gospel, the spiritual Christ, are persecuted. Thus Joseph died before Christ suffered, and Mary in her widowhood was deprived of her child, yet she lived, and all this grief overwhelmed her soul. Thus the Christian Church will always be a widow, feeling great sorrow because the holy fathers, represented by Joseph, die, and the Gospel is persecuted. The Church must feel the sword, and will yet remain until the last day.

[50] What can be more painful for a Christian than to see and experience how furiously the tyrants and unbelievers persecute and exterminate the Gospel of Christ? This is done more at the present time under the pope than ever before. With this agrees the name of Mary, which means a “sea of bitterness.” This declares that there is in her not only a drop, nor a river, but

a whole sea of bitterness, for all the waves of sorrow go over her, so that she may indeed be called Mary, a bitter sea.

[51] Finally Simeon says that all this will happen that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed. What a blessed and necessary fruit of this falling and speaking against! But in order to understand this we must notice that there are two different kinds of temptation among men. There is the temptation to gross sins, as for instance to be disobedient to parents, to kill, to be unchaste, to steal, to lie and blaspheme, etc., which are sins against the second table of the law. The people who do these things need not take offense at a sign which is spoken against; their thoughts are sufficiently revealed by their evil life. The Scriptures speak little of this temptation.

[52] But the most dangerous temptation is prefigured by Cozbi the daughter of Zur, a prince of Midian, because of whom twenty-four thousand were slain in Israel, as Moses writes in Numbers 25:15. This is the temptation through the bright and shining sins of good works and the service of God, which bring misfortune upon the whole world and against which nobody can guard sufficiently. These are the sins against the first table of the law, against faith, the honor of God and his works.

[53] For a life of good works, blameless conduct and outward respectability is the greatest, most dangerous and destructive stumbling-block. The people leading such lives are so upright, reasonable, honorable and pious that scarcely a single soul could have been preserved or saved, if God had not set up a sign against which they might stumble and by which the thought of their hearts might be revealed. Thus we see their hearts behind their beautiful words and good works, and find that these great saints and wise men are pagans and fools; for they persecute the faith for the sake of their works and will not suffer their ways to be rebuked. Thus their thoughts are laid bare and they become manifested as trusting in their own works and themselves, sinning not only continually against the first commandments, but endeavoring also in their enmity against God to exterminate and destroy all that belongs to God, claiming to do this for the sake of God and to preserve the truth. Behold, such are the pope, the bishops and almost all the priests, who have filled the world with innumerable snares and stumbling-blocks by making an external glitter of the spiritual life. Among them there is no faith, but only works, the Gospel does not prevail, but only human laws.

[54] The whole Scriptures speak of this stumbling-block, and God with all his prophets and saints contends against it. This is the true gate of hell and the broad highway to eternal damnation, wherefore this harlot is well called Cozbi, “mendacium meum,” my lie. Everything that glitters lies and deceives, but her beautiful ornaments and embellishments deceive even the princes of Israel, and so she is not merely called “mendacium,” but “meum mendacium,” my lie, because with her deception she attracts and tempts almost everybody.

[55] But in order to protect us God has set up his Christ as a sign, at which they might stumble and fall and which they oppose, so that we may not be seduced by their works and words, nor consider them good and imitate them. We should rather know that before God no moral life without faith is acceptable; where there is no faith, there is only Cozbi, nothing but lies and deception. This becomes manifest as soon as we preach against them and consider their works worthless in comparison with faith. Behold, then you must be a heretic with your faith; they reveal themselves and disclose their heart before you unwillingly and unknowingly. Then you perceive the shocking abominations of unbelief hidden behind that beautiful life, the wolves in sheep’s clothing, the harlot adorned with the wreath, impudently demanding that you consider her disgrace and vice, her honor and virtue, or threatening to kill you. Therefore God says to her Jeremiah 3:3: “Thou hadst a harlot’s forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed,” and Isaiah 8:9: “The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not.” Would she not be considered a mad and impudent harlot who would have her adultery extolled even before her husband? But this is being done by all the preachers of works and faithless teachers, who shamelessly preach righteousness by works, but condemn faith, or conjugal chastity, who call their lewdness chastity, but true chastity they call lewdness. Now all this might remain hidden, and human nature and reason might never discover such vices, for their works are too attractive and their manners too polished. Indeed, human nature devises all this and delights in it, believing it to be well and right, persisting and becoming hardened in it. Therefore God sets up a sign that our nature may stumble and everybody may learn how much higher is the Christian life than nature and reason. The virtues of nature are sins, its light is darkness its ways are errors. We need an entirely new heart and nature; the natural heart reveals itself as an enemy of God.

[56] This is prefigured by the Philistines, 1 Samuel 5:6, whom God smote with tumors when the ark of God was with them. The tumors are the thoughts of unbelieving hearts, breaking out when the ark of God comes to them, that is to say when the Gospel and Christ are preached, which they will not tolerate. Thus it happens that the hearts of these saints, which otherwise could not be known, become revealed when Christ is held up before them. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:15: “But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man,” for he knows their disposition and the attitude of their hearts when he perceives that they do not accept the Word of God and faith.

II. Of Anna. The Second Part of this Gospel.

“And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher (she was of a great age, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity, and she had been a widow even unto fourscore and four years), who departed not from the temple, worshipping with fastings and supplications night and day.”

[57] Here some might say: From the example of Anna you see that good works are exalted, as for instance fasting and praying and going to church, therefore they must not be condemned. But who has ever condemned good works? We only reject hypocritical and spurious good works. Fasting, praying, going to church are good works, if they are done in the right spirit. But the trouble is that these blockheads explain the Scriptures so awkwardly, noticing only the works and examples of the saints and thinking that now they are able to learn from them and imitate them. Thus they become nothing but apes and hypocrites, for they do not perceive that the Scriptures speak more of the heart than of the deeds of men. The sacrifice and works of Abel are praised in Scripture, but he himself a great deal more. They however disregard the person and observe only the example, take notice of the works and pay no heed to faith, eat the bran and throw away the flour, as we read in Hosea 3:1: “They turn unto other gods, and love cakes of raisins.” If you desire to fast and pray like Anna, well and good. But take good care that first of all you imitate her character, and then her works. Be first of all like Anna. But let us see what Luke says of her works and her character, so that her example may be correctly understood.

[58] In the first place he says that she was a prophetess, and undoubtedly a devout, godly prophetess. Most assuredly the Holy Spirit dwelled in her, and consequently she was good and righteous regardless of all her works. Therefore the works which she produced must also have been good and righteous. So you see that Luke does not want to say that through her works she became holy and a prophetess, but she was a holy prophetess before, and for this reason her works were also good. Why would you mutilate this example and pervert the Gospel, paying most attention to the works, while Luke describes first of all the whole person, and not only the works ?

[59] In the second place he praises her as a widow, who did works becoming her widowhood and her station in life. But he would not represent them as being unusual and the only good works whereby we can serve God, rejecting all others. St. Paul writes of the life of widows in Timothy 5:3-6 as follows: "Honor widows that are widows indeed. But if any widow hath children or grandchildren, let them learn first to show piety toward their own family, and to requite their parents: for this is acceptable in the sight of God. Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, hath her hope set on God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day." But she that giveth herself to pleasure is dead while she liveth."

[60] From this you see that Anna must have been a widow, alone in the world, without any children or parents to take care of, otherwise she would not have served God but the devil by not departing from the temple and neglecting her duty of managing her household according to the will of God. Luke indicates this when he writes that she had been a widow even for fourscore and four years. Everybody may then easily calculate that her parents must have been dead and her children provided for, so that as an aged mother she was cared for by them and she did not have anything to do but to pray and fast and forego all worldly pleasures. Luke does not say that all the eighty-four years of her life were spent in this manner; but at the time when Christ was born and brought into the temple she began to lead such a life, when all things, as well as her children and parents, were provided for and she was entirely alone.

[61] It is therefore a dangerous thing to take notice only of the works, and fail to consider the whole character of a person, as well as his station and calling. God cannot bear to see anyone neglect the duties of his calling or station in life in order to imitate the works of the saints. If therefore a

married woman were to follow Anna in this respect, leave her husband and children, her home and parents in order to go on a pilgrimage, to pray, fast and go to church, she would do nothing else but tempt God, confound the matrimonial estate with the state of widowhood, desert her own calling and do works belonging to others. This would be as much as walking on one's ears, putting a veil over one's feet and a boot on one's head, and turning all things upside down. Good works should be done, and you ought to pray and fast, but you must not thereby be kept from or neglect the duties of your calling and station. The service of God does not consist in the performance of one or two special deeds, nor is it bound to any particular calling, but God may be served in every calling. The duty of Anna and all widows who like her are alone, is praying and fasting, and here St. Luke agrees with St. Paul. The duty of married women is not only praying and fasting, but they should govern their children and household according to the will of God and care for their parents, as St. Paul says in 1 Timothy 5:4: For this reason the Evangelist, in describing the life of Anna takes such great care to mention her station and age, so that he may discourage those who would take notice only of her deeds and draw poison from roses. He first of all draws attention to her calling.

[62] In the third place, the same reason prompts him to write that she lived with a husband seven years from her virginity. Here he exalts the state of matrimony and the duties of that estate, so that nobody may think that he considers only praying and fasting as good works. For she did not devote herself entirely to praying and fasting while she lived with her husband, or during the time of her maidenhood, but only after she had become an aged and lonely widow. Yet her virginity and her wedded life with its duties are also praised and help up as an example of truly good works. Why would you disregard them and only cleave to the deeds of the widow?

[63] And with good purpose does the Evangelist first praise her wedded life and then her widowhood, for he wanted to cut the ground entirely from under the feet of the blind legalists. She was a godly maiden, a godly wife, and a godly widow, and in all these three estates she performed her respective duties.

[64] May you then do likewise. Reflect on your condition, and you will find enough good works to do if you would lead a godly life. Every calling has its own duties, so that we need not inquire for others outside of our

station. Behold, then we will truly serve God, just as Luke says that Anna worshiped with fastings and supplications night and day. But the legalists do not serve God, but themselves, nay, the devil, for they do not perform their duties and forsake their own calling. Thus it depends entirely upon the character of the person and his calling whether his works are good, as we have said above in explaining the Gospel for the Day of St. John the Evangelist. This may suffice for the present. Let us now see what Anna means spiritually.

The Spiritual Meaning of Anna, the Prophetess.

[65] We said in §11 and 12 that by Simeon are signified the holy prophets, who have spoken of Christ in Holy Scripture. Therefore Anna must signify those who stand by and hear this message assenting to it and applying it to themselves, as did Anna, who stood by when Simeon spoke of Christ. Thus Anna means nothing but the holy Synagogue, the people of Israel, whose life and history are recorded in the Bible. For Anna is found in the temple, that is to say in the Scripture. And as Mary signifies the Christian Church, the people of God after the birth of Christ, so Anna signifies the people of God before Christ's birth. Therefore Anna is well-nigh a hundred years old and near her death, while Mary is young and in the prime of life. Thus the Synagogue was on the wane at the time of Christ, while the Church was in its beginning.

[66] It is then indicated here that the saints before the birth of Christ have understood and believed the message of the prophets and all have been saved in Christ and by faith in him, as Christ says of Abraham: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad"; also Luke 10:24: "For I say unto you, that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not." Paul says in Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever," and more plainly in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4: "For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual food; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them: and the rock was Christ." Such and similar passages prove that all the saints before the birth of Christ have like

us been saved in Christ. Therefore we read in Hebrews of examples of faith, of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses and others, who spent their lives in Christ and for Christ who heard him and through the prophet's words knew him, believed in him and waited for his coming.

[67] For this reason all the narratives of the Old Testament so beautifully answer Christ and testify of him with one accord, standing around him just as Anna here literally stood near him. It is a great delight to read and perceive how they all look and point at Christ. Let us notice only one example. Isaac was sacrificed by his father and yet his life was spared, a ram being substituted for him, which Abraham saw behind him caught in the thicket by his horns. Here Christ, the Son of God, is prefigured, who like a mortal man died on the cross. Yet the divine nature did not die, the human nature being sacrificed in its place which is designated in the ram that by his horns (this is to say the preaching of the Gospel, rebuking and punishing the perversity and obstinacy of the scribes and priests) was caught in this thicket, being behind Abraham, that is to say coming after him. Many more important lessons might be learned from this narrative.

[68] So Joseph was sold into Egypt, and after having been in prison became the ruler of the whole land, Genesis 37 and 41. This occurred and was recorded that Christ might be prefigured, who through his sufferings became the Lord of all the world. But who has time enough to explain all these narratives and to show how Samson, David, Solomon, Aaron and others are appropriate and perfect types of Christ?

[69] Luke therefore here uses the word "epistasa" with reference to Anna, which means that she stood over, or beside, or near that which happened to Christ in the temple. In the Latin text we read "superveniens," meaning that she came near at that time. This is also true, but the other expression, that she "stood over" what happened, is better. It means that she pressed forward with great earnestness to see him. Thus we say: How the people press forward to see this or that. Thus do the narratives of Holy Writ act toward Christ, in order that they may typify him.

[70] Yet the saints would not have been saved by this, and probably they did not know at the time that by their deeds they became types of Christ. For our faith cannot be based upon figures and interpretations, but it must first of all be established upon clear passages of Scripture, which must be

explained according to the natural meaning of the words. Then, after the foundation for faith has been laid by the words of Scripture, such interpretations of history must be based upon faith, which is thereby nourished and strengthened. Therefore, as I have said, they were types of Christ only in their outward conduct and works, through which nobody could have been sanctified, but they heartily believed in the Christ who was to come, whom they literally knew from clear passages of Holy Writ.

[71] Thus Christ was promised to Adam and Eve after the fall, when God said to the serpent, Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." This promise holds good for Adam and Eve, and they believed in the seed of the woman, who was to bruise the head of the serpent. So it was until the time of Noah, to whom another promise was given when God said, Genesis 6:18: "But I will establish my covenant with thee." When, therefore, Eve bore Cain, her first son (Genesis 4:1) she rejoiced and believed him to be the seed of whom God had spoken, saying: "I have gotten a man with the help of Jehovah," as if she were to say: This will be the man, the seed, who is to fight against the serpent. She desired to see Christ, but the time was not yet come. Afterwards she realized that Cain was not the Savior and that her faith must look forward to another woman.

[72] Then came the clear promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3 and Genesis 22:18), to whom God said: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," of which we have spoken in explaining the Epistle. The faith of all the saints before the birth of Christ until the time of his coming was based upon this promise, so that this passage may also be referred to by the "bosom of Abraham", of which Christ speaks in Luke 16:22. Such a promise was indeed also made to David, but only by the virtue of the promise to Abraham. This child of Mary then is the seed of the woman, waging war against the serpent in order to destroy sin and death. Therefore we read in the text that the seed is to bruise the head of the serpent, by which undoubtedly the serpent is meant that seduced Eve, namely Satan in the serpent, and Adam and Eve certainly understood it thus. Who will show us another son or seed bruising the head? If it had been said of a mere man, it might as well be understood of Adam as of any of his children. Yet not Adam, nor a child of Adam, was to do it, but a woman's, a virgin's child.

[73] It is well said, in distinction, that this seed is to bruise Satan's head, the seat of life; Satan however will not bruise the head of the seed, but his heel, or the sole of his foot. This means that Satan indeed injures, destroys and kills the external, bodily life and activity of Christ; but the head, that is to say the divine nature, remains alive and even raises from death the heel, or the human nature, which was bruised by Satan. So in all Christians he injures and destroys their life and work, thus bruising their heels; but he cannot touch the head, or faith, and therefore their life and work will also be restored. On the other hand, Satan's feet remain, his strength and fury are great; but his head, that is to say sin and the inmost essence of his life, are bruised. Therefore his feet must die eternally with sin and death. Behold, in this manner did God save the saints of old by his Word and their faith, and has kept them from sin and the power of the devil until the coming of Christ, signified by this saintly Anna.

[74] For this reason she does not take the infant Christ into her arms like Simeon, neither does she speak concerning him like Simeon, but she stands by and speaks about him to others. For the dear fathers of old and the saints have not uttered prophecies concerning Christ like the prophets, neither have they spoken of him, but they have taken the greatest interest in the announcement of the prophets, have believed them firmly and transmitted them to other people and generations, just as Luke here says of Anna.

[75] Everything agrees with this that Luke here relates of her. In the first place, she is a prophetess, that is to say, she has the insight of the prophets. Thus all the saints of old have apprehended Christ in the passages of Scripture by faith, and consequently they were all prophets.

[76] In the second place, she is called Anna, which in Latin is "gratia", meaning favor or grace. The two names, Anna and John (Johannes) are almost one in Hebrew. Anna means gracious, or one who is favored. This signifies that the fathers and saints of old have not received such faith and the promise of God by their own merit, but by the favor and grace of God, according to whose mercy they were pleasing in his sight. In the same manner all men are not acceptable and pleasing to God on account of their worthiness, but only by the grace of God. This is also the way of human nature, which often shows a predilection for something that is unattractive, and it is a common saying among us that love and favor may as likely fall upon a frog as upon purple, or that nobody can make us dislike what we

love. Thus God loves us who are sinful and unworthy, and we are all favored by him. We are all Johns and Annas in his sight.

[77] In the third place, she is a daughter of Phanuel. After Jacob had wrestled with the angel, Genesis 32:30, he called the name of the place Peniel or Phanuel, and said: "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Peniel or Phanuel means "face of God." Now the face of God is nothing but the knowledge of God, and God can only be known by faith in his Word. The Word and promises of God declare nothing but comfort and grace in Christ, and whoever believes them beholds the grace and goodness of God. This is the knowledge of God, which cheers and blesses the heart, as David says in Psalm 4:6-7: "Jehovah, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart," and Psalm 80:8: "And cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved." We read much in Scripture concerning the hiding and showing of the countenance of God.

[78] Behold, in this way the fathers and saints of old were spiritual children of Phanuel, of divine knowledge and wisdom, which filled them with joy. To this they attained by faith in the divine promise and thus they became prophets. But faith and the promises of God they obtained only because they were favored by him, out of God's pure grace and mercy.

[79] This brings us to the fourth point, namely that she was of the tribe of Asher. Asher means happiness (Genesis 30:13). Faith makes us children of divine wisdom and blessedness. For faith destroys sin and redeems from death, as Christ says in Mark 16:16: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." To be saved means nothing but redemption from sin and death.

[80] Anna then is a daughter of Phanuel and Asher, full of wisdom and having a good conscience in the face of all sins and the terrors of death. All this is bestowed by faith in the divine promise of mercy; and thus one follows the other: Anna, the prophetess, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. This means that we obtain the promise of God and believe in it only by divine grace, whereby we learn to know God and his goodness thoroughly, which fills the heart with joy, security and blessedness, and delivers us completely from sin and death.

[81] We come now in the fifth place to the more profound and spiritual interpretations. She lived with a husband seven years, and after that was a widow for eighty-four years, without a husband. Had one sufficient time

and skill he might find the whole Bible contained in this number. But in order that we may see how, as Christians, we do not need Aristotle or human lore, but have in the Scriptures enough to study for all eternity, if we should so desire. Let us also consider this number in connection with the wonders of Scripture mentioned before. The number seven is commonly taken to signify our temporal life, the life of this body, because all time is measured by the seven days of the week (Genesis 1), which is the first and best standard for the measurement of time, established by the Scriptures. For in Genesis 1 Moses writes that God first created days and appointed seven of them as a definite period of time. Of weeks were then made months, and of months years, into which our whole life is divided. These seven years therefore signify the whole course of the temporal life and conduct of the saints of old.

[82] But who was the husband? St. Paul explains in Romans 7:2 that a husband signifies the law. For as a woman is bound to her husband while he liveth, so all are bound to the law, who live under it. Now the law has been given to no people on earth except to this Anna, the Jewish people, as Paul says in Romans 3:2 that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. In Psalm 147:19-20

we read: "He showeth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his ordinances unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his ordinances, they have not known them ;" also Psalm 103:7: "He made known his ways unto Moses, his doings unto the children of Israel." The Gospel however he did not reveal only to one nation, but to all the world, as we read in Psalm 19:4: "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world," which means the words of the apostles. Therefore Anna, who lived seven years with her husband, signifies the people of Israel under the law, in their outward conduct and temporal life.

[83] Now we have heard in the Epistle for today that those who live under the law do not live aright, for they do the works of the law unwillingly and without delight, and are bondservants, not children. For the law will hold no one righteous who does not keep it willingly. Such willingness however is only bestowed by faith, as has often been said. Faith will produce righteous works and fulfill the law. It is all the same to the believer whether he is under the law or free from it, seeing that Christ also was under the law.

[84] But St. Luke, or rather the Holy Spirit, desires to show that this saintly Anna, the holy people of old, was not only under the law and a bondservant. He points out that besides her life under the law she also walked in the freedom of faith and the Spirit, fulfilling the law not only with outward works like a bondservant, but rather in faith. This is signified by the eighty-four years of her widowhood, meaning the spiritual life of faith led by the saints of old. For the widowhood, the life without a husband, signifies freedom from the law. Thus the life under the law and the life of faith existed, side by side. The believers of old, as to their souls were justified without the works of the law, alone by faith, and in this respect they were truly widows; but in their external conduct and as to their bodies they were subject to the law. They did not, however, believe that they were justified by works, but having been justified by faith, they kept the law voluntarily, cheerfully and to the glory of God. He who lives in this manner may also do the works of the law, which will not harm him nor make a bond-servant of him, for Christ and the apostles also have kept the law. Behold, these are the people who at the same time live seven years with a husband and eighty-four years without a husband, who at the same time are free from the law and yet under the law as St. Paul says of himself in Corinthians 9:20: "I am to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law."

[85] How can he be at the same time under the law and free from the law? In order to gain others he gladly performed the external works of the law, but in his heart he clung to faith, by which he was justified, without the works of the law. For he fulfilled the law, and yet would not be justified by it, which indeed is impossible. In this manner Anna, the holy people, has kept the law. For whoever believes and has been justified by faith, may keep not only the law of God, but the laws of the whole world, and they will not hinder him; for he keeps them voluntarily, not in the opinion that thereby he acquires righteousness. But those people who only follow Anna in this that they live seven years with a husband, and do not live eighty-four years without a husband, are without the Spirit and faith and are bondservants. They believe that by doing the works of the law they become righteous. But in this manner they can never become righteous and pious, as today's Epistle sufficiently explains. It is well arranged that first the seven years of wedded life and then the eighty-four years of widowhood are

mentioned, for St. Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 15:46: “Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural.”

[86] If man is to become spiritual and a believer, he must necessarily first be under the law; for no one can know his faults without the law, and he who does not know his sin will not long for grace. But the law demands so much that man must realize and confess that he is unable to satisfy those demands. Then he must despair of himself and in all humility sigh for the grace of God. Behold, therefore the seven years come first, the law precedes grace as John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ. The law kills and condemns the natural, sensual man, so that grace may lift up the spiritual, inner man.

[87] There is, however, nothing said of the years of Anna’s virginity, which signifies the unfruitful life before either the law or grace has been in operation, and which is worthless before God. Therefore virginity as a barren state was altogether despised and disapproved in the Old Testament.

[88] But how is it that faith or the spiritual life of the inner man, which without the law is widowed, without a husband, is signified by the number 84? Let us here follow the example of St. Augustine and try to find out the allegorical significance. Everyone knows that the numbers seven and twelve are the most glorious in Holy Scripture. For these two numbers are mentioned frequently, undoubtedly because there were twelve apostles who founded and established the faith in all the world, and who exalted only faith by their doctrine and life. Whereas the one Moses received the law from the angels, thereby uniting Anna to a husband and demanding outward works from men. Thus the apostles, who were twelve times more in number than Moses, received the Gospel, not from angels, but from the Lord himself, and made us widows, free by faith and justified without works. Now the saints of old, as we have said before, possessed this apostolic faith along with the law. Therefore they have not only acquired the number seven, but also the number twelve, have not only possessed the one Moses, but also the apostles who were twelve times more, have lived as well under the law as free from the law, as we have heard before. Thus the number seven signifies the one Moses, and the number twelve times as many as Moses. It is therefore unquestionable that the number twelve signifies the apostles, the apostolic doctrine, the apostolic faith, the true widowhood, the spiritual life without the law. So also the number seven signifies Moses, the

teaching of Moses, the works of the law, the real matrimonial state of bondage.

[89] The twelve apostles are typified by the twelve patriarchs, the twelve precious stones on the holy garment of Aaron, the twelve princes of the people of Israel, the twelve stones taken out of the Jordan, the twelve foundations and gates of the new Jerusalem etc. For the whole Scriptures emphasize faith and the Gospel, preached and established by the apostles. Thus this faith is also signified by these eighty-four years, which contains the number twelve in a wonderful manner.

[90] In the first place, eighty-four is equal to twelve times seven. This signifies that the teacher of the law is only one, Moses, being only one time seven, that is to say the law and the life under the law. But the apostles are twelve, twelve times as many as Moses. Eighty-four bears the same relation to seven as twelve does to one. Now as the law was given through one and the Gospel through twelve, it is evident that seven signifies Moses and eighty-four the apostles. So the disciples of Moses are represented by Anna in the state of matrimony, while the widow Anna signifies the followers of the apostles, the former emphasizing external conduct, the latter a life in the Spirit and in faith. This also signifies that faith exceeds the works as much as twelve exceeds the number one, or eighty-four the number seven. It comprises the whole sum and inheritance, as also the apostles calls it "holokleros", the whole inheritance, 1 Thessalonians 5:23; for the number twelve comprises all the people of Israel, divided into twelve tribes. He who believes possesses all things, is an heir of heaven and a blessed child of God.—Notice also the divine arrangement here. As Anna was not a widow for twelve years nor a married woman for one year, God ordained it so that the years of her wedded life were seven and those of her widowhood eighty-four in number, the former number bearing the same relation to the latter that one does to twelve. Besides this, there is thus also found, as we have seen, a greater spiritual significance in the number seven, in her wedded life and in the state of her widowhood.

[91] In the second place, the arithmeticians divide numbers into so-called aliquot parts, that is to say they examine how often a given number may be divided into equal parts. Thus the number twelve may be divided five times into equal parts. For twelve, in the first place, is twelve times one, all aliquot parts; secondly, six times two; thirdly, four times three;

fourthly, three times four; fifthly, two times six. In this case there can be no further division into aliquot parts. Seven and five are also twelve; likewise three and nine, one and eleven, but those numbers are not aliquot parts of twelve. Now they add together these aliquot parts to find their sum. Thus, the aliquot parts of twelve are 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, which added together make 16, exceeding the number itself by four. This is called the abundant number, because the sum of the aliquot parts exceeds the number itself. Again, sometimes the aliquot parts of a number added together make less than the number itself. For instance eight is eight times one, four times two, two times four. But 1, 2, and 4 makes only seven, one less than eight. This is called the deficient number. Between these two is the perfect number, which is equal to the sum of its aliquot parts. Thus, six is six times one, three times two and two times three; now one, two and three added together make six.

[92] Notice here also that Moses, represented by the number seven, cannot thus be divided, as all odd numbers cannot. For this division is only possible with even numbers. But eighty-four, which signifies the apostles, is an abundant number and can be divided eleven times into aliquot parts. Judas, the traitor, does not belong to the abundant number, although he is one of the number. He is omitted here, so that there may not be twelve. He belongs to the number of the apostles in name, but not in reality. In the first place, eighty-four is 84 times one; then 42 times 2, 28 times 3, 21 times 4, 14 times 6, 12 times 7, 7 times 12, 6 times 14, 4 times 21, 3 times 28, times 42. If you add together the aliquot parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 12, 14, 21, 28, 42, the result is 140, 56 more than the number itself.

[93] All this signifies that Moses undivided, or the law, like the number seven, remained by itself, having not passed beyond the Jewish people nor exercised an influence upon other nations. But the spiritual life and the Gospel preached by the apostles has spread abundantly over all the world. And as the number one compared with twelve is very small and trifling, so that it could hardly look more unimportant, so also the number seven compared with eighty-four is very insignificant. For the law with its works confers nothing upon its servants but temporal possessions and worldly honor, a poor and wretched possession, which will not increase, but surely decrease. On the other hand, one is great and will multiply instead of decreasing; for faith has the blessing of God and abounds forever with possessions and honor.—We have now rambled about sufficiently and have

seen that no tittle of the Scriptures was written in vain. The dear fathers of old have shown us great examples of faith, and with their works have always pointed to that in which we should believe, namely Christ and his Gospel. Therefore we read nothing concerning them in vain, but their whole conduct strengthens and improves our faith. Let us now continue with Anna.

[94] Luke says that she departed not from the temple. What a salutary and necessary exhortation! We have heard that by the temple is signified the Holy Scriptures. It was a special sin of the people that they liked to listen to false prophets and human doctrines; this they proved by erecting altars outside of the temple, in high places and valleys. Moses spoke against this in Deuteronomy 5:32 and Deuteronomy 12:32, when he said: "What thing soever I command you, that shall ye observe to do: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." He desires, as it were, the people to be like Anna, who did not depart from the temple. They were however not all like Anna, but turned from the temple to their altars, from the law of God to their own devices and to false prophets.

[95] But this was nothing compared with the state of affairs at the present time. We have not only been seduced by the pope and human doctrines to depart from the temple, but we have also arbitrarily destroyed and desecrated it with all kinds of profanations and abominations, more than we can express. But we ought to heed what St. Anthony so diligently taught his disciples, namely that nobody should do anything that has not been commanded or advised by God in the Scriptures, so that we might by all means remain in the temple. Psalm 1:1-2 speaks of this: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: but his delight is in the law of Jehovah; and on his law does he meditate day and night." In Peter 4:18 we read: "And if the righteous is scarcely saved, who is in the temple" (Luther's translation). This means that Satan also tempts those who trust only in the Word of God; they are scarcely saved. How then will those secure and reckless people be saved who base their faith upon the doctrines of men?

[96] A holy life cannot endure human doctrines, they are a stumbling-block and a dangerous snare. We must remain in the temple and never depart from it. This was done by the saints of old, of whom St. Paul speaks

in Romans 11:4, where he quotes the answer of God to Elijah: "I have left for myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal." David complains of these persecutors and ensnarers in Psalm 140:4-5: "Keep me, O Jehovah, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man: who have purposed to thrust aside my steps. The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me." All this is directed against human doctrines which take us away from the temple. For the Word of God and the doctrines of men cannot agree at all with each other in the same heart. Yet these senseless enemies of souls, the Papists with their Antichrist, the pope, declare that we must teach and observe more than is found in the Bible. With their ecclesiastical ranks and orders they lead the whole world to hell.

[97] Finally Luke says of Anna that she worshipped with fastings and supplications night and day. Here we see how good works follow faith. She must first be Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, a widow even unto fourscore and four years, not departing from the temple: then her fasting and praying is right, then the sacrifice of Abel is acceptable, then God may be served with fastings and supplications night and day. But whoever starts with works reverses all things and obtains nothing. Thus, after St. Paul has taught the Romans faith, he begins in Romans 12:1 to teach them many good works, exhorting them to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which would be their spiritual service. This is rendered to God in that the body is mortified by fasting, watching and labors, which is done by Anna.

[98] All the saints of old have done this, for fasting means all chastisement and discipline of the body. Although the soul is just and holy by faith, the body is not yet entirely free from sin and carnal appetites, wherefore it must be subdued and disciplined and made subject to the soul, as St. Paul says of himself in 1 Corinthians 9:27: "But I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. We also read in 1 Peter 2:5 that we should offer up spiritual sacrifices, that is to say not sheep nor calves, as under the law of Moses, but our own body and ourselves, by the mortification of sin in our flesh and the discipline of the body. No one can do this who does not first believe.

[99] Therefore I have often said that the works which follow faith should not be done with the intention of meriting righteousness; for this must exist before good works can be done. They must be done with a view to discipline the body and to serve our neighbor. Good works are a true service of God if they are done freely and voluntarily, to the honor of God. Why should he desire us to fast if thereby we did not suppress our sin and flesh, which according to his will should be subdued? But many fast only to please the saints or at special seasons, not in order to discipline the body. Such fasting however is entirely worthless.

[100] But Anna does not fast only on special days, on Saturdays and Fridays, on apostles' or ember days, nor does she know anything about a diversity of meats. But Luke says that she worshipped night and day and thereby served God, which means that she continually disciplined her body, not because she desired to do a meritorious work, but in order to serve God and to subdue sin.

[101] St. Paul also speaks of this fasting in 2 Corinthians 6:4-5, when he says among other things, that we should commend ourselves as ministers of God in fastings. But our foolish fasting contrived by men only consists in not partaking of meat, eggs, butter or milk for a few days, not as a service of God and with the intention to discipline the body and subdue the flesh; but thereby we only serve the pope, the Papists and the fishmongers.

[102] Anna worshipped night and day, therefore she must certainly also have watched. But we must not believe that she prayed and fasted night and day without intermission, for she was obliged also to eat, drink, sleep and rest. Fasting and praying were the mode of life she pursued night and day. Doing something during the day or at night does not mean that we do it all day and all night.

[103] This is the second part of the service of God, by which the soul is offered up to him, as the body is by fasting. And by prayer we do not merely understand oral prayer, but also the hearing, proclaiming, contemplating and meditating on the Word of God. Many psalms are prayers, although they hardly contain a petition; others teach some lesson or rebuke sin, and by meditating upon them we converse with God, with ourselves and with men. Behold, such was the service rendered to God by the dear fathers and saints of old, who sought nothing but the honor of God

and the salvation of men. Thus we read of a great longing on the part of the ancient fathers in Scripture and their longing for Christ and the salvation of the world. This can especially be noticed by anyone in the Psalms.

[104] But at the present time people only pray at stated times, count beads and rattle off their prayers. Nobody thinks seriously of asking and obtaining something from God, but they only perform it as a duty obligatory upon them, and then are satisfied. As a thrasher who wields his flail they move their tongue, and only earn bread for the body. Much less do they trouble themselves by serving God with their prayers and petitioning him to relieve the general need of Christendom, but even the best among them believe they have done enough when they are pious for themselves and pray only for themselves. Therefore, hypocrites as they are, they deserve nothing but hell with their prayers, for they serve neither God nor men, but only their own body and advantage. If they wished to serve God and their neighbor as they ought, they would not think of the number of prayers and psalms they repeat, but with all their hearts would seek the honor of God and the salvation of men, which would be a true service of God. Then for one thing they earnestly desire they would often pray a whole day. This would indeed be praying and worshipping like Anna. When Luke writes that she worshipped God with supplications, he condemns the multitude of our foolish prayers, whereby we only increase and multiply our sins, because we do not serve and seek God. Now let us return again to our text. “And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks unto God, and spoke of him to all them that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

[105] Our Latin texts read. “for the redemption of Israel.” but the Greek has: “that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.” Anna spoke to those who were in Jerusalem and were waiting for the redemption. For, as she did not depart from the temple, she could only speak to those who were in Jerusalem, either to the inhabitants or to visitors. In the spiritual interpretation we have spoken sufficiently of the meaning of her standing near. For when we come with Christ into the temple of the Scriptures to present him to God with thanksgiving, there is found at that very hour also this holy Anna, with all the saints of the whole synagogue, who unanimously look and point at him with their faith and their whole life.

[106] We also notice here the great distinction conferred upon this holy woman, who was favored more than many great people when she recognized this poor child as the true Savior. There were undoubtedly priests present who received the offerings of Joseph and Mary, but did not know the child and perhaps considered the words of Simeon and Anna as mere old wives' talk. She must have been specially illumined by the Holy Spirit, and a saintly woman in the sight of God, who enlightened her more than others.

[107] Behold, five persons are here brought together: the infant Christ, his mother Mary, Joseph, Simeon, and Anna. By this small number of people every station in life is represented, husband and wife, young and old, virgin and widow, the married and the unmarried. Here Christ begins to gather around him people of every honorable station, and will not be alone. Whoever, then, is not found in one of these states, is not on the way to salvation.

[108] "She gave thanks unto God." In the Hebrew tongue different meanings are attached to the word "confess", for which we need various expressions, as for instance: to confess (sins), to acknowledge, to give thanks. Thus to give thanks is in Hebrew expressed by the word "confess," and very appropriately so. For to give thanks is nothing but to acknowledge the kindness of the benefactor, and that the gift is not deserved, to confess that we have received benefits. He who will acknowledge and confess this will also sincerely give thanks. To "confess" means also to admit something. Thus Christ says in Matthew 10:82-88: "Everone therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven."

[109] Now, as it has been said above in explaining the blessing of Simeon that it is a great and extraordinary virtue to bless Christ whom all the world rejects, so it is also a remarkable deed to give thanks to God for Christ. It is done by those who know him, but there are only a few of them. The others blaspheme God, condemn, persecute and oppose Christ and his doctrine. They treat him and God his Father as they treat his doctrine, according to his words in Luke 10:16 "He that rejecteth you rejecteth me; and he that rejecteth me rejecteth him that sent me." It is a terrible thing that the world is full of blasphemers and persecutors, and that we must live

among them. St. Paul predicts in 2 Timothy 3:1-2, that in the last days there will be many railers. This prophecy is now being fulfilled by the pope and the great schools, the convents and monasteries that do nothing else but reject, persecute and condemn the Gospel of Christ.

[110] May you therefore consider it a manifestation of the grace of God in you when you learn to know Christ and give thanks to God for him, when you do not regard him an accursed heretic and seducer and do not blaspheme, despise and forsake God and his teaching, as is done by the great multitude. For Christ does not first of all want his person and name exalted, which is done by all his enemies, but he requires that his doctrine be honored, which is the greatest art. He himself says in Luke 6:46: “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say ?” and Mark 8:38: “For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him.” You perceive here that he cares most for his doctrine. The pope and the Papists also call him Lord, indeed, in his name, to his honor and in his service they reject his doctrine, slay his Anna and persecute her throughout the world. It is dreadful and unbearable to see how great multitudes of people blaspheme God and his Christ, and in their fanaticism go down to hell.

[111] He is a sign which is spoken against, and more stumble and fall against him at the present time than ever before. Deo gratias (Thanks be to God !) is a common saying, but there is scarcely one among a thousand who says it in truth. At the time of Elijah, which was still a gracious time, there were left only seven thousand among the Jewish people, who without doubt numbered more than a million; but how many may be left in these last times which Daniel calls the times of the indignation (Daniel 11:36!)? We might indeed ask God with the words of Psalm 89:49: “Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy faithfulness?”

[112] Anna did not only give thanks unto God but she also spoke of him to all them that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. Luke has a special reason for adding that Anna spoke of Christ only to those who were looking for the redemption. There were certainly not many of them, and none at all among the highly educated priests. What could these great, holy and cultured people learn of such an old, foolish woman! They considered

themselves the real leaders of the people. Thus the words of Anna were undoubtedly despised by these great gentlemen. For the Word of God concerning Christ must necessarily be contemptible, foolish, heretical, sacrilegious and presumptuous to the ears of these great, learned and spiritual men. Therefore it is only received by the hungering, longing souls that look for the redemption, as Luke says here, who feel their sin and desire grace, light and consolation, who know nothing of any wisdom and righteousness of their own.

[113] Now faith and the knowledge of Christ cannot be silent. They break forth and testify, so that others may be helped and receive the light, as we read in Psalm 116:10: "I believe, for I will speak." Faith is too kind and bountiful to keep all such treasures to itself. But when it speaks it is persecuted by all the unbelieving saints; yet it does not care and goes right ahead. And who knows how Anna was treated! But perhaps they spared her on account of her age and sex, and simply despised her as a silly fool. Otherwise her life would hardly have been preserved, because she proclaimed such error and heresy, declaring of Christ such marvelous things, in opposition to all the doctrines and systems of the learned priests and teachers of the law, who are filled with wisdom and righteousness to such a degree that they do not need any redemption, but deserve only a crown and reward for their good works and great merits. For if we speak of the redemption of Christ we declare that they are bound in sin and blindness. This however is too much for these great saints, to be called blind sinners! Therefore they cannot endure hearing anything of Christ and his redemption, and consequently they condemn it as a dangerous error and a diabolical heresy.

[114] We now easily understand how it was that the spiritual Anna gives thanks to God and speaks of Christ to all that are looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. For the dear saints of the Old Testament knew Christ well. Therefore by their whole life they praise God and give thanks to him, exemplifying the Bible and proclaiming only this redemption, how Christ came solely for those who need him and hunger after him. This is proved by all the narratives of the Old Testament. For God never assisted those who consider themselves strong and not forsaken. On the other hand, he never forsook those who were needy and desired his help. This might here be

corroborated by all the stories of the Bible, but it is sufficiently clear and manifest to all who will read them.

[115] The Evangelist in writing of these things mentions especially Jerusalem, for the reason that Jerusalem means a vision of peace and signifies the hearts that are peaceable, not quarrelsome. St. Paul writes in Romans 2:8 that the people who are factious will not obey the truth. Divine truth demands tranquil hearts that listen attentively and are desirous to learn. But those who brawl and bluster, who are pigheaded and demand signs and reasons before accepting the truth, will never find it. They are in the turmoil of Babylon and do not know the peace of Jerusalem. Therefore they neither look for the redemption, nor listen to the words of Anna. But we may also read “Israel” instead of “Jerusalem;” it does not matter much which one of these two words is here used.

III. The Return of the Parents of Jesus to Nazareth, and the Childhood of Jesus

“And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.”

[110] The Gospel for the day of Candlemas will explain what the things are which they accomplished according to the law of the Lord. The significance of Galilee and Nazareth will be explained in the Gospel for the festival of the Annunciation. But we must refer here to the words of St. Matthew (2:13 ff.), who writes that after the wise men had departed, who found Christ in Bethlehem and offered unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and bade him flee into Egypt with the child and his mother, and that Joseph did so. How does this agree with the narrative of Luke, according to whom they returned to Nazareth after six weeks had passed, and they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord? We must here either assume that they went into Egypt immediately after the expiration of the six weeks of purification, and then returned to Nazareth from Egypt in due time, or we must believe, which is also my opinion, that they returned home, immediately after the six weeks had elapsed, as Luke relates here. Then the appearance of the angel who commanded them to flee into Egypt, whereof Matthew speaks, occurred not in Bethlehem, but at Nazareth; and

indeed it took place after the departure of the wise men, as Matthew says, but not directly afterward. But Matthew writes thus because immediately after the departure of the wise men he records the flight into Egypt, and omits what Luke relates here of the presentation in the temple. Thus it is clear that the two Evangelists do not disagree.

[117] It is also pointed out here how they were obliged to take up their cross. After the poor mother had been away from home for seven or eight weeks on account of the sudden birth of her child, and after having now returned and settled down to rest from their travels, they must again leave everything behind and without delay start on a much longer journey. Thus the Lord Christ begins his journeys in his earliest childhood, always wandering on this earth and having no definite place or abode where he might stay. How differently from other children is this royal child reared and treated, how did he, especially in this case, taste the sorrows and troubles of life! The poor mother must flee with the poor child into Egypt from the wrath of Herod. We shall speak more of this when this Gospel is explained. "And the child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

[118] Some inquisitive people who were not satisfied with the information given in the Scriptures have desired to know what Christ did in his childhood, and have received their reward for their curiosity. Some fool or knave has fabricated a legendary book on the childhood of Christ, and has not been afraid nor slow to write down his lies and frauds, relating how Christ went to school and a great deal more of absurd and blasphemous tomfoolery. Thus he jests with his lies at the expense of the Lord, whom all the angels adore and fear, and before whom all creatures tremble, so that this rascal would have deserved that a great millstone had been hanged about his neck and he had been sunk in the depth of the sea, because he did not esteem the Lord of all more than to make him an object of his absurd buffoonery. Yet people may still be found who print this book, read and believe it, which, in fact, was the object of this miscreant. Therefore I say that such books ought to be burned by the pope, the bishops and the universities, if they would follow Christ. But they produce books that are a great deal worse, are blind leaders and remain such.

[119] Christ never went to school, for no schools like ours existed at that time. He did not even have an elementary education, as we read in the

Gospel of St. John 7:15: the Jews were marveling, saying: “How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” We also read in Mark 6:2-3 that they were astonished at his wisdom and said: “What is the wisdom that is given unto this man, and what mean such mighty works wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?” They thought it strange that a layman and the son of a carpenter should have such great knowledge, having never studied. Therefore they were offended in him, as the Evangelist relates, and thought that he must be possessed of an evil spirit.

[120] Let us therefore be satisfied with the narrative of the Gospel, which tells us enough of his childhood. Luke writes that “the child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom” etc. Later on he writes that he was subject to his parents. What else should he have related? The time was not yet come when he performed miracles. He was brought up like other children, with the exception, that as some children excel others in ability, Christ also was an extraordinarily clever child. Thus no more could be written concerning him than is recorded by Luke. If he had related how he ate, drank, and what he did every day, how he walked, stood, slept and watched, what kind of a narrative would it have been?

[121] It is not necessary to believe, neither do I think it is true, that his coat which was woven from the top throughout, grew with him in size from his youth. Probably his mother made it, and in that country it was the common garment of the poor. We should have a pure faith that accepts nothing which is not found in the Scriptures. Enough is contained in the Scriptures that we may believe, especially since Christ did not begin to perform his miracles and mighty deeds until after his baptism, as it is written in John 2:11 and Acts 10:37.

[122] Some hairsplitters are perplexed by the words of Luke according to which Christ, although he was God, waxed strong, filled with wisdom. That he grew, they admit, which is indeed surprising, as they are very swift in inventing miracles where there are none and despise those in which they should believe. The reason for their perplexity and their anxious questions is this, that they have invented an article of faith according to which Christ from the first moment of conception was filled with wisdom and the spirit to the highest possible degree, just as if the soul were a wineskin which may be completely filled. They themselves do not understand what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm, as St. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 1:7.

[128] Even if I could not understand what Luke means when he says that Christ waxed strong, filled with wisdom, I should yet believe his word because it is the Word of God, and should honor it as the truth, although I might never find out how it could be true; and I should abandon my imaginary article of faith as human foolishness, which is far too worthless to be a standard of divine truth. We all must acknowledge that Christ was not always cheerful, notwithstanding the fact that he who is filled with the Spirit is also full of joy, since joy is the fruit of the Spirit, according to Galatians 5:22. Neither was Christ always gentle and calm, but sometimes he was indignant and vexed, as for instance when he cast the Jews out of the temple, John 2:15-17, and when he was angry and grieved at the hardening of their hearts, Mark 3:5.

[124] Therefore we must understand the words of Luke simply as applying to the human nature of Christ, which was an instrument and temple of the Godhead. And although he was always filled with the Spirit and with grace, yet the Spirit did not always move him, but prompted him now to do this, now something else, just as necessity required. Although the Spirit was in him from the first moment of the conception, yet as his body grew and his reason naturally developed as in other men, so also was he filled and moved by the Spirit more and more. It is no delusion when Luke says that he waxed strong and advanced in wisdom, but the words tell us plainly in age and in stature, and as he grew in stature his reason developed, and with the development of his reason he became stronger in the Spirit and filled with wisdom before God, in himself and before men, which needs no further explanation. This is a Christian explanation which can be accepted without any danger, and it does not matter whether it overthrows any imaginary articles of faith.

[125] St. Paul agrees with this when he says in Philippians 2:7 that Christ, who existed in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man. St. Paul does not speak here of the likeness of Christ's human nature to our own, but he says: Christ, the man, after he had taken upon himself human nature, was made in the likeness of men, and found in fashion as a man. Now as all men grow naturally in body, reason, mind and wisdom, which is a universal experience, Luke agrees with Paul when he says that Christ grew in the same manner, yet being an extraordinary child that

developed more rapidly than others. For his bodily constitution was nobler, and the gifts and graces of God were bestowed upon him more abundantly than upon others. Thus the sense of Luke's words is easily understood, perspicuous and simple, if only these wiseacres would leave out their subtleties.—So much on this Gospel.

New Year's Day. The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus. Angel of the Lord.

Text: Luke 2:21.

21 And when eight days were fulfilled for circumcising him, his name was called Jesus, which was so called by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

The Circumcision, and Choosing the Name, as was the Custom at Circumcision.

[1] It is the custom “to distribute the New Year” from the pulpit on this day, as if there were not enough other useful and salutary matter to preach, and it were necessary to present such useless fables in place of the Word of God, and to make a sport and disgrace of so serious an office. The Gospel requires us to preach on the circumcision and the name of Jesus; and this we will do!

I. Of the Circumcision of Jesus.

[2] First let us ask the wise woman, Dame Jezebel, natural reason: Is it not a foolish, ridiculous, useless command, when God demands circumcision? Could he find no member of the body but this? If Abraham had here followed reason, he would not have believed that it was God who demanded this of him. For in our eyes it is such a foolish thing that there can scarcely be anything more absurd. The Jews had to endure great infamy and disgrace on account of it, were despised by everybody and treated as an

abomination. Moreover, there is no use in it. What benefit is it, if the body is mutilated? Man is made no better by it, for everything depends upon the soul.

[3] But such are all of God's commandments and works, and such they are to be. In our eyes they appear most foolish, most contemptible, and most useless, in order that haughty Reason, who deems herself clever and wise, may be put to shame and blinded, and may surrender her self-conceit and submit to God, give him honor, and believe that whatever he appoints, is most useful, most honorable, and most wise, although she does not see it and thinks quite differently. If God had given a sign which would have been suitable to her and useful, wise, and honorable in her estimation, she would have remained in her old skin, would not have surrendered her haughtiness, would have continued in her custom of seeking and loving only honor, gain, and wisdom on earth, and so would have become ever more deeply rooted in worldly, temporal things. But now that he presents to her foolish, useless, and contemptible things, he tears her away from the seeking after gain, honor, and wisdom, and teaches her to regard only the invisible, divine wisdom, honor, and gain, and for its sake willingly to suffer the lack of temporal honor, gain, and wisdom, and to be a fool, poor, unprofitable, and despised for God's sake. Therefore God was not concerned about the circumcision, but about the humiliation of proud nature and reason.

[4] So we also have baptism in the New Testament, in order that we should be buried in the water, and believe that we are thereby cleansed from sins and saved; also, that Christ's body is in the bread of the altar; also, that we worship the crucified man as Lord and God. All this is immeasurably far above, and contrary to, reason. So the works and words of God are all contrary to reason, and this, in turn, is also contrary to God and recoils at the sign that is spoken against. Before men it was a very foolish speech, when Noah built the ark and said, the world would be flooded. So Lot must needs have been a fool, when he said, Sodom and Gomorrah would perish. Moses and Aaron were fools before King Pharaoh. In short, God's Word and his preachers must be fools, as St. Paul says, 1 Corinthians 1:21. In all this God seeks nothing but this humility, that man bring his reason into captivity and be subject to divine truth. Abraham and his seed received the foolish rite of circumcision, in order that by it they should give glory to God and suffer him alone to be wise.

[5] Now circumcision was an external mark, by which God's people were known in distinction from other nations; just as we see that every prince gives his people and army his standard and watchword, by which they are known among themselves and by which foreigners can tell, to what lord they belong. Thus God has never left his people without such a sign or watchword, by which it can outwardly be known in the world where his people are to be found. Jews are known by circumcision: that was their divine mark. Our mark is baptism and the body of Christ. Therefore the ancient fathers called these signs, characters, symbola, tesseras, that is, watchwords or standards, what we now call sacraments, that is, sacred signs. For where there is baptism, there certainly are Christians, be they where they will in the world. It matters not if they are not under the pope, as he claims; for he would like to make of himself a sacrament and a Christian watchword.

[6] Let this be enough concerning the temporal reason for circumcision. We will now also look at the spiritual reason and its significance. First, why did he not command to circumcise a finger, hand, foot, ear, or eye, or some other member? Why did he select just that which in human life serves for no work or employment and which was created by God for natural birth and multiplication? If evil was to be cut off, then certainly the hand or the tongue, of all members, ought to have been circumcised: for by the tongue and hands all wickedness is perpetrated among men.

[7] It is said that it was done for the reason, that evil lust manifests itself most in this member of the body; wherefore also Adam and Eve felt the disobedience of their flesh there, and sought a covering for their nakedness. That is all true; but in addition to that it also signifies, as we are wont to say, that God does not condemn or save the person on account of his works, but his works on account of the person. Accordingly, our fault lies not in our works, but in our nature. The person, nature, and entire existence are corrupt in us because of Adam's fall. Therefore no work can be good in us, until our nature and personal life are changed and renewed. The tree is not good, therefore its fruits are bad.

[8] Thus God has here taught everyone, that nobody can become righteous by works or laws, and that all works and labors to become righteous and be saved are in vain, as long as the nature and person are not renewed. You see now that, had he commanded to circumcise the hand or

the tongue, this would have been a sign that the fault to be changed lay in the words or works; that he was favorable to the nature and person, and hated only the words and works. But now, in selecting that member which has no work except that the nature and personal existence arise thereby, he gives clearly to understand that the fault lies in the entire state of the nature, that its birth and its origin are corrupt and sin. This is original sin, or the sin of the nature, or the sin of the person, the truly chief sin. If this did not exist, there would neither be any actual sin. This sin is not done, like all other sins; but it exists, lives, and does all sins, and is the essential sin, that sins not for an hour or a season; but wherever and as long as the person exists.

[9] God looks at this sin of the nature alone. This can be eradicated by no law, by no punishment, even if there were a thousand hells: but the grace of God alone, which makes the nature pure and new, must purge it away. The law only manifests it and teaches how to recognize it, but does not save from it; the law restrains only the hand or member, it cannot restrain the person and nature from being sinful; for in birth the nature has already anticipated the law, and has become sin before the law could forbid it. Just as little as it lies in one's human power to be born and to receive natural existence, so little does it lie in his power to be without sin or to escape from it. He who has created us, he alone must take it away. Therefore he first gives the law, by which man recognizes this sin and thirsts for grace: then he also gives the Gospel and saves him.

[10] In the second place, why does he command to circumcise males only, when nature and birth involve the woman also? The prophet also complains more of the mother than of the father, when he says, Psalm 51:5: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." It was surely done on account of Christ and his mother, because he was to come, and because it was possible that a natural man and person could be born of a woman without sin and natural intercourse. But in all conception from a man, the man sins as well as the woman, and sin on either side cannot be avoided. Therefore Christ willed not to be conceived of a man, in order that his mother also might not be under the necessity of sinning and of conceiving him in sin. Therefore he made use of her womanly flesh and body for natural birth, but not for natural conception, and was conceived and born a true man without sin. Since, therefore, it is

possible that a pure, innocent birth, nature, and person may be derived from a woman; but from a man only a sinful birth, nature, and person; therefore circumcision was imposed upon males only, in order to signify that all birth from man is sinful and condemned, requiring circumcision and change: but that a birth derived only from a woman without a man, is innocent and uncondemned, requiring no circumcision or change. And here one may apply what John writes, in John 1:12-18: “To them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”—with the understanding that “the will of man” refers to birth from man. If it were possible now that more women could bear without men, these births would be altogether pure and holy; but this has been reserved for this one mother alone.

[11] In the third place, why was it necessary to perform it on the eighth day? Here again the sin of nature is indicated. For the poor babe has no actual sin of its own; nevertheless it must be circumcised and assume the sign of purification from sin. If he had commanded to circumcise after eight years, one might say it was done for sins committed and for the avoidance of future sins. But by commanding to circumcise on the eighth day he excludes both ideas, that it is done for sins committed and for the sake of future sins; without doubt, because a greater than any actual sin is born and ingrained in human nature.

[12] But here it might be objected that Abraham and his servants and household were circumcised when they were grown and old, Genesis 17:23: therefore circumcision might signify actual committed sins. The answer is: Scripture anticipates and abolishes the idea that Abraham was justified by circumcision, for he was already justified of his sins when he received circumcision; for it is written in Genesis 15:6 that he was made righteous by his faith before his circumcision, when he was eighty years old or a little more, and circumcision he received when he was ninety-nine years old; so that circumcision was instituted almost twenty years after his justification. From this St. Paul, in Romans 4:11, concludes, against the Jews, that not circumcision, but faith without circumcision justifies, as Abraham’s example cogently shows. Therefore circumcision is not a putting off of sin, but a sign of such putting off, which is accomplished by faith alone, as was the case with Abraham. Therefore it demands, as in Abraham so in all men,

faith, which removes the sin of nature and makes the person righteous and accepted.

[13] If now Abraham's faith had not been described before his circumcision, it would have been a certain sign of original sin in him, as it is in the case of children, whose faith is not described beforehand. The Scriptures have ordered it so, that Abraham first believed and afterwards was circumcised, and others were first circumcised and afterwards believed, in order that both truths might stand: first, that circumcision is only a sign of justification and nobody is justified by it; secondly, that faith justifies alone without the cooperation of circumcision, and therefore faith and its sign are clearly distinguished, to the discomfiture of the righteousness that trusts in works.

[14] Perhaps the eighth day was also appointed for bodily reasons, in order that the babe might first grow stronger, lest it might appear that it had died from the circumcision, if it were circumcised directly after birth and had died from weakness.

[15] But the spiritual significance is of greater importance. Seven days signify the time of this world until the last day, because this present time is measured by the week or seven days described in Genesis 1. The eighth day is the last day after the present time, when weeks, months, and years will cease, and there will be only an eternal day. On that day circumcision shall be fulfilled, when not only the soul, but also the body, shall be redeemed from sin, death and all impurity, and shall shine as the sun. Meanwhile the soul is circumcised from sin and an evil conscience by faith.

[16] So we see that the Scriptures in all places urge to faith, but only to faith in Christ. Therefore circumcision was not given by the law of Moses, nor to the fathers before Abraham, but to Abraham, to whom Christ, his seed, was promised for a blessing, so that the bodily circumcision might everywhere be in accord with the spiritual circumcision.

[17] Why then has it ceased, if that same faith in Christ, to which it points, still remains? The answer is, God has always, from the beginning of the world to the end, maintained one faith in Christ; but he has not given only one sign of it. If all the signs which refer to faith remained, who could keep them? But since faith is inward and invisible, God has foreshadowed it to men by many external signs, in order that they might be incited to believe

as by many examples, and has permitted each to continue for its time. How many signs did Moses alone do in Egypt and in the wilderness, which have all passed away and lasted during their time, and still were all signs of faith? So when God promised to Abraham the blessings in his seed and gave to him a sign of it, namely circumcision, it could not exist by virtue of that promise longer than the fulfillment of the promise. But when Christ, the blessed seed, came, the promise was finished and fulfilled; it was no longer to be expected. Therefore the sign also necessarily was finished and fulfilled; why should it continue any longer, when the promise on which it depended was finished? But that which it signified, faith, remains always, whether the promise with its sign passes away or remains.

[18] Yet circumcision has not been abolished in such a way that it is sin to be circumcised, as St. Jerome and many others contend; but it has become free. If anybody wishes, he may circumcise himself, or not circumcise himself, as long as he does not act from the opinion, that it is necessary and commanded, or that the promise of God to Abraham is unfulfilled and still to be expected. For faith can endure none of these opinions. Therefore it does not depend upon the work, but upon the imagination and opinion of the one doing the work. If anybody circumcise himself with the same opinion with which he cuts his hair, beard, or skin, in love and service to another, he would not commit sin; for he would do it bound not by the law and by necessity of justification, nor against the fulfilled promise of God, but from free volition and his own choice, because the promise is fulfilled and the sign attached to it is finished.

[19] Moreover, God never has had the custom of establishing a sign again, when once it has come to an end, but he has always instituted other new signs. So after the fulfillment of his promise, after the coming of Christ, he instituted for Abraham's seed another new sign, namely, baptism. This indeed is the last sign to be instituted before the last day, because he instituted it in person. Nevertheless the same faith in Christ, which was in Abraham, abides always; for it knows neither day nor night, nor any outward transformation. This baptism has the same significance as circumcision, as is to be shown at the proper time.

II. The Naming of Jesus, as was the custom at Circumcision.

[20] Finally, it was the custom to give the child its name in circumcision, as we see here and in the instance of John the Baptist, to whom his name was also given in his circumcision. However, just as Christ was not obliged to be circumcised and this sign was empty in this case, so also his name had been given to him before by the angel, so that he did not obtain it by circumcision. This was done and is written, to the end that he should be altogether free from the law and from sin above all other men, and only serve us by submitting to the law and becoming like unto us in order to redeem us from it, as St. Paul said in the last Epistle: “He was born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law,” Galatians 4:4-5.

[21] For when death fell upon him and slew him, and yet had no right or cause against him, and he willingly and innocently submitted and suffered himself to be slain: death became liable to him, did him wrong and sinned against him, and completely exposed itself, so that Christ has an honest claim upon it. Now the wrong which death became guilty of toward him, is so great that death can never pay nor atone for it. Therefore it must be subject to Christ and in his power forever: and so death is overcome and killed in Christ. Now Christ did not do this for himself, but for us, and has bestowed upon us this victory over death in baptism. Therefore all who believe in Christ must also be lords over death, and death must be their subject, nay, their criminal, whom they are to judge and execute; even as they do when they die and at the last day. For by the gift of Christ death has also become guilty to all those, who have received this gift from Christ. Behold, this is the sweet and joyous redemption from death through Christ; these are the spiritual victories of Joshua over the heathen of Canaan, notably the five kings, upon whose necks the princes of Israel put their feet by his command, Joshua 10.

[22] So also circumcision did Christ wrong, for he was not subject to it. Therefore it is justly subject to him and he has power over it, has conquered it, and has granted to us, that it must cease and has lost its right over those who believe in Christ. He has released us from circumcision only by submitting to it innocently and by bestowing his right against it upon us.

[23] Behold, this is putting Christ under the law, in order that he might redeem those who were under it. Galatians 4:5. Moreover, he has subjected himself to all other laws, to none of which he was bound, being Lord and

God over all. Therefore they have all fallen into his power, have done him wrong, and must now justly be subject to him.

[24] Now all this he has also given to us. Therefore if we believe in Christ, and the law would endeavor to punish us as sinners, and death would insist upon it, and try to drive the wretched conscience to hell; and if you then hold up to them in turn their sin and wrong, which they have done to Christ, your Lord: do you not suppose that they also shall be put to shame and be more afraid of you than you of them? Death shall feel its guilt and flee in disgrace; the law shall be compelled to give up its terror and smile friendly upon Christ. In this way sin must be banished by sin. The sins, which they have committed against Christ and now also against you on account of your faith, are greater than those which you have committed against them. In this case God, the just Judge, will not suffer that a great thief should hang a little one; on the contrary, if the great one is to be free, much more must the little one go free. Of this St. Paul says, Corinthians 15:55-57: "O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ; for death is swallowed up in victory." Behold, is not this a precious redemption from the law through him, who innocently subjected himself to the law?

[25] Praise God, what an exceedingly rich and mighty thing faith is! It indeed makes of man a god, to whom nothing is impossible, as Christ says, Mark 9:28: "If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth," Therefore it is also said in Psalm 82:6: "Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High."

[26] His name is rightly called on this day Jesus, that is interpreted, Savior: for Savior we call one who saves, redeems, brings salvation and is of help to everybody; this one the Hebrew language calls Jesus. So the angel Gabriel spoke to Joseph in sleep, Matthew 1:21: "She shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins." Here the angel himself explains why he is called Savior, Jesus, namely, because he is help and salvation to his people. We have now heard how this comes to pass through faith, to which he gives all his right and possession, that he has over sin, death, and the law. He makes it righteous, free and blessed.

[27] Now as circumcision signifies our faith, as we have heard: so the naming of children signifies that by faith we have a name and are known before God. For God knows none of those who do not believe, as is said in Psalm 1:6: “For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the wicked shall perish.” And in Matthew 25:12: “Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.” What then is our name? Doubtless as Christ gives us all that is his, so he also gives his name to us; therefore we are all called Christian from him, all God’s children from him, all Jesuses from him, all Savior from him, and whatever is his name, that also is ours; as St. Paul writes, Romans 8:24: “In hope were ye saved,” for ye are Jesuses or Saviors. Behold, there is therefore no measure to the dignity and honor of a Christian! These are the super abundant riches of his goodness, which he pours out upon us, so that our heart may be free, joyous, peaceable, and unterrified; and willingly and cheerfully keep the law. Amen.

Epiphany. The Story and Spiritual Meaning of This Gospel. The Wise Men.

Text: Matthew 2:1-12.

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had

opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. Matthew 2:1-12

The Story of this Gospel and its Spiritual Interpretation.

[1] This Gospel harmonizes with the Epistle and speaks of the temporal coming of the heathen to Christ, by which their spiritual coming to Christ, mentioned in the Epistle, is signified and commenced. It is both a terrifying and consoling Gospel: terrifying to the great and wise, the self-satisfied and the mighty, because they all reject Christ; consoling to the humble and despised, because to them alone Christ is revealed.

I. The History or Lesson Story.

[2] The Evangelist first refers to Herod the king, in order to recall the prophecy of Jacob the patriarch, who said: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be." Genesis 4:9-10. From this prophecy is evident that Christ must come, when the kingdom or government of the Jews is taken from them, so that no other king or ruler from the house of Judah might sit on the throne. This was fulfilled now when Herod, who was not of the house of Judah, nor of Jewish descent but of Edom, hence a foreigner, was made king over the Jews by the Romans to the great dissatisfaction of the Jewish people. Hence for thirty years he warred with them before he finally silenced and subdued them.

[3] Now when this foreigner had ruled over the Jews for thirty years, had taken possession of the government, and the Jews had acquiesced therein having no hopes of getting rid of him and thus the prophecy of Jacob was fulfilled, then the time was at hand, then Christ came and was born under this first stranger and appeared according to the prophecy; as though he would say: The scepter has now departed from Judah, a stranger is ruling over my people; it is now time that I should appear and become king; the government now belongs to me.

[4] These wise men are usually called the three Kings. As not much depends on this, we will grant this opinion to the simple-minded people. However, it is not known whether there were two, three or more. But they certainly came from the rich country Arabia or Sheba, which is evident from their gifts viz. gold, frankincense and myrrh. All three of these are very precious in that country. It can certainly not be assumed that they had bought these elsewhere, for it is customary in these Eastern countries to do homage and make presents of the choice fruits and wealth of the country. Just like Jacob commanded his sons to carry presents of the choice fruits of the land to Joseph in Egypt. Genesis 43:11. Had these gifts of the wise men not been of their own country, why should they then have brought frankincense, myrrh and gold produced in the land of Judea, instead of silver and precious stones or fruits of some other country?

[5] Therefore these gifts were not presented to Christ like artists paint the scenery that one offers gold, another frankincense and the third myrrh, but they presented the gifts in common as one man. And probably there were quite a number present, a few of them being the leaders, just as now a prince or a city sends a few brave men as messengers to the emperor with presents.

[6] The Evangelist calls these men wise men which means in German weissager, i.e. (predictors, diviners); not in the same manner as the prophets predicted, but like those whom we call wise men and wise women, who can tell people all kinds of things; who know a great deal about the secret arts and follow adventures. The art of such people is called magic, which is sometimes accomplished by the black arts and the help of the devil, but not in all things as by the witches and sorcerers. For the wise men imitate the true prophets and prophesy like the true prophets, though not by the spirit of God. For this reason they sometimes happen to be correct as their work is not, like that of the witches, altogether the devil's work, but rather human reason aided by the devil.

[7] Again, their miraculous deeds are not altogether done by the devil's cunning, like the doings of the witches, but by a combination of natural forces and the power of the devil. Hence a magician always imitates the real natural arts. For there are many hidden forces in nature, and he who knows how to apply them performs miracles in the eyes of those who know no better as, for instance, the alchemists make gold out of copper.

[8] Of these secret forces of nature Solomon knew a great deal by the spirit of God, and made good use of this knowledge when he judged between the two women concerning the living and the dead child, 1 Kings 3:25, discovering the real mother by appealing to the deepest feelings of nature. Again, Jacob also made use of this art when he used the peeled rods and the flocks brought forth speckled and spotted lambs, Genesis 30:39.

[9] This is a fine and a truly natural art by which is derived all that physicians and others know about the properties of herbs, plants, metals, stones etc. The Scriptures also recognize this art when they make comparisons of animals, stones, trees, plants etc. This art was especially practiced and studied among the Persians, Arabians and in other Eastern countries, was an honorable art and made wise people.

[10] But later on swine and block-heads meddled with it, as usually happens with all arts and doctrines, and have gone far from the truth, have confounded this noble art with juggling and sorcery, and have tried to follow and master both. But when they could not do this, they relinquished the real art and became jugglers and conjurers, prophesying and doing miracles by the help of the devil, though sometimes through the forces of nature. For the devil has retained much of this art and at times uses it through the magicians. Thus the word magic has become disreputable, meaning nothing else now than foretelling and doing miraculous deeds through the evil spirit, though at times it is reliable and helps men because natural forces, which are always reliable, are coupled with it, and used by evil spirit.

[11] Hence these magi or wise men were not kings, but men learned and experienced in this natural art though without doubt they also practiced conjury. Even to this day men from these eastern countries are possessed of great and various magic powers and, when this real art ceased, being despised, they brought forth sorcery and spread it throughout the world, but prior to this they relied entirely on the course of the heavenly bodies. Thus presumptuous human reason has always mixed and disgraced that which was good by imitation and indiscretion, attempting to ape everything that it sees and hears. Hence false prophets imitate the true prophets, false work-righteous saints the true saints, and the falsely learned the truly learned. If we look at the world we will find, that the work of human reason is but

aping to imitate the good, only perverts it and thus deceives itself and others.

[12] These wise men, therefore, were nothing else than what the philosophers were in Greece and the priests in Egypt, and the learned among us in the universities. In short, they were the priests and learned in the rich country of Arabia; just as if learned men are priests from the universities were now sent to a prince with presents. For the universities also claim that they teach natural arts which they call philosophy while in reality they are teaching not only tomfoolery, but also poisonous error and idle dreams.

[13] For the natural art, which was formerly called magic but now physiology, is to learn the forces and work of nature; as for example, that a deer with its breath through the nose will draw a snake from the crevice in the rocks, kill and eat it and then on account of the great heat of the poison pants for cooling streams as stated in Psalm 42:1. Again, that a weasel will induce a snake to come out of its hiding place by wagging its tail before the opening, to anger and excite the snake; and then lies in wait so that, when the snake looks up after its enemy the weasel fastens its teeth in the neck of the snake below the venomous fang and thus killing its enemy in its own house. Such arts the wise men studied, and in them is concealed a great deal of wisdom concerning Christ as well as the conduct of men in life. But this art is not taught in the universities now. Hence even the peasants know more about it than our wise men or natural masters who are not, wrongfully called natural fools, because in spite of so much labor and trouble they have only retrograded and are the devil's mockingbirds. If we would therefore truly interpret this Gospel we must say: The masters of nature from the East or the naturalists from Arabia have come.

[14] Some are also surprised that they could come such long distance in so few days, for it is believed that they appeared the thirteenth day after Christ's birth, the geographers state that the capital city Sheba in Arabia is a sixty days journey from the Mediterranean sea, which is not much over three German (i.e. fifteen English) miles from Bethlehem. But questions of this kind do not trouble me very much, nor is it an article of faith to believe that they appeared the thirteenth day.

[15] Neither is it necessary to hold that they came from the capital city Sheba, or from the remotest parts of the country. Perhaps they came from a place near the boundary of the country and thus they had sufficient time to come in the usual way of travel. Mary being unclean had to remain at Bethlehem according to the law for six weeks, just like any other woman, and might thus have been found there even more than twenty or thirty days. However, I will not interpret like the common idea that they came in a miraculous manner; since no one needs to hold as an article of faith the question as to how they proceeded, and what they were accustomed to do in such matters. Whatever the Scriptures do not reveal we do not consider an article of faith.

[16] Now the thought of the Evangelist is this' When Christ was born under Herod, the first foreign king, and the time of the prophecy was fulfilled, this wonderful sign occurred. He whom his own people and fellow citizens would neither seek nor acknowledge was sought by such strangers and foreigners for many days. To him whom the learned and the priests would not acknowledge and worship, came the wise men and astrologers. It was indeed a great shame for the whole Jewish land and people that Christ was born in their midst, and they should first become aware of it through these heathen people living so far away. At least in Jerusalem, the capitol city, they should have known about it. An earnest admonition to seek and to acknowledge Christ was given them. But their neck was an iron sinew and their brow brass as Isaiah says, Isaiah 48:4. "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we saw his star in the East, and are come to worship him." (Matthew 2:1-2)

[17] Text and circumstances demand that we speak further about the natural philosophers or masters of nature, because here the wise men knew by the star of the birth of a King as they declared. It must be observed that to every man is known a certain portion of the knowledge of nature. For instance, I know that a dog's tongue is good in healing wounds, that a cat will catch mice even when she is not hungry, that a hawk catches partridges etc. One individual may know more also than others about nature either by his own experience, or through instruction. God did not however reveal to us all the facts about nature, but only a small portion of them. Yet human reason is inquisitive and always wants to know more and more, and thus originated the study and investigation of nature.

[18] But it is impossible that nature could be understood by human reason after the fall of Adam, in consequence of which it was perverted, any further than experience or divine illumination allows. However, restless human reason will not submit and be satisfied with this, desiring to know and see everything. For this reason it begins to speculate and to investigate farther than is permissible, and thus despises what experience or God has given it. And yet it never attains what it seeks after. All study and wisdom is but error and folly. This is the reason why men, despising or not being able to master this natural art, are divided into numerous sects. Some have written about the earth, others about water, some about this and others about that, so that there is no end to investigation and the making of books. Finally when they were tired of the study of the earth, they turned to the heavens in order to master also the nature of the heavens and the stars, with which no one could ever have any experience. Here they were entirely at liberty to dream, lie and deceive and to say about the innocent heavens whatever they pleased. It is a true saying that: Those who lie about distant countries lie as they please, because no one has had sufficient experience to contradict.

[19] So also here, because no one can reach up into the heavens and testify from experience as to the truth or falsity of their teachings, they lie without fear. Hence they teach that whoever is born in this or that sign must become a gambler, whoever is born under this or that star will become rich or wise. Again, this one must be killed, or that one who builds, marries or makes a journey on this or that day must fare so or so. They say, it is the nature of the stars of heaven so to effect human beings that happen to be born at such a time. The Lord help us! Human reason in all sincerity has come to this, because these are all great and glaring lies, and captivating and unprofitable fables, in which reason in its blindness finds the greatest pleasure, as it delights not so much in the truth, as in fables and lies.

[20] But finally the real champions appeared who, disdainingly to deal with child's play like this, opened their eyes widely and began to investigate the whole world, whence it came and whither it was going; whether it had a beginning or existed from eternity and will continue to all eternity; whether there is a supreme Being who rules all things etc. Here appeared the great light of nature, the heathen master, the supreme master of all masters of nature, who now rules in Christ's stead in all the universities viz: the great

famous Aristotle, who taught and still teaches them that a stone is heavy, that a feather is light, that water is wet and that fire is dry; again, as a special master-piece that the earth is above and the heavens below, which he proves by the fact that the roots of trees and all kinds of plants are in the ground, and the limbs grow heavenward. Now that part which receives nourishment must always be above, and that part to which the nourishment goes, must always be below as we observe in a human being. Therefore man is a tree turned upside down. And thus when a feather flies upward it goes downward, and when a stone falls it rises upward.

[21] Furthermore, when he speaks of the Supreme Being he concludes that the world existed from all eternity and will exist forever, and that all souls die together with the body. And the supreme being sits above the heavens, seeing nothing that occurs, but constantly turns as blind fortune is pictured, the heavens around once every day. In this way all things happen just as they do. His argument is this: Should the Supreme Being see all things, he would see much evil and wrong, and that would make him unhappy. In order to remain happy he must see nothing but himself, and consequently rule the world blindly, just like a mother cradles her child in the night.

[22] This is the wisdom of the universities. Whoever knows or learns this will have a brown cap placed upon his head and be addressed: Worthy magister artium et philosophiae! i.e. worthy master of the arts and of philosophy. He who does not know this art, can never become a theologian nor understand the holy Scriptures; yes, he is considered a heretic and can never become a Christian. Tell me, what shall we call these people? They are neither wise men nor sorcerers nor jugglers, but are mad, frantic and senseless. Therefore consider whether Christ did not rightly chastise us in that we have despised the Gospel, being unthankful, in that he permitted us to become such disgraceful and vile dupes of the devil that we not only do not apprehend the fact, but even with great expense, trouble and labor seek after it as the greatest wisdom.

[23] St. Paul prophesied all this saying: "Take heed lest there shall be anyone that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." Colossians 2:8. Again: "O Timothy, guard that which is committed unto thee, turning away from the profane babblings and oppositions of the

knowledge which is falsely so called; which some professing have erred concerning the faith.” 1 Timothy 6:20-21. Here the apostle surely condemns in plain words the teachings of the universities so emphatically that none can contradict him, and wills that everything that is not from Christ should be avoided. Surely everyone must confess that Aristotle, the chief master of all the universities, teaches not only nothing about Christ, but even teaches such foolish things, as has been stated, that the apostle properly commands us to guard the doctrine committed unto us, calling the natural art of Aristotle unchristian, profane, meaningless babblings in opposition to Christ, knowledge falsely so-called. How could the apostle have explained it more plainly than by designating it thus? There is no greater glory than that of Aristotle in the universities, and yet it is but a false glory. For this art is nothing but an opposition that has arisen for the purpose of destroying Christ.

[24] Therefore, my dear hearer, let natural art depart. If you do not know what powers the stars, stones, wood, animals or any creatures possess, after which knowledge the natural art strives, even doing its best, then be satisfied with that which your experience and common sense teach you. Nor does it matter much whether you know all this or not; it is enough for you to know that fire is hot and water cold and wet, that in summer time different work must be done than during the winter; to know how to attend to your farm, stock, home and children. This is enough for you as to natural art. Beyond this think only of how you can learn to know Christ, He will teach you to know yourself, who you are and what power lieth in you. In this way you will know God and yourself, which no master of the arts of nature ever learned as St. Paul says, 1 Corinthians 2:8.

[25] Coming back to the text you might say. Yes, but the Gospel says that these wise men learned from the stars the birth of a king, and therefore it proves that astrology is to be taught and known. God himself giving encouragement by causing a star to rise and thus teaching the wise men.

[26] Answer: Keep to the example and learn as these wise men learned from the star, and then you will do right and not fall into error, for there is no doubt about it that the sun, moon and stars were created to be signs and to serve the earth with their light, as Moses says, Genesis 1:14. When the sun rises, you learn that the day begins; when it sinks, that the day has ended; and when it stands in the meridian, that it is noon-day. Furthermore,

it has been fixed as a sign and measure of time and of the hours in which to do your work. So also the moon and the stars at night. Again, you also need the sun as a guide in tilling your farm and in caring for your stock, its heat determining your work. Let it be sufficient to know this much about the sun and the heavens. Whatever more you desire to know, you do not need and is but idle curiosity for the most part, unreliable and inclined to error. For instance, when fools pretend to know how large the sun is, how far it is from the earth, what particular power it has over gold, and that one born in the sign of the sun will become wise, and more such tomfoolery, for which they can give no sure reason.

[27] Furthermore, you should also know that when the sun loses its brightness it is surely a sign which forebodes disaster; and likewise when a comet appears. This is taught by experience; and Christ says, Luke 21:25, that such signs will appear in the sun, moon and stars and will signify the final destruction of the world. Great storms, lightning, floods and fire in the air and on earth are also great signs. But how these things occur or what kind of natural forces there are in all of these signs, or what effect they mysteriously produce, about which the magicians inquire and juggle; all this is of no value to you nor necessary for you to know. It is enough that you behold in all of these signs the wrath of God, and amend your life. During these years there have also occurred many eclipses and many signs have been seen in many countries, presaging great disturbances. Thus the eclipse at the suffering of Christ signified the calamity which rests upon the Jews to this day. These are indeed certain signs for which purpose God created them, but those of which astrologers dream are unreliable.

[28] Hence these wise men had nothing else in this star than a sign and only used it as such according to the decree of God. Therefore, astrologers and fortune tellers cannot find encouragement for their false art in this Gospel. For though these wise men may also have been infatuated by this art, in this case they used this star only as a sign. They do not at all foretell what Christ would be in the future, what should happen to him, do not concern themselves about it. They are satisfied that it was a sign of a great king, and only ask where he is to be found.

[29] And in order that Christ might forever stop the mouth of such babblers, he created for his birth a special new star as yet unsullied by their babbling. Knowing that they might say that he was born under the power of

this star, he meets them beforehand and says: This star is not like one of those about which you are speculating. If the future fate of all men rests in the stars, as you teach, then there can be no such power in this star, which is new and of a different nature than the other stars, of which you have hitherto not heard or known anything. Again, if none of the other stars had any power over Christ, having his own new star, it follows that they have no power over any human being, because Christ was in every respect a man like other men. Furthermore, if this new star had no power over other men, existing only for a short time, it certainly had also no power over Christ, as he is just like all other men. For this reason astrology is mere tomfoolery.

[30] But how these wise men could see in this star a sign that unmistakably signified a newborn king, I do not know. Perhaps they read in their histories and chronicles that aforetime the birth of other kings had been signified in the heavens or through a star. For we find also in the histories of the Romans and the Greeks that the coming or birth of some great princes and extraordinary men had been foretold by miracles and signs in the air and in the heavens. These wise men also knew quite well that these Jews were the chosen people of God, who were and had been above all other people, especially favored of God. Therefore, as this was such a beautiful star, they certainly thought that God had given this people a new king. But the claim of some that these wise men knew the saying of Balaam: "There shall come forth a star out of Jacob," etc. (Numbers 21:17), will avail nothing, as this passage speaks mainly of the spiritual coming of Christ, who is the star himself. But whoever is not satisfied with this may think as he pleases about it. Perhaps they knew all by divine revelation.

[31] At first they did not consider this king to be God, but in the usual manner took him for a temporal king, just as the queen of Sheba considered Solomon a king, coming to him with presents from her country. For this reason they also come to Jerusalem, the capital city, hoping to find him in the king's palace and in splendor. For the star that they saw over the Jewish country when they were yet at home in Arabia, must have disappeared so that they did not see it again on their journey till they proceeded from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, as the Gospel states.

[32] But when they say, We have seen his star, they do not yet think that Christ had created it, but that it was his star because it signified his birth, just as the astrologers today call each man's sign in which he was born his

sign, not as though he had created it himself. For the glory of Christ's divinity remained unseen until his ascension, though glimpses were sometimes afforded.

[33] So also when they worshipped him, they did it after the manner of those eastern countries, as the Scriptures state, not as though they considered them gods. The falling down before them and the homage given is called worship by the Scriptures and it is applied both to men and God, just as the words lord and king, yea, even the name of God are applied to man as when Jehovah said to Moses: "See, I have made thee as God to Pharaoh." Exodus 7:1.

II. The Attitude of Herod to the Arrival of the Wise Men.

"And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

[34] Why are they troubled? Were not the Jews waiting for Christ who was promised them by God, as we have seen from Genesis 49:10. Were not Simeon and Anna and many more pious people at Jerusalem at that time looking for Christ's coming and rejoicing in it? That Herod was troubled, there was good reason. He feared the loss of his kingdom because he well knew that he was a foreigner and merited the ill will of the Jews. He also knew that the Jews looked for the Christ who should deliver them as Moses had done. Troubled by his conscience, he feared an insurrection against him and that he be driven from his kingdom. On the other hand, the Jews feared Herod and the Romans, believing that to have a new king would mean much bloodshed for them. They had before this, to their own great misfortune, revolted against the Romans and Herod, hence they were minded like the people of Israel in Egypt, who, when Moses was to lead them out and they were oppressed more than before, murmured against Moses. This was a sign of their weak faith, just as this fear of the Jews at Jerusalem indicates unbelief, and more trust in human than divine power.

[35] However, the true believers were not frightened, but rather rejoiced. And when the Evangelist says that all Jerusalem was troubled together with Herod, he does not mean all the inhabitants and citizens of the city, but speaks after the manner of the Scriptures, viz., that when it mentions a city only and not its inhabitants also, it means not all who dwell in it but the

majority of them. Thus it is often said in the book of Joshua that he destroyed this and that city, killing all the inhabitants and whatever lived in it, but meaning only the largest part and number of them. “And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written through the prophet, and thou Bethlehem, land of Judah, art in no wise least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come forth a governor, who shall be shepherd of my people Israel.”

[36] Here we ask, why did not Christ lead these wise men to Bethlehem by the star instead of allowing his birth, which was now known, to be learned from the Scriptures? This was done that he might teach us to adhere to the Scriptures and not depend on our own wisdom nor the teaching of any man. The Scriptures have been given for a purpose. In them he desires to be found, and nowhere else. Whoever despises and rejects these shall and will never find him. We have also heard, in Luke 2:12, that the angel also gave the shepherds a sign, but not to Mary nor to Joseph nor to any other men, no matter how pious they were, but gave to them only the swaddling clothes and the manger in which he was wrapped and laid; that is, the writings of the prophets and the law; in these he is wrapped, they contain him, they speak only of him and bear witness of him; they are his sure sign, as he says himself. “Ye search the Scriptures because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me.” John 5:89. And Paul says: “A righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.” Romans 3:21. Furthermore, we have also heard that Simeon and Anna represent the Scriptures, which manifest Christ and bear him in their arms. And according to Luke 16:29-81, Abraham would not grant the request of Dives in hell that Lazarus be sent to his brothers, but points to the Scriptures, saying: “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead.”

[37] Against this divine doctrine our learned men have until now set up all kinds of means to learn the truth. We must speak of a few in order to guard ourselves against them. In the first place they have set up innumerable laws, statutes, articles and teachings invented by men, such as clerical canons, orders, regulations, etc.; all of which are without doubt not the swaddling clothes and the manger of Christ, neither do they represent

Simeon nor Anna. St. Paul has earnestly warned us against such teachings and urged us to abide in the Word of God alone. For all human doctrines are dangerous and cause us to depart from the faith, just as Solomon was led astray by strange women, and as Paul says, Titus 1:14, "That fables and commandments of men turn away from the truth."

[38] If anyone were to use human doctrines as he eats and drinks and wears clothing, they might be harmless. No one eats or drinks or clothes himself for the purpose of becoming holy and being saved thereby. Such an opinion or conviction would be base folly for anyone. His intention and desire to become holy rests upon this, that he strives firmly to believe in Christ and thus become holy and be saved. Such intention is correct and the desire good. Hence let him who fasts, labors, wears the garments of monks or priests, or keeps the rules of his order, consider this just as he considers eating and drinking, not as making him holy by doing it, or as making him unholy by omitting it. Let him know that he can become holy only through faith. Doing this he will be safe and human teachings will do him no more harm than eating and drinking or the wearing of clothing. But where are they that are doing this? Among a thousand there is scarcely one, for they usually all say: If I do not become holy and am not saved by such a life, order, regulations and work, what a fool I am to walk in them and observe them.

[39] It is therefore not possible for human doctrines not to lead away from the truth, as Paul says. For one of two things must take place, viz.; They will either be despised and rejected when it is understood that they will not make us holy nor save us; or they will ensnare and deaden conscience and conviction if it is believed that they do make us holy and must therefore be kept. In this case faith is destroyed and the soul must perish. There is no help nor rescue. For true faith cannot exist nor can it tolerate that anyone should conscientiously hold something else to be necessary to become holy and be saved than faith in Christ alone. Therefore, whoever has this faith cannot trust in human teachings, but observes them when and wherever he pleases, being lord over them. But he who follows human doctrines without having faith, can never apprehend faith, remains forever a slave of human commandments and will never do a really good work, as St. Paul says, Titus 1:16. For this reason we must hold fast to the plain teaching of Scripture which presents Christ only, and that

by faith in him we become true Christians and then freely do all kinds of good works to the good of our neighbor, as has often been said.

[40] In the second place they point us to tradition and the examples of the saints to strengthen and prove their man-made teachings. And this is very effective and leads many souls to destruction. It leads away from the Scriptures and faith in such a smooth unsuspecting manner that no one is aware of it. Thus they point to St. Benedict, Gregory, Bernard, Augustine, Francis, Dominic and many other saints, whom we all recognize as holy men and say that they observed such human ordinances and regulations and by virtue of them became holy men. Tell me how can the simple-minded Christian withstand such arguments and still keep the faith? It must be an apostolic or evangelical spirit that will here remain firm. Oh, how sure they are and how boldly they parade! When they produce such examples of holy men they think that they have kindled a great light.

[41] Now, if I say to them, these holy men also ate, drank, slept and wore clothing, does it therefore follow that we should also establish an eat-order, drink-order, sleep-order and clothes-order? They will answer: O, these holy fathers did not observe this, viz., eating and drinking, etc., to become pious and holy men, as they observed these other regulations which they believed to be good and holy institutions. Here I answer, if you say that these holy fathers become pious and holy through such human ordinances more than by eating and drinking, sleeping and wearing clothing, then you are quite mistaken. For God has wisely desisted from ever honoring one of these saints with a miracle on account of his good works, rather were they all full of the spirit and faith. You seem to care not for their spirit and faith, but instead cling to their external deeds only. A fool would do the same if he were to sleep all his life because he heard that St. Bernard also slept once, and were to hope thereby to become holy and be saved. Therefore these holy men are wronged if it is claimed that they observed these ordinances to become holy and be saved, and the people are deceived by the life and in the name of these saints.

[42] But you may say: Yes, but they still kept them, did not reject them, nor consider them so important as you seem to teach. Answer: It is not for you or me to judge their hearts and intentions, but we say this, It is not impossible that they considered them of too great importance. If so, they as human beings, have erred concerning them, for everybody must confess

that the saints have also erred and sinned. Therefore God demands that we look to his Word only, and not follow the example of the saints except as these agree with the word of God. But whenever they as human beings follow also their own inventions or human teachings, then we should do as the pious Shem and Japheth, who covered the wickedness of their father, and not like the impious Ham, who went around talking about it. Thus we should keep silent about the infirmities of the saints and not make them known that we may follow them only in their strength. It is no wonder that these saints have stumbled and erred in these things. The knowledge of Christ and of faith is so above the natural man that only God's grace can work it in us. Flesh and blood cannot reveal it unto us, but only the Father in heaven, as Christ says, Matthew 16:17. Even greater saints than Augustine, Benedict, Gregory and others like them have erred in these things. At the time of the apostles there were already such teachers, against whom St. Paul wrote all his epistles in order to keep the faith altogether free from works and human doctrines.

[43] And that you may marvel still more, the whole Christian church in its early days, and at its best, erred in these things, only Peter, Paul and Barnabas standing firm and holding that neither law nor good works are profitable and necessary for salvation. St. Luke clearly states it in Acts 15. There were great saints there, the apostles and their disciples who insisted and would have continued to insist that the law and good works were necessary for salvation, had not St. Paul and Peter declared against it. And even they themselves would not have known this had not God by miraculous signs from heaven confirmed them in their opinion that only faith is profitable and necessary for salvation, as we read, Acts 10:48.

[44] More than this, although St. Peter knew all this and helped to defend it, yet at Antioch he also erred and made improper use of his Christian liberty, and only St. Paul understood him, as he writes, Galatians 2:11. Not as though St. Peter believed that he must keep the law, but that he did not at once make proper use of his Christian liberty, which he well understood thinking that he had to hesitate for the sake of others, This was wrong and was censured by Paul. Therefore, it amounts to nothing whatever if those works of the saints are referred to which they did outside of the Scriptures. They are deceiving just as well and even more than the errors of heretics and false teachers, because real and true holiness adorns such

infirmities altogether too much. God permits such things in order that he might hold us to his Word and doctrine without which there is neither life nor light, even if all the angels were to teach such things.

[45] In the third place, they hold up to us the saints' interpretations of the Scriptures, and consider them a great light. They finally adhere to them and believe that in these interpretations they possess something that no one could reject, and claim again and again in order to keep us away from the pure Word that the Scriptures are obscure and make many heretics.

[46] Is not this a masterpiece of blasphemy? But who guarantees them that the fathers are not also obscure? Or who will give us the guaranty that the fathers did not err in their interpretations? Indeed it is well known that they did often err, often contradicted themselves, often contradicted each other and very seldom were unanimous in their agreement. God permitted this to happen to make uncertain also the interpretations of the fathers and to warn us on all sides not to depart from the Scriptures. And yet we stumble here and do not permit ourselves to be guided by the Scriptures. Therefore we should know that it is not true when they say: The fathers give light to the obscure Scriptures. They are doing injustice to the fathers, and belie them. The work of the fathers was not to give light to the Scriptures with their comments, but rather to set forth the clear Scriptures and thus interpret Scripture by Scripture only without any additions of their own.

[47] However, that heretics originated from the Scriptures, is true. From where else should they have come? There is no other book that teaches the Christian faith but the Scriptures. Therefore, as no one can become a Christian except by the Scriptures, so also can no one become a heretic but by the same Scriptures. Christ is indeed a sign spoken against and set for the falling and rising of many. Should we on that account reject him or set up another Christ by his side? You do not at the same time need wine and bread, but should we on that account quit tilling the farm and the vineyards or start others besides them? Satan is the enemy of the Scriptures and therefore he has decried and calumniated them by this clamor and blasphemy.

[48] But what does this Gospel teach? In the first place, these wise men did not inquire after the chief priests and do not ask: Where is Annas or

Caiaphas, or how did this or that man live? But they ask: Where is the newborn king of the Jews? Yes, Christ permits them, as a warning to us, to go astray and to seek him in Jerusalem in the holy city among the priests, the learned and the royalty. He is not found in the holy place nor in the holy customs. Nor did they receive as an answer any human opinions, but only what the Scriptures say about Christ, which alone are to be sought among the holy people and in holy places.

[49] Sufficient examples are here given to show us that disregarding all human works, teachings, comments and life we should be mindful only of the clear Scriptures, and as to the life and teachings of the saints preserve the right not to rake or snatch up everything that they teach or live, but rather to sit in judgment on these things and accept with discretion only that which is compatible with the Scriptures. But what is their own, without Scripture proof, we should consider as human inventions and avoid, as St. Paul teaches: Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. 1 Thessalonians 5:21. Moses has also indicated this, Leviticus 11:3, Deuteronomy 14:6, where he describes clean and unclean beasts, that all animals which are not cloven footed and ruminant are unclean. These are the men who are not cloven footed, who spend their lives carelessly, rake up whatever comes before them and follow it. But the clean animals are those men who by the spirit act with discretion in all external things and doctrines. Whatever they see harmonizing with the Scriptures they keep, but whatever is without Scriptural foundation and mere human inventions they dismiss, no matter how great and famous the saints who taught it may be. For no saint has been so perfect as to be free from flesh and blood, or the continued struggle with flesh and blood, so that it is scarcely possible that all their teachings and works were spiritually perfect and are to be accepted as examples. Human nature and reason often concurred in their work, and these are not to be trusted at all. Hence Moses commands us to be cloven footed and Paul to discern the spirits and not to accept all the works and doings of men.

[50] Now in these three things, viz., human teachings, examples of the saints and the comments of the fathers, they think and many believe it that they are quite right, that no one dares to doubt or contradict them and that they rule here in perfect safety. They imagine that no one but they alone

possess the holy Scriptures, which they have so beautifully summarized in these three vessels.

[51] In addition they sink still deeper into the abyss of spiritual darkness when they claim that natural light or intellect and heathen philosophy are also safe means of discovering the truth. In this direction the universities have gone so far astray that they teach that no one can be a theologian, i.e. one of the best Christians without Aristotle. O blindness above all blindness! It might be tolerated if they were to refer here to truths of nature as would call this natural philosophy, viz., that fire is hot, that three and five are eight, etc., which reason at once recognizes. But they soar high and invent idle dreams and useless thoughts about things that are vain and of which they know nothing; and it is grievous to think of their senseless, absurd studying. They go to so much expense and trouble that even Satan mocks at them, whereby God deservedly punishes them because they would not abide in the pure Word. For this reason they must devour the very pollution of hell and be lost.

[52] They then meddled even with the work of the devil and followed the example of the souls or spirits appearing and praying for help and believed everything that these spirits said without fear or hesitation. Thus the mass, i.e. the Lord's Supper, has been so abused by saying mass for souls in purgatory and by the selling of indulgences, that the whole world by shedding tears of blood day and night could not bewail it sufficiently. Thus the devil has permitted himself to be conjured and constrained to reveal the truth and has turned our faith and sacrament into play and mockery to his own liking. All this is the result and reward of our over curiousness, which has not been satisfied with the Scriptures of God and has made our true and faithful God and Father a fool and clown, who pretends to teach us by his Word and yet does not care to teach us that which we ought and necessarily need to know. For this reason he serves us right in permitting us to become the devil's pupils, inasmuch as we despised his school.

[53] But you say: Should we then deny that wandering spirits go astray and seek for help? Answer: Let wander who will, you listen to what God commands. If you hold all these spirits in suspicion, you are not sinning; but if you hold some of them to be genuine and honest, you are already in danger of erring. And why? Because God does not want you to seek and

learn the truth from the dead. He himself wants to be your living and all sufficient teacher. To his Word you should cling. He knows best what to tell you about the living and the dead, for he knows all things. But whatever he does not want to tell you, you should not desire to know, and give him the honor to believe that he knows what is not necessary, profitable nor good for you to know.

[54] Therefore you should freely and unhesitatingly cast all such ghostly apparitions to the winds and not be afraid of them; they will then leave you in peace. And should it seem, that perhaps in your house you hear a hobgoblin or rumbling spirit, then make no ado about it, but be assured that it cannot be a good spirit come from God. Make the sign of the cross and firmly hold to your faith. Has he been sent by God to chastise you, like Job, then be ready to endure it willingly, but should it be the spirit's own sport, then defy him by strong faith and joyfully depend on God's Word. Depend upon it he will not attack that. However, I hold that none of these hobgoblins are ordained of God to molest us, but it is their own mischief to terrify the people, because they have no longer any power to harm. If they had any power to harm, they would surely not engage in much racketing, but do their evil work before you could be aware who had done it. But if a good spirit were to visit you, it would not occur with such noise and frivolity. Do this and manifest strong faith and you will find that such a spirit is not of God, and will cease its work. If you have not such faith, then he will have easy work, for then God's Word which alone he fears is not with you.

[55] The words of the Scriptures upon which you should boldly rely are Luke 16:29, where Abraham said to Dives in hell, who desired the departed Lazarus to be sent to his brothers living on earth, but Abraham refusing to do this, said: "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." From these words it is plain that God will not have us taught by the dead, but have us abide in his Word. Therefore, no matter how and where a spirit comes to you, do not ask whether he be good or evil, but bravely, quickly and defiantly cast into his teeth the words: "they have Moses and the prophets," and he will soon understand what you mean. Is it a good spirit, he will only love you the more for adhering so gladly and firmly to the Word of your God. Is it an evil spirit, as are all those that are noisy, he will soon bid you adieu. Again, another word of God is spoken by Moses in

Deuteronomy 18:11: “When thou art come into the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found with thee anyone that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through fire, one that useth divination, one that practiceth augury, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a consulter with a familiar spirit, or a wizard, or a necromancer.” Here you are told that it is an abomination in the sight of God to consult the dead or the spirits, and it is strictly forbidden. To this word of Moses Abraham looked when he did not permit Lazarus to come back to the earth. You can also use this passage against these spirits, saying: “Thou shalt not consult the dead, saith the Lord.”

[56] God has insisted on this so firmly, that there is no example recorded in the Scriptures, where the saints have ever consulted the dead about anything. And this is the third argument that you can use against these spirits: No one ever heard or read of an example in the Scriptures as to such spirits and their work, hence the whole must be condemned and avoided as of the devil.

[57] From this we may easily learn, that the coming up of Samuel was an apparition, 1 Samuel 28:13, inasmuch as it is altogether contrary to this commandment of God. It is therefore not to be assumed that the real prophet Samuel came up by the power of the witch of Endor. But that the Scriptures are silent on this point, not telling us whether it was the real or false Samuel, is because they demand of everybody to remember well that through Moses God forbade to consult the dead. And he never revokes his Word, as Job says and Balaam also, Numbers 23:10. How can the witch have any power over the saints, who are resting in God’s hands?

[58] However, should it be said: In this way purgatory will also be denied, I will answer: You are not a heretic for disbelieving in purgatory, as there is nothing said about it in the Scriptures. And it is better not to believe that which is outside of the Scriptures, than to depart from that which is in the Scriptures. Let pope and Papists here rage as they please, who have made purgatory an article of faith because it has brought to them the wealth of the earth but also countless souls to hell, souls that depended and relied on good works for redemption from it. God gave no command concerning purgatory, but he did command us in no way to consult the dead nor to believe what they say. Consider God more truthful and trustworthy than all

angels, to say nothing of the pope and the Papists who, as all their work is but lying and deceiving, awaken but little faith in purgatory. However, if you want to pray for the dead, I will not interfere. I am of the opinion that purgatory is not so general as they say, but that only a few souls will enter it. Still as I have said, it is without any danger to your soul if you do not believe in a purgatory. You are not called upon to believe more than what the Scriptures teach. But should they advance also the sayings and comments of Gregory, Augustine and other saints concerning purgatory, then remember that I have already told you how far these saints are to be followed and believed. Who will assure us that they did not err and were not deceived here as in many other things?

[59] Our faith must have a sure foundation, God's Word; and not the sand or bog of human custom and inventions. With this Isaiah also agrees when he says, 'And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits and unto the wizards, that chirp and that mutter. Should not a people seek unto their God? On behalf of the living should they seek unto the dead? To the law and the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them etc.'" Isaiah 8:19-20. This is certainly a clear passage that urges and compels us to seek in God's law and testimony all that we want to know. And he who will not do this, shall, be deprived of the morning light which no doubt means Christ and the truth itself. Note also that after Isaiah said we should seek unto God, so that no one might stare at the heavens and expect something extraordinary from God, he shows where and whence we should seek unto God, saying: To the law and to the testimony. He will not permit any seeking unto God in himself outside of the Scriptures, much less will he permit it in others.

[60] Moses mentions many ways by which men seek knowledge. Deuteronomy 18:10-11 There are eight classes as follows.

1. The users of divination. They are those who reveal the future, like the astrologers and false prophets by inspiration of the devil.
2. Those that practice augury. They designate some days as lucky for making a journey, for building, for marrying, for wearing fine clothes, for battle and for all kinds of transactions.

3. The enchanters or rather diviners — I know no better name to call these, who conjure the devil by means of mirrors, pictures, sticks, words, glass, crystals, fingers, nails, circles, rods, etc., and expect in this way to discover hidden treasures, history and other things.
4. The sorcerers, or witches, the devil mongers who steal milk, make the weather, ride on goats, brooms and sails (mantles), shoot the people, cripple and torture and wither, slay infants in the cradle, bewitch certain members of the body, etc.
5. The charmers, who bless people and animals, bewitch snakes, bespeak steel and iron, bluster and see much, and can do wonders.
6. The consulters of familiar spirits, who have the devil in their ears and tell the people what they have lost, what they are doing or what they will do in the future, just as the gypsies do.
7. The wizards, who can change things into different forms so that something may look like a cow or an ox, which in reality is a human being, that can drive people to illicit love and intercourse, and more such works of the devil.
8. The necromancers, who are walking spirits.

[61] Behold, Moses did not forget anything, stopping up every avenue where men seek to learn, outside of the Word of God. Thus he has often denounced self-conceit and human reason, especially Deuteronomy 12:8: Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. And Proverbs 8:5: Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart and lean not upon thine own understanding. He does this that we might know that God wants us to follow neither our own reason nor that which is above reason, but only his Word, as Isaiah said above, not to seek unto the living nor the dead, but to seek unto God only in the law and testimony. St. Peter also says in 2 Peter 1:19: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:” Does not St. Peter here agree nicely with Isaiah as to God’s Word and the dawn of the morning? And when St. Peter says that the Word alone is a light that shines in a dark place, does he not clearly show that there is only darkness where God’s Word is absent?

[62] This digression was necessary in order to reply to the false teachers and doctrines of men, and to preserve the Scriptures in their purity. We now come back to our text and learn of these wise men to ask: “Where is the new born King of the Jews?” Let Herod consult the priests and scribes, we will only inquire after the new born King. Let the universities ask, Where is Aristotle? Where is the pope? What does human reason teach? What says St. Bernard, St. Gregory, the church councils and the learned doctors, etc., We ask, Where is Christ? We are not satisfied until we hear what the Scriptures say about him. We are not concerned as to how great and holy Jerusalem is, nor how great and mighty Rome may be. We seek neither Jerusalem nor Rome, but Christ the King in the Scriptures. If we have the Scriptures, we cast aside Herod, the priests and the scribes, Jerusalem and Rome, and search in them till we find Jesus.

[63] However we learn here that the Scriptures and Christ have three kinds of disciples. The first are the priests and the scribes. They know and teach the Scriptures to all, but do not come to him. Is not this great hardness of heart and contempt on the part of the learned? They hear and see that great and honest men come from a far country to seek Christ, and they are told that a star in the heavens testified to his birth; in addition they themselves produce testimony from the Scriptures. Since they were the priests and most learned men they should have been the first, joyfully and eagerly to hurry to Bethlehem. Yes, if they had been told that Christ had been born in some Eastern country, they should even then by all means have hurried to him, inasmuch as all their hopes and consolation rested in Christ’s coming.

[64] But they feared Herod who would surely have killed them, if they had without word confessed Christ and their willingness to accept him as their king, as he had before killed Hircanus and many others and slew innocent babes. Hence because they feared death they forsook their Lord and king, and remained with the tyrant Herod and the devil.

[65] Afterward when Christ did not appear with splendor and power they looked with contempt and disregard upon all this, believing that the wise men had been deceived. Hence Christ grew up among them entirely unknown, and no one knew finally whence he should come as stated, John 1:26. There are disciples of Christ who indeed know the truth, but dare not confess it nor defend it, and are therefore lost as Christ says Matthew

10:32-83: “Everyone therefore who shall confess me before men him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven.”

[66] The second class of disciples are Herod and his people. Herod searched the Scriptures, believing that it was the truth, and that the coming of Christ was predicted therein, and that Christ had now been born, otherwise he would despise all this and not have been concerned about it. Hence it is certain that he held the Scriptures to be the Word of God which must be fulfilled, and that in Christ’s birth the work of God was revealed. Yet he at once determines to set himself intentionally and directly against God’s Word and work, and thinks he can bring to naught that which God has spoken and done, in spite of better knowledge. Therefore he searched the Scriptures, diligently to learn about Christ, but only for the purpose of bringing to naught and destroying all. He was concerned lest that which God, who cannot lie, spoke, would come to pass. Is not this incredibly foolish arrogance? Who would have thought that such intentions could have ever entered the human heart? And yet the world is always full of such people, and they are generally the rulers and upper classes.

[67] The third class of disciples are the pious wise men who left their country, home and possessions, forsaking all in order to find Christ. They represent the people who fearlessly confess Christ and the truth; but Herod stands for those who persecute and destroy the former, though they still claim to serve God, and enter the house of God just as other pious persons do.

III. The Prophecy of Micah.

[68] One may be interested in asking why the Evangelist changed the words of the prophet and said. “And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah, art in no wise least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come forth a governor, who shall be shepherd of my people Israel.” While the prophet Micah says: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel.” Micah 5:2. Matthew says: Thou art in no wise the least, but Micah says: Thou art little. How do these two statements agree with each other?

[69] The other difference between Matthew and Micah, the former saying: Among the princes of Judah, the latter: Among the thousands of Judah, can easily be adjusted as the Hebrew word Alpha means both a prince and a thousand, hence whoever chooses may interpret the prophet either way. For instance if I say, There comes a duke, by this one may understand either a prince or an army, as duke means a prince, and also a leader of an army, and whatsoever an army is doing we usually say the duke did it. The law of Moses also provides that men should be made rulers over thousands, Exodus 18:21, so that we can say among the princes or rulers as well as among the thousands. For the prince stands for the army of thousands into which the people were divided. And among them the princes or thousands in Judah the city of Bethlehem is mentioned as being the least, just as though we were to say: Among the cities of Saxony, Wittenberg is the least. But it pleased the Evangelist to say among the princes rather than among the thousands, as it is not necessary that there should be just a thousand men, it being sufficient that there be a regiment in which there may be a thousand men, and always having a prince who may rule over a thousand. So also might we call the mayor of each city, or the community, Alpha i.e. a thousand, or a community in which there may be about a thousand inhabitants who have an Alpha i.e. a prince or a mayor. Hence we might render the words of the Evangelist and the prophet thus: And thou Bethlehem art a humble and common city among the communities or cities of Judah. And in comparison to such cities as Hebron, Kariath, and Sephar, etc., It was but a small city at that time.

[70] That the prophet calls the city Bethlehem Ephrathah, and the Evangelist Bethlehem in Judah, is after all the same, for both of them undoubtedly intended to point out that city which aforetime was called Ephrathah, but now Bethlehem in the land of Judah. We heard in the first gospel lesson for Christmas why this city was called Ephrathah and Bethlehem, that is, a country rich in grain, from which it perhaps has its name. For Bethlehem means a house of bread, and Ephrathah means fruitful, so that it must have been a rich country and blessed with plenty (with plenty of food in it.)

[71] Nor does it present any difficulty that the prophet says: “A ruler in Israel,” and the Evangelist: “A governor, who shall be a shepherd of my

people Israel.” The latter speaks of a government without saying how blessed it is nor how it rules.

[72] But how can we harmonize the fact that the prophet calls the city little, and the Evangelist in no wise least. These seem diametrically opposed to each other. It would not be a sufficient answer to say that the books were falsified. There can be no doubt that the Evangelist looks more at the spiritual greatness which is also indicated by the prophet, as though he would say: Thou Bethlehem art little before men, but before God thou really art in no wise the least inasmuch as the ruler of Israel shall come out of thee. Hence what the prophet meant but did not express, the Evangelist states clearly. The figure of speech by which a certain thing is not directly mentioned but only indicated is also used in common conversation. If I say for instance: You are my friend, yet you side with my enemies, I really said: You are not of the least among my’ enemies. Again: The beggars are poor, yet they have much money, that is, they are not the poorest. So also when Paul says in Romans 2:22, “Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou rob temples?” he means thou dost not infrequently abhor idols in order to rob the temples.

[73] Let this suffice for it does not afford much pleasure to argue very much on this point, nor is it necessary for a true believer to do so for he gives all glory to God and never doubts that everything is truly and correctly stated in the Scriptures, though he is not able to prove everything. For the learned it is necessary in order to defend the Scriptures against the blasphemers and perverse. Therefore we return to the sense and meaning of the Scriptures, which do not speak here of a common master in Israel such as there had been many before, whom the prophets so highly honored and predicted must be altogether different from others. For the passage of Micah reads as if there had been no ruler in Israel before, because he says out of Bethlehem shall he come forth that shall be a ruler in Israel. That sounds as though he would say: I will give the people of Israel a ruler, so that they may also have their own prince. So far the kings and princes have only been servants, and the people were not their own. This one however shall be a ruler to whom the people belong.

[74] For this reason the fathers among them always understood such passages to mean that Christ would be not only man, but God, and that his government would be without end, and not be a temporal but a spiritual

government. For no man, nor angel has a people of his own. God alone is the Lord of his own people as David says. "The Lord ministereth judgment to the people." Psalm 7:8. And when Gideon was asked by the people to rule them he replied: "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: The Lord shall rule over you." Judges 8:23. And when the people asked for a king of Samuel, God said: "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them." Samuel 8:7. Not that it was a sin to have a King for he gave them one; but they trusted more in human power and government than in God. And that was a great sin.

[75] Now if Christ was to be a ruler over his own people, then his government could be neither temporal nor corporeal, but he must rule over the entire people past, present and future. Therefore he must be an eternal king. And this he can only be spiritually. But as God bestows on Christ his own government, he could not be a human being only. For it is not possible for God to bestow his glory, government, property or people on one who is not true God, as he himself declares: "And my glory will I not give to another." Isaiah 42:8.

[76] Therefore Micah continues: "Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." As if he would say: I proclaim the ruler that shall come out of Bethlehem, but he does not there begin to be; he has been already from the beginning before the world began, in that no day or beginning can be named in which he did not already have his being. Now from all eternity and before the creation of the world there existed nothing but God alone. Hence the going forth from everlasting could not be by one person only, for going forth signifies that there was someone from whom he came forth. Hence Micah proves that this ruler must be God's own true son, born of God the Father, and that the one true God must be with him eternally before all creation began.

[77] Again, if he shall come out of Bethlehem in time, then he must be a true and natural man. And this, viz. that Christ is God and man is the corner stone of Christian faith. Those are his own people and the true Israel who acknowledged him as such a ruler and permit him to rule and work in their hearts.

[78] From this we can easily conclude why Christ had to die and rise again in order to rule spiritually to all eternity. For though the passage here proves that he had to become a true natural man, it yet follows that he had to change this bodily life into a spiritual invisible life, as it was impossible for him to rule bodily as widely and as long as the prophet indicates.

[79] Micah continues and says: “Therefore will he give them up until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the residue of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and shall feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God: and they shall abide; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.” From these words it is clear that Christ’s kingdom should be extended to the ends of the earth by preaching and suffering, of which the prophet says that in the majesty of the name of Jehovah he would preach and feed his flock, showing also that he would be persecuted on account of his preaching. Therefore the prophet also says that they should be given a respite as to their temporal existence and government until a new people had been born. The woman in travail represents the little flock of the apostles which during the sufferings of Christ was in the agony of the birth of a new spiritual people for this ruler of Israel, as Christ himself foretells, John 16:2. “Then Herod privily called the wise men, and learned of them exactly what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search out exactly concerning the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word, that I also may come and worship him.” (Matthew 2:7-8).

[80] From this text we learn that the wise men were not kings nor princes, but common, honest people, like the learned and the clergy. Herod does not treat them as belonging to royalty, but sends them to Bethlehem, tells them to attend to their mission, and, as if they were his subjects, commands them to bring him word again. He would not have done this if they had been kings or lords; he would have invited them to his palace, accompanied them on their journey, and treated them with great honor. For all historians agree that Herod was a pompous man, who knew how to treat people royally after the way of the world, and wished to be admired by the people. As, however, he calls the men privily and without display and parade they must have been of much lower rank than he was.

[81] But why does he call them privately, since the land was his and in his full control? He did it for this reason. He knew quite well that the Jews were his sworn enemies and wished to be rid of him. He was afraid, therefore, that if he called the men publicly and the Jews became aware of it, they would go to the wise men and enjoin them not to acquaint Herod with the true state of affairs, so that the new king may live before his eyes.

[82] When he asks them about the time of the star he does it out of the same anxiety. He was already resolved in his heart to slay the innocent children. He reasoned thus: If the new king is born the Jews will rejoice, and will secrete him for a while until he is grown up, and then will espouse his cause, put him on the throne and banish me. I must forestall them, therefore, and carefully inquire into the time of his birth; and although he is hidden from me I shall still find him amongst the people when I slay all the children, and their disguise will avail them nothing. He pursues this plan diligently so that the new king might be made known to him, commands the wise men to bring him word again, and puts on a pious and devout face as if he wished to worship the child also.

[83] Humanly speaking, he acted wisely enough in his purpose of slaying Christ. But it is true what Solomon says, Proverbs 21:30: "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Jehovah." And Psalm 33:10: "Jehovah bringeth the counsel of the nations to naught; he maketh the thoughts of the people to be of none effect." And Psalm 37:32-33: "The wicked watcheth the righteous and seeketh to slay him. Jehovah will not leave him in his hand." Herod is here compelled to fulfill such passages against his will, and be an illustration of the same for our own comfort, in order that we might be free and secure and need fear none but God alone. If he is with us neither guile nor force can harm us.

IV. How the Wise Men continue their journey, Find Christ and Worship Him.

"And they having heard the king, went their way; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

[84] It is not said here that they promised the king to return, but that they heard his request to bring him word again. Yet it appears from the warning they received in a dream that, in the simplicity of their hearts, they were willing to return to Herod, not knowing his depravity nor his purpose and thinking him to be an artless honest man. We learn from this that the children of God may be so misled by the pleasing manners and false pretensions of unbelieving saints that they take that to be good which is not. But they do not always remain in deception, for they are directed and delivered, if need be, from heaven. Their hearing of the king, as mentioned by the Evangelist, may also be understood to mean that they listened to the words of the prophet, that in Bethlehem was to be born the new king for whom they inquired, and who was the object of their search.

[85] This is an illustration of how the enemies of Christ may at times be of service and teach others rightly, as Caiaphas teaches, John 11:50, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people, and as Balaam, Numbers 24, utters many beautiful words concerning Christ, although they do it sometimes unintentionally and in ignorance. So Christ instructs the people, Matthew 23:2-3, they should listen to the scribes and Pharisees and follow them when they sit in Moses' seat; but forbids them to do after their works. These wise men were right, therefore, and give us a good example by listening to Herod, not for Herod's sake, neither as said by him, but for the sake of the Scriptures, which he taught them; and they followed this and not Herod's works. From this is derived the good rule that we should hear the evil bishops and priests, as well as the good ones, and should follow, not their lives, but their teachings, provided their teaching is Scripture and not idle talk. For, as we are to listen to the teachings of Holy Writ, even when spoken by Herod, though he also commit murder, so we are not to listen to human doctrine, even if spoken by St. Peter, Paul, or an angel, and accompanied by many wondrous signs.

[86] It was said above that the saints often err and give offense by human doctrines and works. It is God's will, therefore, that we shall not be guided by their examples, but by his Word. For this reason he permits the saints often to deliver human doctrine and works. Again, he disposes that the impious sometimes teach the clear and plain Scriptures, in order to guard us against offenses, on the one hand, and from the wicked life of the ungodly, on the other hand from the shining deeds of the saints. For, if you

do not follow the Scriptures alone, the lives of the saints are ten times more dangerous and offensive than those of the ungodly. These commit gross sins, which are easily recognized and avoided, but the saints exhibit a subtle, pleasing appearance in human doctrines, which might deceive the very elect, as Christ says, Matthew 24:24.

[87] But now such offense of the saints is directly against the articles of faith and its doctrine; gross sins, however, do not oppose faith and doctrine. If they desert it they do not rail against it, while human doctrine is nothing but rebellion against faith and its doctrine, for it makes men rely upon themselves and upon their works. From this Christ rescues his saints in the midst of human doctrine and work, just as he preserved the three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3) at Babylonia, in the midst of the fiery furnace. Hence the lives of the saints are not to be followed as an example in this but are rather to be avoided, like miracles which are only to be admired and praised. For he does not desire to do wonders to everyone in the fiery furnace, neither does he wish to make everyone a Bernhard, Francis, Gregory, Benedict or Augustine.

[88] This was the Evangelist's intention when he omitted Herod's name, saying, they heard the king. He calls him by the name of his office and dignity, just as John 11:51, says that Caiaphas uttered his prophesies, not because his name was Caiaphas, but because he was high priest. The offices of king and priest are good and by divine institution, although wicked people make evil use of them, as gold and silver and all creatures are good, and yet may be put to good or evil use. God uses Herod when he may be used to advantage as God's creature, and offers him to the wise men for their service. Hence they did not look upon or listen to Herod but to the king. It did not concern them that he was wicked within himself, they took hold of what was good in him, as the bee sucks the honey from the flower and leaves the poison to the spider. They listened to him when he told them to go to Bethlehem and search diligently for the child, as the prophet had foretold; which intelligence he had not from himself but from the priests. They could not, however, know his wicked counsel and purpose, nor his evil life. Thus we are to learn to hate the vices of men, but love the men; we are to distinguish the honey from the poison.

[89] It is also indicated here that this star was not high in the heavens like the other stars, but hung above them in the air; otherwise it would have

been impossible for them to discover whether it stood over Jerusalem or over Bethlehem. For, according to astronomy and experience, it cannot be discerned on account of their height over the town the stars of heaven really are suspended, since two cities, ten or more miles apart, both think the star above them. Again, you cannot perceive their movement with the eye, although they move more swiftly than time or lightning. This star, however, they did not see move swiftly but glide slowly before them according to the speed of their journey. A star in heaven moves farther in one movement than ten journeys from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, for they move once around earth and heaven every day and night. Besides, all stars move from east to west.

[90] But this star accompanying them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, traveled from north to south. This was proof that it was of another kind, its course and place in the sky different from the other stars in the heavens. It was not a fixed star, as astronomers call them, but rather a movable star that could rise and descend and move from one place to another. With this those astronomers are again silenced who say that the star had no special significance in Christ's birth or life. It was probably not as large as the stars in the heavens, although it appeared larger on account of its nearness. In short, it was a servant of Christ and had no power or authority over Christ's birth.

[91] It seems strange, however, that the star reappears to them now when they do not need it any more, when they know the town of Christ's birth, while it was hidden before, when they needed it and knew not the town. But this was done to strengthen their faith, as the law of Moses says, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. The wise men first heard the word of the prophet in Jerusalem, as a witness of Christ's birth; with this the second witness, the star, agrees and announces the same birth, so that they may be sure of their ground. The prophet speaks only of the Child at Bethlehem; in like manner the star does not go any further than where the child is, to Bethlehem, and remains over him. And they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. "And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshipped him; and opening their treasures they offered unto him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh."

[92] It was diligently prevented that the wise men should find Christ through themselves, or men. On the contrary, they found him alone through the Scriptures of the prophet and by the aid of the stars of heaven that there might be put to naught all natural ability, all human reason, all light outside of the spirit and of grace, which now boasts and pretends to teach the truth and lead people aright, as was said above is done in the universities. Here it is concluded that Christ, the knowledge of salvation, is not taught or acquired by human teaching or assistance, but the Scriptures and divine light must reveal him. as he says, Matthew 16:17: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.” With this Christ distinctly casts aside flesh and blood with its revelation, i.e., man and all human wisdom, which, being nothing but darkness, cannot reveal Christ. Christ says, John 6:44: “No man can come to me, except the Father that hath sent me draw him.” By this all boasting of human reason is condemned, since it cannot guide aright and all who follow it must go astray. So strongly does God everywhere resist our natural haughtiness and will, that we may know we are blind, despair of our own light, put ourselves into his hands and be led by him into the ways which reason cannot know nor follow.

V. Of the Faith of the Wise Men.

[93] The wise men here teach us the true faith. After they heard the sermon and the word of the prophet they were not slow to believe, in spite of obstacles and difficulties. First they came to Jerusalem, the capital, and did not find him, the star also disappearing. Do you not think they would have said within themselves, if they had followed human reason alone: Alas, we have traveled so far in vain, the star has misled us, it was a phantom. If a king were born he should of course be found in the capital and lie in the royal chamber. But when we arrived the star disappeared and no one knew anything about him. We strangers are the first to speak of him in his own country and royal city! Indeed, it must be all false!

[94] Besides, his own people are troubled and do not care to hear of him, and direct us from the royal city to a little village. Who knows what we shall find? The people act so coldly and strangely, no one accompanies us to show us the child; they do not believe themselves that a king is born to them, and we come from afar and expect to find him. O how odd and

unusual everything appears at the birth of a king! If a young pup were born, there would be a little noise. A king is born here, and there is no stir. Should not the people sing and dance, light candles and torches and pave the streets with branches and roses? O the poor king whom we seek! Fools we are to permit ourselves to be deceived so shamefully.

[95] Having been flesh and blood, doubtless they were not free from such thoughts and views, and they had to battle for their faith. Natural reason could here not have held its own; if they had not found the king as they had expected, they would have murmured and complained and said: The devil must have led us here. A king cannot have been born since everything is so quiet and nothing is going on. There is more noise when a child is born to our shepherd, and a calving cow is more talked about than this king.

[96] Reason and nature never proceed any farther than they can see and feel. When they cease to feel they at once deny God's existence and say as Psalm 14:1 says. "There is no God," therefore the devil must be here. This is the light of the universities which is to lead men to God, but rather leads to the abyss of hell. The light of nature and the light of grace cannot be friends. Nature wants to feel and be certain before she believes, grace believes before she perceives. For this reason, nature does not go further than her own light. Grace joyfully steps out into the darkness, follows the mere word of Scripture, no matter how it appears. Whether nature holds it true or false, she clings to the Word.

[97] For the sake of this very strife and struggle, by which the wise men accepted the word of the prophet and followed it into such wild, unnatural appearance of a royal birth, God comforted and strengthened them by this star which went before them more friendly than before. Now they see it near, it is their guide, and they have an assurance which needs no further question. Before it was far from them, and they were not certain where they would find the king.

[98] So it is always with the Christian, after affliction has been endured God becomes more dear to him and is so near and so distinctly seen that man not only forgets anxiety and affliction, but has a desire for greater affliction. He gradually becomes so strong that he does not take offense at the insignificant, unattractive life of Christ. For now he experiences and

realizes that to find Christ it must appear as though he found nothing but disgrace.

[99] Even so the wise men must have been ashamed of themselves if they had doubted and had said, as perhaps they did say secretly in their hearts: We were so successful, let us travel a little farther on and seek new kings. I call this buffoonery, as Dame Gay, i.e. nature, conducts herself in the presence of divine words and works. For from the fact that the wise men were so much rejoiced when they saw the star we can infer that they were in such temptation and were heavy-minded when everything appeared so inconsistent. Their joy indicates that they were perhaps despondent and tempted with unbelief. There was cause enough if you look at nature alone. Hence Christ says, Matthew 11:6: "Blessed is he whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me." Blessed indeed, but how difficult since appearances were against Christ's presence.

[100] When the wise men had overcome their temptation and were born again by the great joy they were strong and took no offense at Christ, they had overcome in the trial. For although they enter a lowly hut and find a poor young wife with a poor little child, and find less of royal appearance than the homes of their own servants presented, they are not led astray. But in a great, strong, living faith they remove from their eyes and their minds whatever might attract and influence human nature with its pretense, follow the word of the prophet and the sign of the star in all simplicity, treat the child as a king, fall down before him, worship him, and offer gifts. This was a strong faith indeed, for it casts aside many things which impress human nature. Perhaps there were some people present who thought: What great fools are these men to worship such a poor child. They must indeed be in a trance to make of him a king.

[101] This is the kernel of the Gospel, in which the nature and character of faith is explained as an assurance of things not seen. It clings alone to the words of God and follows the things that are not seen, as alone conveyed in the word of God, and looks askance at many things which urge it to disbelieve the Word. What nature calls playing the fool, faith calls the true way. Nature may be wise and clever, faith remains nature's fool and idiot, and thus comes to Christ and finds him. St. Paul's words, 1 Corinthians 1:25 apply here: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the

weakness of God is stronger than men.” For feeling and believing do not get together.

[102] When they give three presents and worship him it does not imply that each gave a separate gift, but, as mentioned above, it was a common gift of the goods of their country, with which they honored him as a king. Nor was the worship like that due to God, for, in my opinion, they did not yet recognize him as God, but after the usage of the Scriptures, kings and dignitaries were worshipped, i.e. honored and respected, by the bending of the knee as we do today.

[103] What conversation they had with Mary and Joseph I leave to the imagination of idle minds. The languages in the orient are not so foreign to the Hebrew, so that they may easily have understood each other. They had spoken with Herod and the priests and the citizens of Jerusalem, hence they no doubt spoke with Mary and Joseph. If they had a different language, the Jews still had such business connections and were so well known at the Red Sea that in both countries both languages were no doubt known, as in German lands you find French and in France German. The Red Sea country is on one side exclusively Arabic, and from there the wise men came.

VI. How the Wise Men by the Command of God Returned to Their Fatherland.

“And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod they departed into their own country another way.”

[104] Here it appears that those who believe in God enjoy his special protection. He has an eye upon these wise men so that he keeps watch over their return and directs them in a dream.

[105] And why does he not allow them to return to Herod since he could have shielded the child from all the world even if Herod had known and found him? It is done for the purpose of teaching us not to tempt God. Whatever can be accomplished by ordinary means should be done. We should not presume upon faith and say in idleness: I trust in God everything will grow that is to grow. His creatures have no purpose if we do not make use of them. In Genesis 1 he created and ordained all creatures with their works, and indicated the use man shall make of them. This will he never recall and ordain something special for you.

[106] Here the question arises: How can I strike the golden mean to believe and yet not tempt God, for you preach and praise faith alone and cannot extol it enough? Answer: You should not believe save where you have a word of God. It is the character and nature of faith to be built and to rely on the Word of God. Where there is no Word of God there cannot and shall not be any faith. Is this not stated clearly and positively enough? Hence the Word of God is called in Scripture: testament, testimonia, pacta, foedera, testimonies, agreements, Covenants, as these postulate faith; nor did God ever command us to believe any of his works without his Word.

[107] Again, he has confirmed his works and wonders, as Christ says, John 10:33 “Though ye believe not me believe the works.” If you have not God’s Word you should continue to make use of your power, of your goods, of your friends, and of all that God has given you, and thus abide in the dispensation, established by God, Genesis 1. For he did not give it to you in vain, he will not, for your sake, turn water into wine or stone into bread, but

you should use according to his order whatever he has created until he forces you by word or work to use it differently.

[108] But when the hour comes that the creature cannot help you any more and all your strength fails, behold then God's Word begins. For then he has commanded us to acknowledge him as God, i.e. expect everything that is good from him. This word, though in force all the time, will yet be only understood and made use of in need, when nothing else avails. Of this he speaks, Psalm 50:15: "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." From this it is clear that we cannot make trial of God in need, for all his words and promises point to the time of trouble, when no one but he is able to help. Hence we read, Matthew 4:7, that when the devil tempted Christ to cast himself down from the temple, Christ said, no, for it is written: "Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord thy God," as if to say: I can go down by the steps, it is not necessary to do signs and wonders. Again we read in the legends of the fathers that two brothers journeyed and one of them died of hunger for God's sake; that is, he went to hell; for they came amongst wicked people, who offered them something to eat, and the one said, he would not take bread from these people, but expect his food from heaven. The other took and ate and lived. That fool did nothing else but set aside God's order and tempted him. However sinful people may be, they are still God's creatures as well as thorns and thistles. You make use of a thorn to open a boil or for some other purpose; will you look contemptuously upon it, because it is a prickly brush? Thus we read that Abraham and Isaac gave up their own wives and had them taken from them in order not to tempt God. Therefore God preserved them so that no harm was done to them or to their wives, while great kings were punished. From this it is clear that to tempt God is mere wickedness and frivolity except in time of trouble.

[109] There is another temptation also in the time of trouble which was punished severely among the people of Israel and which alas is common as compared to the other temptation and equally irrational. That temptation occurs before God's Word is heard; this after we hear the Word, namely thus: when we know that God has promised help in the time of any trouble, but are not content with it, go forward and will not abide his promise, but prescribe time, place, and manner for his help; and then if he does not come as we expect and desire, faith vanishes. There faith is too long, here it is too

short; there it is too early, here it is too late. In both cases men fall from the Word. Those have faith without Word, these have Word without faith, both of which are of no avail. Middle ground is blessed, both Word and faith united in one, as God and man are one in Christ.

[110] He who holds fast to the Word alone, trusts and abides in it, does not doubt that what the Word says will come to pass; he who does not dictate aim or time or means and ways, but resigns all freely to God's will and pleasure as to when, how, where, and by whom he will fulfill his Word; he, I say, has a true living faith which does not nor cannot tempt God.

[111] Learn then what it means to tempt God; it is easily understood; it is a deficiency of true faith. To faith belongs above all the Word of God, as the foundation and rock of faith. Hence to tempt God is nothing else than to deal with him aside from his Word, i.e. to believe when he did not command faith and gave us no Word, or to disbelieve when he bids believe and gives us his Word. He did not give orders to believe that he would feed you when you have food before you or can find it without a miracle. But where you cannot find it, he has commanded that you firmly believe he will not forsake you. But you should not set time or measure for him, for he deserves to be free, which is becoming, and will not forsake you, which is divine; what more could you desire?

[112] Such was the lot of Christ. God could have rescued him from the power of Herod. But since without apparent necessity of a miracle all could be adjusted, he used for our example ordinary means, and led the wise men into their own country by another way. It would have required an unnecessary exhibition of miracles if they had returned to Herod and made known the house wherein the child was to be found. But even this has its meaning, as we shall see later.

VII. The Spiritual Significance of this Gospel.

[113] Christ's natural birth always signifies his spiritual birth, since he is born in us and we in him, as St. Paul says in Galatians 4:19: "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you." Now in order to complete this birth God's Word and faith are necessary, because only through these can Christ's spiritual birth be wrought in us. Therefore this Gospel signifies spiritually nothing more than the nature of the divine

Word and of faith; also, how they fare who are born spiritually; what temptations and conflicts faith must encounter.

[114] First: God used the circumstance that Herod, a stranger, reigned over his people to signify thereby the kind of reign existing within the soul. They had rejected God, so that he could no more govern them by faith. The Jews had become nothing but a Pharisaical, Sadusaical, hypocritical and selfish people, who wanted to save themselves by human doctrines and outward works. They have no faith, which the entire Gospel and the life of Christ prove. As they, unbelieving in spirit, made for themselves a Herod in the place of Christ: they had to submit bodily and spiritually to a Herod instead of one who descended from the royal line of David, and therefore in both relations there was purely a kingdom of Herod. In the Greek language we are accustomed to call those who are noted for great clamor and deeds heroes, as were Hercules, Hector, Achilles, and the like, who in German are called giants, but in Saxon a fellow (Kerl), hence the name Carolus or Carl means among us what hero or Herod does in Greek. Herod comes from hero, because he was like a fellow, like a giant, a boaster, a Dieterich from Bern, a Hildebrand, a Roland, or by whatever other name you may call these great murderers and devourers of the people, who were also before the flood and whom Moses calls in Hebrew Niphlim (giants), Genesis 6:4, which means that the people who fall upon others and with force suppress them will themselves fall. The people of Israel destroyed many of them in the land of Canaan, as the Anakims, Raphaims and Emims. Anak is called a golden chain; hence the Anakims (Deuteronomy 2:11) were called giants in the land and wore golden chains. The Rephaims were called rescuers, because they rescued the land and the people. The Emims were called terrible and frightful because the people were afraid of them.

[115] Thus there always have been Herods, only in a different way and under other names: and thus there always will be Herods until the day of judgment, whom Christ at his coming will destroy. They are now called pope, cardinal, bishop, priest, monks, spiritual lords and holy fathers, who are very unjustly called shepherds and sheep of Christ, but who are in reality ravenous wolves that flay and devour Christ's people in body, soul and property. They are in these last days the mighty fellows, giants, devourers of the people and Herods, whom none but Christ from heaven can destroy.

[116] Now Christ and Herod are entirely different and diametrically opposed one to the other. Christ's merit consists not in a great clamor and in pretentious deeds. With him there are no doings such as the giants and the fellows boast of, but only pure humanity that thinks not of self, is despised and content to let God be all in all and to do all and also to give him all the glory. Herod's ambition is to do great things, to possess every ability, to make a loud clamor, to be everything and to lack nothing.

[117] Since the Jews were inwardly veritable Herods, boasting much of themselves and of their deeds, commanding great respect on account of their ostentatious lives, Christ's humble demeanor amounted to nothing with them; therefore God sent them a king, Herod, who dealt with them in temporal things as they dealt with souls in spiritual things. They rejected Christ and God; therefore he rejected their royal family. Since he could not reign in their souls, he did not allow their own flesh and blood to reign over their bodies and property; and as they destroyed and suppressed the people spiritually with their government and with human doctrines, therefore he permitted them to be destroyed, suppressed and tormented through Herod. The physical Herod was a chastisement and a sign of their spiritual Herod.

[118] As in all sin, one 'feels and hates the punishment, but loves the sin without being conscious of it; so it was with the Jews. They indeed felt the physical Herod and hated him, but the spiritual Herod, their unbelief, spiritual tyranny, they considered excellent, arrogantly claiming, through their Pharisaical, sectarian conduct in human doctrines and works of the law, to have earned much before God, and they could not discern that they had thereby earned the kingdom of Herod, from which they were not able to free themselves however much they desired it, and they considered themselves worthy on account of their spiritual and holy conduct.

[119] Thus we now also keenly feel our Herod, who is flaying and devouring us in body and estate; and since we are not sincere Christians and do not permit Christ to be our king in a pure and free faith, but are satisfied with the spiritual affairs now existing and with our own works, we are unable to rid ourselves of this Herod and there is no hope of relief. We must suffer ourselves to be devoured and ruined, there is no help, he must be our bodily and spiritual Herod.

[120] Let this be an established truth, that in the first place Herod signifies a kingdom; not simply a kingdom such as worldly lords rule, but a spiritual kingdom. Therefore the kingdom does not include only the temporal possessions of people but also their spiritual possessions; that is, their consciences and the affairs belonging to salvation, such as good works, a pious life, the sacraments and the Word of God.

[121] Furthermore, this spiritual kingdom may be governed in a twofold manner: first, in a blessed way, when Christ alone governs in the true faith and the pure Gospel; secondly, in a pernicious way, when man governs with works and human doctrines. Just as the people of Israel were governed at one time by one of their own kindred, by their own king, and then again by Herod, a foreign king. Therefore Herod signifies nothing else than such a spiritual kingdom, in which people are governed, not through faith and the Gospel, but through works and doctrines of men. It has the name, indeed, and the appearance of being the true way to heaven and of teaching the people right, but in reality it is nothing else than the broad road to hell. The sum of it all is that Herod is the pope with his spiritual kingdom. There we see no faith, no Gospel, but simply human doctrines and works, and he has an enormous Herod-like power and makes a loud clamor in the world. The consciences of men should be guided, fed and preserved through God's Word alone, but he leads and feeds them only with his own swivel and slabber, with indulgences, orders, masses, prayers, fasts and the like, and in this respect is a mighty giant, a Roland and a fellow, a Kerl.

[122] They say that if the Christian church were not sustained by the state she would founder, when the truth is that faith in Christ alone should govern her. Hence it is in this respect as the peasants say: Kuntz Hildebrand, the great whale, carries the world on his tail; that is, if it were not for what the pope did with his kingdom, God would be entirely too weak, the apple of the world would certainly fall out of his hand and neither faith nor Gospel could avail anything. But now since the pope comes to his assistance and lays the foundation for him with his many tonsures, caps, robes, wooden shoes, bishop and cardinal hats, organ peals and smoke of incense, sounding of bells and candle-snuffing, bawling in the church and turkeys in their bellies, particularly in those who fast, eating neither milk, eggs nor meat and the like, in which the pope's holiness consists, every thing will be sustained. And if the pope were in favor of doing away with

such spiritual, orderly, holy government, where would the world be? Here we have what Herod and Christ are, two spiritual kingdoms, one unbelieving and the other believing.

[123] Now, what is the “star”? It is nothing else than the new light, the oral and public preaching of the Gospel. Christ has two witnesses of his birth and kingdom; the one is the Scripture, the written Word; the other is the voice or the word preached orally. The same word Paul calls in Corinthians 4:6, and Peter in Peter 1:19, a light and lamp.

[124] The Scriptures are not understood until the light is risen, for through the Gospel the prophets arose; therefore the star must first arise and shine. In the New Testament sermons must be preached orally, with living voices publicly, and that which formerly lay concealed in the letter and secret vision must be proclaimed in language to the ear. Since the New Testament is nothing else than a resurrection and revelation of the Old Testament, as Revelation 5:9 testifies, where the Lamb of God opens the Book with its seven seals. We furthermore see that all the preaching of the apostles was nothing else than a presentation of the Scriptures upon which they built. Christ did not write his doctrines himself as Moses did, but he gave them orally, and commanded that they should be published abroad by preaching, and he did not command that they should be written. Likewise the Apostles wrote very little, except Peter, Paul, John, Matthew and a few others; from the rest we have nothing, for many do not consider the epistles of James and Jude apostolic writings. Those who have written do nothing more than direct us to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, just as the angel directed the shepherds to the manger and the swaddling clothes and the star led the wise men to Bethlehem.

[125] Nor do we need any more New Testament books concerning Christian doctrine, but we need good, learned, spiritual, faithful preachers in every locality who without books can draw forth the living Word from the old Scriptures and make it plain and simple to the people, just as the apostles did; for previous to their writing they preached and conferred with the people by word of mouth, which was strictly the apostolic and New Testament mode of evangelical work. This is also the right star, testifying of Christ’s birth and the angelic message concerning the swaddling clothes and the manger.

[126] That there was a necessity of writing books was in itself a great detriment and denotes an infirmity of the human spirit and does not arise out of the nature of the New Testament. For instead of pious preachers there came heretics, false teachers and all kinds of errorists giving the sheep of Christ poison in the place of pasture. Hence in order to rescue at least some of the sheep from the wolves it was necessary to write books in harmony with the Scriptures, so that as much as possible the lambs of Christ might be fed and the Scriptures preserved in their purity, thereby enabling the sheep to protect themselves against the wolves and to be their own guides when their false shepherds would not lead them into the green pastures.

[127] Luke says in his preface, Luke 1:1, that he was influenced to write his Gospel by the fact that some had undertaken to write the history of Christ in whose reliableness he did not have full confidence. It was the object of all the epistles of Paul to guard and foster what he had taught before, doubting not that he had preached much more abundantly than he wrote. If wishing did any good, one could wish nothing better than that all books were simply destroyed and that nothing remained in the world except that which Christians formerly had, namely, the pure Scriptures alone or the Bible. It contains more than is necessary of all kinds of art and doctrine which man ought to know, but wishing is now to no purpose; would to God there were only good books besides the Bible.

[128] Let it suffice for the present that this star is the visible sermon and the bright revelation of Christ as he is concealed and foreshadowed in the promises of the Scriptures. Therefore, whoever sees the star certainly recognizes the king of the Jews, the newly-born Christ. For the Gospel teaches nothing else but Christ and therefore the Scripture contains nothing else than Christ. But he who does not recognize Christ may hear the Gospel, or indeed carry the book in his hands, but he has not yet its real meaning. To have the Gospel without its meaning is to have no Gospel; and to have the Scripture without recognizing Christ means to have no Scripture and is nothing else than to let this star shine and yet not see it.

[129] Therefore the Herodites and the people of Jerusalem fare thus: the star rises over their land and over their heads, but they do not see it. Hence, when the Gospel arose over the Jewish people, as Isaiah says in the Epistle, Romans 10:21, they let it shine but did not acknowledge it. Of this Paul writes, 2 Corinthians 4:3,4, "And even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled in

them that perish: in whom the god of this world,” that is, the devil, “hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them.” From this it is evident, that unbelief alone is the cause of blindness, on account of which they do not see the Gospel although it shines and is preached without ceasing. That it is impossible for Christ and his Gospel to be acknowledged by reason, but by faith alone, is here plainly taught. And the seeing of the star signifies this individual star.

[130] The wise men signify, and are themselves the first fruit of heathendom converted unto faith through the Gospel. For the heathen were the wise men, that is, people of nature, living according to their reason, who did not have the law and the prophets, as ‘the Jews, but walked only according to nature, without the divine law and the Word. Now, as the natural masters, the wise men, generally deviated from the line of right, and converted the natural art into witchcraft and sorcery, as stated above, so the natural reason when left to itself, and not assisted by the doctrines of God, most certainly will go astray, and will loose itself in error and blindness as a veritable witch, full of all manner of unbelief.

[131] Thus Paul writes, Romans 2:14, that the heathen, although the law of God had not been given to them, nevertheless had a natural law of conscience and performed the works of the law, which they found written in their hearts. But though they were far from the truth, and were without the law of God, they were brought to faith much more easily and much sooner than the Jews, for the reason, that the Jews, having the law depended upon it, and thought they had sufficiently satisfied it by their works. Therefore they despised the Gospel as something entirely superfluous and false, because it rejected works, concerning which they boasted so much, and lauded faith alone. The heathen had no ground for such vain boasting, because they were without the law; hence they more easily yielded to the Gospel, acknowledged its necessity, and their need of it.

[132] That the wise men came to Jerusalem and inquired after the new born king signifies nothing else than that the heathen were enlightened through the Gospel, came into the Christian church and sought Christ. For Jerusalem is a figure of the Christian church, into which God’s people are gathered, which in German may be called, vision of peace, because in the Christian church peace is seen, that is, when all have a good conscience,

and peaceful confidence of heart, who, being in the Christian church and being true Christians, have forgiveness of sins through the grace of God.

[133] Now in this peaceful place, Herod the devourer of men, would reign at all times; for all the doctrines and works of men, have in them this vexatious evil, that they in their very nature mislead, oppress, and destroy the true Jerusalem, ensnaring good consciences and pious hearts, teaching them to trust in themselves and in their good works, thereby causing faith to perish, peace and a good conscience to be destroyed, while the rule of Herod with its great show and clamor and faithless works, alone remains. This is what our Gospel wishes to say, that thus Christ was born and sought after at the time of Herod, in the very city of his kingdom. For evangelical truth wages its whole warfare with the false holiness of Herod, and every time it renews the strife it finds Herods, who rule the people with their doctrines and human works, and these things are so for no other reason than that the truth condemns these doings of theirs and teaches the pure grace of God instead of works and pure faith instead of law, in order to rescue the people of God from the reign of Herod, and save them for the true Jerusalem.

[134] When Herod heard this he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. Why? Because Herod was afraid of another king, the true king, for he himself, with force wanted to be the only king. It came to pass, that through the Gospel the heathen began to praise Christ and to have faith, contrary to the works and doctrines of men; thereupon the Jews became enraged, because they could easily perceive that if this matter should grow and spread, their affairs would soon be considered worthless, and their great and false doings would surely be brought to shame. This they could not endure, and therefore they began to rage, as is shown by the history of the apostles. For they knew very well that the progress of the Gospel, their government, honor, power and riches, which they had in such abundance under the spiritual reign of Herod, would receive a powerful blow.

[135] Human works and doctrines at all times yield much revenue and carnal gain, while the doctrines of God and the work of Christ bring the cross, poverty, ignominy, and all kinds of calamity, which the holiness of Herod cannot endure. Thus it happens always, that they who have ensnared and oppressed the poor with an erring conscience and with human doctrines, do not like to hear that poor, miserable consciences receive

instruction, attain a right understanding, and seek the simple, pure Word of God and faith. Many say that they want a new king, and have seen his star; for thus the pope, bishops, holy fathers and lords could not indulge their carnal desires.

[136] Therefore, it is not at all agreeable nor serviceable to the reign of Herod that the wise men, the learned, the laity, who know nothing, should begin to speak of the light of the Gospel, and to inquire about another matter in the midst of Jerusalem, paying no attention to spiritual pomp of the rulers. This must indeed have frightened Herod and his associates because it concerned their purses and their belly. Yes, it also frightened all Jerusalem; for many pious people, though they hated the reign of Herod and wished that it were not thus, also were afraid that the truth might be brought to light at an unpropitious time, that through it a tumult and confusion might be caused in the world, that the government might be attacked, and that perhaps this tumult could not without great detriment, be suppressed. Therefore they thought that it might be better to withhold the truth for a time, or to bring it forth in such a manner as not to frighten Herod, and arouse him to some desperate action.

[137] But the wise men do not inquire after his fright and anger, but speak openly of the star and the new king and are not in the least concerned that the heavens might fall. For one must neither confess nor deny the Gospel on account of any particular person; it is God's Word, Herod must yield to it and follow it. Does he rage however? Then let him rage, Christ must remain in preference to him.

[138] And now behold! Herod is foremost to learn of the new king, not with sincerity but with deceit, and so he gathers together all the learned men and diligently searches the Scripture, as though he were anxious to learn the truth, and yet we know that it was his determination to accomplish his own will and intention instead of obeying the Scripture. Here we arrive at the real character of Herod; here we see the pope and his followers truly portrayed.

[139] But that no one may blame me for applying this to the pope, and comparing his holy order and its reign so contemptuously with that of Herod. I want it understood that I do it because it is my Christian duty and a debt of faithfulness which I feel in my conscience that I owe everyone. If

the truth and experience do not prove all that I say, then let anyone who will chastise me for lying; I will fulfill my fraternal office satisfactorily and be excused before God. If anyone despises my faithful warning, let him answer for it himself, I want to say to him, that Christ and his doctrine shall not suffer on account of the pope and his spiritual rule. Therefore let everyone guard himself against them, as against his eternal destruction, and adhere alone to Christ. Whether it brings the pope and his divines any fortune or honor, does not concern me in the least; I must preach Christ and not the fortune and honor of the pope and his divines. What is said of the pope and his divines, is said of all those who oppress the people with their works and doctrines, and do not teach the true faith, the pure Scripture and the one Christ, as the Jews also did but accomplished very little against the pope and his associates. He who will suffer himself to be misled has herewith heard my warning: I am innocent of his blood and ruin.

[140] That Herod called the princes, priests and scribes of the people together and inquired of them concerning the birth of Christ, is the same as our spiritual kingdom, and is what the unbelieving tinkers are doing; they keep the Scriptures to themselves, and what they teach is presumably contained in the Scripture, but in this sense, that their own opinion comes first, and the Scriptures must be twisted so as to agree with their opinion. For their intention is to use the Scripture only to this end, that it may suppress the truth and satisfy, their own doings, just as Herod searched in the Scriptures for no other purpose than that he might slay Christ.

[141] Thus our Herod is doing, with his Herodites, the people; he indeed searches the Scriptures and uses it, but he explains it only in such a way that he may destroy its real sense, and read into it his own sense. With such show even the elect are deceived; for there is no greater show, which frightens and deceives every conscience, than that which sets forth the name of God and claims only to search and follow God's Scripture and Word, while at the same time it seeks thereby only to oppose and to quell the Scriptures with all their contents. Therefore the wise men do not see the star of Jerusalem, and do not know where they shall go. And all who walk among such genteel and glittering folks will be deceived and will lose the real Christian sense on account of the great bustle and glittering exterior of unbelieving divines, unless they grasp firmly the pure Scripture.

[142] Although both Herod and the wise men received the Scriptures here from the priest, Herod received them in a false and vicious sense. The wise men received them in a right and good sense; therefore they see again the star shining, and are rescued from Herod's hypocrisy under which they had lost the star. As here the strife between Herod and the wise men is signified, so also is signified the strife between the true and the false divines who place themselves over the Scriptures, that the true divines are indeed a trifle in error, and for a little while lose the true light, but they do not continue in error. They finally grasp the true sense of Scripture, come again to the clear light, and let the Herods praise themselves in their false understanding of the Scripture.

[143] Concerning this St. Paul writes, 2 Timothy 3:1-9: "But knew this, that in the last days, grievous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy. Without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of good, traitors, headstrong, puffed up, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God; holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof: from these also turn away. For of these are they who creep into houses, and take captive silly women laden with sin, led away by divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. And even as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also withstand the truth; men corrupt in mind, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further for their folly shall be evident unto all men, as theirs also came to be." etc.

[144] I think that here St. Paul has spoken freely, and pointed out our spiritual lords, and Herod's holy domestics. Indeed there is not a letter here, which cannot be seen by anyone publicly verified in the spiritual order. But they have a petrified pate, and imagine that this does not speak of themselves at all; and fancy that because the pope fortifies them with parchment and pencil, they are greatly wronged if one understands Paul's words to mean them. Therefore we must consider this rich text of Paul's a little more closely so that we may clearly see and recognize Herod. He says that in the last times there should come people who had been running for many years already, and who were dangerous, because on account of such deceivers, few people would be saved, destroying the faith and slaying souls with their human doctrines and individual nonsense.

[145] The apostle would not be understood to mean the common people, whom they now call wordlings or laymen, but his words are clear and forcibly point to the tonsure crowned and hooded people, the spiritual kingdom. For among others of their noble virtues, he mentions very notably their chief virtue, namely, that they affect the appearance of the Christian life and of the service of God, but renounce the reality. Who does not know who they are? Where is the spiritual life, God's service, holy orders, except in their institutions and cloisters? Likewise he says, "They creep into houses, and lead captive silly women," teaching them constantly, which is clearly said of teachers and preachers, particularly of mendicant friars and vagabonds. Likewise the statement that they withstand the truth, as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, signifies plainly that he is speaking of those who preach and rule among the people. But let us give attention to another class.

[146] First, they are the Philauti, who think much of themselves and are well pleased with themselves; everything they do is well done and right; they alone will get to heaven, and are the only ones who have found the right way; they alone are the Christian church, and they are the only people who rule heaven and earth. Compared with them, other people are poor sinners, in a dangerous relation, and must buy from them intercessions, good works and merit. Finally, they have accomplished so much, that all other Christians are called wordlings, while they are the divines. It cannot be expressed how this title pleases them, how they think themselves too good for other relations, and how there are other people on earth to whom the name Philauti can be given than to themselves. The apostle has indeed hit them well; but above all, their chief lord, the pope, who fairly stinks with self-esteem and self-complacency in all the world, so that they must confess themselves how his spiritual claims are nothing but Philautia, purely his own satisfaction.

[147] God help! how much the abomination thinks of himself, how well his station pleases him, how insolently he distinguishes between himself and all other Christians, not only in the temporal but also in spiritual things, doing no more than tickling himself until he laughs himself nearly to death from sheer wantonness, as everyone who sees his life, his kingdom, his bulls, his laws and his doctrines must publicly confess. Such poison others in their respective stations, draw from him, and he helps them in it with

liberties, protection, blessing and praise. Afterward the laymen learn it also from them, each one in his good little prayer and peculiar manner, in this way Christian faith must perish, which has its pleasure and good intention in Christ alone, all other affairs being indifferent to it, and it has no preference among them.

[148] Secondly, they are haughty. This follows from the first, their own self-esteem, that they exalt themselves in their hearts over all others, thinking themselves better than everybody else. This you can abundantly see in the people and the ministers; how they, beyond measure; shamelessly say and boast of themselves, that the spiritual station is better than the temporal, although Christians are in the latter; but the fact is that the Christian relation alone is good, which will either not suffer such a distinction or it will perish. Yes, this spiritual pride is the foundation upon which their entire kingdom stands; for if it were not respectable and better, all its affairs and government must be destroyed.

[149] These two great, low and horrible vices are so artful and so entirely spiritual that they do not see a glimpse of them; yes, they hold them as the very truth and as established righteousness. They go right on also in their satanical would-be holy life, allowing themselves, in their frightful vices, to be called and honored as holy, spiritual and blessed people.

[150] Thirdly, they are arrogant. This follows from the former, namely their haughtiness. For haughtiness is not satisfied with honoring one's self, but it breaks forth and soars so high, esteems itself so highly, hovers entirely in the regions above, sits on the very highest seat and acts outwardly according to its internal sentiment. The difference between haughtiness and arrogance is that haughtiness possesses the heart, while arrogance consists in the external lofty bearing and demeanor. Who cannot see this in the pope and the entire spiritual order? Do they not veritably carry themselves above emperors, kings and princes, and everything both great and small on earth? They have set themselves over man's possessions, and with free and malicious strength govern both body and soul, as though they had the best right and cause. And if they are told that Christ forbids such arrogance, when he says to his disciples, Luke 22:26, "But he that is the greater among you let him become as the younger," and Luke 22:25, "Ye shall not have lordship over them as the kings of the Gentiles", they wrest the entire force of the passage unto themselves by giving an

explanation, which no one except themselves can give, by saying that Christ has thereby not forbidden the authority and rulership over others, but that this refers to the intention of the heart, namely that they are not to exalt and esteem themselves better than others. For, say they, there can be a prelate, indeed, who is humble and does not exalt himself in his heart over others, and yet he must soar above them outwardly. Hence they quote several passages from the fathers and thereby blind and fool themselves, and everybody else.

[151] The apostle would say of this external imperviousness: I know very well that he who would teach and rule others must be spiritually superior, but they make spiritual that which is bodily; for they want to soar high bodily; their goods, honor, behavior, persons, affairs, right and rule must be over all other goods, honor, persons, affairs and rule. They want to have everything their own way and insist on having it that way too, those dear squires, and therefore convert temporal goods, honor, person, behavior, clothes, etc. into spiritual things.

[152] Christ was spiritually the highest on the earth, for he taught everybody, as a teacher and master, but he did not exalt his person over any man. Yea, he served man with all that he had and was able to do. The prophets and apostles undoubtedly were also among the highest on the earth spiritually, but when did ever anyone of them set his person, goods and existence over others, much less over kings and princes. They were much rather subject to them and offered them their service, as Christ also was subject to Caesar, Matthew 17:2-7. Beloved Herodites, the spiritual kingdom is not seen with eyes, and does not rule over goods nor persons, but over souls and spirits through the Word of God. But you convert it into an earthly kingdom, and give it the spiritual name, in order to cover and adorn the accursed arrogance, that you might not be subject to anyone, nor pay interest, taxes and toll, that you might be exempt from every duty, and only receive and rob.

[153] I have forgotten and overlooked the fact that I should have credited them with avarice, and must therefore consider it here in the fourth place. This vice is so enormous in the pope and the spiritual order, that wood and stone cry out about it. But this is nothing compared with that which few people see, namely that the spiritual order is founded almost entirely upon usury, through the highly damnable rental sales, which the

pope has instituted as a reserve and patron of avarice, that he might visibly swallow the world. Furthermore, among thousands, one scarcely sees the secret avarice prevailing among them, that they are spiritual simply for the sake of bodily maintenance and support.

[154] The proverb has hit upon the truth, Despondency makes the monk. For how many are there not who become spiritual for no other reason than that of anxiety, lest they may not be able to nourish themselves, or must do it with labor and worry. There are now bishops and dignitaries who became such for this very reason. What is it but avarice, when one does not trust God, who created him, to the extent that he will also nourish him? But some also become spiritual because they are despondent on account of their salvation; these however are the few, and since this is no good reason, they are not well established.

[155] Fifthly, they are slanderers. This must follow from the former virtues. For if their pride, arrogance, avarice and self-esteem are to stand and be preserved, they must equip themselves with armor, and defend themselves against those who chastise such sins with Scripture, as they justly deserve to be chastised, and cannot endure the Scripture. Therefore the pope must here send out his bulls and law, and must curse, damn, slander, and excommunicate all who militate against his kingdom and say it is not God's Word but the devil's, all who withstand his holiness and his divines, who must be avoided as the worst of heretics, as St. Peter also proclaimed in 2 Peter 2:2, that such people shall speak evil of the way of truth, and shall afterward say, that they did it all to the honor of God, and for the sake of spiritual possessions. But the pope's faction, his Herod-like associates, will adhere to him, and will spread such slander and cursing as far as their avarice, pride and arrogance prevail, so that the world shall be filled with blasphemy and curses.

[156] O God, heavenly Father! Thy terrible wrath and fearful judgment are visited upon all the world in these dangerous and miserable times, and alas, no one acknowledges it; wilt thou have created all men to no purpose?

[157] Sixthly, they are disobedient to parents. Next to obedience unto himself, before and above everything else, God has commanded obedience to parents. But what do the pope and his spiritual kingdom now teach? If a father has reared a son to be a parson or a bishop, he has raised a lord over

himself, who is under no obligation to be obedient to him, on account of this great worthiness and the exultant holiness of Herodic spirituality. Therefore, the people also, as we can see, lead a free and unrestrained life. God's command concerning obedience to parents is disregarded, and they claim that they are under the highest obedience to God; although God has not commanded one single letter of their claim, but it is all of their own invention. Now God does not recall one command, even on his own account, much less on account of man's choosing and selection. Likewise, the cloisters also have come into vogue in order to get rid of this commandment of God; therefore the son or daughter, without the will of the father, leaves the parental roof and goes into the cloister. The holy father pope and his Herodites decide that this is right and proper and so compel the people to break the commandment of God. Thus the entire spiritual order has been made free and independent of the highest and first commandment of the second table.

[158] But if you will listen to me, I will from my whole soul advise you rightly, in the name of Christ Jesus. If your child becomes clerical contrary to your will, whether it be priest, monk or nun, you may, if you chose subsequently, sanction and tolerate the disobedience: But if you do not sanction it, and if you are afraid, that on account of weakness your child might not preserve his chastity, or otherwise might lead a perverse and dissolute life, or perhaps spiritually misguided, or if you should need his support at home then do not dispute about the matter but go, unhesitatingly, and take your child out of the cloister, out of his monk's dress and tonsure, or whatever else he may have crept into. Do not yield if he has made a hundred thousand vows, and all the bishops in a pile have blessed him. Your child has been entrusted by God to you to govern, and from you he will again be demanded. What answer will you give if you allow him to be lost, when you can advise and save him? If the authorities object, then oppose them in return with the commandment of God, that children are to be obedient to their parents, particularly when parents are concerned about their danger, and will not allow it. Why, the pope's law allows a wife, unhindered, to take her husband out of the cloister and priesthood. Now the fourth commandment, to be obedient to parents in matters not contrary to God's commandment, is just as well God's commandment, as that man and wife shall not be separated.

[159] Therefore, I say that the pope takes the liberty from sheer insolence, to remove monks and nuns from the cloisters, though he has no power to do so. The parents have the power to leave their child there or take him away when they please, or as they see it beneficial for the child.

[160] But when the Herodites here say, that obedience to parents cease when the service of God orders it, and that the first commandment is above the fourth commandment, then answer them boldly, that God's service is not their spiritual order, concerning which God has commanded nothing, and that they lie when they call their little invention God's service. The service of God is nothing else than to keep his commandments. In the first table, his commandments require faith and love to God. Now they do not walk in faith and love to God, who become clerical only in external particular affairs, in which there is less love, than in domestic and worldly affairs.

[161] But now alas! many people are pleased to see their children become clerical, because they do not see the danger in it. Some solemnly promise their children to the clerical rank. Such is all pure ignorance concerning the faith and the Christian relation. If however, parents should demand something contrary to God's commandments, as for example, against faith and love to our neighbor, they are not to be obeyed. Here Christ's word must stand: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me," Matthew 10:37, otherwise the commandment of obedience remains. Parents however may and ought to be willing, and even suffer themselves to be persuaded to give their child, when it is possible and necessary for his soul.

[162] In this connection another subject of great importance must be considered, namely the marriage of our children. No one indeed is so foolish as to force his child into marriage. This must not be done. When a daughter wishes to marry, I claim that she shall pledge obedience in her virginity, and ask her father's consent. Neither should she be compelled to take this or that man, but she should have her own free choice; as in the case of Rebekah, Genesis 24:58. When, however, obedience is coerced, I claim that it must be respected.

[163] But the question is here whether the father has the power to annul the marriage, when the child became engaged contrary to his will. The pope

answers no! releasing the child from obedience to the father; but I say, yes, and do not release the child from obedience to the father. And I think also that no other man has the power to release previous to entering into the marriage relation. But when the relation has already been entered and the fruits are apparent, and they want to remain together, it is very unkind of the father to separate and tear them apart, though he have the power to do so, for however great his power may be, it is a duty he owes to love and friendship, to connive a little, and act according to the child's desire, that such separation may not be affected by self-will and wantonness, undertaken without any cause whatever.

[164] For parents are sometimes inclined to give attention to their own disposition rather than to the benefit and need of the child. Although the child may suffer in this way it is not right on the part of the father, whose duty it is to be friendly and, to the best of his ability, to use his power for his child's welfare; just as Manoah and his wife listened to Samson's intercession, to get the wife for him whom he desired, though she was not their choice, Judges 14:8.

[165] When it happens, however, that the maid betrothes herself clandestinely, while the father, or the father's vice-parent had given her another, then she shall trample the pope's snare under foot, and without any conscientious scruples dismiss the first, and take the second. For the pope has no power to act contrary to God's command, or to substitute the first engagement and break the second, causing thereby consciences to err, saying that such a maid is an adulteress for marrying the second, and forcing her to the first, claiming that she must suffer, and not willingly take the second, nor demand the conjugal duty. O thou murderer of souls! how miserably thou comfortest consciences! jumbling one thing with another, until there is no more any room for salvation, and causing perilous times! If the maid should beg her father's pardon, and plead that she may live with the first, because she has such a strong desire, then let her do so; otherwise obedience is a mere farce; she can insist upon conjugal duty and act as though she had never been betrothed. Had this precept been preserved, clandestine engagements would long since have been suppressed, and the great destructive snare for consciences in the pope's jurisdiction would never have prevailed.

[166] Now you can see, I think, how keenly St. Paul understood this spiritual kingdom which would teach all children to be obedient to their parents, and yet give them liberty to choose temporal or spiritual stations, or to continue in those already chosen, without the sanction of the parents. In this way it has simply destroyed and nullified God's commandment concerning obedience, and thereby so lamentably confused consciences, that they do not know what to do. As they teach disobedience toward parents, and separation from God's command through their spiritual holiness, so also they teach young and worldly people to act wrong in the marriage relation.

[167] But a pious child must learn to honor his parents and to be pleased and satisfied with their dealings with him when they do not act contrary to God's command. And if he should be able to awaken the dead, or heaven should open its portals at his bidding, he must undertake none of these, knowing that such an act would be contrary to the will of his parents. For he who is obedient to his parents is obedient also to God, whose commandment it is to be obedient to parents. Therefore one should be glad to see destroyed that which is done contrary to parental obedience when not required of God, however good and however great a service of God it may seem to be; for that cannot please God which is contrary to parents, if God has not commanded it. Therefore God speaks through Jeremiah, Jeremiah 29:6, to the parents: "And take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands," etc., so that the children may not take them themselves, but that the parents have the power to dispose of them. More might be said on this point, but let this suffice for this time.

[168] Seventhly, they are ungrateful not only toward God, which is a necessary sequence, when they blaspheme, condemn his word and destroy his commandments, but also toward men; for they have received great good and honor from the princes of the whole world, and their entire comfortable life is the sweat and blood of others. Neither do they acknowledge that when a city or district is destroyed they shall contribute and help with their abundant riches and treasures; this is nothing else than simply keeping their treasures in their own pockets. Again, if their interest and goods in any way are interfered with, there is no mercy exercised in excommunication, driving and martyrdom. No one thinks or says, "Very well, then, seeing that we have such and such goods or lands and to spare, and since they have had

such trouble and ruin, we will now show them love and extend a helping hand.” It is a spiritual blessing and must not serve worldly affairs; yes, they consider it the greatest vice if they should be charitable, and say, “He who does that ravages the goods of the bishopric, cloister and the holy church.” Therefore that the goods of the church may always remain, Christian love and genuine gratitude must perish. And yet those who do such things are not spiritual, holy people, and they will enter into heaven as little as a cow into a mouse-hole.

[169] Eighthly, they do not consider holy things. Here the apostle deals them a powerful blow by calling them Anosios, Osios means consecrated, holy, spiritual, such as deal in holy things and are ordained to this end; such as through consecration become spiritual and holy. Anosios, hence, means unconsecrated and unholy. But is he not an insolent apostle who dryly and openly calls these spiritual fellows unspiritual and the consecrated unconsecrated? Have they not the tonsure and are they not anointed with oil? Have they not white gowns, and do they not hold masses, sing high and read low, play organs and pipes, bells and sounding symbols, consecrate churches and chapels, burn incense and sprinkle water, carry the cross and banners, dress themselves in silk and velvet, carry golden caps and silver pyxes, and do everything that is great? If these are not spiritual things, then what is spiritual? Thus the pope and bishops must go astray. Certainly, St. Paul is under the pope’s ban, because he has spoken against such a spiritual right, in which purely such spiritual things are performed.

[170] No cow, no ass, no swine is so entirely devoid of sense that it would not be able to recognize these things as physical and external, through which no one can become spiritual or holy. Neither do we now call everything of this Herodian rule spiritual and consecrated. Therefore St. Paul rightly calls them the unspiritual ecclesiastics on account of these unspiritual things which cause them to neglect the true spiritual things. He understood their perversion and how they assumed the place of ecclesiastics, and therefore changed their name, as if to say: These men profess to be the spirituals and say that they administer holy things; they are rather the unspirituals, concerning themselves about foolish deeds and neglecting the true spiritual things.

[171] For he is called osios or spiritual who administers the Word of God and the sacraments in order that he may lead himself and his fellowmen to

God. This is in truth the office of the spirituals. But neither of these do they do; yes, through their abuse of all the sacraments, especially of the mass, they lead themselves and everyone else still further away from God. Neither do they preach the Gospel nor fulfill their spiritual duties rightly. Much could be said concerning this. The apostle has in these words embraced everything that pertains to their true office and on account of which they are called spirituals, and he says: They do none of these things, therefore they are rather the unspirituals.

[172] Ninthly, without natural affection. They do not with their heart mean anyone, that is they do not interest themselves in anyone, they let everyone fare as he will and go where he pleases. If they but have enough, they are satisfied. As has been said, it is the duty of the clergy to minister to the spiritual wants of the people, and also to see that the poor are provided with the necessities of life. Now it is evident that no one on earth manifests less interest in his fellowmen than does the clergy. And all this is caused by the aforesaid wickedness, love of money, unthankfulness and unholiness. They are a united people, bent upon their own profit and advantage in temporal as well as spiritual things.

[173] Or is there anyone who would call that kindness, when the pope and his allies shed the blood of so many Christians, when they instigate the whole world to war, when they exhaust, suck out and flay the world with their indulgences and all kinds of roguery? It is indeed a very fine virtue in rulers to interest themselves in their subjects and heartily to be concerned about their affairs and their needs in things of this world; but it is a still finer virtue when the clergy does likewise in spiritual matters, as they would do if they were truly *Osii* But now they are *anosii* and *astorgi*, unholy as well as unkind.

[174] In the tenth place, they are obstinate, not willing to help others. Here St. Paul vehemently attacks the holy canon law, which speaks so much of privileges, liberties and exemptions, and strikes the holy *scrinium pectoris* (heart-shrine) at Rome. Nature and God's disposition ordain that people who must live together in one community unite to carry common burdens upon common backs and do common work with common hands. Thus they are bound together with common burdens. In disregard of this, the pope and the canon law have their *privilegia*, *libertates*, *immunitates*, *indulta*, *gratias*, nothing but exceptions; he and his allies avail themselves of

the advantages which community affords but leave the doing of common work and the carrying of common burdens to others; yes, it were the greatest sin to follow St. Paul, to relinquish their privileges and to help carry the burdens of the community. And still they plainly see that such liberties cause people to look at them askance and with dissatisfaction and that it justly embitters their hearts and therefore is contrary to brotherly love.

[175] Moreover, the holiest father, the pope, has the power, if members of the clergy would unite or had united with the community, to tear all such bonds and to absolve them from their oaths and vows because they had been made to the detriment of the church. It is the fruit of unkindness that no one but they are to be free and rich, are to have the necessities and pleasures of life and are to live without the burden of danger and care.

[176] They exempt themselves from the obligations which they have as members of the community and are subject only to the pope; therefore St. Paul calls them *aspondos*, those that exempt themselves, the obstinate, who are of no service to their fellowmen, but wish to enjoy the service of everyone else, and who wish to enjoy the advantage in all things, but repudiate the disadvantage. Such a state of affairs cannot be tolerated in any community and is indeed contrary not only to Christian love, but also to all fairness and all reason.

[177] In the eleventh place, they are slumberers and backbiters. What an awful vice of which St. Paul speaks here, which is most commonly found among the clergy, much more so than among other men, and also among those who, in the eyes of the people, are highly renowned as men of breeding, honor, and upright character. Do but take notice what attitude these people take toward the sins and faults of others; how they boast of their love and kindness as examples of good breeding, honor and uprightness, how they apply themselves with great earnestness to righteousness, that indeed there is nothing lacking in regard to love and mercy toward their neighbors.

[178] That we may understand this well, we shall speak of it carefully and slowly. In the former vices it has been shown what attitude these men take toward the person and the property of their neighbors. Here he particularly tells us what attitude they take toward the sins of their

neighbors. Oh, how blind and ignorant they are here, how they are led by their own pleasure and haughtiness! The Scriptures teach us what attitude to take toward our neighbor's sins, namely, this:

[179] First, we are not to be suspicious, but are to put, if at all possible, the best construction on everything that we see in our neighbor which is not an open sin. For thus writes St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 13:7: "Love believeth all things," that is, it has the best opinion of everyone and is suspicious of no one; it is of the opinion that others act and think as love itself acts and thinks. Love always means well, though its actions may be apparently evil at times; therefore it puts the best construction upon everything others do, no matter how evil it may appear.

[180] Secondly, when our neighbor's deed is an open sin and cannot be otherwise construed, then love acts thus: Has this deed been seen by, or is it known to no one else, then love will keep it quiet and not disclose it, will tell no one of it and will, if possible, cover it, that no one else may know of it, and will thus preserve its neighbor's honor; but love will also reprove him and pray for him, have patience and mercy with him, and will think as a certain father thought, he fell yesterday, I may fall today; or, if he sins in this thing, I sin in another; we both need the same grace. Therefore love will forgive and help, as we also pray that we may be forgiven and helped. Thus Christ teaches us, Matthew 18:15: "And if thy brother sin against thee (that is, secretly, that no one has seen it but you) go show him his fault between thee and him alone." And St. Paul, Galatians 6:1: "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to thyself lest thou also be tempted."

[181] Thirdly, if our neighbor's sin is committed publicly and cannot be covered because it is known to a number of people, then love will again act thus: love will keep silence, will tell no one else of this sin, but will go and make it known to his superior, whose duty it is to reprimand him and will let that suffice; then love will pray for him and have mercy as before. Thus we read, Genesis 37:2, that Joseph told his father Jacob the bad rumor which was spread concerning his brother. He did not tell their secret deed, but as the text says, the bad rumor concerning them, which was to show that their deed was no more a secret but had become public and the talk of the people.

[182] Compare with this what these lovers of discipline and honor now do. In the first place, because they secretly think so much of themselves and are so well pleased with themselves, they think that no one acts and thinks as well as they do, they are the most suspicious people on earth, full of unnecessary care and anxiety that no one does right, and they put the worst construction upon everything; and even when a deed is good, they nevertheless think the intention is evil. Then they search for and meditate closely upon the intention that a person may possibly have and are not satisfied until they have heard something bad about their neighbor. Oh! what respectable and honorable people are addicted to this vice; and it really seems at times as though it were only cautiousness with them and fear of being deceived. But cautiousness considers casual danger and protects itself from being degraded, speaks openly: I believe that you have no bad intentions, but we are all human, you may change and err as well as I, etc. But suspicion considers the present deed only, thinking nothing good of it, and not of the casual danger; it thinks that that is already wrong which caution regards as good and for which it provides means to save it from becoming bad.

[183] Secondly, when suspicion sees the neighbor's evil deed secretly or hears of it, he is delighted, for he can now show how pious he is and how bad other people are, how it loves righteousness, propriety and honor. The poor publican must submit to the Pharisee; Noah must suffer to have his son Ham see his nakedness. Yea, we are accustomed to say, what an honorable, pious man this is; everyone must now hear of this neighbor's evil deed. Some take great pleasure in hearing and talking about the sins of others and say: Indeed it is true. This vice has assumed greater proportions than anyone believes, especially among those who seem to be honorable and well-bred people. Here there is no one who would conceal, who would reprove, who would amend, who would intercede; but everyone slanders and defames and yet they are holy and spiritual people.

[184] Thirdly, when, however, they wish to reprove or accuse another, they deal as unmercifully with him as though they themselves were in need of no grace, and as though they themselves had never committed any sin. They do not tell his superior but revile him publicly before those who knew nothing of it before. Here the love of justice is bought for a high price, for thereby the neighbor is robbed of his honor and disgraced. Here it concerns

them not when he is driven into despair, hazards his body and soul, becomes a desperate man. They have reprov'd the sin as pious, honorable people, but as to betterment, let another see to that. They cast him from them as one who would always remain a good-for-nothing. Oh, what a senseless mass of holy, honorable people they are; they have no scruples of conscience, they go and pray as though they had done their part well! Behold! to this vice they add the ones spoken of previously; they are boastful lovers of self and also without natural affection, obstinate, who concern themselves about no one, are of service to no one and seek only their own honor to the shame and detriment of others. For this reason St. Paul her calls them diabolus, slanderers, defilers, who know no other way of dealing with their neighbor's sins than thereby to disgrace him, to rob him publicly of his good name that they only may be looked upon as pious, well-bred and honored men: For if they were merciful and kind-hearted, they would seek to better and not to defame or cast away anyone but destroy his sin.

[185] St. Paul has indeed described them perfectly; for experience teaches how insanelly the clergy and men of this kind are bent upon listening to other people's sins and shame, ridiculing, speaking about and spreading them, that they indeed are worthy of the name diaboli or devils. St. Paul always uses this little word diabolus in this sense; although some people use it for the devil, whose nature also is to expose, spread and magnify people's sins. But when St. Paul speaks of the devil he usually says Satan. Thus he says, 1 Timothy 3:6: "A bishop must not be a novice, lest being puffed up he fall into the condemnation of the diabolus," that is, the slanderer, that he may not have occasion to judge evil of him etc.

[186] In the twelfth place, they are unchaste. How could it be otherwise when they are leading such a haughty, free, secure, indolent, gay and wanton life? How is it possible that they should remain chaste, addicted to all the aforesaid vices, when those scarcely succeed who live an irreproachable, virtuous life? Now, this vice is publicly known to exist among them, they indulge in it immeasurably and yet go unpunished. But no one is responsible for this unchastity but the pope, because he has forbidden the clergy to marry. If they were allowed to marry, many would abstain from the vices, but many of them would be obliged to choose a different calling. The evil spirit knew this well, and in order that such vice

may be strengthened, he prompted the pope to forbid marriage. Thus has originated this peculiar institution, which is pleasing unto themselves. And lastly, he has beguiled them with this pretense, that they do not acknowledge, never regret, nor repent of, the eleven vices previously described, but regard them as right and virtuous, and enter heaven with them. But this twelfth vice is so coarse that they cannot deny it. Here they do penance and confess it and thereby become as white again as snow, just as a sow that lies in the mud with its entire body. but keeps only one ear and a few bristles on its back clean.

[187] In the thirteenth place, they are fierce; that is, they are entirely untried, untrained, inexperienced people, who cannot understand any shame; when you touch them they lose their temper, and this must all follow from their unrestrained life in which they have been reared. As a child that has been left to do as it pleased becomes coarse and knotty, so they also are inflexible, ungentle, intolerable people. They are accustomed to be honored, to receive plenty, to have their will and to go unpunished; if anything else, therefore, comes in their way, they will not tolerate it. But if they were under discipline as others, they would oftentimes have to give way and abstain from that which they now freely do and would no doubt become more mellow and mild, so that one could get along better with them. This vice is also a very open one, especially in the monasteries, where they call themselves *pas-donates*; that is, such that easily become angry.

[188] In the fourteenth place, they are no lovers of good; that is, they do not regard the good, they are entirely unconcerned about performing good works and proceed as though they were not in need of good works and as if they knew another and better way to heaven. For they maintain that they are so superabundantly rich in good works, through holding mass and praying their horas that they can even sell them to others. They simply know of no other good works than their own self-imposed and self-chosen works, concerning which God has commanded nothing. Those who are the most pious make their testament when they die, institute masses and vigils, increase the fees of the officiating clergy and improve the possessions and the worship of the holy church. These are their good works; besides this their whole life is of no good and no benefit to anyone. Or would you call that a good work when they extort money from the poor people, as the Jews

did, practice usury in all the lands and levy taxes on every house and head? Do not believe that they would ever give without returns, or loan without interest; on the contrary, they must gather for their wills and soulmasses. Therefore it has become proverbial that a priest's testament is a sausage, remains a sausage, and will be a sausage. Therefore the will passes through and through the testators from one to the other; that the property is not worthy to be of any benefit to the poor people. Thus also other good works, such as visiting the sick, clothing the naked, comforting the downcast and the like; being of service and benefit to neighbors, is with them neither a matter of concern nor an act of worship. They abide by their masses and church — howling and make of the mass a good work and offering. This costs them neither trouble nor money, but brings money and secures indolent and good days.

[189] Then they proceed and speak of two kinds of works of mercy, spiritual and bodily ones, and say: The spiritual ones are better than the bodily; therefore they despise the bodily as inferior and abide by the spiritual as superior; and therefore secretly and without being aware of it, depart from the ways and commands of Christ. The spiritual works of mercy, they say, are the mass and its commands; what, therefore, is not mass and vigil is vile in their eyes. Thus they entirely forget and disregard good works. Tell me, I pray, how can the devil succeed better in beguiling them than by teaching them that they shall call their mass and prayer spiritual and better works than the bodily, which Christ commanded, who knows nothing of their spiritual works.

[190] Therefore the apostle has indeed pictured them most clearly when he reproves them for lack of interest in good works. He does not say that they do not know what good works are, but says that they have no regard for them. For they know very well that Christ has commanded them; yes, they themselves confess that there are bodily works of mercy. but now they come with their interpretation and destroy them with their spiritual good works. My dear friend, look at all the convents and monasteries and tell me who derives a farthing's worth of benefit from these people. Whom do they serve? Whom do they help? They profess to do only spiritual works of mercy, which are nothing but their idolatrous masses and vile bawlings and murmurings in the churches. This they themselves call good spiritual

works, but God does not, though they are certainly nothing more than the devil's phantom.

[191] Now this possibly could be endured if they alone would thereby go to hell, but this cursed rabble leads the whole world to damnation. For others learn from them to despise good works and follow and obey them in masses, vigils, prayers, gifts to the saints and similar satanical good works. Thus it happens that they live in indolence and laziness, that they are not allowed to do good to anyone but suffer others to do good to them and to give unto them so that all join with them in their spiritual good works and leave the bodily good works undone. No one helps another, but everyone is bent upon doing these spiritual good works. They are spiritual good works, to be sure, wrought, however, not by the Holy Spirit, but by the evil spirit.

[192] Oh, how many thousand times more blessed is the estate of matrimony or any secular profession! For married life necessitates good works toward the children and servants. A married man must of necessity be of bodily benefit to others as well as to himself; and a secular government must surely be of some benefit to its subjects. Servants, maids and all subjects must be of some benefit and service to others. But this miserable rabble is of no benefit to anyone in this world, but wants everyone to be of benefit to them, and they are drowned in their disregard for everything that is good. Still they pray and hold mass for other people, just as though prayer and mass were committed to them alone and not to the whole congregation. Oh Lord God, behold this cursed conduct and perverted divine service!

[193] In the fifteenth place, they are traitors. Ay, St. Paul! Whereto art thou going? When wilt thou cease? How thou dost bite and sting and strike so terribly this tender crowd with their soft ears! Are they indeed traitors of the race of Judas who sold Christ? Whereby have they rendered themselves guilty? A traitor accepts money or favor and with kind words leads his master or friend into danger and death: just as Judas accepted money and with loving greeting and kiss delivered the Lord into the hands of his enemies. This also the pope and his clergy are continually doing spiritually by taking the treasures of the whole world and giving indulgences for them; and his preachers preach to the poor people his lies of indulgence and false works, speaking good words to them from faith to works, that they might lose Christ and fall into the meshes of the devil. This is indeed a great

abominable treachery toward all the souls in the world. But still it is spiritual. St. Paul, however, must also be understood to mean bodily treason.

[194] We can often read how the popes with their sleek words incited kings and princes against one another and against the Turks by promising them heaven and thus destroying their body and soul and filling the world with the blood of Christians. And they continue still to betray the poor people in this way whenever they please; they preach and command to be preached, how sacred the wars are that are carried on for the sake of spiritual treasures and the church. Yet they are concerned only about their bellies and their preaching is nothing but lies. As to the pope himself, he has always been perfidious in dealing with emperors and kings, as history abundantly proves. And here the bishops and the clergy stand by him and help him; otherwise he could not have accomplished it. Perfidy is so common to all of them that the apostle justly calls them traitors. And they will continue whenever an opportunity presents itself to betray and sell emperors and kings: for they cannot otherwise suppress and overpower them. Now they must side with one, now with another, that they may subdue one after another and thus retain their power.

[195] And here they have no scruples of conscience; on the contrary, it is a great merit, for he who sides with the most holy father, the pope, is no traitor, but an obedient child of the Christian church. Just as they have bodily betrayed kings, countries and people, so also they themselves betray each other spiritually, suffering themselves to be led into treason with sleek words, as if it were an act of worship receiving the pope's benediction and grace as their reward and helping to betray the whole world. Do you see how clearly St. Paul saw all these things long before and how correctly he describes the state of affairs as it exists now and has already existed long. He has not missed it by a hair's breadth.

[196] In the sixteenth place, they are headstrong; that is, their treason and all their vices they commit freely, securely, boldly, without any timidity for men and without any fear of God, as though it were impossible for them to err or as though no one saw them who would judge and punish them. They are a most foolhardy, thirsty and presumptuous people in whatever they undertake. Because they have freed themselves from all duties and

obligations, there is nothing occurring to them which they will not boldly and eagerly undertake, if they only have the chance and the right to do so.

[197] This vice we find particularly in the pope, who permits himself to be called *plenitudinem potestatis* (absolute power), likewise: *proprium motum et certam scientiam* (absolute will and infallible knowledge). The others are addicted to this vice also and they call it *zelum veritatis et justitiae*, *reverentiam ecclesiae* (zeal for truth and righteousness and reverence for the church), and the like. If they once get a person under their influence, then beware! there is nothing but pure malice and thirst.

[198] In the seventeenth place, they are puffed up, having a big turgid heart. This follows very naturally from the vice just mentioned, their headstrongness. For when they have committed treason and all wickedness in the most shameless manner they brag of it, blow it about and say: Who will punish us for it? Who will restrain us? Who will judge us on account of it? We are under obligations to no one; we may judge and punish, but no one shall judge and punish us. Thus they do not only wish to have liberty to do all kinds of knavery, but defy those who would restrain them, and go unjudged. One is to remain quiet about it and call them gracious young men and to suffer them to do all the harm they wish to the body, soul, goods and honor of all the world.

[199] Concerning this vice St. Paul also writes, 2 Peter 2:18, that they desire to go unpunished uttering great swelling words of vanity, as if their throat was swollen. Many laws in the pope's canon law are of this kind, for here he puffs himself up like an adder and defies the whole world; no one is to interfere with whatever he does nor judge neither him nor his associates. And all the clergy follow his example, they are also haughty and bombastic, suffering themselves to be judged by no one, threatening with lightning, thunder and twenty and four hells, as experience teaches. For St. Paul says nothing about them which they have not publicly committed: and thus they richly and abundantly fulfill the words of St. Paul.

[200] In the eighteenth place, they are blind. Be careful, holy apostle, be careful! These are the learned and the lights of the world, who have the power to make new articles of faith, and without whom no one can dare to interpret the Scriptures. Thou wouldst like to cause an uproar and incite the laity against the clergy; then the divine services would be turned upside

down and the heavens, which rest upon them alone, certainly would fall. Thou better be still, or otherwise scold the laity alone; for to scold the clergy brings no good, fosters dissatisfaction among the people and causes them to despise the spiritual authority. Neither will these fellows be reformed by your admonitions, they only become angry and worse than before; they would like to put you under the ban, damn and burn you as a heretic.

[201] But why are they blind? Why do they concern themselves in such foolishness that even children and fools see its worthlessness? They do not see a spark of the true light of faith and of the Gospel. Egyptian darkness has so thickly settled on them and in them, one can almost grasp it; and yet they consider them nothing but virtues. It is now the highest virtue of the bishops to be great, coarse unlearned ass-heads, who consider it a shame to be really learned.

[202] In the nineteenth place, they are “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” Hence the apostle agrees with the common proverb: The clergy has an easy life. If there is a life of sensual pleasure on earth, it is theirs; for they live without work, reap the fruits of the sweat and blood of others, lead a lazy life, eat and drink the very best, clothe themselves with the finest goods, have the best lands and houses and withal the most beautiful little maidens, or any other pleasure and amusement, so that it is commonly said: The good things belong to the clergy.

[203] But the holy cross which Christ lays upon all his followers and which cannot be reconciled with sensual pleasure, they have perverted in a masterly manner; they have enchased it in silver, for then it can be more easily carried and causes no pain; yes, they have sold its kisses and its blessing, and it has become a useful servant of sensual pleasure. But into their hearts the dear cross may not come and dare have nothing to do with their lives; for their liberty, thirst, scorn and pomp have placed a barrier between them and the cross. Nevertheless, they carry the Lord’s cross in silver to his praise and go to heaven thereby. If the Lord should now say to them: I have carried my cross myself and have not commanded you to carry it, let each one of you carry his own cross and follow me; then they would perhaps again outwit him by producing a twofold cross, as they have produced twofold works of mercy, and say that Christ’s cross is better than theirs; therefore they have abided by the best and have forsaken their own

cross that they could honorably carry his; yes, honor it and worship it as their idol; as they now unfortunately lead these poor people and teach them to worship wood, silver and gold, telling them of their relation to God through the cross; just as if the poor, common man were able to grasp their subtle buffoonery when he prays to the holy cross. They are the enemies of the cross of Christ, that is the sum and substance of it all.

[204] In the twentieth and last place, “Holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof.” How ruthlessly the apostle proceeds and anticipates a forcible question and objection, namely, that one should say: How is this possible? They pray and sing so much, daily hold mass and divine services with great pomp and honor. Thus the clergy have always lived in obedience, poverty and chastity under their holy orders and rules. To all this and to whatever may yet be brought forth the apostle briefly answers and says: It is nothing but pretense, glitter and color, beneath which are covered, adorned and fattened such abominable vices, for all their things are chosen and devised by men and not commanded by God. Therefore they abandon God’s commandments and adhere to their own nonsense and are veritable electors who do not the will of God but what they have chosen themselves. The Lord Jesus himself, Matthew 24:15, briefly mentions all these vices, under such pretense, and calls them an abomination and says: “When, therefore, ye see the abomination of desolation,” etc. For it is an abomination of which everyone justly has a horror that under such a small pretense such great, ugly, offensive vices should grow and flourish.

[205] He speaks also very intelligently: “They deny the power or the strength of the godly life, which is plainer and severer. They are without the power and activity of a godly life. They deny and antagonize. But what that means we shall consider later when we again come to Herod and speak of his worship. Let it suffice now that St. Paul is recognized in this text and that we see how he agrees with the Gospel. For here the wise men search and have the Scriptures with honest intentions and Herod has them also, but only in pretense and with wrong intention, namely, to hinder them for the sake of his kingdom, as the Papists also do. Therefore we shall consider St. Paul’s text to the end.

[206] He says: “Beware! from these also turn away.” Here he warns us to guard ourselves against this clerical rule and orders and gives permission, yes, commands us to leave them if we have been caught in their meshes, as

we shall hear; he throws open all monasteries and cloisters and frees every priest and monk. Thus Christ also teaches, Matthew 24:16, to flee from them and avoid them.

[207] Furthermore he portrays some among them in particular when he says: “For of these are they that creep into houses and take captive silly women laden with sins, led away by divers lusts, ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Who can interpret this differently than that here are meant the mendicant orders, which the apostle here clearly foresaw? They are they who have always crept into houses. St. Paul calls that a house which we now call a church, for at his time there were no churches, but the Christians assembled in houses just as it may happen now that ten or twenty neighbors come together and preach and pray and all receive the sacrament.

[208] Thus these mendicant orders now also creep into parish churches which do not belong to them and preach their sermons there. This right the pope has given them by reason of his own insolence and power. The other thing is that they alone rule almost the entire confession. This privilege the pope has also given them by reason of the same power through which he has allowed them to creep into the houses. This is truly the devil’s game and the women adhere to it, especially those who are already guilty of gross transgressions, as St. Paul here says, laden with sin. For when these foolish women are troubled in their conscience and do not know how to help or counsel themselves, they go and pour out their troubles before the priest and think that all is well. But then they are caught, and they give and bring as much as they have and can. And then the holy fathers come and preach and admonish the people to confess their sins, citing many examples of how women who were in perdition and who appeared after death declare that they were damned because they had neglected the confession, and they utter such enormous papistical lies that the very stones tremble and sweat.

[209] If you observe closely these examples which they adduce, you will discover that only women have been damned because of neglect of confession and not men; so that one can clearly see that a great arch-knave has contrived these examples who was eager to know the secrets of women’s hearts and who, having seen how the women out of natural faintheartedness are naturally more bashful than men, has said to himself: I will advise them rightly and through the fear of confession learn to know

their hearts; and by the help of the devil he was successful. But he has withal entangled and damned many consciences who on account of shame and timidity, which they could not overcome, have not confessed and yet have thereby sinned against their consciences because they believed that it was necessary to confess and yet had not done so. For as you believe so God will judge you; if you believe that it is your duty to do something, and you do not do it, you sin. It is my conviction that such a knave who with such examples entangles and damns consciences through a false faith, deserves that not only his body but also his soul be torn and ground by all the devils into a hundred thousand pieces. What horrible murders of souls these hellish traitors and papistical liars commit in all the world! Oh, weep, he that can weep, over such lamentable destruction of poor souls.

[210] When poor timid women who are naturally simple and credulous, and wish to be devout and pious, hear such a sermon, they suffer themselves to be entrapped. And when they seek advice and help of their spiritual father, the coarse ass and blind leader cannot tell them anything about Christ and faith, but proceeds to teach them that they must atone for their sins through satisfactions and works. Then the torturing begins of which St. Paul here speaks; thus they are always learning and never come to a knowledge of the truth: therefore the woman's conscience finds no rest, her sins oppress and torture her; she would like to be freed from them and cannot; then it follows what St. Paul says, that they are led away by diverse desires; then she begins to fast with water and bread, makes pilgrimages in bare feet to the saints; some scourge themselves until the blood flows, some give here to the church and there to the cup, and their diverse desires have neither end nor measure; whatever they hear as being good for the atonement of their sins they try to do in full earnest, but find no rest. In the meantime the holy spiritual father sits, and rests, having caught the poor creatures, which are of no more value to him so many milk cows. And when the women are caught, the men will also be caught before long, and what secret confession imposes upon them must be done.

[211] If you would preach free penance correctly, then say thus: Dear women, if anyone is burdened with sin, let her confess, if she will; if she confess, or if she do not confess, let her have a firm faith that Christ will forgive her sins, and let her confess them to him secretly, with entire, sincere confidence in his grace, which he has promised to all who desire it,

never doubting, and then her sins are certainly forgiven. Then abstain from them and perform good works toward your neighbors who are in need of them, invite poor people, wash their feet and humbly serve them. Behold! this is the right way to rescue a sinful woman, and it can be done without burdening the conscience, with good will and delight, as is pleasing to God. But if this were done, these men who murder souls and frighten spirits would lose the confession penny, the milk cow would go dry, and the poor consciences would be freed, not led any more by their endless teaching and preaching. But this would hurt the holy clergy, yes, they would have to starve to death. For the apostle has not without reason mentioned the women who are laden with sins, for the others who are innocent they do not trouble with such devilish examples, teachings and incarcerations. In order that this milk may not be diminished they must urge such fright upon the consciences, especially such women who are easily misled; and that particularly, when they are burdened with an evil, sinful conscience. For then there is nothing that they would not obey, and too much can never be imposed upon them. They eventually become unsteadfast and finally despairing souls, who have learned to comfort themselves not with the grace of God but with their own works, and wish to have their sins taken away not through faith but through satisfaction, and this is impossible.

[212] They request that we should spare the clergy, and not scold and reprove, but honor and excuse them. Yes, if they alone were evil and if they would ruin only themselves, I could well be silent; but their rule destroys the whole world. He who remains silent to this, and does not hazard his body and life, is no true Christian, and does not love his neighbor's salvation as his own. If I were only able to tear the souls out of hellish jaws, I would then scold more temperately. They set the city on fire and say I should not cry, fire! nor quench the flames. "Cursed be he," says Jeremiah, Jeremiah 48:10, "that doeth the work of Jehovah negligently, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood." God desires us to strike vigorously with our swords, that the blood may flow; he that does the work unfaithfully is accursed. They however wish to be treated leniently and with much indulgence. Not thus, dear man!

[213] St. Paul says further: "And even as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also withstand the truth." Here he does not speak of the mendicant orders only, but also of the aforesaid members of the clergy, who

withstand the truth, and will not suffer the people to be led out of their rule of fear to the knowledge of free faith. Everyone can now see that they fear that their rule and tyranny will be suppressed. Thus, when the children of Israel were oppressed in Egypt by King Pharaoh, and God sent Moses to deliver them. Moses performed two miracles, to prove that God had sent him; then two of King Pharaoh's magicians, Jannes and Jambres, performed the same miracles, thereby detaining the king and rendering Moses' miracles ineffectual so that the Israelites had to remain until the third miracle was performed: This the magicians could not perform and then it was known that they were wrong and that Moses was right.

[214] Thus it always is, the tyrants among God's people have always had a pretense, they act as though they were the true saints. Thus they hinder and retard the simple, that they cannot become free; for they are weak in conscience and cannot clearly distinguish between show and reality, between pretense and truth. Therefore the people will always be entrapped through show and pretense, and the truth is hindered and retarded. Thus the wise men were detained at Jerusalem through Herod who pretended to search the Scriptures. And now the clerical pageantry also prevents people from coming to faith and the truth, because it has a good appearance and is so much like the true worship. St. Paul says further:

[215] "Men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith." Here you can see what they really are; their mind and their imagination are corrupted. For they insist that what they do is right and that there is nothing else, and yet they know nothing about faith. True faith alone can make uncorrupted minds and spiritual virgins. He teaches a correct imagination and a good mind who insists that the grace of God alone is our comfort. He who is not of this mind is a Christian like the harlot is a virgin, though he may perform the good works of all the saints. Where there is such a corrupted mind there is little hope that they will ever come to true faith; especially not when they have gone so far as to oppose true faith and when they suffer themselves to be corrupted after true faith had been planted in them by baptism.

[216] Further, "But they shall proceed no further; for their loll7 shall be evident unto all men." Thus also the pope and our clergy will fare; the truth will remain and will be so strong against them that their empty show and knavery must be exposed; though they rage and storm and have four thousand Turkish emperors on their side. Show and lie cannot obtain in the

end, for that is impossible, although they may save themselves and remain for a time. Let this now suffice concerning St. Paul's text, and let us return to the Gospel and its interpretation.

[217] That Herod called the wise men and inquired of them secretly as to when the star appeared, indicates that the spiritual Herods do not deny the Gospel outwardly, but learn it from the true Christians, however, only, with this intention that they will use it to do mischief; just as Herod here intended to use the time the star appeared, to kill Christ and confirm his own kingdom. Thus also now, when we hold up the Gospel to our clergy they do not deny that it is the Gospel, they hear and accept it. They deny, however, that this is not the correct meaning, that it has a gloss and an interpretation which we shall get from no one but them, and that everyone must acknowledge their interpretation. Thus they do not deny the Gospel, but rob it of its power, and under the name and appearance of the Gospel they teach their own dreams. This St. Paul, 2 Timothy 2:5, calls: "Holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof." He does not say they have the power of the divine essence, although that is true also; but he says much more forcibly, that they deny it. Thereby he gives us to understand clearly, that they are godless not only in their life and walk, but also in their doctrine and government; that they lead themselves with their lives, and others with their doctrine away from the Gospel and salvation. This the pope and the clergy now do in all their sermons. Though they cry loudly: Gospel! Gospel! Yet they deny, damn and curse everything that is in the Gospel with all its contents. Just as Herod learned of the star, but endeavored to destroy everything the star signified. We will now consider a few of their doctrines, and guard against them.

[218] The Gospel teaches that salvation is by faith alone. This they hear and do not deny; nevertheless, they destroy all its power by saying that faith without works is useless. Thus they secretly depart from faith to works, and publicly condemn faith and ascribe everything to works. Therefore they retain the little word faith only in appearance, and deny, condemn and curse everything of the nature of faith, and begin to divide it into many parts; some say there is a natural faith, others a spiritual, some a common, some others a particular, some a simple, others a complex, and they themselves, these blind leaders, know less of what they are juggling, than any natural fool. The Gospel knows nothing of their manifold faith, has but the one,

which is founded upon the pure grace of God, without any merit of works, of this they have not the faintest idea, yes, condemn it as the worst heresy, and yet they say that they will defend the Gospel and the Christian faith.

[219] Again the Gospel says that Christ is our Savior; this they hear, but then loosen and weaken every natural work, manner, and attribute of Christ inasmuch as they publicly teach that man can, through natural strength and works, earn the grace of God, therefore they condemn Christ and all his works, as St. Peter, (2 Peter 2:1,) has prophesied of them: “There shall be false teachers among you denying even the Master that bought them.” For if nature itself can attain the grace of God, as now all high schools, institutions, and cloisters, hold and teach in harmony with the pope, then Christ was born and died to no purpose. Why should Christ have shed his blood to acquire grace for us, if we through our nature could have acquired ourselves? Yet they wish to be Christians, and raise aloft the name of Christ, under the appearance of which they revile and condemn as heresy the entire Christian essence.

[220] Again, the Gospel teaches that the law of God is spiritual and cannot possibly be fulfilled by nature; but that the Spirit of God must fulfill it in us through faith, Romans 8:2-3. Therefore they deny neither the Spirit nor the law, but they nevertheless destroy all its power, and teach that man, without the help of the Spirit, can fulfill the law naturally in all its works, although he cannot thereby earn heaven. This is nothing less than denying the power of the law and of the Spirit, retaining only the name.

[221] Then they proceed and tear the law of God asunder where they think it too difficult for nature, making superfluous, unnecessary things of it; as for example, that it is neither necessary nor commanded that we should love God with the entire heart, that we give the cloak with the coat; again, that we should not go to court; again, that we should loan and give to everybody, without profit or gain. Again, that we should suffer evil and do good unto our enemies, etc. Thus they have destroyed the true nature of Christianity, which consists alone in this that we suffer wrong and do good to everybody. And then they institute in its stead their own command, that they wear tonsures and caps, eat no meat, eggs, butter, and milk, make a great noise in the church; that nothing remains now of the law of God.

[222] Again, the Gospel praises the pure grace of God as pardoning and destroying sin. Now they do not deny the little word grace, but hold it seemingly in high esteem; besides this, however, they teach a multiplicity of satisfactions for sin, payments of money, orders, divisions of repentance in order to purchase from God the forgiveness of sin, and to pay him for his grace. Therefore the nature and work of grace are destroyed and condemned to the very foundation; for grace is pure grace or nothing at all.

[223] Again, the Gospel teaches that through original sin all men are under wrath and disfavor, and that all their works are thereby rendered sinful. They do not deny the expression, original sin, but destroy its force by saying that nature is still good, and its works are not sinful, and can as yet well prepare itself, yet for grace. They say also that original sin did not injure nature so that it should be condemned, but simply weakened it towards the good, and disposed it to evil. If it does not follow its inclination, which of itself it does not need to do, it does not deserve hell, and can also acquire the grace of God. Behold, this is as much as to say: original sin is not original sin; and under this name they deny the work and nature of sin.

[224] Again, the Gospel teaches: that love does not seek its own, but serves others only. Now they indeed hold to the little word love, but curtail its entire nature, in as much as they teach, ordinary love begins with itself and loves itself first and most. Then they say, it is loving enough if, one simply wishes another well, it is not necessary to add the deed of serving him; for it would be dishonest for the pope to humble himself and serve his subject, but he permits his feet to be kissed, and thinks it enough simply to say: I wish everybody well except my enemies. Behold! here lie in ruins, the nature and power of love, and nothing remains but the simple empty name.

[225] Again, the Gospel teaches how hope builds alone upon pure divine revelation; they confess the little word, hope, teach, however, that hope does not rest upon divine revelation, but upon its own merits.

[226] Again, the Gospel teaches how God's providence is eternally sure; they, however, teach that it rests upon the free will and is uncertain.

[227] In short, they confess God and his name, but root out and condemn as the worst heresy whatever God orders, wills, does, establishes, and

executes, from which we can clearly see how Christ's suffering is now spiritually fulfilled under the rule of the pope. Behold, see they have in their teaching the appearance of faith, of hope, of love, of grace, of sin, of the law, of Christ, of God, of the Gospel; yet they deny all strength and nature of the same, and even condemn it all as the worst heresy. On this account the apostle spoke so sharply when he said: They deny the power of the whole divine worship and life, and live only the pretense of it. Oh, Lord God of heaven, where are the streams of water, yes, of blood that rightly should flow from our eyes in this last terrible and dreadful time of the unspeakable, immeasurable wrath of God upon the world because of its sin and thanklessness?

[228] Further, Herod sends the wise men to Bethlehem and commands them diligently to seek the child, pretending that he also wished to come and worship him. Here our Herodians are shown another thing, namely, that they ought to live as they preach. Teaching and living are with them empty show and denial of the truth, for the life must be as the teaching directs. However the pope and the religious orders now do allow Christians to be pious, and command them to seek Christ and the truth; yet with this addition, that they must be his betrayers, and serve the priesthood in thus seeking Christ. For the pope now shamelessly and eagerly declares this to all the world: Anyone is allowed to seek Christ and to live righteously; but, if he does not also obey the pope's orders and command, and serve him, with all his good life, be subject to his authority, he still cannot be saved. The people are thus made to think that more, or at least just as much, depends upon obedience to the pope than upon God's commands.

[229] See, this is Herod's addition, that he not only sends the wise men to Bethlehem, but also holds them subject to himself and feels bound treacherously to destroy Christ. For what do all who thus hold that obedience to the pope is necessary to salvation, and that whoever does not hold it is condemned, do, except betray and surrender Christ that Herod may find and kill him. For Christian faith cannot exist beside such obedience or such conscience, as has often been said. For faith alone must save, and if such obedience be counted useful and permitted, faith must perish, and Herod reign in Christ's stead. That means then really to surrender and betray Christ and one's faith.

[230] But, when Herod says: I too will come and worship him, everyone sees that he lies, that these are mere words and a clear pretense, beneath which he is still planning something quite different, namely to kill Christ and to destroy his kingdom. Here you have in Herod the image of all unbelieving saints well and briefly set forth. In the first place Herod does not pretend any common thing: he does not say that he wishes to give him gold or myrrh, neither that he wishes to help him or to be his true friend; but undertakes the very highest and best thing that there is in the service of God, namely, humility and worship. I will come, he says, as a lowly one, and show the highest honor, even worship.

[231] Thus do now also the Herodians, the priests, who do not undertake any ordinary work, but the very highest, the service of God. This they appropriate to themselves, in that they exercise themselves, saying openly that the life of other men is temporal and worldly, but that they are in the service of God day and night, and, while others labor, they pray and serve God for the poor people. Do you not believe this? Well then, ask the bells about it which ring for their worship. To this they go in humble manner, let themselves be proclaimed God's servants before all men, fattening their bellies right well in so doing, gather for themselves riches out of all the world, and build houses, as if they expected to live here forever. Accordingly we must here note the difference between true and false worship, that we may recognize and avoid the spirit of the villain Herod.

The True and False Worship of God

[232] No better distinction is to be had here than God's Word. The worship which is there taught must surely be the true worship; but that which is set up beside God's Word or outside of it. as invented by men, must certainly be the false Herod-worship. Now the worship of God is nowhere established, except in his commandments. For without doubt he alone serves God who keeps his commandments; just as a servant in the house is said to serve his master only when he does, and attends to, whatever his master bids him to do. However, if he does not do this, even if he otherwise does the will of the whole town he is not said to serve his master. So then, whoever does not keep God's commandments, does not serve God, even though he keeps the teachings and commandments of all men.

[233] Now the worship of God consists in this that you confess, honor and love God with your whole heart, put all your trust and confidence in him, never doubt his goodness, either in life or in death, either in sins or in right living, as the first commandment teaches. To this we can attain through the merit and blood of Christ alone, who has gained for us and gives us such a heart, if we hear and believe his word; for our nature cannot have such a heart of itself. Behold, this is the chief worship of God and the greatest thing, to wit, an upright Christian faith and love to God through Christ. Therefore the first commandment is fulfilled by us through the precious blood of Christ, and God is faithfully served from the heart.

[234] In the second place, if you honor God's name, and call upon it in need, and openly confess it before the tyrants and persecutors of this true worship, not fearing them, but punishing the Herodians and guarding, as much as you can, that they do not dishonor God's name with their false life and teaching, set forth under God's name, which is truly a great thing and takes the burdens of the world upon itself. See, this is the second article of worship which is kept in the commandment.

[235] Thirdly, if you bear the holy cross, and must suffer much because of such faith and confession, that you must risk for it body and life, goods and honor, friend and favor; this means rightly keeping and hallowing the Sabbath, since it is not you, but God only who works in you, for you are but a suffering, persecuted man. This is the third article of worship, and is included in the third commandment. See, here is the first table with the first three commandments, which are contained in the three articles, faith, confession, and suffering. By this the present life and the world are renounced and God alone is praised.

[236] Fourthly, we come into the second table, and henceforth you serve God, if you honor father and mother, are subject and obedient to them, and help them where they need it before all mankind, and if you do not without their consent, go into orders, when they are in need of your services in some other way.

[237] Fifthly, that you injure no one in body, but show kindness to everyone, even to your enemies, that you visit the sick and prisoners, and give a helping hand to all needy, and have a good, kind heart for all men.

[238] Sixthly, that you live chastely and temperately, or always honor your marriage vow, and help others to honor theirs.

[239] Seventhly, that you do not deceive or injure anyone, or take advantage in business; but that you lend and give to everyone or exchange with him, as far as you can, and protect your neighbor against injury.

[240] Eighthly, that you guard your tongue, and injure, slander, or belie no one, but defend, excuse and spare everyone.

[241] Ninthly and tenthly, that you do not covet any man's wife or property.

[242] See, these are the parts of truly good worship. This and nothing else God requires of you; if you do anything more, he does not value it. This is also clear and easy to be understood by everyone. Now you see that the true worship must be common to all classes, and to all men, and only this alone dare be found among God's people. And, where another worship is found, it must certainly be false and misleading; as that is what will not be common to all, but limits itself to some special classes and men. Thus far we have spoken of the true, universal, and only worship.

[243] Now let us see the false, peculiar, factional and multifarious worship which is not commanded of God, but made up by the pope and his priests. There you may see many kinds of monasteries, orders, and cloisters, of which one has nothing in common with any other. One monk wears a large, another a small shaven crown; one wears gray, another wears black, another white, another woolen, another linen clothing, another made of hair; this one prays on such days and time; this one eats flesh, that one fish; this one is a Carthusian, that one a barefoot monk. This one has such ceremonies; that one others; one prays with the stool toward Rome; another with the bench toward Jerusalem; this one conducts mass so, that one differently; this one is bound to this monastery, that one to another; this one bawls in this choir, that one in another, and the churches are full of their mutterings. They live too in celibacy and have all kinds of disciplines. And who can name all their countless, factional, odd and sectarian practices? Well, now this worship has vomited forth another, yet more overgrown. There is neither limit nor measure to the building of churches, chapels, monasteries, and altars, to founding masses and vigils, to establishing hours of prayer, and to creating mass vestures, choir caps, chalices, monstrance's,

silver images and ornaments, candlesticks, tapers, lights, incense, tables and bells. Hey, what an ocean, what a forest of these things there is! into this has gone all the devotion, tribute, money, and property of the laity; this calling increasing the worship of God and caring for the service of God, as the pope calls it in his divine right.

[244] Compare now this article with true worship, and tell me, where has God ever commanded anyone a letter of the article? Do you still doubt then that the whole clergy under the pope is nothing but the creature, the empty show, or the imposture of Herod, only that people may be hindered and turned away from the true worship? These are the altars and the groves over which the prophets lament regarding the people of Israel, that every town set up its own grove and altar, and forsook the true temple of God. Just so has this ungodly, superstitious, popish, Herodian worship filled all the corners of the world and has forced away and destroyed the only true worship of God.

[245] Perhaps you look about and think: What, could so many people be wrong all at once? Beware, and do not let their number trouble you; hold fast to God's word; he cannot deceive you, though all mankind be false, as indeed the Scriptures say, Psalm 116:11: "All men are liars." Do not be astonished that so many are now in error for in the days of Elijah there were only seven thousand righteous men in all Israel, 1 Kings, 19:18. Tell me, what were seven thousand men over against all Israel, of whom there were more than twelve hundred thousand fighting men, besides women and children? What was even the whole people over against the whole world that was all at one time in sin? What then is to be now, since Christ and the apostles have spoken such terrible things of these times that even Christ himself says, Luke 18:8: When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? These must be great and terrible things and must lead a great many people astray, and those most of all of whom one should expect it the least shall be ruled by the Anti-Christ who leads the world astray. We should be certain, since we do not regard God's judgment and do not take his wrath to heart, that it would be no miracle, if he retained scarcely one man on earth as righteous.

[246] This is the last and worst time, of which all Scriptures has spoken so terribly. Thank God, therefore, that you see his word, telling which is true and which the false worship. Then see that you remain therein and do

not follow the mob that wanders without God's word. If those scarcely remain steadfast who have God's word and hold fast to it, where shall those stay who, without God's word, follow their own head? Therefore, let him doubt who will; God's word and worship convincingly show that the pope is the Anti-Christ and the priests his disciples who lead all the world astray.

[247] See now, has it not been well arranged? The Herodian worship has brazen bells, and these are many and large, with which they allure the people to such worship. As the worship is, so also are the bells or allurements. God has given to the true worship other and right bells, namely the preachers who should ring and sound such worship into the people. But where are they now? Those are dead, senseless bells, and they would be more useful if one made pots and vessels of them. Just so the worship is dead and useless, and it would be better if one carried on such a business in the field of jugglery.

[248] See, this is the worship of Herod which pretends to worship Christ and serve God, and is nothing but deception. Yet it plays the hypocrite so well that it daily deceives many good, pious people, and has often deceived them, as Christ says, Matthew 24:25, that they shall lead astray, if possible, even the elect. As it has happened to St. Bernard, to St. Francis, and to St. Dominic and others, who however, did not perish in error, nor remained in it, since their saving faith kept them safe through such error and led them out.

[249] So also it happened to these pious wise men. They had a good, true faith and purpose; still they were mistaken in Herod, thinking his pretense true and believing his lies, and were ready also to do as they were told and to be obedient to him, had they not been otherwise instructed from heaven. So it happens today, and so it has happened, that many are obedient to the pope, and believing in simple faith that his existence is right and good, thus falling into error. However their Christian faith helps them that such poison does not in the end injure them, as Christ says, Mark 16:17-18: "And if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them, if they believe in my name." But what drink can be more deadly than such lies and hypocrisy of false teaching and wrong worship?

[250] According as we have now learned to know Herod's worship and perceived his artful hypocrisy, let us now see too his evil purpose and

maliciousness, with which he plans to destroy not only the true worship, but also Christ, the King, and his whole kingdom. He attempts to do this in three ways. First, with the same hypocritical appearance of this false worship. For such an appearance of worship is so strong an enticement from true worship that it can be overcome only by special grace, so that St. Paul well names it *energiam erroris*, a strong working of error. The people cannot defend themselves against such seduction, where there are not true bishops and preachers who preach the only true worship, hold the people to the pure word of God, and forbid the false worship; as the prophets did in Israel, and were all for that reason put to death.

[251] In the second place Herod destroys true worship through his teaching, of which we have already spoken. Thus he teaches works instead of faith, contrary to the first commandment to honor and serve God; in the second and third commandments he perverts and teaches one's own works and sufficiency, and forbids to confess the faith and God's name. As has been said, he teaches disobedience to father and mother, contrary to the fourth commandment. Contrary to the fifth he teaches that it is not necessary to love one's enemy and to do him good. Contrary to the sixth he tears matrimony to pieces. He robs and steals and even justifies so doing, thus breaking the seventh commandment. He teaches also that it is not necessary to lend and give. Summa sum-mature, he teaches that it is not necessary to love God and one's neighbor from the heart. That means, to be sure, that he destroys the whole Scripture and worship of God.

[252] In the third place, he is not satisfied with such poisonous examples and deadly teachings, but goes ahead and exercises two kinds of force in them; he banishes and execrates the souls that do not follow him, also burns, hunts and persecutes their bodies, property and honor in the most shameful way. What more could he do that is evil? I mean to say that he is a Herod; nevertheless he must leave Christ alone, and cannot carry out his will. He destroys many, but faith remains to the end of the world, although hidden, a fugitive, and unknown.

[253] But here perhaps you ask me, what then should they do who are spiritual captives under Herod in false worship, in convents and monasteries? I answer: You cannot do otherwise than lay aside the false worship and hold to God's word and true worship; or do as the wise men did, and drink the poison, firmly believing that it will not hurt you. You will

find no other means: God's word will remain unchanged to all eternity. But, although I have already spoken of this in another gospel, I must speak of it again.

[254] Well now, we place before us one who holds fast in this matter and argues against us that a priest, a monk, or a nun, or any other person who has gone into orders, is bound to keep his spoken vow and may not in any way during his whole life leave it or turn aside. Such a man may take his stand in the Scripture, which says that one should fulfill what one has vowed. But let us, however, speak of vows which God has not commanded, but which men make of their own accord. For, since in baptism we vowed to serve God and keep his commandment, such a vow is demanded by God of all men, as the Scripture says, Psalm 22:25: "I will pay my vows before them that fear him," and, Psalm 116:18: "I will pay my vows unto Jehovah, yea, in the presence of all his people." But the vow of the religious orders he has not commanded.

[255] With this opponent we shall deal in two ways. First, let us decide definitely upon those things in which there is no doubt or argument; secondly, let us dispute with him, explore and seek the truth. First, no one can or should doubt that all contrary to God's command, whether it be to live or to die, to vow or to become free, to speak or to be silent, is to be condemned and by all means to be changed and to be avoided. For the will of God must soar above all and be done in heaven and on earth, as we pray, even if a man could work all miracles. This is clear and certain enough. So there is now no doubt or argument, but it is certainly determined: If anyone has been consecrated as priest, monk or nun against God's will, such priesthood and monkery is nothing and altogether to be condemned, and he is bound to let it all go and change. Thus, if anyone has become priest or monk only for the purpose of stealing a chalice or ornaments, he has certainly taken the vow against God's commandment, and has also sinned in so doing and his vow does not bind him. Such a man may and should return to secular life, or he must take the vow anew and from right motives. For his purpose has never been to enter the clergy; but, if thievishness had not urged him, he would certainly not have taken the vow and considered entering the order. Accordingly God cannot accept the vow, nor is it binding upon the man to observe it.

[256] But before men it is different, for whoever has vowed anything must keep his vow, although he did not intend it in his heart. For man does not see his neighbor's heart, and accordingly accepts his vow as honest and believes it to be from the heart. So he has the right to ask him to fulfill it, and may honestly state that he is not bound to believe that the promisor has changed his mind and ruded his bargain. If, however, the other lied, the loss is his. But God cannot be deceived, and he judges only by the heart. Accordingly such a vow counts for nothing with him, and he does not ask it, but is angry to have anyone thus tempt him.

[257] If now anyone had taken vows against the first great commandment of God of the first table, he would be much more obliged to give up his vow than that thief who had vowed against the seventh commandment, as the first commandment is higher than the seventh commandment. For whoever thus steals contrary to the seventh commandment steals only worldly property, the very least of created things. But he who deals contrary to the first commandment robs and denies God himself, the highest good and the Creator of all. The priests and monks, then, who sin against the first commandment, are many times worse than that thievish cheat and breaker of the seventh commandment. What, if we could now prove that nearly all priests and monks enter orders against the first commandment, and that they become spiritual just as little, or even less than these thievish roguish knaves. Oh, this means to throw open monasteries and convents and to set free the monks and priests. Well now, consider and listen.

[258] The first commandment contains the Christian faith, for he who does not believe cannot have a God or know him; all unbelief is idolatry. This is Christian faith that trusts in God's grace alone, gained for us and bestowed upon us through the blood of Christ, and that counts no work useful or good to win God's favor. For this were too hard for nature, which is conceived and born in sin, and also lives, works and dies in it if Christ would not come to its help, gaining God's mercy for us by his works alone and not by our own. Through him, too, we fulfill the first commandment and have a God on whose mercy we can depend with all confidence, so that without our merit he forgives all our sins and saves us in Christ, as has often already been said. Therefore it is impossible that this faith should permit beside itself a trust in works, as though anyone could obtain forgiveness of

sins and grace and become holy and be saved by them, for this belongs to Christ alone, who does all this through his work. Thus we have only to believe and confidently to entrust ourselves to him.

[259] Therefore there is no penance, no satisfaction for sin, no acquiring of grace, no becoming holy, for we believe only in Christ, that he has done enough for our sin, won mercy for us and saved us. After that we should first of all do good works of free will, to his honor and for the good of our neighbor, not that we may become holy or be saved or put away sin thereby, for that must remain entrusted to Christ alone through faith. He does not grant to angels, much less to our good works, that they should put away sin, win grace, and make holy: that belongs to him, he has done and does it alone. This he wishes to have us believe, and if we believe it then we have it. Of this St. Paul says: I do not make void the grace of God; for if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for naught, Galatians 2:21. That is to say, if we are able to do so much that God forgives our sins and gives grace and salvation on account of our works, then we do not need Christ. For what other reason did he die, except to atone for our sins and win grace, that we give up hope in ourselves and our works, make nothing of them, confide in Christ alone and hold with a fixed faith that he is the one whom God regards in our place and through whose merit alone forgives us our sins, becomes reconciled and saves us. This is a Christian faith, of which Christ says, Mark 16:16. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned."

[260] Now let us consider the religious orders and estimate them over against the first commandment and Christian faith. Does anyone wish to become a priest or to take a vow in the Christian spirit so that he does not run against the first commandment and tempt God, then the intention of his heart must be that he can say: Well, I intend to become a priest, a monk, or nun, or to take some other vow, not that I consider the station of life or order a way to salvation, neither because I expect through such a life to become holy, to atone for sin and to win God's grace. God protect me against this, for this would be against Christ and his blood, this would be destroying all his merit and honor and the worst scorn and mockery of God. For all that will I expect from him in pure faith, since I do not doubt that he has done it for me. However, since I must do something on earth, I will take up this life, exercise myself in it, chastise my body and serve my neighbor:

just as another man works in the field or garden or at his trade without regard to merit and good in his works. See, where this purpose is not, there Christ must be denied and the first commandment destroyed, and vain, unchristian, unbelieving, Jewish and heathen life be found. This also says the mighty Scripture truth of St. Paul, Romans 14:23: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." For without faith no one will be saved, Mark 16:16. So, too, without faith there can be no righteousness nor truth.

[261] Tell me now how many priests and monks, think you, are to be found who take vows and live under vows with so Christian a purpose? Do not nearly all of them speak thus: Well, if my order does not count more for me in atoning for sin, in becoming holy, and in getting to heaven than a farmer's plough or a tailor's needle does for him, then what am I doing in the order of priesthood? No, I will do good works, hold many masses, pray and do penance for myself and other people. What kind of word is that of an unbelieving heart that has denied Christ and that ascribes to its order and works that which should be expected of Christ alone through faith?

[262] Moreover, as has been said above, it is the meaning and teaching of all those in the religious orders that one can through his own work win God's grace and put away sin. They are so devoid of shame that they sell, promise and divide to others their good works, merit and brotherhood; they are so bold as to do for men what Christ alone is able to do, namely, to put away men's sins and to make them holy. Of this Christ has especially prophesied and said, Matthew 24:5: "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ." Beloved, give heed to the word. Is it not true, as has just been said, that our priests and monks make themselves Christ? Although no one of them says with the mouth, I am Christ; nevertheless they say: I help other people, give them my merit, win grace for them, put away their sin, which is Christ's work and office only. Accordingly, they are Christ, although they do not call themselves Christ. For Matthew does not say that they will say: I am called Christ, but I am Christ. It is not the name, but the office and work of Christ that they take for themselves.

[263] Therefore we conclude here without any dispute or question or doubt that all in religious orders who are not priests, monks or nuns from the above named Christian purpose have certainly taken vows and live against the first commandment of God and are ten times worse than the thievish, tricky rascal of whom we have spoken. And they are truly the lost

multitude, heathen and Jews, the Devil's own, as they come and go; they are truly and exactly those of whom St. Peter says, 2 Peter 2:1-3: "Among you also there shall be false teachers denying even the Master that bought them. And in covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you." This they do to perfection, for all possessions and tribute come to the religious orders, because of their false, unchristian life, which they hold up with false words.

[264] Accordingly, all these are to be advised to leave tonsures and caps, monastery and convent, and to cease keeping their vow; or to begin anew to vow such a life in Christian faith and purpose. For the vow observed in the Christian purpose counts no more before God than this much: See here, God, I vow to you not to be a Christian as long as I live. I recall the vow of my baptism, and will now make and keep for thee a better vow, apart from Christ, in my own doings and works. Is not that a terrible, horrible vow? Now it is nothing different, as can clearly be seen from the above. But these are the ones who take vows in the best way, as they suppose.

[265] For the great, mad crowd who become priests and monks for their bellies' sake, that they may be provided for in this world, and who compose the larger part of the clergy, are not worthy to be discussed and much less is their vow of any validity. These can surely become secular, if they wish, for they have never become nor been religious. And it would indeed be necessary for them to cease mocking God with their mummery, to give up their prebend, tenure, priesthood, monkery and nuns' life. Oh, Lord God, how totally blind is the world, how perverted it is! The world now is religious and religious orders are now the world. How strong is the rule of Anti-Christ!

[266] In the second place we shall now argue and say: Although someone had honestly taken the vow with Christian intention, has he not the power, if occasion demand, to return to secular life? Here I desire that only pious, honest spirits would give heed, who are not swift to judge, but are eager to learn and reason. For nothing can be said to the mad Papists and Herodians, no one can argue with them: they can only hold their ears, gnash their teeth and scream: Heretic, heretic, fire, fire, fire! We let these alone as irrational and talk with those who would gladly have their own and other people's conscience instructed.

[267] It is undeniable that a Christian purpose to take vows consists, as has been said above, in this, that it does not take the vow because the order is useful and necessary to abolish sin, to win grace, to become pious, to especially serve God and to be saved. These are properties of the common Christian faith only which nowhere, except in Christ, expects such blessings, but which, free and exempt from such unchristian madness, thinks only of accepting a good discipline of the body in this life. Just so undeniable it is that God accepts no vow or religious order, except it be taken with this Christian purpose, since St. Paul stands firmly here and says, Romans 14:23: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." But God cannot accept sin, Psalm 5:5, Habakkuk 1:13. Because, therefore, God does not accept such vow and order otherwise than as voluntary and unnecessary to salvation, and because true Christian purpose does not begin nor vow otherwise, I should like to hear the man who thoroughly and with honest reason could deny that one in religious orders could reenter secular life without injury to his soul and with a good conscience before God, especially if he had cause to do so.

[268] That many say: It is not customary, the holy fathers have done and written differently, settles nothing, as anyone can see. We ask here, not what custom does or what the writings of the fathers ask, but what is right and pleasing before God. Who will assure that custom is not wrong and that the fathers are not in error, since even Christ declares, Matthew 24:24, that even the elect shall be deceived by false Christs, such as those in the religious orders. Say what you will, it cannot be made to agree that anything which is free and unnecessary to the soul's salvation as undertaken or vowed before God and the conscience, cannot be let go, but, on the contrary must, at the risk of the soul's salvation, be kept until death. The two things are exactly opposite, as you can see for yourself.

[269] A Christian vow to take religious orders must before God be thus: See, dear God, I vow to thee to lead this life, which can be led free by nature and without regard to salvation. Ought not God answer here: Well, what then have you vowed to me here, and what are you keeping? Have you not enough necessary things to observe? In this you vow nothing to me, since you may observe it and again let it go. Good, this I will allow. And thus the vow before God naturally excludes that the life under the vow remains free to be observed or to be let go. It is just as if your servant made

you a vow and promised: Master, I vow to you on this extra day free service, which I may do or leave undone; on the other days I am bound to serve you. Here, I think, whether the servant did or left undone, as it may happen, he would have done enough for his vow.

[270] I cannot understand differently but that the vow of all those who are in religious orders is the same; for the reason that faith makes all things free, and it is impossible that anything should be necessary or should be made necessary to salvation, either through ourselves, through angels or through any creatures, faith alone excepted. And this is the liberty which Christ has won for us, of which St. Paul teaches, Galatians 5:1, and says against all the teaching of men: "For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast therefore." Therefore the vow of all those who are in orders must naturally have in it liberty again to leave this life and should read thus: I vow to God and you, chastity, poverty and obedience, according to the rule of St. Augustine, to be freely held or given up, until death.

[271] Here probably someone begins to laugh and to say that would be a foolish, ridiculous vow and a mere deception. I answer: Do not be surprised if men do ridiculous and foolish things, when they leave God's ordering to follow their own blindness and to do, not what god's Word teaches, but what suits them. Ridiculous, foolish and worthless such a vow is; but nevertheless by it God's wrath is fulfilled and countless souls are led astray, so that scarcely the elect escape.

[272] Men have invented such vows and such a life, therefore it is and remains a human order. Many years ago when young people were accepted to be taught and reared in a Christian way, as now ought to be done in the schools, they were allowed, of their own free will, to remain for a while under discipline. Now some remained willingly in this state all their lives and became so accustomed to it that few forsook the company, but remained altogether in it until their end; thus finally monasteries and convents arose. Since now the masters have become lazy and the youth intractable, men invented these cords and chains of the vow and with it took the conscious prisoners and rid themselves with care and oversight by making each one constrain himself to be and to remain disciplined and pious for the sake of the bond of his vow; just as in the higher schools also, the abominable practice prevails of guarding and carrying out everything

with oaths and vows to bind the poor youth so shamefully without any necessity.

[273] Thus convents and cloisters have grown out of the free Christian schools, and faith has been perverted into works, and liberty destroyed and bound through vows. Accordingly, it is not surprising that, where Christian liberty again shines forth, human vows appear ridiculous and foolish. Christian liberty can at no time exist together with the timid vows of external works. One of the two must yield; that is unavoidable. Faith makes all external things free; the vow binds them fast; how then can both remain together? Thus faith is divine, the vow is human; therefore it is not possible that God should let faith go and regard our vow. Therefore it is not possible that he should sin against God or break his vow who remains priest, monk or nun as long as he wishes, and returns to secular life when he wishes.

[274] We would further discuss this for the comfort of the wretched, imprisoned consciences, oppressed under this Herod and Anti-Christ. If we take for granted that vows made in a Christian way ought to be kept, what then will you say if one of these would become impossible for someone to observe? I take up the one that is the most plausible, the vow of chastity, which, as we see with our own eyes, cannot be kept by the majority: for nature is far too weak to keep it, where especial grace is not present.

[275] Moses has written much of the natural sexual intercourse between man and woman, both while awake and asleep, of which no one dare now speak openly. So much purer have our ears become than the mouth of the Holy Ghost that we are ashamed where there is nothing to be ashamed of, and are not ashamed where there is cause for shame. Yet it is necessary that everyone should know and be instructed in these things, and especially the youth. Where special heavenly grace is not found, there nature must be satisfied according to its constitution. If man and woman do not come together, nature takes its own course and is unrestrained, so that it would be better for man and woman to come together, as God created them and as nature prompts. Many teachings and books have been written about this; would to God they were all well written and helpful!

[276] So now I ask, How will they advise one for whom it is impossible to restrain himself? You say that such should guard themselves with prohibitions. Well then, one of these three things will follow, where there is

not special grace. Man and woman will come together, if they can, as now takes place among priests; or nature will relieve itself; or, where neither of these happens, there will be a continual burning and secret suffering. Here then you have a diabolical torture, and it comes about that the man would take the ugliest woman on earth, and the woman the most disgusting man because of the raging evil lust of the flesh.

[277] Modest ears should and will pardon me; I must lay hold on the sickness of souls as a physician does of the excrement and secret places if I am to help at all. Now God can and will have no forced, unwilling chastity, which is no chastity to him; it must be voluntary, as all other services of God must be voluntary, or he does not regard it. What are you doing then that you hold this poor man for his whole life in unchaste chastity, that without cessation he sins with the heart against his vow, so that it would be better for the young man to have a young woman and for the young woman to have a young man?

[278] Here some teach that it is enough if one willingly begins the life of chastity and takes the vow accordingly, for by virtue of the willing beginning it will not harm, if he afterwards become unwilling. Oh, ye betrayers and blind leaders who adapt the service of God to works and not to the Spirit! All is in vain that is unwillingly done, and it would better be left undone. For it may happen that the man and the woman who live together have much less fire and lust than such solitary men and women; but the greater the lust the greater is the sin of unchastity. So now these three kinds of men can find no counsel; the Pope lets them burn and be martyred, as they may, so that I consider these to be the children who among the people of Israel were offered and burned before the fiery idol of Moloch.

[279] Then you say, What shall I do otherwise? It is not fitting to let them marry, on account of the vow, since the Scriptures say: Vovete et reddite, vow and observe. That answer I would have. Now answer me again: It is not fitting to let them marry, you say; why then is it fitting to let them play the profligate, to have secret sexual intercourse and to burn? Will not the vow be violated worse here than if they were married? How cleverly this helps the vow when you forbid marriage and when you see that you cannot prevent profligacy and lust. I think to do the latter would be to leave the beam in the eye and to draw out the mote.

[280] Yes, say you, the man may at last leave the woman and live chastely, and this he could not do if married. My dear man, give me a few examples: It would happen sooner that married people separate and voluntarily abstain than such people. But let that go until another time. Answer me here: St. Augustine makes a rule that his brethren are not to go alone, but two by two. This I have vowed till death; well then, I am taken prisoner and compelled to be alone; tell me, what becomes of my vow? Shall I keep my vow here, then I must let myself be killed, rather than be alone. But what if they will not kill me and keep me alone by force, then my vow must be broken or I must always have made for myself this condition, that I vow to keep the rule in this and this particular, as far as it is possible for me.

[281] Further, I vow to pray, to wear a habit and other things of the kind according to the rule. Well then, I become sick, must keep my bed, and cannot observe any of them. What becomes now of the command: *Vovete et reddite*, vow and observe? It does not help me that I am sick, for God's commandment should always be kept in death as well as in life, in sickness as well as in health. What will you say to this? It does not count to invent careless, lazy, unfounded excuses here, we are to do with serious matters, on which the salvation of the soul depends, so that one should answer honestly, uprightly and thoroughly. Accordingly, if you should say: If I am imprisoned and forced to be alone, if I am sick that I cannot keep the other rules, it is enough that I have the will to keep them and that I act contrary to the rule against my will; God accepts the will, where the act cannot follow; then I say, My friend, that does not help; my vow rests on the deed and embraces not only the will but also the work prescribed in the rule.

[282] Therefore where the work does not follow, the vow is broken, or the vow excludes the possibility of the lack of ability. Otherwise I too might take a woman and say: I do this unwillingly and I would gladly by choice remain chaste, but it is impossible for me, my nature forces, seizes and draws me on. Who in the world is there who would not prefer to live chaste and alone if he could do as he would? You must answer here differently.

[283] Now see, as in other points in religious vows impossibility is reserved (as no one can deny), and as no one sins, though he never in his life keeps the vow, because of impossibility, I should like to hear honest reasons why chastity alone must be observed, whether it is possible or

impossible to observe it, and why not in the vow this condition should be made: I vow chastity, as far as it is possible for me. If we would speak without foolish talk, we must say that either the impossible chastity, like the other impossible things, shall never be vowed, or there never was a monk on earth. For there never has been one who has not at one time been sick or otherwise hindered that he had to leave undone certain parts of his rule which is contrary to his vow.

[284] Concerning all this it is in accord with their usual custom to leave such parts of the rule in the power of the abbot, that he may give his inferiors dispensation and excuse them from keeping what he will; not only because of impossibility, but also for convenience sake, and as it seems good to him, all of which is contrary to the vow, where vows are to be understood without any condition. For what you vow to God to keep no creature can take away. Now you vow the whole rule and your prelate excuses you in whatever point he will or you have need, so that without doubt all monks' vows can be considered as having this meaning: I vow to keep the rule as far as is possible for me and agreeable to my superior. If that is not the contents and meaning of the vow, then all orders and cloisters are false and damnable, or there never has been a monk on earth. For no one has ever believed and regarded this point differently. Why then should not a superior have the power to give a brother permission to become secular and to marry, when he sees how the fiery and restless temptations of the flesh are tormenting him? If he cannot release from the vow of chastity, how then can he release from the others? But if he can release from the others, why not also from the vow of chastity, for which there is so much more cause than for the others?

[285] Therefore it has come about that they have divided vows into substantialia and accidentalia; that is, some vows are fixed and others are removable. Of fixed vows they have made three: Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. All the others, with the whole rule and order, they call removable.

[286] What a rascal the devil is and how full of a thousand tricks! If we ask them here for what reason they make such a difference, and who has given them the power to do this, they cannot say anything else than that they do it of their own power and without all reason and cause. For when they saw that it was impossible to vow the order and rule, and that it could

not be kept, they thought: Well, what shall we do now, this is all vowed and will not be kept. If they should all be condemned, there is no monk in a state of holiness, and all orders and rules would be nothing else than impossible, foolish things. We will do thus with it. We will exclude three points that shall be called fixed, and whoever does not keep these shall be damned; the others shall be called removable and not damnable. And so it has also happened; so they all hold, practice and teach. But wait, dear sirs, we have something to discuss with you about this.

[287] If it is true that you have the power to make vows fixed and removable, you have also the power to condemn people and to save them. But tell me, how shall I be sure that this division of yours is right and pleasing to God? Who will quiet my conscience and assure it, when it is pressed with the commandment, *Vovete et reddite*? Do you think that it will be enough for me that you so divide, or that you point out how it is not to be observed? No, your division and non-observance will not satisfy me against this storm: *Vovete et reddite*. I have vowed not only the fixed vows, but the whole rule, with removable and fixed vows. The judge of all will not permit that I change his word and say: *Omnia vovete, aliqua reddite*; but he will say: *Quodcunque voveris, redde. Et iterum; Redde vota tua*.

[288] Therefore to exclude these three vows is surely a senseless, misleading thing, invented by mere human presumption, or all vows must be alike removable; for they are all vowed alike, demanded by the same commandment, and must alike be kept or given up. What can you say to this, dear sirs? You will say: Such a religious life is an impossible and useless thing. That is certainly true. We are fools, we vow and do not know what we vow, afterwards we would help ourselves and make possible, impossible, observe, let go, remove and fix as it suits us. But the Highest will not permit us this, he will not allow his commandment to move this way and that according to our will.

[289] You have learned such things from the pope; he too takes this commandment of God, *Vovete et reddite*, and stretches it as far as he will. He will set aside all vows, except those of chastity and pilgrimages to Rome, to St. James, and to Jerusalem, and God's commandment is now taking this meaning: Vow chastity and a pilgrimage to St. James, Rome, and Jerusalem; observe this; what you have vowed otherwise you dare not observe. See, it is to be in his power which of God's commands are to be

observed and what are not to be observed. Oh, thou cursed abomination, how impudent, how trifling is thy insolence towards thy God! But what reason and cause has he for this? No other but that chastity and pilgrimage are great things, and that the other vows are little. Behold here the senseless fool and blasphemer who sets aside God's commandment if it commands a little thing and teaches to observe it if it commands a great thing. This is directly contrary to Christ, Matthew 5:19: "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven." You should not hold, like the pope, that a thing is trifling. We listen to the command, *Vovete et reddite*, even in little things; while the religious orders do as their father, the pope, teaches them and say: *Vovete et reddite* the three fixed vows, but *Vovete et non reddite* the removable vows. See, then, whether the religious orders are not the devil's own government and nature, founded on mere lies and blasphemy.

[290] Is it not so, my dear man? Be it little or great, whatever is comprehended in God's commandments should and must be observed. One must here direct himself, not according to works, but according to the commandment. You must not consider whether the work is great or little, but only whether it is commanded. If it is commanded, there should be no neglecting it, be the case as it may. For Christ says: Not one jot or tittle shall pass from the law till all be fulfilled. But the pope and his disciples take away not only jot and tittle from this commandment, *Vovete et reddite*, but also letters, text, meaning and everything.

[291] The religious orders cannot deny that they vow removable vows which they include under the word *Vovete*; for they call them *Vota*, vows, although they change them into removable ones. So they can never deny that they are bound to observe these, and that they are also to remain under the word *Reddite*. Otherwise you might be an enemy to your neighbor in your heart, and say that you are not bound to love him, but that it is sufficient that you do not kill him, thus keeping the larger part of the fifth commandment and neglecting the smaller part. Henceforth we could divide all God's commandments into great and small or into removable and fixed parts and say that we are not bound to observe the small or removable ones. This is contrary to God, although the pope and the universities thus hold and teach and the religious orders follow them.

[292] What shall we now do? If the religious orders hold all their vows and rules as fixed, who among them can be saved? Will you then condemn them all? I would not willingly condemn one but would far rather that they all escaped from the cloisters or became holy in another way. In this way they must certainly all be condemned, if they tear and twist God's word according to their whims. I have discussed all this in order that I conclude beyond contradiction that all vows be made removable or all fixed and equal; one must be like the other. And if one among them can be given up with a good conscience for some cause, then the vow of chastity too, and all the others can and should be given up, where need and cause demand. I hope I have now stopped the mouth of all gainsayers so that they on this account must be silent and have nothing to answer.

[293] Since we now see plainly that the impossible vows must be given up, even by the holy people, and that God does not ask these of them, I shall have concluded that no vow will be otherwise accepted by God, or can otherwise be made, except with the restriction and meaning: If it is possible and pleases the Superior. Accordingly, we may give all young monks and nuns wives and husbands and let them re-enter secular life, where it is necessary, and where we cannot hold them with a good conscience so as to please God. By this means we shall restore the cloisters to their original purity and nature as Christian schools, in which boys and girls learn discipline, reverence and faith, after which they may freely remain there until death, or as long as they wish, if God has not otherwise planned and willed for them.

[294] Further, we would have another encounter with them, that we may see how wholly confused and groundless a thing the "religious" life is. I grant that their dream of the three fixed vows, Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, is true. Poverty is of two kinds, spiritual and bodily. Concerning spiritual poverty Christ says, Matthew 5:3: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This means that man is content and ready to deny himself all riches, and that he bears in his heart only a renounced desire for them, although he may have and control great riches, as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and many pious Christians. This poverty of spirit is vowed by all Christians in common at baptism and is not vowed by the religious orders; for their vow demands that the Christian, evangelical, common poverty first exist.

[295] Bodily poverty means to possess or have no property outwardly. This is not possible. Christ neither demanded nor practiced it, for man cannot live without bodily food and clothing. Therefore they have made it mean this that bodily purity is, not to have anything of one's own. This poverty Luke has described in Acts 4:34: "For neither was there among them any that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the prices of the things that were sold." Christ also practiced this, for his purse, which Judas carried, was common to all the apostles, so that John does not say that Judas had Christ's purse to carry, but: "Having the bag, took away what was put therein," John 12:6. This word proves that the purse was common to all: otherwise he had said, He had Christ's purse and carried what was given to Christ.

[296] Now see, St. Bonaventura was a cardinal; Eugene, the pope, was St. Bernhard's disciple, and many in religious orders have become bishops and popes. Tell me, what has become of their vow of poverty? They are always holy. And if their vow had not been removable and free before God, they would certainly have been damned, since they did not keep their vow until death. Now, popes, cardinals and bishops always have their own property and do with it what they will; which is directly contrary to the vow of poverty, so that being a pope, cardinal or bishop is considered by everyone as secular, as over against the monkish orders.

[297] Will you say here: They have followed obedience and have risen to a more perfect order, and do not have their own property but that of the church in their control? My dear man, observe what you say; are not these empty words? Or do you think to stop my mouth with this? Is it not so, dear brother? I would say, first: Obedience here, obedience there; to keep one's vows is God's commandment and obedience, from which we ought not follow even an angel, as St. Paul says, Galatians 1:8: "But though we, or an angel from heaven should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we have preached unto you, let him be anathema." Also St. Peter, Acts 5:29: "We must obey God rather than man." Have they now left God's obedience for the sake of the pope's obedience? Then they have left heaven for hell. No, you dare not thus throw away God's commandment and obedience. Then I too would say that you may depart also from the vow of chastity for the pope's sake, and set aside all God's commandments. If you

can set aside one command of God, for the sake of men, then you can set them all aside.

[298] Secondly, even if the orders of pope, cardinals, and bishop were a perfect order, we ought nevertheless not free ourselves from God's commandment. For without God's commandment there is no order, much less a perfect order, but nothing but error and seduction. Perfection is not contrary to God's commandment, but it much rather follows God's commandments and sees none but observes all. See, with what great lies and foolishness the people have to do, that it does not know what and of what it speaks, that it establishes perfection without God's commandment and wishes thereby to abolish God's commandment. But now because the orders of pope, bishop, and cardinal form a real aristocracy, and are the most imperfect, we shall not keep these saints, unless we confess that all vows exist before God only for a time and can be changed, as we see that this vow of poverty is here changed. For why should not the vow of chastity be changed on account of necessity and cause, since it is not vowed more strongly than poverty? But now let it be that such saints have passed out of the vow of poverty into the perfect state, then you must grant me that the state of matrimony is perfect over against the state of unchastity, or against impossible chastity, as St. Paul says, Corinthians 7:9: "It is better to marry than to burn." It is always better to have a lawful wife than to live with a woman unlawfully or to burn. Well then, let those pass out into this perfect state of marriage who hold an unchaste chastity or an imperfect, unwilling state of chastity; or, if you will not have that, then your excuse of the perfect state counts for nothing.

[299] In the third place, how can you be so bold as to say that the vow of poverty is not broken for the reason that they care not for their own property, but for that of the church. If that now were true, in what were they better than a secular servant or official? Why then do you not consider these also as "religious," since they do not control their own property? This is empty, foolish chatter. But now is it not true that the bishops hold property of their own, and that, in respect of poverty, their life is a thousand miles removed from that of the monks. Accordingly, nothing can be claimed here, you must acknowledge that poverty is vowed no further than the prelate wishes or cause demands, if we would keep our saints.

[300] And what is the need of so much round about talk? It is clear that a man in a religious order vows only the childish, slavish poverty, which consists in this ‘that he has no property in his hands; but is subordinate, and takes what people give him. As soon, however, as he comes into power and stands before others to administer property he is no longer under the vow of poverty, unless he is deposed and again becomes subordinate. For what difference is there between such a ruler and the secular housefather or official, as far as having, using, ruling over and administering property is concerned? These are only feigned words, as St. Peter says, what men speak to the contrary: in reality it is a purely secular office, work and order. Therefore we see that God does not accept vows, unless they be free and removable; otherwise no cloister could have a prelate; so that necessity compels us to support the cloisters or schools for the training of young people.

[301] In the same way obedience may and cannot be understood otherwise than as childish and slavish obedience; for the words of the vow clearly demand obedience to the abbot or prior. If then one becomes a bishop or prelate, what becomes of his vow of obedience? People must now be obedient to him, and he is not obedient.

[302] Will you again bring forward your foolish pretense that such a one passes into a higher obedience, or keeps his heart willing to become again obedient? All this has already been set aside; for it says: *Vovete et Reddite*; against this word there is no gloss; God will not have his command destroyed for the sake of either higher, middle or lower obedience. It is clear then that those in the religious orders vow a subjection, not of the heart, but only of the body; for the willing subjection of the heart toward everyone is common to all Christians, as St. Paul says, Romans 12:10: “In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another: in honor preferring one another.” But now again the cloisters dare have no prelates and supply no bishops; or the word subjection ends with the vow. See therefore how cleverly those two vows are called immovable and what fables and reigned words they use. God allows his saints both to vow and to live; he suffers their folly. But he does not accept the fixed vows, as you see from all this discussion; since they are contrary to Christian liberty and all good order, and exist only that Satan may have his sport with the unbelieving and may work his deception in them, as St. Paul teaches.

[303] Now there remains only the vow of chastity; that alone must remain fixed and unchangeable which justly should be the first of all and most removable. In all the others they say *Vovete et non reddite*; here alone it is like iron and steel, *Vovete et reddite*. Is not this a horrible perversion? But Satan has done it for this reason, that he may the more firmly hold souls in unchastity, and he grasps just where they are the weakest and most easily held; for he saw clearly that all other vows could be more easily kept. Accordingly he did not insist upon them; but he insists upon this impossible thing alone, that he may be sure of his tyranny. Alas, Oh God, what illusion and foolery does he carry on with the religious orders!

[304] We find then in the whole “religious” life nothing fundamental, certain or permanent; everything shakes and moves without Scripture or reason, so that there is cause enough that we should run away from the whole thing. There is the special reason that it has no Scripture foundation, and that it has so many kinds of errors and lies in its leading points. Moreover, it is so condemned and cursed by Christ in Matthew 24, by St. Paul in 2 Timothy 3, by St. Peter in 2 Peter 2, that, if you had taken ten vows and you saw that it was the Devil’s doing and against God, you would be obliged to give it up or to vow in a new, free way, as has been said above.

[305] They have one thing that they advance: There have been holy fathers in the religious orders. But here they should be terrified when Christ says, that the elect may be deceived by them, as here the magi were deceived by Herod, and many other examples. The three children of Israel, Ananias, Azarias and Misael, remained in the fiery oven of Babylon. Naaman the Syrian alone remained pious in the temple of the false god. Joseph remained pious in Egypt. What shall I say? St. Agnes remained chaste in an ordinary brothel, and the martyrs remained pious in dungeons, and Christians still daily remain pious in the flesh, in the world and in the midst of devils. Could God then not have been able to preserve Francis, Bernhard and their like in the midst of error, and although they have sometimes erred to rescue them from this error again?

[306] He has allowed hardly any great saint to live without error. He allowed Moses and Aaron and Miriam, David, Solomon and Hezekiah and many more to stumble, that no one should rely without Scripture upon the mere example and work of the saints. But we throw in whatever we see and

hear of the saints, and so we come upon and generally find that as men they have erred in their infirmity. This error has then to be for us a fundamental truth, and thus we build on the crooked wall of which Psalm 62:3-4 speaks. "How long will ye set upon a man, that ye may slay him, all of you; like a leaning wall, like a tottering fence. They only consult to thrust him down from his dignity; they delight in lies. They bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly."

[307] But if all other things were good in the priesthood, the abuse of the mass would be enough to cause one to flee wherever one hears of it. I think that such abuse of the holy sacrament is reserved for this order as the worst, most destructive, and horrible that has come upon earth, and which will be the greatest and last among evil things. Thus they make out of the mass a sacrifice and a good work which they sell to people and make all kinds of money out of it. Oh, the terrible perversion! What wrath ought it not merit? Would to God that all secondary masses were done away with; then there might be hope that God would be a little more merciful to us. But now, blinded as we are, we think that we should commit a great sin if we were to drop the masses; and we intend with such horrible abuse to propitiate and serve God. Thus there is no end to his wrath, and all our prayer becomes only sin, as Psalm 109:1-7 has declared. Only one mass a day should be held, and this should be treated as a sacrament for all, yes, one mass a week would be still better. But the matter cannot be improved; it is too deeply seated.

[308] This utterance I wish to have made for the benefit of whom will use it; it makes no difference to me if the priests are angry at and cry over me. I prefer that they should be angry rather than Christ. I know that I am obliged to advise and help wretched consciences and souls, and to share with everyone that which God has given me. I will not leave the blame upon myself. I shall not be responsible for the man who does not accept it; he must take care of himself. He has my true service and advice so far; if I could do more for him, I would do more. Whoever will can enter and remain in a religious order; but whoever wishes to be saved must see to it that he becomes a Christian, and let priests and monks be priests and monks.

[309] Here probably the chaste hearts and holy priests of God, whom nothing pleases except what they themselves speak and write, will pucker

up their mouths and say: Oh, how the cowl presses the monk, how he wishes he had a wife! But let them slander and enjoy their malice, the chaste hearts and great saints; let them be iron and steel, as flay set themselves up to be; but do you not deny that you are a man of flesh and blood, and let God afterward judge between the strong, angelic heroes and you, the poor, despised sinner. I hope I have come so far that by the grace of God, I shall remain as I am; although I am not yet over the mountain, and I do not venture to compare myself with the chaste hearts. I should be sorry to do this, and may God in his mercy keep me from it. For if you know them, who they are who pretend so great chastity and make a show of discipline, and what it is that St. Paul says, Ephesians 5:12, "For the things which are done by them in secret it is a shame even to speak of," you would not consider their much-praised chastity fit for a whore to wipe her shoe with. Here too the perversion is found, that the chaste are the unchaste, and that whatever glitters deceives.

[310] Dear youth, do not be ashamed that you desire a girl, and that the girl desires a boy; only let this result in marriage, not unchastity, and then it is no more a disgrace than eating and drinking. Celibacy ought to be a virtue which happens among God's miracles, as the instance of a man who neither eats nor drinks. It is beyond healthy nature, not to mention sinful, fallen nature. God has not let many virgins live long, but quickly hastened them out of the world, as Caccilia, Agnes, Lucia, Agatha and their like, for he well knows how noble the treasure is, and how difficult it is to preserve long. If in every city there were five young men and five young women, twenty years old and entirely pure who had discovered nothing of the natural flowings, then I could say that Christianity of today were better than in the times of the apostles and martyrs.

[311] Alas, Lord God, I consider that in no other way has unchastity been able to spread faster or more terribly than through such a command and vow of chastity. What a Sodom and Gomorrah that the devil established through such a command and vow, and how altogether vile has he made this same chastity to indescribable wretchedness. There is neither the common house of prostitution nor any other allurements so destructive in this command and vow invented by the devil himself.

[312] Here I shall say something of the boys and girls who have taken the vow before they felt what flesh and blood are, when they were only

fifteen, sixteen or twenty years old. These should be taken out at once, if they so desire; for their vow is as yet nothing at all, as if a child had engaged itself to marry. Here the Shrove-Tuesday consecration is not to be regarded, whether the man be a priest, a deacon or hold any other religious rank. Such consecration is jugglery and counts for nothing with God. But enough of this, let us come again to our subject, where we left it.

[313] When the wise men came from Herod, and turned to Bethlehem, the star appeared to them again, and they became very glad. This always happens when, after the error and deception of human teaching, the heart comes again to the knowledge of the pure truth and of the Gospel. Then at once it is free from Herod and sees how altogether certain and light the way of the truth is, over against the appearances that the Herodians pretend; so the heart is made glad. For the Gospel is a comforting doctrine, which leads us out of human presumption into the confidence of the pure grace of God, as Psalm 4:7-8 says.

[314] Again, all who wander in the teachings of men and in their own strength lead a hard, anxious life, and still it does not help them. What heart should not rejoice to discover that the pope's rule is merely trouble and burden for the conscience, and that it deceives the whole world with its pretense. Heavenly light and truth has this nature, that it lifts up the conscience, comforts the heart, and creates a free spirit; just as on the other hand the teaching of men naturally oppresses the conscience, tortures the heart and, quenches the spirit.

[315] The star thus goes before them and does not leave them until it brings them to Christ, yet it goes no farther, but remains at rest over where the child is. So too the light of the holy gospel does; it is as a light in the darkness, as St. Peter calls it, 2 Peter 1:19, and goes before us and leads us, if we only cherish it with a strong faith, it does not leave us until it brings us to Christ and to the truth; but it goes no further, for beside Christ it teaches us nothing.

[316] Accordingly, in this leading of a star the manner and work of the Gospel is shown, and through the wise men all · believers; so that, as the star led them bodily to Christ, and they followed it in the body, so the gospel spiritually guides the hearts of men in this world, and believing hearts see it and follow it with joy until they come to Christ. So too St. Paul

boasts, 1 Corinthians 2:2, “For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.” And in Colossians 2:8, he forbids us to follow any doctrine which does not teach Christ. What else is this than that the star points to Christ alone, and nothing else, and goes no farther? In this figure, therefore, all doctrines of men are condemned, and should no longer be preached to Christians, but only the pure, simple light of the Gospel, is to be preached and we should follow this star only. Therefore pope, bishops, priests, and monks, with all their rule and teachings, are here condemned, and are to be avoided as the tyranny of Herod.

[317] Here too the mouth of the Papists and Herodians is closed, and their lies rightly punished, since they teach with deliberate sacrilege that we can find the Christian church and faith only with them; and whoever does not hear them, should be considered as if he did not hear the Christian church. They wish to be the sign and the star that leads to Christ, but this is all a lie. Do you wish to know where Christ and the truth are? Learn that here from this history. Do not look to the pope nor to the bishops, nor to the universities and monasteries, do not be led astray by their abundant preaching, praying, singing and holding of masses; do not mind that they sit in the place of the apostles and usurp spiritual jurisdiction: that may all deceive, and does deceive continuously; they are in error and teach error. There is only one sure sign whereby you can recognize where Christ and his church are, namely, the star, the holy Gospel; all else is false. But where the Gospel is preached, there this star shines, there Christ certainly is, there you surely find the Church. whether it be in Turkey, Russia, Bohemia, or anywhere else. It is not possible that God’s word should be heard, and God, Christ and the Holy Ghost not to be there. On the other hand it is not possible that God, Christ, the Holy Ghost, the Church, or anything holy should be where God’s Word is not heard, even if they worked all miracles; but there can be only Herodians and the devil’s rule at such a place. Now everyone can see how the pope and the clergy are occupied not with God’s Word but with human teaching. “And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshipped him.”

[319] This house is the Christian church, the assembly of all believers on earth, in which alone you can find Christ and his mother; for in the Christian church alone are those who, being filled by the Holy Ghost, bring

forth the fruits of Christianity and lead a Christian life. Everything that is outside of this house, however beautiful it may appear, however reasonable it may be, has neither Christ nor his mother; that is, there is no Christian there, for these cannot exist without faith and the Holy Ghost.

[320] Therefore, if the pope, bishops, or anyone else demand of you that you should look to them, if you wish to see the church, then think of this Gospel, and look to the star. Be assured that where the star does not stand there is not the house where Christ and his mother are to be found. In other words, where the Gospel does not give its light, there the Christian church is certainly not found. This star will never fail you, and without it you will never arrive at the right place. It leads to this house and remains over this house, and just so the Gospel brings you into the church, and remains over the church, keeping its place and not letting itself be driven away by any persecution. Here it sounds and shines freely and clearly, to the vexation of all its enemies, as we see entirely fulfilled in the apostles, martyrs, and all saints, and still daily, where it is preached. And Opening Their Treasures, they Offered unto Him Gifts, Gold and Frankincense and Myrrh.

[321] All bodily sacrifices in the law of Moses, wherever they occur, point to the spiritual sacrifice of which Hebrews 13:15, speaks. "Through him let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of the lips which make confession to his name." And Hosea 14:2-3: "O Israel, return unto Jehovah thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and return unto Jehovah; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and accept that which is good," that is, take away the evil, which thou bringest over us through thy hand, and take the good into thy hand, that thou mayest give it to us; so will we render as bullocks the offering of our lips," that is, praise and thanksgiving. These are the true bullocks that we should offer thee, of which also Psalm 51:18-19 speaks: "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: Build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then wilt thou delight in the sacrifices of righteousness, then will they offer bullocks thine altar." Also Psalm 50:7-15: "Hear, O Israel, I am thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices. What will you offer me? Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? If I were hungry I would not tell thee: For the world is mine, and all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field. Offer unto God the sacrifice of thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the highest. The sacrifice of thanksgiving honors me, and that is the way to

salvation.” From these verses we can see that sacrifice, if it is to find favor before God, must be praise and thanksgiving, or at least not without praise and thanksgiving. And where a sacrifice is offered without praise and thanksgiving, he will reject it, as he says, “What unto me is the multitude of your sacrifices? I have had enough of the burnt offerings.”

[322] Moreover we could not give God anything else, for everything is his already, and we have everything from him; praise thanks and honor only we can give him. So also Psalm 116:12-13 teaches: “What shall I render unto Jehovah for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of Jehovah. Thou hast loosed my bonds, I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving.” Now praise is nothing else than recognizing the favor received from God, and ascribing this, not to ourselves, but to him. And this praise and confession is rendered in two ways; first before God alone, and then before men, and is a true work and fruit of faith. St. Paul teaches of this in Romans 10:9-10: “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” This is as though St. Paul were to say: That is not the true faith, if you were to believe in Christ secretly in your heart and praise him in some hidden place; you must freely confess him with your mouth before everyone, even as you believe in your heart. This perhaps may cost you your life. For devils and men do not like to hear such confession, and the cross goes with such confession, as you see that even now the pope, bishops, priests, and monks cannot bear or endure Christ’s Word, so that the prophet well says: “I will take the wholesome cup, and preach the name of the Lord.” This is as though he were to say: If I praise and confess God, they will afflict and persecute me with the cup of the martyrs; well, I will take it in God’s name, and not cease from praising God. He will not harm me, but will be a savior to me, and help me quickly to salvation. This Christ too will do, Mark 8:38, “For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

[323] Many have commented upon these three offerings, one in this way, another in that, yet all agree that it is a threefold confession. Therefore we

shall take from all what seems true to us. The offering of gold, they say, means that they confess Christ as king; the frankincense that he is a priest; the myrrh, that he died and was buried. All three articles apply to Christ according to his human nature; yet so that he is God, and that such things have happened to his humanity because of his divinity.

[324] In the first place, the Christian faith confesses and rejoices that Christ is a king and lord over all things, according to the sayings of Psalm 8:6: “Thou makest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.” Also Psalm 110:1: “Jehovah saith unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. This confession of the true faith is a high and strong defense and boast for all who believe in Christ against all that is against them, though it be, as St. Paul says, Romans 8:36, sword, hunger, cold or any other creature. Who can injure or terrify a Christian, if he offers this gold, believes and confesses that his Lord Christ is Lord also over death, hell, over the devils and over all other creatures, and that everything lies in his hands, yes, under his feet?

[325] If anyone has a gracious prince, he fears nothing that is under the power of this prince, he boasts of glories and declares his master’s favor and power. How much more does a Christian boast and glory against pain, death, hell, and the devil, and say confidently to him: What can you do to me? Are you not under the feet of my Lord? Attach and devour me without his will! See, such a free heart makes this offering of gold. Oh, how rare has that become! Therefore it is truly comforting, if anything terrifies or injures you, to come out openly, confess Christ and say, *Omnia subjecisti sub pedibus ejus*, all things are under his feet; who will then be against me?

[326] In the second place, they use incense in divine services, according to the law of Moses, to burn incense in the temple, which pertains to the office of priest. Therefore, to offer incense is nothing else than to recognize Christ as a priest who is an intercessor between God and us, as St. Paul says, Romans 8:34, that he speaks for us, and is our intercessor before God, which is most necessary for us. For through his kingdom and rule he protects us against evil in all things; but through his priesthood he defends us against all sin and the wrath of God, takes his place before us, and offers himself to propitiate God, that we through him may have confidence toward God, and that our conscience may not be terrified before his wrath and

judgment, as St. Paul says, Romans 5:12: “Through him we have peace with God and access by faith into his grace.”

[327] Now this is a much greater thing, that he makes us safe toward God and sets our consciences at peace, that God and ourselves are not at enmity, than that he should make the creatures harmless to us. For guilt is much greater than pain, and sin than death, since sin brings death, and without sin there would be no death, or it would not be injurious. As Christ is now Lord over sin and death, and has it in his power to give grace and life to all who believe on him; so to offer gold and incense is to recognize these two offices and works of his, and to thank him, as St. Paul does, Corinthians 15:55-56: “O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

[328] This is surely a strong defense, that a man can set this high priest against his sin, against his bad conscience, against God’s terrible anger and judgment, and with unshaken faith say and confess: Tu es sacerdos in aeternum, thou art a high priest forever. But, if thou art a high priest, thou intercedest for all sin of those who confess you as such a priest. As little as God’s judgment and anger, sin and a bad conscience may condemn or terrify you, do they condemn and terrify me, for whom thou art such a priest. See, this is to offer true incense, to be undismayed against all sin and the wrath of God through faith in Christ.

[329] In the third place, they used myrrh to anoint dead bodies, that they should not corrupt in the grave. Therefore the death and resurrection of Christ are here set forth; since it is he alone who died and was buried and is not corrupted, but arose again from the dead, as Psalm 16:10 says: “For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol, neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption.” And his incorruptibility is indicated through all who are preserved and kept through bodily myrrh. Accordingly to offer myrrh is as much as to confess that Christ died and yet remained incorrupt, that is, that death has been overcome by life, and that he never died according to his divinity, and that his human nature again awoke from death.

[330] This confession is the most important of all the three, although all three are necessary and must be undivided. For, since he has become a king and priest for you, and given you so great a possession, you must not think

that it has been done in vain, or that it has cost little, or come to you through your own merit. Sin and death have been overcome for you in him and through him, and grace and life given you; but it was bitter for him, and cost him much, and has been bought for a high price, namely, with his own blood, body, and life. For it was impossible to put away God's wrath and judgment, conscience, hell, death, and every evil thing, divine righteousness must be satisfied, sin atoned for, and death overcome by justice. Accordingly it was St. Paul's practice, when he preached God's grace in Christ, to mention his suffering and blood together, that he might show how all our good things have been given through Christ, but not without his unspeakable merit and cost, as he says, Romans 3:25: "God has set him forth, to be a propitiation through faith." Also, Corinthians 2:9: "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified," etc. Therefore to offer myrrh is to confess the great cost and pains that it meant for Christ to become our priest and king.

[331] See, these are the three parts in which we should praise and confess his three works which he has shown us, and will show us daily until the day of judgment. And the order too is fine: but the evangelist puts gold in the first place. For it would not be possible that he should be king over all things for our good, if he had not first reconciled us to God and assured our conscience, that with calm and peace he might rule and work in us as in his own kingdom. Accordingly he must first be priest for us. But, if he is to be priest and to reconcile us to God according to his priestly office, he must fulfill God's righteousness for us. But there was no other satisfaction; he had to give himself to death, and in his own person overcome sin with death. So too through death he came to the priesthood, through his priesthood to the kingdom, thus receiving the myrrh before the incense, and the incense before the gold. But the Scripture at all times declares the kingdom to be first, then the priesthood, and finally his death, as Psalm 110:1-7 also does, which Psalm describes for the first time his kingdom as follows: "Jehovah saith unto my lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." It follows then from his priesthood thus: "Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent: Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Finally he closes with his martyrdom thus: "He will drink of the brook in the way: Therefore will he lift up his head." Here too he wishes to say: He will taste the myrrh, therefore he will become a priest;

he is a priest, and therefore he will also be king; so that one follows from the other; one is the cause of the other, and they follow one upon another.

[332] With these simple and plain interpretations, I let the matter rest, and commend the lofty considerations to people of leisure. Here it concerns us most to have care that we do not take anyone of these three confessions alone, but offer them together. And although Isaiah 60:6, speaks of gold and incense only, and is silent about the myrrh, it may readily be on this account, namely, that Christ's kingdom and priesthood have been from the beginning of the world, as St. Paul says, Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and forever." For all the saints have been redeemed from death and sin through him and his faith; and yet at that time the third part, his passion, the myrrh, had not yet been accomplished, which properly belonged to the evangelist to announce after its fulfillment.

[333] But the Herodians and Papists have not only separated these three offerings, but also by an unspeakable outrage have destroyed them, retaining, however, the names and confessing with words that Christ is a king and priest, and that he has died for us. However, with other, contradictory words they deny all this with the heart and their whole life, and condemn it in the most shameful way. We, to observe such a thing, have begun with the myrrh, but they teach that man, without the grace of God, of himself and from the natural power of his reason and free will, may make himself worthy and receptive of divine favor. What else is this than to desire, without Christ's blood and suffering, to satisfy through one's own act the divine righteousness, to appease the worth and judgment of God, and to give the conscience peace? This is indeed to make nothing of Christ's blood and all his suffering, yea, his whole humanity and all his work, to regard them as useless and to tread them under foot, of which St. Paul says, Hebrews 6:5-6: "It is impossible to renew to repentance those who fell away; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." For without Christ there is no grace nor repentance, but wrath only. Nevertheless the Papists teach that we can seek and find grace without him. Accordingly the offering of myrrh is entirely done away with.

[334] Then the offering of incense must first cease to be. For how shall Christ be their priest and intercessor, if they are so good and pure that they do not need his blood and intercession, but intercede through themselves,

and stand of themselves before God, and attain grace and eternal life through their own ability? Thereby they confess and teach that natural ability is pure and good, and therefore Christ need not be priest. Who would ever have believed that Christians would arrive at such a stage when someone would teach and hear such things which are dreadful to think of?

[335] But now we see that all higher schools as well as the pope and his clergy do not teach and hold differently, yes, they condemn as heresy whatever does not conform to their teaching. How clearly has Peter described them, when he says, 2 Peter 2:1: “Among you also there shall be false teachers, denying even the Master that bought them.” He does not say: They will deny Christ, but: “the Master that bought them;” as if he wished to say: Christ they will confess with words; but they will not regard him as having bought them with his blood; but without his blood they will redeem themselves, through their own natural power they will attain God’s grace, which Christ alone has bought for us all with his blood. This is what they mean, when they say that is costs and affords nothing to attain God’s grace. Therefore they wish to redeem themselves and cannot bear to hear of Christ’s redemption.

[336] Where, however, Christ is not acknowledged as priest, there he is much less acknowledged as king. For they are in no wise subject to him, they are their own masters, that is, the devil’s own household. Although they do not suffer him to rule over them and to exercise his power in them, he is nevertheless a king, priest, and redeemer, without their consent, over all creatures. Behold, thus you see that now is the time when St. Peter thrice denies Christ. Would to God that they would hear the cock’s crow, that they would recover from their error, acknowledge their fall, cry bitterly, and go out from the house of Caiphaz, that is, out from the diabolical assembly of the pope, where the fire of wordly love has been kindled, and where the pope’s household is to warm itself; for the divine love is utterly extinguished in them. Let this suffice of the spiritual offerings. We come now to: And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

[337] This is the outcome and end, namely, that we are to shun human teaching, and are not to relapse into it, when we have once been redeemed therefrom; just as the wise men, having once been freed from Herod, do not return to him. Thus I also say that we are to shun the pope’s and all Papists’

law and teaching, if we do not wish to incur God's displeasure and hazard our soul's salvation, since we have already experienced the true evangelical truth. For their teaching brings us away from God and makes us follow our own reason and work. Thereby God's work is hindered, who should and would give us and work in us all things, and who desires us also to expect that of him.

[338] Human teaching, however, leads us so that we just begin all works, desire to be the first ones to seek God, and that we then expect God to come afterwhile and to look at what we have begun. Let me give you this for an example: Those that seem to be the best teachers of young people say to them that they are willing to pray and to go to church, to live chaste, and to be pious; however, they do not tell them where they are to begin and to seek all this; just as it were enough that they had instructed them to be pious. Again, when after this they are to marry or to enter orders, they think it is enough that they themselves have begun, they do not look at God, neither do they consult him about it; but, when they have begun, then they want God to come, to see what they have made and to be satisfied with it.

[339] Yes, the young people are educated so that a girl is ashamed to ask God for a young man, and a young man to ask God for a girl; they consider it foolish to ask God for a such a thing, they want to do it themselves. Ought not a girl to be taught with all earnestness to come to God and to say with all confidence: See, dear God, I have become old enough to marry, be thou my Father and let me be thy child, give me a pious young man, and graciously help me to enter the estate of matrimony, or, if it pleases thee, give me a spirit to remain chaste. Thus also a young man is to ask for a girl, and is to begin nothing himself, but is to ask God that he may begin and to lay the first stone. These would be true children of God indeed, who begin nothing but consult God about it, no matter how insignificant it may be. Thus Christ would remain our king, and all our works would be his works and would be done well. But human teachings do not allow this, they act as if there is no God, and as if they would have to do whatever is to be done well. Behold, from these examples you can learn, how all human teaching is seductive and against God.

[340] There are, however, three ways in which human teaching can be avoided: first, that it is avoided by the conscience only and not by the deed. For instance, when I confess, pray, and fast according to the pope's canon,

not as if it were necessary for us to do so, or as if it were sin, if I were not to do it; but when I do it willingly, of my own accord, not compelled by necessity, when I can leave it undone, if I wish so. Here the deed is under human teaching, but the conscience is free, it considers the doing no more nor no less than the not doing, it does not think it a sin to neglect it, nor a good work to do it; for it is not obedient but does it of its own accord. This is the best way.

[341] Thus the wise men are still in Herod's land, they also travel under his rule, but they do not regard him, do not come to him, and are not obedient to him. He, therefore, who now also is under the pope, and who observes his law, not for the sake of obedience, but of his own accord, how, when, where, and as long as he pleases, he, I say, suffers no harm. This understanding, however, is above the average mind and is found with but few people, and as it was given to the wise men secretly in their sleep, so we experience it only in our heart through God's Spirit; it cannot be given to anyone with a heart from without, if the heart itself does not receive it from heaven.

[342] The second way is that human teaching is avoided by the conscience as well as by deeds, as those do who trample it under foot and only do the contrary with a glad secure conscience. And this way is the most necessary and best for weak consciences that they may be liberated and made strong, perfect, and free, as the foregoing. This cannot be very readily accomplished with words and conscience alone, if you do not show the contrary by examples; just as Christ did, who allowed his disciples, contrary to the law of the Pharisees, to neglect to wash their hands. Thus it were good, if we would neglect the prescribed confession, prayer, and fasting for a certain time and show by examples that the pope's laws are foolery and deception, and if we would at another time do all this of our own accord.

[343] The third way is that it is avoided by the deed alone and not by the conscience, as those do who boldly neglect human teaching and still believe that they do wrong in not observing it. And alas, such a conscience is ever to be found among the common people. For their sake St. Paul calls these times grievous times, 2 Timothy 3:1. For such consciences sin continually whether they observe or do not observe, and the pope with his law is the murderer of their souls and the cause of such danger and sin. If they

observe, they do it against faith, which is to be free from all human teaching. If they do not observe, they do it against their conscience which believes that it must be observed. It is necessary that these are well instructed in the free Christian faith, and that they put aside this false conscience, or if they are not able to do this, that we bear their infirmities for a time as St. Paul teaches, Romans 15:1, and that we suffer them to follow and observe such a conscience together with faith, till they also have become large and strong.

[344] Behold, this is the other way to depart into one's own country and not to return to Herod. For generally, when people begin to be pious, they do it through human teaching and outward holiness, but we must abandon this and come to pure faith and not suffer ourselves again to fall from faith into works. Thus we surely come into our fatherland, from which we have come, that is, to God, by whom we have been created. The end thus comes together with the beginning as in a golden ring. God grant this through Christ, our king and priest, who be blessed to all eternity.

First Sunday after Epiphany. Jesus Among the Doctors, or An Example of Cross-Bearing. Jesus in the Temple.

Text: Luke 2:41-52.

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

48 And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject

unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. Luke 2:41-52

[1] This is a Gospel that presents to us an example of the holy cross, showing us through what experiences those have to pass who are Christians, and how they ought to bear their sorrow. For he who desires to be a Christian must expect to help bear the cross. For God will place him between the spurs and thoroughly test him that he may be humble and no one will come to Christ without suffering. Of this we have here an example, which we ought to imitate and shall now consider.

[2] Although the holy mother Mary, who was highly blessed and upon whom many favors were bestowed, had undoubtedly the greatest delight in her child, yet the Lord so ruled that her joy was not without sorrow, and like all others, she did not attain complete blessedness until she entered heaven. For this reason she had to suffer so much sorrow, pain and anguish on earth. It was her first great sorrow that she had to give birth to her child in Bethlehem, in a strange town, where she found no room with her babe except in a stable. Then her second sad experience was that, soon after the six weeks of her purification, she was compelled to flee with her child into Egypt, a strange country, which was indeed a poor consolation. She undoubtedly experienced many more like trials, which have not been recorded.

[3] One of them is related here, when her son caused her so much anxiety, by tarrying behind in the temple and letting her seek him so long, and she could not find him. This alarmed and grieved her so that she almost despaired, as her words indicate: "Behold, thy father and I sought thee sorrowing." For we may well imagine that thoughts like these may have passed through her mind: "Behold this child is only mine, this I know very well, and I know that God has entrusted him to me and commanded me to take care of him; why is it then that he is taken from me? It is my fault, for I have not sufficiently taken care of him and guarded him. Perhaps God does not deem me worthy to watch over this child and will take him from me again." She was undoubtedly greatly frightened and her heart trembled and was filled with grief.

[4] Here you see what she experienced. Although she is the mother of a child in whom she might have gloried before all mothers, and although her joy was immeasurably greater than any she had ever felt, yet you perceive how God deprives her of all happiness, in that she can no longer call herself the mother of Jesus. In her great dismay she probably wished, she had never known her child and was tempted to greater sins than any mother had ever committed.

[5] In the same manner the Lord our God can take from us our joy and comfort, if he so desires, and cause us the greatest sorrow with the very things that are our greatest joy, and, on the other hand, give us the greatest delight in the things that terrify us most. For it was the greatest joy of Mary that she was the mother of this child, but now he has become the cause of her greatest sorrow. Thus we are afraid of nothing more than of sin and death, yet God can comfort us so that we may boast, as St. Paul says in Romans 7, that sin served to the end that we became justified and that we longed for death and desire to die.

[6] The great sorrow of the mother of Christ, who was deprived of her child, came upon her in order that even her trust in God might be taken from her. For she had reason to fear that God was angry with her and would no longer have her to be the mother of his Son. Nobody will understand what she suffered who has not passed through similar experiences. Therefore we should apply this example to ourselves, for it was not recorded for her sake, but for our benefit. She is now at the end of her sorrows; therefore we should profit by her example and be prepared to bear our sorrow if a similar affliction befall us.

[7] When God vouchsafes to us a strong faith and a firm trust in him, so that we are assured he is our gracious God and we can depend upon him, then we are in paradise. But when God permits our hearts to be discouraged and we believe that he takes from us Christ our Lord; when our conscience feels that we have lost him and amidst trembling and despair our confidence is gone, then we are truly in misery and distress. For even if we are not conscious of any special sin, yet in such a condition we tremble and doubt whether God still cares for us; just as Mary here doubts and knows not whether God still deems her worthy to be the mother of his Son. Our heart thinks in the time of trial thus: God has indeed given me a strong faith, but perhaps he will take it from me and will no longer want me as his child.

Only strong minds can endure such temptations and there are not many people whom God tests to this degree. Yet we must be prepared, so that we may not despair if such trials should come upon us.

[8] We find many examples of this in the Scriptures, as for instance in Joshua 7:6-7. God had given to Joshua great and strong promises, telling him that he would exterminate the heathen and charging him to attack his enemies courageously and vigorously, which he also did. But what happened? When his faith was strong he sent three thousand men against a city to take it. They were proud, seeing that it was a small city with only a few people to defend it. When the men of Israel approached, the enemy sallied forth from the city and defeated the people. Then Joshua fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of Jehovah until the evening, lifting up his voice and lamenting before God, saying: "Alas, O Lord Jehovah, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over the Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to cause us to perish?" His faith had become weak and he was utterly discouraged, so that God himself had to raise him up again. Thus God deals with his great saints, whom he sometimes deprives of Christ, that is, of their faith and confidence.

[9] But God does all this out of his superabundant grace and goodness in order that we might perceive on every hand how kindly and lovingly the Father deals with us and tries us, so that our faith may be developed and become continually stronger and stronger. And he does this especially so as to guard his children against a twofold danger which might otherwise threaten them. In the first place, being strong in their own mind and arrogant, they might ultimately depend upon themselves and believe they are able to accomplish everything in their own strength. For this reason God sometimes permits their faith to grow weak and to be prostrated, so that they might see who they are and be forced to confess: Even if I would believe, I cannot. Thus the omnipotent God humbles his saints and keeps them in their true knowledge. For nature and reason will always boast of the gifts of God and depend upon them. Therefore God must lead us to a recognition of the fact that it is he who puts faith in our heart and that we cannot produce it ourselves. Thus the fear of God and trust in him must not be separated from one another, for we need them both, in order that we may not become presumptuous and overconfident, depending upon ourselves.

This is one of the reasons why God leads his saints through such great trials.

[10] Another reason is, that he wants to give us an example. For if in the Scriptures we had no examples of saints who passed through the same experiences, we should be unable to bear our trials and would imagine that we alone are thus afflicted, that God never dealt with anyone in this manner; therefore my suffering must be a sign of God's displeasure with me. But when we see that the Virgin Mary and other saints have also suffered, we are thereby comforted and need not despair, for their example shows that we should calmly and patiently wait until God comes and strengthens us.

[11] We find many examples of similar trials in the Scriptures, and here we might refer to the words of David in Psalm 31:22: "As for me, I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes," just as we sometimes think that God does not want us. Such trials are unendurable and severe beyond measure, wherefore the saints passing through them lament greatly, for if God would not deliver them they would be in hell. Compared with these trials other temptations and sorrows are trivial, as for instance when our possessions and honors are taken from us, or when the innocent babes were murdered and Jesus was forced to flee into Egypt. The prophet speaks of this in Psalm 94:17: "Unless Jehovah had been my help, my soul had soon dwelt in silence." So great is the terror and anguish of such visitations. But God permitted them that we might lay hold of these examples, be comforted and saved from despair. At the end of our lives we must also pass through like trials. Therefore we must be armed and prepared for them.

II. An Example of Comfort Under the Cross.

[12] Such is the narrative and example of the great sorrow as it is portrayed in this Gospel, but we are also shown where comfort may be found. The parents of Jesus lost him, going a day's journey and seeking for him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance, but found him not. They return to Jerusalem and after a search of three days, he is found by them in the temple. Here God has pointed out how we can find consolation and strength in all our sorrows, and especially in these great trials, and how we can find

Christ the Lord, namely by seeking him in the temple. Jesus said to his parents: “Knew ye not that I must be in my Father’s house?”

[13] The words of Luke “and they understood not the saying which he spake unto them” are especially to be noted here. With these words he silenced the idle talk of those who exalted and praised the Virgin Mary too highly, asserting that she knew everything and could not err. For you see here how the Lord permits her to seek her child for a long time in vain, till she finds him in the temple after three days. In addition to this, Jesus seems to reprimand her when he says: “How is it that ye sought me? knew ye not that I must be in my Father’s house?” She understood not the saying which he spake to her. Consequently all the idle talk to which we have referred is nothing but falsehood, and the Virgin Mary does not need this fabricated and mendacious praise. God concealed much from her and led her through many trials, so that she might remain humble and not think herself better than others.

[14] But the consolation of which I have spoken is that Christ is only found in the temple, that is to say in the house of God. But what is the house of God? Is it not the whole creation? It is indeed true that God is everywhere, but he is especially present in the Holy Scriptures, in his Word, more than anywhere else. We learn therefore here that nobody can presume to derive any comfort from anything but the Word of God; you will find the Son only in the temple. Now look at the mother of Jesus who does not yet understand this and does not know that she must seek for him in the temple. When she sought for him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance, and not at the right place, she did not find him.

[15] Therefore I have often said and say again, that in the Christian Church nothing should be preached but the pure Word of God. With this the Gospel agrees when it says that they did not find the Lord among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. It is therefore wrong to say that we must believe what the councils have decreed, or what Jerome, Augustine and other holy fathers have written. We must point out the place where Christ may be found, which he himself points out when he says that he must be in his Father’s house, which means that he can only be found in the Word of God. We should therefore not believe that our conscience may trust in the teachings of the holy fathers or derive comfort from them. Now if they say to you: Should we not believe the holy fathers? you may reply: Christ is not

found among the kinsfolk and acquaintance. It would indeed be well if Christians generally were to heed this example from the Gospel and use it as a maxim against every doctrine that does not agree with the Word of God.

[16] But in order to emphasize this more and to make it clearer, let us see what other doctrines have been proclaimed that do not agree with the Word of God. Up to this time we have had three different systems of doctrine. The first and coarsest is that of St. Thomas (if indeed he be a saint). This was taken from the system of pagan science and art which was written by that great light of nature, Aristotle. Now they say that his philosophy is like a bright, shining plate, and the Word of Christ is like the sun. And as the sun shines upon the plate, causing it to gleam and glitter all the brighter, so the divine light shines upon the light of nature and illumines it. With this beautiful simile they have introduced pagan doctrines into the Christian church, which have been taught and cultivated by the great universities and in which teachers and preachers have been instructed. The devil has taught them to speak in this way. Thus the Word of God is trodden under foot, for when it is given full play, it subverts all these satanic doctrines.

[17] In the second place, they have taught and prescribed human laws, called the institutions and precepts of the holy Christian church. Thereby these fools have thought to lead men to heaven and to be able to comfort and pacify our conscience. These human laws prevail to such a degree that like a great deluge they cover the whole world and have submerged everything else, so that it is almost impossible that anyone may be saved from going down to hell. For they clamor unceasingly as though they were insane: This has been decreed by the holy councils and that has been commanded by the church; we have observed this a long time, shall we not believe it now?

[18] Therefore we should reply to this from the Gospel, as I said: Even if Mary, the Holy Virgin, had done this, it would not be surprising if she had erred. She was the mother of God, and yet she did not know where to find Christ; she sought him among her kinsfolk and acquaintance and failed to find him. Now if she did not succeed in finding Christ among her kinsfolk, but had finally to come to the temple, how shall we expect to find him outside of the Word of God in human doctrines, in the decrees of the councils or the teachings of the scholastics? Bishops and councils have

undoubtedly not possessed the gift of the Holy Spirit in as large a measure as Mary. If she erred, why should not they also be mistaken who fancy to find Christ elsewhere but in his Father's house, that is in the Word of God?

[19] If therefore you find one who adheres to these two different systems of doctrine, believing them to be right and trusting in them, ask him whether he is quite confident that they will comfort his soul in the hour of death or under the judgment and the wrath of God, whether he will be able to say then with a conscience undaunted: This has been declared and decreed by the pope and the bishops in their councils, I depend upon that and am quite certain I shall not fail? He will soon be obliged to say: How can I be so certain of this? Thus, when it comes to the point and you are in the presence of death, your conscience will say: It is indeed true, the councils have decreed this, but what if they were mistaken, and who knows whether they were right? Then when you are in such doubts, you cannot hold out, and Satan will assail you and hurl you to the ground, so that you lie there helpless.

[20] In the third place, besides these two theories they have also pointed us to the Holy Scriptures and said, that above every other doctrine the laws and decrees of the pope in matters of faith must be observed. But here they except the teachings of some of the holy fathers, who have interpreted the Scriptures, and whom they have exalted so highly that they place them on the same level with the pope of Rome, or a little above him, asserting even that they could not err, and clamoring: How could it be possible for the holy fathers not to understand the Scriptures? But let these fools say what they wish, always remind them of the words of Christ: "Knew ye not that I must be in my Father's house?" We must above all things have the Word of God and cling to it, for Christ will be there and in no where else. Therefore it is in vain that you seek him elsewhere. For how can you convince me that Christ must be found in the writings of the holy fathers?

[21] This Gospel is therefore a severe thrust at every doctrine and every comfort of any kind that is not derived from the Word of God. You may therefore say: It matters not how highly you exalt reason and the light of nature, I reserve the right of not putting my trust in it. The councils have issued decrees and the pope or the holy fathers have taught what they wish, but that does not concern me; I will not depend upon them. We will soon agree if they decide and propose what they please, but grant me the liberty

to say: If it pleases me, I shall observe it, but not as something that is especially meritorious. They will however not grant us this right; for they are not satisfied to let us use our own discretion in these things, but demand in addition that we base our trust and comfort on them, teaching that if we trust in them, it is as much as if we place our confidence in Christ and the Holy Spirit. We cannot tolerate their delusions according to which they think that they are doing a good work who keep their laws, and again, that it is a sin not to keep them. For they declare that the precepts and doctrines of the pope and the church come from the Holy Spirit and are the Word of God, for which reason we ought to believe and observe them. But this is an obvious and shameless lie; for how can they prove it?

[22] But, they say, the Christian church is always led by the Holy Spirit, who will not permit the church to err or go wrong. To this we answer with what we said before: However good the church may be, it has never possessed the Spirit in as large a measure as Mary, who although she was led by the Spirit, erred nevertheless, so that we might learn from her experience. If she herself is uncertain, how can you make me certain? Whither should we then go? We must also come into the temple, that is to say we must cling to the Word of God, which is secure and will not fail us and where we will certainly find Christ. I must therefore always be with the Word, if I cleave to it. If the Word of God goes conquering through death and remains alive, I must also pass through death to life, and nothing can hinder or destroy me, neither sin nor death, nor the devil. The comfort and boldness I derive from the Word of God cannot be engendered by any other doctrine, for none can be compared with it.

[23] Therefore it is necessary that we understand this clearly and not place our confidence in human doctrines and the teachings of the holy fathers. God has demonstrated this by many other examples in order to teach us not in the least to depend upon men, as the saints also may sometimes make mistakes. We read for instance in Acts 15:5-11 that not more than eighteen years after the Ascension of Christ, the apostles and the majority of the Christians held a conference. The question was raised whether the Gentiles should be compelled to submit to circumcision. There stood up the leaders of the sect of the Pharisees who believed and said: It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses. There was a great commotion and all seemed to hold the same opinion.

Only Peter, Paul, Barnabas and James were opposed to this view, and Peter especially rose up and said unto them: God has given the Holy Spirit unto the Gentiles who have heard the Gospel from me, even as he did unto us; and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now if they received the Holy Spirit and were not circumcised, why would you force them and put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they.

[24] You notice that many Christians were at this council who were true believers, at a time when the church was in its youthful vigor and almost perfect, and yet God permits them all to err with the exception of three or four men. If these few men had not protested, erroneous doctrines would have been taught and a law not in accordance with the Gospel of Christ been established. Yet we are such blind fools as to say continually: The councils and the church have commanded this or that, and as they cannot be in error, their decrees must be observed.

[25] Later on we read that even the most prominent leaders, both Peter and Barnabas, fell into error and all the other Jews with them. Then Paul alone rose up and rebuked Peter publicly, as he himself writes in Galatians 2:11. Now if these holy councils and holy men erred, why should we put our trust in our own councils? For they cannot for an instant be compared with the councils held by the apostles.

[26] Why does God permit these things to occur? He does it that we may not depend upon or derive comfort from the words and doctrines of men, however holy they may be, but place our confidence only in the Word of God. If then even an apostle came or an angel from heaven, as St. Paul says in Galatians 1:8-9, who would preach another Gospel, we should openly declare it is not the Word of God and refuse to listen to it. Do not forget that the child can be found in no other place but the temple, or the house of God. Mary indeed sought him among the kinsfolk, who are the great, learned and pious people, but she did not find him among them.

[27] There are many similar examples and types elsewhere in the Gospel which point out the same truth, namely, that nothing should be taught but the Word of God and no other doctrine should be accepted, because Christ can be found only in the Scriptures. Thus we read in the Gospel for

Christmas, Luke 2:12, where the angel, who announced the birth of Christ, said to the shepherds: “And this is the sign unto you: Ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.” Why does he not direct them to Mary and Joseph, but only points them to the swaddling clothes and the manger? The reason is that God will not point us to any saint, not even to the holy mother herself, for they may all err. Therefore a special place must be pointed out where Christ is, namely the manger, where he surely may be found, even if Joseph and Mary were not present. This signifies that Christ is completely wrapped in the Scriptures, just as the body is wrapped in the clothes. The manger is the preaching of the Gospel, where he is lying and where he is apprehended, and from which we take our food. Now it would indeed appear that the child should lie where Joseph and Mary are, these great and holy people. Yet the angel points only to the manger, which he will not have overlooked or dishonored. It is an insignificant and simple expression, but Christ is found in it.

[28] The same truth is also pointed out in other narratives, as for instance in that of holy Simeon, who had received a promise from God that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord Christ. He came in the Spirit into the temple, found the child and received him into his arms. But here it is only emphasized that he finds Christ in the temple. From all this we learn that God would warn us against human doctrines, however excellent they may be, advising us not to depend upon them, but cleave to the only true guide, the Word of God. Lay aside everything else. Their declarations and decrees may indeed be good and right, but our heart cannot trust in them.

[29] This then is the comfort we derive from this Gospel in our great trials, of which we have spoken above. We know that consolation may be found only in the Scriptures, the Word of God. For this reason God caused this to be recorded, so that we might learn these lessons, as St. Paul writes to the Romans: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Romans 15:4. Here he says that the Scriptures are comforting, that they impart patience and comfort. Consequently there can be nothing else that comforts the soul, not even in the most trifling temptations. For everything else with which man comforts himself, however great it may be, is altogether uncertain, and the heart

inquires constantly: Who knows whether it is right? if I only were sure about it! etc. But when the heart clings to the Word of God, it may say without any wavering: This is the Word of God, which cannot lie nor err, of this I am certain. And this is our greatest struggle, that we keep and hold firmly to the Word; for if that is taken from the heart, man is lost.

[30] Let us then be prepared for their representations and expostulations to the effect that the Christian church cannot err, so that we may know how to meet them, and say: Here is not the word of man, but the Word of God. We read in this Gospel that his mother, Mary, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and yet she erred. Likewise we read in the Acts that there was a Christian council of such who believed and who had the Spirit, and yet they stumbled and would have established an unchristian law, if others had not protested. We should therefore not believe any council or, saint, if they come without the Word of God. This is then the sum total of this Gospel, and if anything else is to be said on it, we will let those explain it who have leisure; but he who studies it faithfully will easily understand it.

[31] Some have broken their heads over the meaning of the words of Luke where he says that Christ advanced in wisdom and grace, for they assume that as true God he possessed all wisdom and grace from the time of his conception. But here they have shamefully altered the text with their commentaries. Therefore refrain from such idle talk and let the words stand just as they are without any commentary. We must understand them simply as saying that he grew continually and waxed strong in the Spirit, just as any other man, as we have explained it more fully in the Gospel for the Sunday after Christmas.

First Sunday after Epiphany Second Sermon. An Example of Severe Suffering.

Text: Luke 2:41-52.

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

48 And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. Luke 2:41-52

I. An Example of the Cross and of Severe Suffering

[1] Hitherto, under the blindness of the papacy, nothing was taught concerning the blessed saints of God except to cover them with extravagant praise and laudation, and to praise them for exalted devotion and celestial joy, as if on earth they had not also been human beings and as if they had never suffered and felt the adversities, misfortunes and frailties of men; and as if they could not be honored sufficiently, unless they were represented in

wood and stone. They have sought to strengthen this idea by means of false and shameful lies and idle tales, as if in this way the saints were highly honored and men spoke of them only in wonder and saw only such examples in them as no one could realize in this life, nor find comfort in them. In consequence, they have been turned into idols and men have been taught to call upon them, instead of the Lord Jesus Christ, as intercessors, mediators and helpers in need, to the shameless blasphemy and denial of our blessed Savior and high priest, Jesus Christ.

[2] Thus they also falsely imagined to exalt the mother of Christ and know of no greater honor for her than to fill and overload her with graces and gifts, as if she had never suffered temptations, had never faltered nor failed in reason, nor in anything else. The holy Scriptures and this Gospel, on the other hand, show how God deals with his saints in a wonderful manner, according to Psalm 4:4 and in a way altogether contrary to human reason; and that the more highly he endows them with grace and exalts and honors them, the deeper he thrusts them into sorrow and suffering, yea, even into dishonor, shame and desertion.

[3] Human reason would undoubtedly teach and advise God not to permit his own Son to be shamefully and ignominiously dealt with as a murderer and malefactor, and allow his blood to be shed, but rather see to it that the angels should bear him on their hands, all kings and nobles fall at his feet and render him all honor. For human wisdom consists in this, that it neither sees, nor seeks, nor desires anything except that which is high and precious, and that which brings honor; and, again, neither shuns nor flees from anything more readily than dishonor, contempt, suffering, misery, and the like. Thus God reverses the order and acts in a contrary way, deals so harshly and offensively, according to human reason and opinion, with his dearly beloved Son as he would not deal with any man on earth, as if he were not the Son of God, or of man, but the child of Satan! In the same way he also dealt with his well-beloved servant, John the Baptist, of whom Christ says, Matthew 11:11, that among those that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than he, and yet upon him he conferred the honor of being beheaded by a knave. This was, indeed, a most dishonorable and shameful death.

[4] In like manner he dealt with his dear mother, so that she was compelled to learn and experience how wonderfully God deals with his

saints, and the Gospels point out with sufficient clearness, that he very seldom permitted them to see and experience what was noble, precious and joyous, but for the most part caused them to experience suffering and anxiety, as the aged and holy Simeon had foretold her, as a type for all Christians. Besides, he spoke harshly to her and repulsed her in an unfriendly manner.

[5] Accordingly, this Gospel presents, first of all, the mother of Christ as an example of cross-bearing and of great suffering, such as God permits his saints to endure. For although the holy Virgin was greatly blessed with all grace and was a beautiful temple of the holy God and in preference to all was accorded the high honor of being the mother of the Son of God, and doubtless had the greatest possible pleasure and joy in her child, more so than any other mother, as was natural; yet God so ordered that she did not merely have exalted pleasure, but also great distress, pain and sorrow because of him. For her first distress was that she was in a strange place when he was born at Bethlehem, where she found no place for her child but a common stable. Her other distress was that within six weeks after his birth she was compelled to flee with the child and remain an exile for seven years. Besides she must have endured many things that are not recorded.

[6] One of these afflictions, and not the least, is the misery he caused her to suffer when he permitted himself to be lost to her in the temple, and allowed her to search for him so long. By this he so terrified and saddened her that she might have despaired of finding him, as she confessed when she exclaimed, "Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." For let us think for a moment, how she must have felt and grieved. Every father and mother can easily understand the misery and sorrow caused by the unavoidable separation from a dear child, when they know only that the child is lost. And even if the separation should last only an hour, how great are not the sorrow and lamentation, and how many tears are not shed, without consolation, without strength to eat, drink, sleep or rest, and with such misery that they would prefer to die. How much greater the suffering, if this condition were to continue for a day and a night, or even longer, when each hour must seem like a hundred years!

[7] Now, on the other hand, behold this mother who, first loses her only son, a son like whom neither she nor anyone else can have; who is alone her son and she alone his mother, without a natural father; yea, who is truly the

only-begotten Son of God and in a special manner given and entrusted to her by God, that she, as his mother, should wait on him, care for him, and look after him with all diligence. Hitherto she had nourished him, not without much care and sorrow, and had strenuously defended him among strangers and enemies. Now that he has grown some and she could have her greatest joy and comfort in him, she must suddenly lose him, when she thought he was most secure and her sorrows past, and lose him not only for two hours, nor for a day and night, but three whole days, so that she was compelled to think he was lost forever. Who can think or say how her motherly heart must have been agonized and afflicted during the three whole days she was searching for him? It was marvelous that she lived through this great sorrow.

[8] The affliction and suffering she was compelled to endure were not of a nature that they had occurred without her fault, but her conscience forced her to remember how God had entrusted the child to her and that no one else was accountable for him, and hence storms burst and thundered in her heart: Behold, thou hast lost the child. This is no one's fault but thine own; for thou shouldst have waited on him and looked after him, and not permitted him for a moment to go out of thy sight. How wilt thou give an account of this before God, since thou hast failed to watch over him? This is the result of sin and thou art no longer worthy to be his mother; yea, thou hast deserved to be condemned by him before all people, inasmuch as he has conferred on thee the great honor and favor of choosing thee for his mother.

[9] Should not her heart have failed and fainted here from anxiety, for two reasons? First, because she lost her son and was unable to find him; secondly, which was the most severe of all and which could not happen to other mothers, making the pain all the more severe, because she must abhor herself before God, the only Father of the child, that he would no longer have or regard her as his mother, and hence she must be more sorrowful and sad at heart than any other woman on earth. In her own heart she regards herself guilty of the same sin as Eve, the first mother, who brought the whole human race to ruin. For what are all sins compared with this one, that she has neglected and lost this child, the Son of God and the Savior of the World? And if he should not be found, or, since he could not be lost, if God should have taken him back to himself, she would be the cause of

preventing the completion of the work of the redemption of the world. Such and doubtless many other thoughts filled her heart with great fear, especially since she, as a pious child of God, had a very tender heart and conscience.

[10] Here you may see how God dealt with the most holy person, the mother of his Son, even though she had been most highly honored by him and her joy in her Son had been immeasurably great, such as no mother ever had; and yet God so assailed her and she must be so divested of her honor and comfort that she cannot say, I am the mother of the Son. Previously she had been exalted to heaven, now she has been suddenly cast into deepest hell and is in such terror and sorrow that she might have despaired and died, and have wished that she had never seen the child, nor heard of him; and thus she might have committed a more grievous sin than any other person ever committed.

[11] Thus you see, that God can deal with his saints in a way to deprive them of happiness and comfort whenever he pleases, and cast them into the greatest fear concerning that in which they have their greatest joy. So, likewise, he can again confer the greatest joy. For this was the greatest joy of this holy Virgin, that she had become the mother of this child, but now she has no greater terror and sorrow than that caused by this Son. Thus, we can have no greater terror than that caused by sin and death; and yet God can comfort us even in this, so that we may glory in the fact, as St. Paul says, Romans 5:20-21, that sin was compelled to serve to the end that grace might be greater and much more abound. And death, overcome by Christ, furnishes the reason why we may desire death and be able to die with gladness.

[12] Again, if God has given us a precious faith and we therefore live in strong confidence of the fact that we have a gracious God through Christ, we are in paradise. But before we are aware, it may happen that God may cause our hearts to fail and we may think that he wants to tear Christ out of our hearts, and Christ may be so hidden from us that we can find no consolation in him, but instead receive only horrible thoughts into our hearts from the devil; so that we may feel as if we had lost Christ and then struggle and tremble as if on account of our sins we had deserved nothing from him but wrath and condemnation.

[13] Yea, though it may not be a matter of open sin, the devil can make sin of that which is no sin, and so move and terrify the heart that it will plague itself with the thought: Who knows, if God will accept thee or Christ be favorable to thee? So here; this dear mother doubted whether he would still regard her as his mother and felt in her heart as if she had neglected and lost her Son, although she was innocent in the whole matter, since he was not lost. Thus the heart speaks in temptation: Yea, God has indeed given thee an excellent faith; but perhaps he will no longer give it thee. Thou hast deserved this from some cause or other.

[14] And this is the greatest and most severe trial and suffering which God at times visits upon and exercises over his saints, namely, that which we are accustomed to call deserted by grace, on account of which the human heart feels as if the grace of God had been withdrawn, so that no matter where it turns it sees nothing but wrath and terror. But this great trial is not experienced by everyone, and no one can understand its significance unless he has experienced it. A strong spirit is required in order to endure such blows.

[15] Yet these examples are held up to us, in order that we may learn from them how to guard and console ourselves in temptation and to prepare ourselves for the time when God may see fit to assail us with similar great trials, in order that we may not be led to despair. For this has not been written for the sake of this Virgin, the mother of Christ, but for our benefit, in order that by it we may be taught and comforted.

[16] For the same, reason numerous examples of the great trials of other exalted saints are presented in Scriptures, among whom undoubtedly was that of the patriarch Jacob, of whom Moses writes, Genesis 32:24, that he wrestled the whole night with God; again, of Joshua. Joshua 7:7, to whom God had given the great and powerful promise that he should be able to overcome the heathen that opposed him, admonished him to be comforted and undismayed, for he would be with him, etc. On the strength of this promise Joshua went joyously forward, boldly struck out against his enemies, and gained a great victory. But what happened? Even while he possessed such faith and courage and in the same faith had taken and destroyed Jericho, it came to pass that not more than three thousand men from among all the people of Israel were sent to Ai to conquer and destroy it. They were proud and audacious, because the city was small and the

enemy few in number. But when they arrived at the city, they were suddenly seized with fear, turned their backs and fled from the enemy, although not more than thirty six of their number were slain. Joshua himself lost courage, prostrated himself on the ground and lay on his face all day and cried to God: "Alas, O Lord, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us? would that we had been content and dwelt beyond Jordan." Behold the great and valiant hero lies there on the ground with his faith, who had received the strong Word of God, and God alone can raise him up again. Why is he so despondent? Simply because God, in order to try him, had concealed himself and therefore had disheartened him, in order that Joshua might learn to realize what man is and can do without the divine help

[17] Sufferings like these are immeasurably heavy and unbearable to human nature; therefore the saints cry and complain woefully and wretchedly under them, many examples of which are found in the Psalms, as Psalm 31:23, "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes," that is, "I knew and felt nothing else than that my heart said to me, God does not care for you." And if God would not support them by his power and help them out of their sufferings, they would have to sink into hell. Thus Psalm 94:17 says "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had soon dwelt in silence."

[18] Therefore, this holy Virgin was a real martyr for three days, and these days were heavier to her than was the external pain of martyrdom to other saints. She had had such anxiety on her Son's account that she could not have suffered any more bitter pain, For that is the greatest torture and woe, when the heart is attacked and tortured. All other sufferings that assail the body are more endurable; yea, amid them the heart can be joyful and can scorn all bodily suffering, as we read concerning St. Agnes and other martyrs. That is only half-suffering when the body alone is afflicted, while the heart and soul remain full of joy; but when the heart alone is compelled to endure suffering only great and noble spirits, and special grace and strength, are able to endure it.

[19] Now, why does God permit these afflictions to come upon his loved ones? Certainly not without reason, nor from wrath or lack of grace, but from motives of great grace and mercy, in order to show us how, in all things, he deals with us in a friendly and paternal manner and how

faithfully he cares for his own and so guides them that their faith may be more and more exercised and become stronger and stronger. But he does this especially for the following reasons.

[20] First, that he may guard his own against presumption, so that great saints, who have received special grace and gifts from God, may not presume and depend on themselves. For if they should at all times be strong in spirit, and experience only joy and sweetness, they might finally fall into the fatal pride of the devil, which despises God and trusts in self. Hence they must be seasoned and tempered so as not always to feel the power of the Spirit; but that their faith may at times tumble and their hearts tremble, in order that they may see what they are and be compelled to confess that they cannot do anything unless God sustains them by his pure grace. Thus God keeps them in humility and the knowledge of themselves, so that they do not become proud nor carnally secure in regard to their faith and holiness, as it happened to St. Peter, when he boasted he was willing to lay down his life for Christ, John 13:37.

[21] Thus the prophet David confesses that he was compelled to learn this lesson, Psalm 30:6-7; "I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved. Thou didst hide thy face, I was troubled." And St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 complains of the great affliction that befell him in Asia, saying: "We would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning our affliction which befell us in Asia, that we were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life; yea, we ourselves have had the answer of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead." And in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 he says that there was given him a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, that he should not be too highly exalted, on account of the great revelation which he had received; and that God would not remove this, although he had prayed thrice, but had to cling to the consolation which God afforded him, namely, that he should be satisfied with his grace and by means of it overcome his weakness. Therefore, such a trial of the saints is as necessary or even more necessary than food and drink, in order that they may remain in fear and humility, and learn to adhere alone to the grace of God.

[22] Secondly, God permits his saints to suffer these trials as an example for others, both to alarm the carnally secure and to comfort the timid and

alarmed. The wicked and impenitent may learn from this how to amend their ways, keep themselves from sin, since they can see that God deals even with the saints in a way to produce anxiety, in order that they may feel nothing but wrath and disfavor, and become alarmed as if they had committed the grossest sins that man can commit. So here, the mother of Christ was forced to contend, even till the third day, with a heavy heart, which accused her as if she had lost the Son of God, a sin the like of which no one else on earth had committed, and she had to fear only the Most High; and yet truly there was no such sin, nor wrath, nor disfavor.

[23] If, therefore, the hearts of the godly are overwhelmed with such heavy and unbearable alarm and anxiety, what shall become of others who lie securely and continue impenitent in real sins, and who deserve and heap up the wrath of God? How shall they be able to stand when suddenly seized by fear, which may happen at any moment?

[24] Again, such examples are intended to serve as a means of comfort for alarmed and anxious consciences, when they see that God has attacked not only them, but also the most exalted saints and permitted them to suffer the same trials and anxieties. For if we had no examples in Scripture, showing that these things happened to the saints, we would not be able to endure, and timid consciences would be led to cry out: Yea, I alone am compelled to endure these sufferings; when did God permit the pious and holy ones to be thus tempted? Hence, it must be a sign that God will have nothing to do with me. But when we see and hear that God has in like manner dealt with his saints and did not spare even his own mother, we have the knowledge and comfort that we need not despair in our trials, but remain quiet and wait until he helps us, even as he has helped all his saints.

[25] In the third place, we note the true reason why God does this, namely, in order that he may teach his saints to seek true comfort and prepare themselves that they may find Christ and keep him. The principal part of this Gospel lesson is to teach us how and where we are to seek and find Christ. So the text says that Mary and Joseph sought the child Jesus for three days without finding him, neither in Jerusalem, nor among their friends and acquaintances, until they came to the temple where he sat among the teachers and where the Scriptures and God's Word are studied. And when they were astonished and began to complain how they had sought him with sorrow, he said to them: II. The Teaching as to Where We

are to Seek Christ “How is it that ye sought me? Knew ye not that I must be in my Father’s house (in the things of my Father)?”

[26] What is meant by “I must be in the things of my Father?” Are not all creatures the Father’s? All things belong to him; but he gave us the creatures for our use, that we should use them in our earthly life according to our best understanding. But one thing he reserved for himself, which is holy and is called God’s own, and which we are in a special manner to receive from him. This is his holy Word, through which he rules the hearts and consciences, and makes holy and saves. Therefore, the temple is also called his holy place or his holy dwelling place, in order that he may there manifest himself and be heard through his Word. Hence Christ is in the things of his Father, when he speaks to us through his Word and by means of it leads us to the Father.

[27] Behold, he punishes his parents because they had erred and had sought him among earthly and human affairs, among friends and acquaintances, not thinking that he must be in that which is his Father’s. He wishes to indicate by this, that his kingdom and the whole essence of Christianity consists alone in the Word and in faith, not in external things (as the external and hypocritical sanctity of Judaism), nor in temporal and worldly ordinance or government. In a word; he will not permit himself to be found, either among friends and acquaintances, nor in anything outside of his Word. For he does not wish to be worldly, nor in that which is worldly, but in that which is his Father’s, even as he always manifested himself from his birth through his entire life. He was, indeed, in the world, but he did not conform to the world, as he also said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.” He was among friends and acquaintances and came to them, but did not identify himself with any of their affairs in the world, except that he sojourned in the world as a guest and used it to satisfy the wants of his body; but he waits alone on that which is his Father’s i.e., the Word. There he can be found; there he who wishes truly to find him, must seek him.

[28] Hence, as I have already said, God will not tolerate that we depend on anything else and permit our hearts to trust in anything that is not Christ in his Word, be it ever so holy and spiritual. Faith has no other foundation on which it can stand. Hence, it happened that the wisdom, thoughts and hopes of the mother of Christ and of Joseph must fail and everything be lost

while they were seeking him in other places. For they did not seek him as they ought, but as flesh and blood do, which always grope after other comfort than that of the Word; for it always wants what it can see and feel, and acquire by meditation and reason.

[29] Therefore God permits them to fall and fail, in order that they may learn that all comfort not based on the Word, but on flesh and blood, on men and all other creatures, must inevitably fail. Here everything must be abandoned; friends, acquaintances and the whole city of Jerusalem, all art, wit and everything belonging to these and to men; for all this neither gives nor aids comfort, until the Lord is sought in the temple, since he is in that which is his Father's. There he can truly be found and the heart is made to rejoice, or else it would have to remain without the least comfort.

[30] Accordingly, if God permits us to be thus sorely tried, we should learn then not to follow our own opinion, or human counsel, which directs us hither and thither, nor to depend on ourselves and others, but we should consider that we must seek Christ in the things of his Father; that is, that we cling simply and alone to the Word of the Gospel, which directs us Christians in the right way and gives us correct knowledge. Therefore, if you desire to comfort others or yourself, learn in this and all other spiritual trials to say with Christ; Why is it that you run hither and thither and so torment yourself with anxious and sorrowful thoughts, as if God had no more grace for you and as if Christ was not to be found, and that you will not be satisfied unless you find him by your own efforts and can feel yourself holy and without sin? Nothing can result from this; it is merely lost effort and labor. Do you not know that he does not wish to be found, except in that which is his Father's? Not in that which you or all other men are or have. It is not the fault of Christ and his grace; he indeed is not nor does he remain lost, he may always be found. But the fault lies in you, because you do not seek him rightly where he is to be found, since you judge according to your own feelings and think you can lay hold on him through your own thoughts. You must come to this, where neither your work and rule, nor that of any human being, but that of God is, namely, his Word. There you shall meet him, and hear and see that there is neither wrath nor displeasure there, as you feared and dreaded would be, but pure grace and sincere love toward you and as a friendly and dear mediator he entreats the Father most earnestly and effectually for you. Nor does he send such trial upon you in

order to cast you off, but that you may the better learn to know and the more closely cling to his Word, to punish your lack of understanding and that you may experience how earnestly and faithfully he cares for you.

[31] Behold, here is the precious doctrine of this Gospel, namely, how rightly to seek Christ and how he may be found; and it points out the real comfort that can satisfy troubled consciences, take away all terror and anxiety and again rejoice the heart and at the same time give it a new life. But the heart must become heavy before it can attain and lay hold of this truth; it must first run and experience that everything else is lost and useless in the search for Christ, and finally no counsel is to be had, unless you give yourself, without your own and all human comfort, to the Word alone. In bodily mishaps and straits you may seek comfort in gold, possessions, friends and acquaintances; but in these matters you must have something that is not human but divine, namely, the Word, through which alone Christ deals with us and we can deal with him. This how ever, is especially to be noted, as the Evangelist says: “They understood not the saying, which he spake unto them.”

[32] This should shut the mouths of vain babblers who exalt the holy Virgin Mary and other saints as if they knew everything and could not err; for you can see here how they err and falter, not only in this that they seek Christ and know not where to find him until they accidentally come to the temple, but also that they could not understand these words with which he censured their ignorance and is compelled to say to them: “Knew ye not, that I must be in the things of my Father.?” The Evangelist has pointed this out with great diligence, in order that men should not give credence to such falsehoods as ignorant, inexperienced and conceited teachers of works-righteousness present in exalting the saints, even setting them up as idols.

[33] The holy Virgin is not in need of such falsely invented praise. God led her in such a way that he concealed much from her and daily permitted many things to happen which she had not known beforehand, in order that he might keep her humble, so that she should not regard herself better than others. And this is praise and honor enough for her, that he guided and sustained her by his grace, although he had endowed her with many far greater gifts than others; and yet so that she, like others, was compelled, through manifold temptations and sorrows, to learn daily and grow in grace.

[34] Examples like this are useful and necessary to show us that even the saints, who are the children of God and highly favored above others, still have weaknesses so that they frequently err and blunder, yea, retain many faults, at times even commit great sins; yet not intentionally and willfully, but from weakness and ignorance, as we see again and again in the lives of the apostles. This happens in order that we may learn neither to build nor depend on any man; but, as this Gospel teaches, to cling to the Word of God only; and in order that we may find comfort in such examples and be not led to despair, although we may be weak and ignorant; and yet that we should not become bold and carnally secure on account of such grace as the haughty and pretended saints are wont to do.

[35] In a word, you have in this Gospel a strong example with which to overthrow the common cry both of the false saints and the great critics, which they still keep up, in order that contrary to the Word of God they may continue in their trifling; to wit, that they may reproach us with the writings and teachings of the fathers and the decrees of the church and councils; for, they say, these had the Holy Spirit, therefore they could not err, etc. In this way they desire to mislead us concerning the Scriptures and the true place to which Christ himself points and where he can surely be found; in order that what happened to Mary the mother, and to Joseph may happen also to us, namely, that we seek Christ everywhere and yet find him nowhere except at the place where he is to be found. The same thing has been carried on with great power in Christendom through the cursed government of the pope, who has striven both by his teachings and actions, threats and punishments to cause men to fail in seeking or finding Christ in the Scriptures.

[36] As was stated in the exposition of the Gospel for the preceding Sunday, they filled the world with three kinds of doctrines by which men have been led away from the Word of God. The first was the very gross one written by St. Thomas (of doubtful sanctity) and others by the schoolmen (scholastics) which proceeds from heathen art and natural reason, concerning which they have said: The light of nature is like a beautiful and bright tablet, and Scripture is like the sun shining on this tablet, causing it to shine all the more brightly. So also the divine light shines on the light of nature and illumines it. With this comparison they introduced this heathen doctrine into Christendom. According to this view they have both taught

and conducted the high schools in a way to reverse the comparison and thereby attempted, by means of reason and Aristotle, art and teaching, to illumine Scripture, which nevertheless is the only true light, and without which all the light of reason is simply darkness in divine things and in the articles of faith, as we have often said before.

[37] In the second place, the world has been filled with the teachings and commands of men and the so-called ordinances and commands of the church concerning fasts, celebrations, prayers, singing, vestments, monkery, etc., with which all the trickeries of the pope and the books of the Summists are filled and by means of these they have held out to the people the false hope of leading them to heaven. This has burst upon men like a flood and drowned the world, ensnared and captured all consciences, so that it is almost impossible to rescue anyone from these jaws of hell. On the basis of this the examples of the saints and the deceived have been so led, and this has been confirmed by the popes and councils, that they were forced to regard them as of equal value with the articles of faith. Therefore they shouted like the insane, without intermission: Aye, the councils have decreed this, the church has commanded it, it has been maintained ever so long, and like statements.

[38] In the third place, besides these two doctrines they have abandoned Holy Scripture; yet so as to attach it to some of the writings and expositions of the fathers, nevertheless not any farther than it pleased the pope and would not prove contrary to his law, and that no one should use Scripture except in accordance with the pleasure of the pope, to whom alone pertains the interpretations of Scripture and whose knowledge and judgments everyone is bound to accept. Yet, in spite of this, they so far honor the fathers as to demand that their interpretations and explanations should be followed. All the world accepted this and so received all that the fathers said, as if they could not err, and shouted again: Aye, how could it be possible that so many holy, learned and highly intelligent men should not have understood the Scriptures?

[39] To this we should reply as is taught in this Gospel: Be they called holy, learned, fathers, councils, or any other name, even though they were Mary, Joseph and all the saints it does not follow that they could not have erred and made mistakes. For here you learn that the mother of Christ though she possessed great intelligence and enlightenment, showed great

ignorance in that she did not know where to find Christ, and in consequence was censured by him because she did not know what she should have known. If she failed and through her ignorance was brought to such anxiety and sorrow that she thought she had lost Christ, is it a wonder that other saints should often have erred and stumbled, when they followed their own notions, without the guidance of Scripture, or put their own notions into Scripture?

[40] Hence, it amounts to nothing, if one asserts that men must believe and adhere to the decrees of councils or the teachings and writings of the holy fathers; for all these can and may err. But on the other hand, a definite place must be designated where Christ is and desires to be found, namely, as he here himself points out, when he says: He must be in that which is his Father's.

[41] It would be well for us Christians if we always followed the example presented in this Gospel and make it a maxim against all teachings and whatever can be set up against the Word of God, and say: Christ should not be sought among kinsfolk and acquaintances, nor in anything that men may have, no matter how holy, pious, or great they may be; for the mother of Christ herself erred and sinned because she did not know or understand this.

[42] Therefore conscience cannot establish itself on any saint or any creature, but on Christ alone. I may regard and honor reason and natural light ever so highly, but this will I reserve, that I dare not depend on it. Whatever the holy fathers and councils may have taught, decreed and ordered, as seemed good to them, I let pass for what it is worth, yet only so, that I am not to be bound by them, as if I were compelled to observe them or depend upon them. In a word, you may allow all these things to remain and stand for their true worth in human affairs, which are regulated as we deem best; but we dare not substitute them for Christ, that is, the comforts of our souls for them, but regard them merely as being concerned about the outward human life before the world.

[43] If the papists had been willing to admit this, as the Word of God teaches, we would long ago have been united with them, would have been satisfied that they should order and establish these human affairs as it pleased them, reserving, however, the freedom for ourselves not to be

forced to maintain them further than it is our pleasure, not from necessity or as if they had any value before God. They are not indeed willing to do this, but have hung their additions to it so that men are bound to observe their ordinances as if they were necessary to salvation, and call them the commands of the Church of Christ and their non-observance a mortal sin. We neither can nor will do or allow any thing of the kind.

[44] Yea, say they, the church, the holy fathers, and the councils have decreed and determined many things in controversial articles against the heretics, that have been received, which each one must believe and observe; therefore what has been decreed by the church and councils concerning other matters must also have authority.

[45] Answer: here they must again permit us freedom of judgment, so that we may not be bound, without any exception, by what the councils decreed or the fathers taught; but be allowed to maintain this distinction, namely, if they have determined and established anything in harmony with the Word of God, we accept it, not for their sake, but because of the Word itself, on which they ground themselves and to which they direct us. In this case, they do not act as mere men, but lead us to that which is God's, and are no longer among friends and acquaintances, but sit among those who hear Christ and inquire of him about the things of Scripture. Then we gladly honor them by listening to them. But when they determine anything contrary to and outside of this rule concerning other matters, not according to the Word of God, but according to their own opinion, this does not concern the conscience. Hence, it is to be regarded as a human affair by which we dare not be bound, nor be compelled to regard them as if they contained Christian faith and doctrine, but as St. Augustine has correctly said: *Totum hoc genus habet liberas observationes*, — as to what this thing is, we are free to observe or not.

[46] You say further: Yea, the church and the fathers were endowed with the Holy Spirit, who kept them from error. The answer to this is not difficult: The church and councils may have been ever so holy, they did not have the Holy Spirit in greater measure than Mary, the mother of Christ, who was also a member, yea, at the time, the most eminent member of the Church. And although she had been sanctified by the Holy Spirit; yet he permitted her at times to err, even in the important matters of faith. From this it does not follow, that the saints, who were endowed with the Spirit,

could on this account not err, nor that everything they said would have to be correct. Great weakness and ignorance may be found to exist even in the most eminent people. and hence we cannot judge concerning doctrines and matters of faith on the basis of personal holiness, for all this can fail. But here you come to the Word of God which is sure and infallible, where you shall certainly find Christ and the Holy Spirit, and can be and remain firmly fortified against sin, death, and the devil.

[47] Examples like these, which show that even the saints and the great mass called the church may err, we find elsewhere in the Scripture, especially in Acts 15, where it is shown that only eighteen years after the Ascension of Christ, the apostles and the whole body of Christians came together in Jerusalem. At that time the most eminent and learned of the Pharisees, who had become believers, arose and taught that converts from heathenism would have to be circumcised and be compelled to observe the law of Moses and by this teaching drew nearly the entire body of believers to their views. Then Peter, Paul, Barnabas and James stood alone in opposition to this view and concluded from Scriptures that the Gentiles should not be burdened with the observance of the Law, since God had bestowed on them, without the Law, through the preaching of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit even as upon the Jews. Behold, here were so many Christians who had faith at a time when the church was young and at her best, and yet all of them, except those three or four, fell into the error of thinking that the Law of Moses was necessary to salvation. If these few had not contended against this error, an erroneous article and command against Christ would have been established and confirmed. Again, at a later period St. Peter, who had maintained the true doctrine, stumbled with Barnabas at the same article, in that they dissembled with the Jews who refused to eat with the Gentiles and thereby gave offense to the Gentiles, in the breach of this freedom, so that St. Paul was compelled to reprimand them publicly, as he does in Galatians 2:11. Therefore, let us learn from this example to be prudent in the matters that concern faith and Christ, not allowing ourselves to be led by men, but adhering to the Word and maintaining the rule which St. Paul lays down in Galatians 1:8-9, that, even though an angel should come from heaven and preach another Gospel, he should be accursed; and the fact remains that Christ can be found nowhere else than in that which is God's.

[48] The same truth has been previously presented in many figures and examples, as in the Gospel for Christmas, Luke 2:12, where the angels give no other sign to the shepherds by which they might find Christ than the manger and the swaddling clothes. There they should find him lying and wrapped up, not in the bosom of the mother, nor on her lap, which would have seemed credible. That is, God does not wish to direct us to any saint or person of man, but only to the Word or Scripture, in which Christ is wrapped as in swaddling clothes, and in the poor manger (that is the preaching of the Gospel), which is so highly esteemed, and serves merely for the feeding of the cattle. Again, we have also heard from the aged and holy Simeon who, as had been promised him by God, should not die until he had seen Christ, but who does not recognize him until by the instigation of the Holy Spirit he enters the temple. So also the wise men from the east who, when they came to Jerusalem and no longer saw the star, hear of no other sign concerning Christ, as to where he was born and where he could be found, than the Scripture of the prophet Micah. So much may be said concerning the most important teaching and the principal parts of this Gospel. Finally, it is also to be noted that the Evangelist says: "His mother kept all these sayings in her heart."

[49] This is also given for our admonition, in order that we may endeavor to keep the Word of God in our hearts, as the blessed Virgin did, who, seeing she had erred and lacked understanding, became all the more diligent to keep in her heart all she heard from Christ. She furnishes another example, that above all things we should adhere to the Word and not permit it to go out of our hearts, but constantly use it, learn to gain strength from it, find comfort in it, and increase in it, as is indeed necessary for all of us. For when we come to the point where we shall be tried and tempted, we are liable to be forgotten or dropped even by those who are diligent.

[50] Whatever else might be said concerning this Gospel, as how Christ went home with his parents and was obedient and subject to them, etc., is easy and may readily be ascertained. Again, how we are to understand that Christ increased in wisdom and in favor was presented in the Gospel for a previous Sunday.

Second Sunday after Epiphany. Marriage at Cana. Jesus Turns Water into Wine

Text: John 2:1-11.

1 And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there:

2 And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.

3 And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.

4 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.

5 His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

6 And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.

7 Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.

8 And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.

9 When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,

10 And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.

11 This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him. John 2:1-11

[1] Enough has been written heretofore on marriage; hence we leave that subject for the present, and treat the following three topics in this Gospel text: first, the consolation this history affords married people by virtue of their marriage; secondly, the faith and love revealed in this Gospel lesson; thirdly, the spiritual significance of this marriage.

[2] In the first place, it is indeed a high honor paid to married life for Christ himself to attend this marriage, together with his mother and his disciples. Moreover, his mother is present as the one arranging the wedding, the parties married being apparently her poor relatives or neighbors, and she being compelled to act as the bride's mother; so of course, it was nothing more than a wedding, and in no way a display. For Christ lived up to his doctrine, not going to the rich, but to the poor; or, if he does go to the great and rich, he is sure to rebuke and reprove, coming away with disfavor, earning small thanks at their hands, with no thought of honoring them by a miracle as he does here.

[3] Now the second honor is his giving good wine for the poor marriage by means of a great miracle, making himself the bride's chief cup-bearer; it may be too that he had no money or jewel to give as a wedding present. He never did such honor to the life or doings of the Pharisees; for by this miracle he confirms marriage as the work and institution of God, no matter how common or how lowly it appears in the eyes of men, God none the less acknowledges his own work and loves it. Even our Caiaphases themselves have often declared and preached that marriage was the only state instituted by God. Who then instituted the others? Certainly not God, but the devil by means of men; yet they shun, reject and revile this state, and deem themselves so holy that they not only themselves avoid marriage — though they need it and ought to marry — but from excess of holiness they will not even attend a marriage, being much holier than Christ himself, who as an unholy sinner attends a wedding.

[4] Since then marriage has the foundation and consolation, that it is instituted by God and that God loves it, and that Christ himself so honors and comforts it, everybody ought to prize and esteem it, and the heart ought to be glad, that it is surely the state God loves and cheerfully endures every burden in it, even though the burdens be ten times heavier than they are. For this is the reason there is so much care and unpleasantness in marriage to the outward man, because everything that is God's Word and work, if it is to

be blessed at all, must be distasteful, bitter and burdensome to the outward man. On this account marriage is a state that cultivates and exercises faith in God and love to our neighbor by means of manifold cares, labors, unpleasantnesses, crosses and all kinds of adversities, that are to follow everything that is God's Word and work. All this the chaste whoremongers, saintly effeminates and Sodomites nicely escape, serving God outside of God's ordinance by doings of their own.

[5] For this is what Christ also indicates by his readiness to supply any want arising in marriage, bestowing wine where it is needed, and making it of water; as though he would say: Must you drink water, that is, suffer affliction outwardly, and is this distasteful? Very well, I will sweeten it for you and change the water into wine, so that your affliction will be your joy and delight. I will not do this by taking the water away or having it poured out; it shall remain, yea, I will have it poured in and the vessels filled up to the brim. For I will not deprive Christian marriage of its cares and trials, but rather add to it. The thing shall be wondrous, so that none, except they themselves who experience it, shall understand it. It shall be on this wise: 6. God's Word shall do it, by which all things are made, preserved and transformed; that Word which turns your water into wine, and distasteful marriage into delight. That God has instituted marriage (Genesis 2:32) the heathen and unbelievers do not know, therefore their water remains water and never becomes wine; for they feel not God's pleasure and delight in married life, which if they did feel they would experience such delight in my pleasure as not to feel the half of their affliction, feeling it outwardly only, but inwardly not at all. And this would be the way to turn water into wine, mixing my pleasure with your displeasure and placing the one against the other, so that my pleasure would drown your displeasure, and turn it into pleasure; but this pleasure of mine nothing will reveal and give to you except my Word, Genesis 1:31: "God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."

[7] Here too Christ indicates that he is not displeased with a marriage feast, nor with the things belonging to a wedding such as adornments, cheerfulness, eating and drinking, according to the usage and custom of the country; which appear to be superfluous and needless expense and a worldly matter; only so far as these things are used in moderation and in keeping with a marriage. For the bride and groom must be adorned; so also

the guests must eat and drink to be cheerful. And such dining and doing may all be done in good conscience; for the Scriptures occasionally report the like, even the Gospel lessons mentioning bridal adornment, the wedding garment, guests and feastings at weddings. Thus Abraham's servant in Genesis 24:53 presents ornaments of gold and silver to Rebecca, the bride of Isaac, and to her brothers; so that in these things no one need pay attention to the sour-visaged hypocrites and self-constituted saints who are pleased with nothing but what they themselves do and teach, and will not suffer a maid to wear a wreath or to adorn herself at all.

[8] God is not concerned about such external things, if only faith and love reign; provided, as already stated, it be in moderation and in accord with each person's station. For this marriage, although it was poor and small, had three tables; which is indicated by the word Architriclinus, showing that the ruler of the feast had three tables to provide for; moreover, the groom did not himself attend to this office, but had servants; then too there was wine to drink; all of which, if poverty were to be urged, might have been dispensed with, as is frequently the case with us. So also the guests did not merely quench their thirst with the wine; for the ruler of the feast speaks of how the good wine ought first to be set on, then, when men have freely drunk, that which is worse. All this Christ allows to pass, and we likewise should let it pass and not make it a matter of conscience. They were not of the devil, even if a few drank of the wine a little beyond what thirst required, and became merry; else you would have to blame Christ for being the cause by means of his presence, and his mother by asking for it; so that both Christ and his mother are sinners in this if the sour-visaged saints are to render judgment.

[9] But the excess customary in our times is a different thing, where men do not eat and drink but gorge themselves with food and drink, revel and carouse, and act as though it were a sign of skill or strength to consume overmuch: where, moreover, the intention is not to be merry, but to be full and crazy. But these are swine, not men; to such Christ would not give wine, nor would he visit them. So also in the matter of dress, it is not the marriage that is kept in mind, but display and pomp; as though the most admirable were those most able to wear gold, silver and pearls, and to spoil much silk and broadcloth, which even asses might do and switches.

[10] What then is moderation? Reason should teach that, and cite examples from other countries and cities where such pomp and excess are unknown. But to give my opinion, I would say a farmer is well adorned if for his wedding he have clothes twice as fine as he daily wears at his work; a burgher likewise; and a nobleman, if he have garments twice as costly as a townsman; a count, twice as costly as a nobleman; a duke, twice as costly as a count, and so in due order. In like manner food and drink and the entertainment of guests should be governed by their social position, and the purpose of the table should be pleasure not debauchery.

[11] Now is it a sin to play and dance at a wedding, inasmuch as some declare great sin is caused by dancing? Whether the Jews had dances I do not know; but since it is the custom of the country, like inviting guests, decorating, eating and drinking and being merry, I see no reason to condemn it, save its excess when it goes beyond decency and moderation. That sin should be committed is not the fault of dancing alone; since at a table or in church that may happen; even as it is not the fault of eating that some while so engaged should turn themselves into swine. Where things are decently conducted I will not interfere with the marriage rites and customs, and dance and never mind. Faith and love cannot be driven away either by dancing or by sitting still, as long as you keep to decency and moderation. Young children certainly dance without sin; do the same also, and be a child, then dancing will not harm you. Otherwise were dancing a sin in itself, children should not be allowed to dance. This is sufficient concerning marriage. II. The Doctrine and Example of Love and Faith

[12] In the second place, to return to. our Gospel lesson, we here see the example of love in Christ and his mother. The mother renders service and takes the part of house-keeper: Christ honors the occasion by his personal presence, by a miracle and a gift. And all this is for the benefit of the groom, the bride and the guests, as is the nature of love and its works. Thus Christ lures all hearts to himself, to rely on him as ever ready to help, even in temporal things, and never willing to forsake any; so that all who believe in him shall not suffer want, be it in spiritual or temporal things; rather must water become wine, and every creature turned into the thing his believer needs. He who believes must have sufficient, and no one can prevent it.

[13] But the example of faith is still more wonderful in this Gospel. Christ waits to the very last moment when the want is felt by all present,

and there is no counsel or help left. This shows the way of divine grace; it is not imparted to one who still has enough, and has not yet felt his need. For grace does not feed the full and satiated, but the hungry, as we have often said. Whoever still deems himself wise, strong and pious, and finds something good in himself, and is not yet a poor, miserable, sick sinner and fool, the same cannot come to Christ the Lord, nor receive his grace.

[14] But whenever the need is felt, he does not at once hasten and bestow what is needed and desired, but delays and tests our faith and trust, even as he does here; yea, what is still more severe, he acts as though he would not help at all, but speaks with harshness and austerity. This you observe in the case of his mother. She feels the need and tells him of it, desiring his help and counsel in a humble and polite request. For she does not say: My dear son, furnish us wine; but: "They have no wine." Thus she merely touches his kindness, of which she is fully assured. As though she would say: He is so good and gracious, there is no need of my asking, I will only tell him what is lacking, and he will of his own accord do more than one could ask. This is the way of faith, it pictures God's goodness to itself in this manner, never doubting but that it is really so; therefore it makes bold to bring its petition and to present its need.

[15] But see, how unkindly he turns away the humble request of his mother who addresses him with such great confidence. Now observe the nature of faith. What has it to rely on? Absolutely nothing, all is darkness. It feels its need and sees help nowhere; in addition, God turns against it like a stranger and does not recognize it, so that absolutely nothing is left. It is the same way with our conscience when we feel our sin and the lack of righteousness; or in the agony of death when we feel the lack of life; or in the dread of hell when eternal salvation seems to have left us. Then indeed there is humble longing and knocking, prayer and search, in order to be rid of sin, death and dread. And then he acts as if he had only begun to show us our sins, as if death were to continue, and hell never to cease. Just as he here treats his mother, by his refusal making the need greater and more distressing than it was before she came to him with her request; for now it seems everything is lost, since the one support on which she relied in her need is also gone.

[16] This is where faith stands in the heat of battle. Now observe how his mother acts and here becomes our teacher. However harsh his words

sound, however unkind he appears, she does not in her heart interpret this as anger, or as the opposite of kindness, but adheres firmly to the conviction that he is kind, refusing to give up this opinion because of the thrust she received, and unwilling to dishonor him in her heart by thinking him to be otherwise than kind and gracious-as they do who are without faith, who fall back at the first shock and think of God merely according to what they feel, like the horse and the mule, Psalm 32:9. For if Christ's mother had allowed those harsh words to frighten her she would have gone away silently and displeased; but in ordering the servants to do what he might tell them she proves that she has overcome the rebuff and still expects of him nothing but kindness.

[17] What do you think of the hellish blow, when a man in his distress, especially in the highest distress of conscience, receives the rebuff, that he feels God declaring to him: "What have I to do with thee?" Quid mihi et tibi? He must needs faint and despair, unless he knows and understands the nature of such acts of God, and is experienced in faith. For he will act just as he feels, and will not think of God in a different way and mean the words. Feeling nothing but wrath and hearing nothing but indignation, he will consider God only as his enemy and angry judge. But just as he thinks God to be so will he find him. Thus he will expect nothing good from him. That is to renounce God with all his goodness. The result is that he flees and hates him, and will not have God to be God; and every other blasphemy that is the fruit of unbelief.

[18] Hence the highest thought in this Gospel lesson, and it must ever be kept in mind, is, that we honor God as being good and gracious, even if he acts and speaks otherwise, and all our understanding and feeling be otherwise., For in this way feeling is killed, and the old man perishes, so that nothing but faith in God's goodness remains, and no feeling. For here you see how his mother retains a free faith and holds it forth as an example to us. She is certain that he will be gracious, although she does not feel it. She is certain also that she feels otherwise than she believes. Therefore she freely leaves and commends all to his goodness, and fixes for him neither time nor place, neither manner nor measure, neither person nor name. He is to act when it pleases him. If not in the midst of the feast, then at the end of it, or after the feast. My defeat I will swallow, his scorning me, letting me stand in disgrace before all the guests, speaking so unkindly to me, causing

us all to blush for shame. He acts tart, but he is sweet I know. Let us proceed in the same way, then we are true Christians.

[19] Here note how severely he deals with his own mother, teaching us thereby not only the example of faith mentioned above, but confirming that in things pertaining to God and his service we are to know neither father nor mother, as Moses writes in Deuteronomy 33:9: “He who says of his father and of his mother, I know them not, observes thy Word, Israel.” For although there is no higher authority on earth than that of father and mother, still this ends when God’s Word and work begin. For in divine things neither father nor mother, still less, a bishop or any other person, only God’s Word is to teach and guide. And if father and mother were to order, teach, or even beg you to do anything for God, and in his service that he has not clearly ordered and commanded, you are to reply: Quid mihi et tibi? What have I and you to do with each other? In this same way Christ there refuses absolutely to do God’s work when his own mother wants it.

[20] For father and mother are in duty bound, yea, God made them father and mother for this very purpose, not to teach and lead their children to God according to their own notions and devotion, but according to God’s command; as St. Paul declares in Ephesians 6:4: “Ye fathers; provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord;” i.e. teach them God’s command and Word, as you were taught, and not notions of your own. Thus in this Gospel lesson you see the mother of Christ directing the servants away from herself unto Christ, telling them not: Whatsoever I say unto you, do it; but: “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.” To this Word alone you must direct everyone, if you would direct aright; so that this word of Mary (whatsoever he saith, do it) is, and ought to be, a daily saying in Christendom, destroying all doctrines of men and everything not really Christ’s Word. And we ought firmly to believe that what is imposed upon us over and above God’s Word is not, as they boast and lie, the commandment of the church. For Mary says: Whatsoever he saith that, that, that do, and that alone; for in it there will be enough to do.

[21] Here also you see, how faith does not fail, God does not permit that, but gives more abundantly and gloriously than we ask. For here not merely wine is given, but excellent and good wine, and a great quantity of it. By this he again entices and allures us to believe confidently in him, though he

delay. For he is truthful and cannot deny himself; he is good and gracious, that he must of himself confess and in addition prove it, unless we hinder him and refuse him time and place and the means to do so. At last he cannot forsake his work, as little as he can forsake himself — if only we can hold out until his hour comes. III. The Significance of this Marriage

[22] In the third place, we must briefly touch upon the spiritual significance of the text. This marriage and every marriage signifies Christ, the true bridegroom, and Christendom, the bride; as the Gospel lesson of Matthew 22:1-14 sufficiently shows.

[23] This marriage took place in Cana of Galilee; that is, Christendom began in the days of Christ among the Jewish people, and continues still among all who are like the Jews. The Jewish nation is called Cana, which signifies, zeal, because it diligently practiced the Law and zealously clung to the works of the Law, so that even the Gospel lessons always call the Jews zealots, and especially St. Paul in Romans 9 and Romans 10. It is natural too that wherever Law and good works are, there zeal will be and contention, one claiming to be better than the other, first of all, however, opposing faith which cares naught for works and boasts only of God's grace. Now wherever Christ is there such zealots will always be, and his marriage must be at Zeal City, for you always find by the side of the Gospel and faith work-righteous people and Jewish zealots who quarrel with faith.

[24] Galilee signifies border or the edge of the country, where you pass from one country into another. This signifies the same people in Zeal City who dwell between the Law and the Gospel, and ought to emigrate and pass from works to faith, from the Law into the Christian liberty; as some also have done, and now still do. But the greater part remains in their works and dwell on the border, achieving neither good works nor faith, shielding themselves behind the shine and glitter of works.

[25] Christ's being bidden to the marriage signifies that he was promised long ago in the Law and the prophets and is earnestly expected and invoked to turn water into wine, fulfill the Law and establish faith, and make true Galileans of us.

[26] His disciples are bidden with him; for he is expected to be a great King, hence to need apostles and disciples in order to have his Word freely and fully preached everywhere. Likewise, his mother is the Christian

church, taken from the Jews, who herself most of all belongs to the marriage, for Christ was really promised to the Jewish nation.

[27] The six waterpots of stone, for the purification of the Jews, are the books of the Old Testament which by law and commandment made the Jewish people only outwardly pious and pure; for which reason the Evangelist says, they were set there after the Jews' manner of purifying, as if to say: This signifies the purification by works without faith, which never purifies the heart, but only makes it more impure; which is a Jewish, not a Christian or spiritual purification.

[28] There being six waterpots signifies the labor and toil which they who deal in works undergo in such purification; for the heart finds no rest in them, since the Sabbath, the seventh day, is wanting, in which we rest from our works and let God work in us. For there are six work days, in which God created heaven and earth, and commanded us to labor. The seventh day is the day of rest, in which we are not to toil in the works of the Law, but to let God work in us by faith, while we remain quiet and enjoy a holiday from the labors of the Law.

[29] The water in the pots is the contents and substance of the Law by which conscience is governed, and is graven in letters as in the waterpots of stone.

[30] And they are of stone, as were the tables of Moses, signifying the stiff-necked people of the Jews. For as their heart is set against the Law, so the Law appears outwardly to be against them. It seems hard and difficult to them, and therefore it is hard and difficult; the reason is that their heart is hard and averse to the Law; we all find, feel and discover by experience that we are hard and averse to what is good, and soft and prone to what is evil. This the wicked do not feel, but those who long to be pious and labor exceedingly with their works. This is the significance of the two or three firkins apiece.

[31] To turn water into wine is to render the interpretation of the Law delightful. This is done as follows: Before the Gospel arrives everyone understands the Law as demanding our works, that we must fulfill it with works of our own. This interpretation begets either hardened, presumptuous dissemblers and hypocrites, harder than any pot of stone, or timid, restless consciences. There remains nothing but water in the pot, fear and dread of

God's Judgment. This is the water interpretation, not intended for drinking, neither filling any with delight; on the contrary, there is nothing to it but washing and purification, and yet no true inner cleansing. But the Gospel explains the Law, showing that it requires more than we can render, and that it demands a person different from ourselves to fulfill it; that is, it demands Christ and brings us unto him, so that first of all by his grace we are made in true faith a different people like unto Christ, and that then we do truly good works. Thus the right interpretation and significance of the Law is to lead us to the knowledge of our helplessness, to drive us from ourselves to another, namely to Christ, to seek grace and help of him.

[32] Therefore, when Christ wanted to make wine he had them pour in still more water, up to the very brim. For the Gospel comes and renders the interpretation of the Law perfectly clear (as already stated), showing that what belongs to us is nothing but sin; wherefore by the law we cannot escape sinning. When now the two or three firkins hear this, namely the good hearts who have labored according to the law in good works, and are already timid at heart and troubled in conscience, this interpretation adds greatly to their fear and terror; and the water now threatens to rise above the lid and brim. Before this, while they felt disinclined and averse to what is good, they still imagined they might yet succeed by their good works; now they hear that they are altogether unfit and helpless: and that it is impossible to gain their end by good works. That overfills the pot with water, it cannot hold more. This is to interpret the Law in the highest manner, leaving nothing but despair.

[33] Then comes the consoling Gospel and turns the water into wine. For when the heart hears that Christ fulfills the Law for us and takes our sin upon himself, it no longer cares that impossible things are demanded by the Law, that we must despair of rendering them, and must give up our good works. Yea, it is an excellent thing, and delectable, that the Law is so deep and high, so holy and righteous and good, and demands things so great; and it is loved and lauded for making so many and such great demands. This is because the heart now has in Christ all that the Law demands, and it would be sorry indeed if it demanded less. Behold, thus the Law is delightful now and easy which before was disagreeable, difficult and impossible; for it lives in the heart by the Spirit. Water no longer is in the pots, it has turned

to wine, it is passed to the guest, it is consumed, and has made the heart glad.

[34] And these servants are all preachers of the New Testament like the apostles and their successors.

[35] The drawing and passing to the guests is, to take this interpretation from the Scriptures, and to preach it to all the world, which is bidden to Christ's marriage.

[36] And these servants knew (the Evangelist tells us) whence the wine was, how it had been water. For the apostles and their successors alone understand how the law becomes delightful and pleasant through Christ, and how the Gospel by faith does not fulfill the Law by works, every thing being unchanged from what it formerly was in good works.

[37] But the ruler of the feast does indeed taste that the wine is good, yet he knows not whence it is. This ruler of the feast is the old priesthood among the Jews who knew of naught but works, of whom Nicodemus was one, John 3:9; he indeed feels how fine this cause of Christ would be, but knows not how it can be, and why it is so, clinging still to works. For they who teach works cannot understand and apprehend the Gospel and the actions of faith.

[38] He calleth the bridegroom and reproacheth him for setting on the good wine last, whereas every man setteth on last that which is worse. To this very day it is the surprise of the Jews that the preaching of the Gospel should have been delayed so long, coming first of all now to the Gentiles, while they are said to have been drinking the worse wine for so long a time, bearing so long the burden and heat of the day under the Law; as is set forth in another Gospel lesson. Matthew 20:12.

[39] Observe, God and men proceed in contrary ways. Men set on first that which is best, afterward that which is worse. God first gives the cross and affliction, then honor and blessedness. This is because men seek to preserve the old man; on which account they instruct us to keep the Law by works, and offer promises great and sweet. But the outcome is stale, the result has a vile taste; for the longer it goes on the worse is the condition of conscience, although, being intoxicated with great promises, it does not feel its wretchedness; yet at last when the wine is digested, and the false

promises gone, the wretchedness appears. But God first of all terrifies the conscience, sets on miserable wine, in fact nothing but water; then, however, he consoles us with the promises of the Gospel which endure forever.

Third Sunday after Epiphany. Christ heals the Centurion's Servant, or Two Examples of Faith and Love. The Faith and Baptism of Children. The Thankful Leper.

Text: Matthew 8:1-13.

1 When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

2 And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

3 And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

4 And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

5 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

13 And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour. Matthew 8:1-13

[1] Two examples of faith and love are taught in this Gospel: one by the leper, the other by the centurion. Let us first consider the leper. This leper would not have been so bold as to go to the Lord and ask to be cleansed, if he had not trusted and expected with his whole heart, that Christ would be kind and gracious and would cleanse him. For because he was a leper, he had reason to be timid. Moreover the law forbids lepers to mingle with the people. Nevertheless he approaches, regardless of law and people, and of how pure and holy Christ is.

[2] Here behold the attitude of faith toward Christ: it sets before itself absolutely nothing but the pure goodness and free grace of Christ, without seeking and bringing any merit. For here it certainly cannot be said, that the leper merited by his purity to approach Christ, to speak to him and to invoke his help. Nay, just because he feels his impurity and unworthiness, he approaches all the more and looks only upon the goodness of Christ. This is true faith, a living confidence in the goodness of God. The heart that does this, has true faith; the heart that does it not, has not true faith; as they do who keep not the goodness of God and that alone in sight, but first look around for their own good works, in order to be worthy of God's grace and

to merit it. These never become bold to call upon God earnestly or to draw near to him.

[3] Now this confidence of faith or knowledge of the goodness of Christ would never have originated in this leper by virtue of his own reason, if he had not first heard a good report about Christ, namely, how kind, gracious and merciful he is, ready to help and befriend, comfort and counsel everyone that comes to him. Such a report must undoubtedly have come to his ears, and from this fame he derived courage, and turned and interpreted the report to his own advantage. He applied this goodness to his own need and concluded with all confidence: To me also he will be as kind as his fame and good report declare. His faith therefore did not grow out of his reason, but out of the report he heard of Christ, as St. Paul says: “Belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the Word (or report) of Christ.” Romans 10:17.

[4] This is the Gospel that is the beginning, middle and end of everything good and of all salvation. For we have often heard that we must first hear the Gospel, and after that believe and love and do good works; not first do good works and so reverse the order, as the teachers of works do. But the Gospel is a good report, saying or fame of Christ, how he is all goodness, love and grace, as can be said of no other man or saint. For even if other saints have a good report and reputation, it is nevertheless not the Gospel, unless it tells alone of the goodness and grace of Christ; and if it should include other saints also, it is no longer the Gospel. For the Gospel builds faith and confidence alone upon the rock, Jesus Christ.

[5] You see therefore that this example of the leper fights for faith and against works. For as Christ helps him out of pure grace through faith without any works or merits of his own, so he does for every man, and would have all to think thus of him and expect from him like aid. And if this leper had said: “Behold, Lord, I have prayed and fasted so much; I beg you to look upon this and on account of it make me clean” – if he had come in this manner, Christ would never have cleansed him. For such a person does not rest upon God’s grace, but upon his own merit. In this way God’s grace is not praised, loved, magnified nor desired; but one’s own works deprive God of his honor and rob him of that which is his. This is to kiss the hand and to deny God, as Job 31:27-28 says: “If my mouth hath kissed my hand; this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judges; for I should

have denied God that is above;” and Isaiah 2:8: “They worship the work of their own hands,” that is, the honor and confidence they ought to give to God, they attribute to their own work.

[6] Furthermore the example of love is presented here in the love of Christ to the leper. For you see here, how love makes a servant of Christ, so that he helps the poor man freely without any reward, and seeks neither advantage, favor nor honor thereby, but only the good of the poor man and the honor of God the Father. For this reason he also forbids him to tell anyone, in order that it may be a pure, sincere work of free and gracious love.

[7] This is what I have often said, that faith makes of us lords, and love makes of us servants. Indeed, by faith we become gods and partakers of the divine nature and name, as is said in Psalm 82:6: “I said, Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High.” But through love we become equal to the poorest. According to faith we are in need of nothing, and have an abundance; according to love we are servants of all. By faith we receive blessings from above, from God; through love we give them out below, to our neighbor. Even as Christ in his divinity stood in need of nothing, but in his humanity served everybody who had need of him. Of this we have spoken often enough, namely, that we also must by faith be born God’s sons and gods, lords and kings, even as Christ is born true God of the Father in eternity; and again, come out of ourselves by love and help our neighbors with kind deeds, even as Christ became man to help us all. And as Christ is not God, because he first merited divinity by his works or attained to it through his incarnation, but has it by birth, without any works, even before he became man; so we also have not merited by works or love sonship with God, so that our sins are forgiven, and death and hell cannot injure us; but without works and before our love, we have received it in the Gospel by grace through faith. And as Christ first became man to serve us after being God from eternity; so we also do good and exercise love to our neighbor, after we have become pious, free from sin, alive, saved, and sons of God by faith. Let this suffice concerning the first example, the leper.

[8] The other example is like it in respect to faith and love. For this centurion also has a heartfelt confidence in Christ, and sets before his eyes nothing but the goodness and grace of Christ; otherwise he would not have come to him, or he would not have sent to him, as Luke 7:3 says. Likewise

he would not have had this bold confidence, if he had not first heard of the goodness and grace of Christ. In this instance also the Gospel is the beginning and incentive of his confidence and faith.

[9] Here we learn again, that we must begin with the Gospel and believe it and not look upon any merit or work of our own as this centurion also advanced no merit or work, but only his confidence in the goodness of Christ. So we see that all the works of Christ exhibit examples of the Gospel, of faith and of love.

[10] We also observe the example of love, how Christ freely shows him kindness, without any request or reward, as was said above. Moreover, the centurion also shows an example of love, in that he took pity upon his servant as upon himself, even as Christ also has had compassion upon us, and did the good deed freely, solely for the benefit of the servant, as Luke 7:2 says, he did it because the servant was dear to him; just as if he said: The love and affection, which he bore to him, impelled him to consider his need and to do this. Let us also do likewise, and see to it that we do not deceive ourselves and rest satisfied in that we now have the Gospel, and yet have no regard for our neighbor in his need. This having been said of these two examples, we will now also examine some details of the text.

II. The Explanation of Two Thoughts in This Gospel

[11] When the leper here limits his prayer and says: “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,” it is not to be understood as if he doubted the goodness and grace of Christ. For such a faith would be of no value, even if he believed that Christ was almighty, and was able to do and know all things. For that is living faith, which does not doubt that God is also good to us and is graciously willing to do what we ask. But it is to be understood in this way: faith does not doubt the good will God has toward a person, by which he wishes him every good; but it is not known to us, whether what faith asks and presents, is good and useful for us; God alone knows this. Therefore faith prays in a way that it submits all to the gracious will of God, whether it is for his honor and our good, and yet it does not doubt that God will grant it, or, if it cannot be granted, that his divine will withholds it in great grace, because he sees it is better not to bestow it. But in all this faith nevertheless remains certain and sure of God’s gracious will, whether he

gives or withholds, as St. Paul also says in Romans 8:26, we know not how to pray as we ought, and as the Lord's Prayer bids us to prefer his will and to pray for it.

[12] This is what we have often said: we ought to believe without doubting and without limiting the divine goodness; but we ought to pray with the limitation, that it may be his honor, his kingdom and will, in order that we may not limit his will to time, place, measure or name, but leave all that freely to him. For this reason the prayer of the leper pleased the Lord so well and was soon heard. For where we submit to his will, and seek what is acceptable to him, he cannot refrain from doing in return what is acceptable to us. Faith inclines his favor to us, and submissive prayer inclines him to grant us what we pray for. As to the sending of the leper to the priests, why it was done and what it signified, enough has been said in the Postil of the ten lepers.

[13] However, the saying of Christ: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel," has been discussed with solicitude, lest it should imply that Christ did not speak truly or that the Mother of God and the apostles were inferior to this centurion. Although I might say here that Christ is speaking of the people of Israel, among whom he had preached and to whom he had come, and that therefore his mother and disciples were excluded, because they traveled with him and came with him to the people of Israel in his preaching, nevertheless I will abide by the words of the Lord and take them as they stand; and for the following reasons. First, it is contrary to no article of belief that this faith of the centurion was without a parallel among the apostles or in the Mother of God. But whenever no article of faith openly contradicts the words of Christ, they are to be taken literally, and are not to be adapted and bent by our interpretation, neither for the sake of any saint, or angel, nor of God himself. For his Word is the truth itself, above all saints and angels.

[14] Secondly, such interpretation and adaptation spring from a carnal mind and intention, namely to estimate the saints of God not according to God's grace, but according to their person, worth and greatness; which is contrary to God, who estimates quite differently, according to his gifts alone. For he never granted to John the Baptist to perform miracles, John 10:41, as many inferior saints did. In short, he frequently does through inferior saints what he does not do through great saints. He concealed

himself from his mother, when he was twelve years old, and suffered her to be in ignorance and error, Luke 2:43. On Easter Sunday he showed himself to Mary Magdalene, before he showed himself to his mother and the apostles, John 20:14. He spoke to the Samaritan woman, John 4:7, and to the woman taken in adultery, more kindly than he ever spoke to his own mother. John 8:10. And when Peter fell and denied him, the murderer on the cross stood firm in his faith.

[15] By these and similar wonders he shows that he will not have his Spirit in his saints limited by us, and that we are not to judge according to the person. He wills to bestow his gifts freely, according to his pleasure and not according to our opinion, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:11. Indeed even of himself he says in John 14:12: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do." The purpose of all this is to prevent men from being presumptuous toward others and from elevating one saint above another and creating divisions. All are to be equal in the grace of God, however unequal they are in his gifts. It is his will to do through St. Stephen what he does not do through St. Peter, and through St. Peter what he does not do through his mother; so that it may be he alone who does all in all without distinction of person according to his will.

[16] In this sense also is it to be understood that at the time of his preaching he found not such faith either in his mother or in the apostles, whether or not he found then or afterward greater faith in his mother and the apostles, or in many others. For it may easily be possible that at the time of his conception and birth he granted great faith to his mother, and afterwards never or seldom like great faith. At times he may have permitted it to decline, as he did when for three days she had lost him, Luke 2:48. He deals thus with all his saints; and if he did not, the saints would doubtless fall into presumption and make idols of themselves or we would make idols of them, and look more upon their worthiness and persons than upon God's grace.

[17] Now learn from this how foolish and void of understanding we are in regard to God's works and wonders, when we despise the plain Christian man and think that only the "men with pointed mitres" and the learned know and understand God's truth; whereas Christ here exalts this heathen with his faith above all his disciples. This is because we hold to persons and

dignities, and not to God's Word and grace. Therefore with persons and dignities we also plunge into every error, and then say, the Christian church and the councils have declared so; they cannot err, because they have the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile Christ is with those despised ones and gives dignitaries and councils over to the devil. Therefore note well, how Christ exalts this heathen. He surpasses Annas, Caiaphas and all the priests, scholars and saints, all of whom ought by right to be the pupils of this heathen, not to say that they ought never to be above him in their opinions and judgments. God sometimes grants to a great saint no faith and to a small saint great faith, in order that one may always esteem another better than himself. Romans 12:10. III. The Discussion of the Doctrine of Person Faith and the Faith of Others; Also, of Faith and the Baptism of Children "Lord, I am not worthy."

[18] Herein is the great faith of this heathen, that he knows salvation does not depend upon the bodily presence of Christ, for this does not avail, but upon the Word and faith. But the apostles did not yet know this, neither perhaps did his mother, but they clung to his bodily presence and were not willing to let it go, John 16:6. They did not cling to his Word alone. But this heathen is so fully satisfied with his Word, that he does not even desire his presence nor does he deem himself worthy of it. Moreover, he proves his strong faith by a comparison and says: I am a man and can do what I wish with mine own by a word; should not you be able to do what you wish by a word, because I am sure, and you also prove, that health and sickness, death and life are subject to you as my servants are to me? Therefore also his servant was healed in that hour by the power of his faith.

[19] Now since the occasion is offered and this Gospel requires it, we must say a little about alien faith and its power. For many are interested in this subject, especially on account of the little children, who are baptized and are saved not by their own, but by the faith of others; just as this servant was healed not by his own faith, but by the faith of his master. We have never yet treated of this matter; therefore we must treat of it now in order to anticipate, as much as in us lies, future danger and error.

[20] First we must let the foundation stand firm and sure, that nobody will be saved by the faith or righteousness of another, but only by his own; and on the other hand nobody will be condemned for the unbelief or sins of another, but for his own unbelief; as the Gospel says clearly and distinctly

in Mark 16:16: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.” And Romans 1:17: “The righteous shall live by faith.” And John 3:16-18: “Whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already.” These are clear, public words, that everyone must believe for himself, and nobody can help himself by the faith of others., without his own faith. From these passages we dare not depart and we must not deny them, let them strike where they may, and we ought rather let the world perish than change this divine truth. And if any plausible argument is made against it, that you are not able to refute, you must confess that you do not understand the matter and commit it to God, rather than admit anything contrary to these clear statements. Whatever may become of the heathen, Jews, Turks, little children and everything that exists, these words must be right and true.

[21] Now the question is, what becomes of the young children, seeing that they have not yet reason and are not able to believe for themselves, because it is written in Romans 10:17: “Belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” Little children neither hear nor understand the Word of God, and therefore they can have no faith of their own.

[22] The sophists in the universities and the sects of the pope have invented the following answer to the question: Little children are baptized without their own faith, and on the faith of the Church, which the sponsors confess at the baptism; thereupon the infant receives in baptism the forgiveness of sins by the power and virtue of the baptism, and faith of its own is infused with grace, so that it becomes a newborn child through the water and the Holy Spirit.

[23] But if you ask them for the proof of this answer and where this is found in the Scriptures, it is found up the dark chimney, or they will point to their doctor’s hat and say: We are the highly learned doctors and we say so; therefore it is true, and you must not inquire any farther. For almost all their doctrine has no other foundation than their own dreams and imaginations. And when they prepare themselves most carefully, they drag in some quotation from St. Augustine or another holy father. But this is not enough in the things that concern the salvation of souls; for they themselves are, and all the holy fathers were, men. Who will be surety and guarantee that they speak the truth? Who will rely upon it and die by it? For they say so

without Scripture and the Word of God. Saints hither, and saints thither; if my soul is at stake, either to be lost or to be saved eternally, I cannot depend upon all the angels and saints put together, much less upon one or two saints, where they show us no Word of God.

[24] From this falsehood they have gone farther and have even come to the point, where they have taught and still teach, that the sacraments have such power, that even if you have no faith and receive the sacrament (provided you have no intention to sin), you shall still receive the grace and the forgiveness of sins without faith. This they have inferred from the former opinion, that little children receive grace in this way without faith, solely by the virtue and power of the sacrament, as they dream. Therefore they also ascribe the same thing to adults and to all men, and utter such things from their own mind, and thereby they have in a masterly way eradicated and made void and unnecessary the Christian faith, and have set up human works alone by virtue of the power of the sacraments. On this subject I have said enough in what I wrote concerning the articles of the bull of Leo.

[25] The holy ancient fathers have spoken somewhat better, although not clearly enough. They say nothing about this imaginary power of the sacraments, but they teach that little children are baptized in the faith of the Christian church. But since they do not explain thoroughly, how this Christian faith benefits the children, whether they thereby receive a faith of their own, or are baptized only upon the Christian faith, without faith of their own: the sophists rush in and interpret the language of the holy fathers to the effect, that children are baptized without faith of their own and receive grace solely by reason of the faith of the church. For they are enemies of faith; if only they can exalt works, faith must allow them to do so. They do not think for a moment, whether the holy fathers erred or they themselves understood the fathers aright.

[26] Beware of this poison and error, even if it were the expressed opinion of all the fathers and councils; for it will not stand; it has no Scripture for its foundation, but only the imaginations and dreams of men. Moreover it is directly and manifestly opposed to the chief texts already mentioned, where Christ says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." The conclusion from this is in short, baptism avails for nobody and is to be administered to nobody, unless he believes for himself; and without

faith nobody is to be baptized, as St. Augustine himself says: Non sacramentum justificat, sed fides sacramenti (Not the sacrament justifies, but the faith of the sacrament).

[27] Besides these there are others, like the brethren called Waldensians. They teach that everyone must believe for himself, and receive baptism or the Lord's supper with his own faith; otherwise neither baptism nor the Lord's supper is of any benefit to him. So far they speak and teach correctly. But it is a mockery of holy baptism, when they go on and baptize little children, although they teach that they have no faith of their own. They thus sin against the second commandment, in that they consciously and deliberately take the name and Word of God in vain. Nor does the excuse help them which they plead, that children are baptized upon their future faith, when they come to the age of reason. For the faith must be present before or at least in the baptism; otherwise the child will not be delivered from the devil and sins.

[28] Therefore if their opinion were correct, all that is done with the child in baptism is necessarily falsehood and mockery. For the baptizer asks whether the child believes, and the answer for the child is: Yes. And he asks whether it desires to be baptized, and the answer for the child is again: Yes. Now nobody is baptized for the child, but it is baptized itself. Therefore it must also believe itself, or the sponsors must speak a falsehood, when for it they say: I believe. Furthermore, the baptizer declares that it is born anew, has forgiveness of sins, is freed from the devil, and as a sign of this he puts on it a white garment, and deals with it in every way as with a new, holy child of God: all of which would necessarily be untrue, if the child had not its own faith. Indeed, it would be better never to baptize a child, than to trifle and juggle with God's Word and sacrament, as if he were an idol or a fool.

[29] Nor is it of any use that they make a threefold distinction in the kingdom of God: first, it is the Christian church; secondly, eternal life; thirdly, the Gospel; and then say children are baptized for the kingdom of heaven in the third and first sense. That is, they are baptized, not to be saved thereby and to receive forgiveness of sins; but they are received into the church and brought to the Gospel. All this amounts to nothing and is only an invention of their imagination. For it is not entering the kingdom of heaven, if I get among Christians and hear the Gospel. The heathen can also

do that without baptism. This is not entering the kingdom of heaven, however, you may talk of the first, second and third sense of the kingdom of heaven. But being in the kingdom of heaven means to be a living member of the church, and not only to hear, but also to believe the Gospel. Otherwise a man would be in the kingdom of heaven, just as if I threw a stick or stone among Christians, or as the devil is among them. All this is worth nothing.

[30] It also follows from this, that the Christian church has two kinds of baptism, and that children have not the same baptism as adults. Nevertheless St. Paul says there is only “one baptism, one Lord, one faith.” Ephesians 4:5: For if the baptism of children does not effect and bestow, what the baptism of adults effects and bestows, it is not the same baptism: it is indeed no baptism at all, but a sport and mockery of baptism, inasmuch as there is no baptism but that which saves. If one knows or believes that it does not save, he ought not to administer it. But if it is administered, it is not Christian baptism; for one does not believe, that it effects what baptism is to effect. Therefore it is another and foreign baptism. For this reason it were almost necessary, that the Waldensian brethren should have themselves baptized again, as they baptize our people again; because they not only receive baptism without faith, but even contrary to faith, and in mockery and dishonor of God administer another, foreign, unchristian baptism.

[31] If now we cannot give a better answer to this question and prove that the little children themselves believe and have their own faith, my sincere counsel and judgment is, that we abstain altogether and the sooner the better, and never baptize a child, so that we may not mock and blaspheme the adorable majesty of God by such trifling and juggling with nothing in it. Therefore we here conclude and declare that in baptism the children themselves believe and have their own faith, which God effects in them through the sponsors, when in the faith of the Christian church they intercede for them and bring them to baptism. And this is what we call the power of alien faith: not that anybody can be saved by it, but that through it as an intercession and aid he can obtain from God himself his own faith, by which he is saved. It may be compared to my natural life and death. If I am to live, I myself must be born, and nobody can be born for me to enable me to live; but mother and midwife can by their life aid me in birth and enable

me to live. In the same way I myself must suffer death, if I am to die; but one can help to bring about my death, if he frightens me, or falls upon me, or chokes, crushes or suffocates me. In like manner, nobody can go to hell for me; but he can seduce me by false doctrine and life, so that I go thither by my own error, into which his error has led me. So nobody can go to heaven for me: but he can assist me, can preach, teach, govern, pray and obtain faith from God, through which I can go to heaven. This centurion was not healed of the palsy of his servant; but yet he brought it about that his servant was restored to health.

[32] So here we also say, that children are not baptized in the faith of the sponsors or of the church; but the faith of sponsors and of the church prays and gains faith for them, in which they are baptized and believe for themselves. For this we have strong and firm Scripture proof, Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-16. When some brought little children to the Lord Jesus that he should touch them, and the disciples forbade them, he rebuked the disciples, and embraced the children, and laid his hands upon them and blessed them, and said: "To such belongeth the kingdom of God" etc. These passages nobody will take from us, nor refute with good proof. For here is written: Christ will permit no one to forbid that little children should be brought to him; nay, he bid them to be brought to him, and blesses them and gives to them the kingdom of heaven. Let us give due heed to this Scripture.

[33] This is undoubtedly written of natural children. The interpretation of Christ's words, as if he had meant only spiritual children, who are small in humility, will not stand. For they were small children as to their bodies, which Luke calls infants. His blessing is placed upon these, and of these he says that the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Will we say they were without faith of their own? Then the passages quoted above are untrue: "He that disbelieveth shall be condemned." Then Christ also speaks falsely or feigns, when he says the kingdom of heaven is theirs, and is not really speaking of the true kingdom of heaven. Interpret these words of Christ as you please, we have it that children are to be brought to Christ and not to be forbidden to be brought: and when they are brought to Christ, he here compels us to believe that he blesses them and gives to them the kingdom of heaven, as he does with these children. And it is in no way proper for us to act and believe otherwise as long as the words stand: "Suffer the little children to come

unto me, and forbid them not.” Not less is it proper for us to believe that when they are brought to him he embraces them, blesses them, and bestows upon them heaven, as long as the text stands that he blessed the children which were brought to him and gave heaven to them. Who can ignore this text? Who will be so bold as not to suffer little children to come to baptism, or not to believe that Christ blesses them when they come ?

[34] He is just as present in baptism now as he was then: this we Christians know for certain. Therefore we dare not forbid baptism to children. Nor dare we doubt that he blesses all who come thither, as he did those children. So then there is nothing left here but the piety and faith of those who brought the little children to him. By bringing them, they effect and aid that the little children are blessed and obtain the kingdom of heaven; which cannot be the case unless they themselves have their own faith, as has been said. So we also say here, that children are brought to baptism by the faith and work of others; but when they get there and the pastor or baptizer deals with them in Christ’s stead, he blesses them and grants to them the faith and the kingdom of heaven: for the word and deed of the pastor are the word and work of Christ himself.

[35] With this agrees also what St. John says in his first Epistle,¹ John 2:13: “I write unto you, fathers; I write unto you, young men; I have written unto you, little children.” He is not satisfied to write to the young men; he also writes to the children, and writes that they may know the Father. From this it follows that the apostles baptized children also, and held that they believe and know the Father, just as if they had attained to reason and could read. Although somebody might here interpret the word “children” as adults, as Christ designates his disciples sometimes: yet it is certain that here they are meant who are younger than the young men; so that it is evident he is speaking of young people who are under fifteen or eighteen years of age, and excludes nobody down to the first year: for these all are called children.

[36] But let us examine their reason why they do not think children believe. They say, because they have not attained to reason they cannot hear God’s Word; but where God’s Word is not heard there can be no faith. Romans 10:17: “Belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” Tell me is this Christian to judge of God’s works by our thinking, and say, Children have not attained to reason, therefore they cannot believe?

How if through this very reason you have already departed from faith, and the children come to faith through their unreason? Dear friend, what good does reason do for faith and the Word of God? Is it not reason which resists in the highest degree faith and the Word of God, so that nobody can come to faith by means of reason? Reason will not endure God's Word unless it is first blinded and disgraced. Man must first die to reason and become, as it were, a fool, and even as unreasonable and unintelligent as a little child, if he is to become a believer and receive the grace of God; as Christ says in Matthew 18:3: "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." How often does Christ hold before us that we must become children and fools, and condemn reason?

[37] Tell me also, what kind of reason had the little children whom Christ embraced and blessed, and upon whom he bestowed the kingdom of heaven? Were they not still without reason? Why does he command to bring them to him and then bless them? Where did they get the faith which makes them children of the kingdom of heaven? Nay, just because they are without reason and foolish, they are better prepared to believe than adults and those possessed of reason, because reason is always in the way and with its large head is not willing to push through the narrow door. One must not look upon reason or its works when faith and God's work are under consideration. Here God alone works and reason is dead, blind and, compared to this work, an unreasonable block, in order that the Scripture may stand, which says: "God is wonderful in his saints;" and: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways," Isaiah 55:9.

[38] But since they stick so fast in reason, we must assail them with their own wisdom. Tell me, why do you baptize a man when he has come to the age of reason? You answer: He hears God's Word and believes. I ask: How do you know that? You answer: He professes it with his mouth. What shall I say? How, if he lies and deceives? You cannot see his heart. Very well, then you baptize for no other reason than for what the man shows himself to be externally, and you are uncertain of his faith, and must believe that if he has not more within in his heart than you perceive without, neither his hearing, nor his profession, nor his faith will help him; for it may all be a delusion and no true faith. Who then are you, that you say external hearing and profession are necessary to baptism; where these are wanting one must not

baptize? You yourself must confess that such hearing and profession are uncertain, and not enough for one to receive baptism. Now upon what do you baptize? How will you justify your actions when you thus bungle baptism and bring it into doubt? Is it not the fact that you must come and say that it is not becoming for you to know or do more than that he whom you are to baptize be brought to you and ask baptism from you; and you must believe or commit the matter to God, whether he inwardly truly believes or not? In this way you are excused and baptize aright. Why then will you not do the same for the children, whom Christ commands to be brought to him and promises to bless? But you wish first to have the outward hearing and profession, which you yourself acknowledge is uncertain and not sufficient for baptism on the part of the one to be baptized. And you let go the sure word of Christ: in which he bids the little children to be brought unto him, on account of your uncertain external hearing.

[39] Moreover tell me, where is the reason of a Christian while he is asleep, since his faith and the grace of God never leave him? If faith can thus continue without the aid of reason, so that the latter is not conscious of it, why should it not also begin in children before reason knows anything about it? In the same way I would like to say of every hour in which a Christian lives and is busy and occupied, that he is not conscious of his faith and reason, and yet his faith does not on that account cease. God's works are mysterious and wonderful, where and when he wills: and again manifest enough, where and when he wills. Judgment upon them is too high and too deep for us.

[40] Since it is commanded here, not to forbid little children to come unto him in order to receive his blessing, and it is not demanded of us to know the exact state of faith within, and the external hearing and profession are not sufficient for the one baptized, we are to be content that it is enough for us, the baptizers, to hear the profession of the one to be baptized, who comes to us of himself. And this for the reason that we may not administer the sacrament against our conscience, as giving it to those in whom no fruit is to be hoped for. But if they assure our conscience of their desire and profession, so that we can administer it as a sacrament that imparts grace, we are excused. If his faith is not true, let that rest with God; we have not

given the sacrament as a useless thing, but with the consciousness that it is beneficial.

[41] All this I say in order that one may not baptize recklessly, as they do who even administer it with the deliberate knowledge that it will be of no effect or benefit to the person receiving it. For therein the baptizers sin, because they knowingly use God's sacrament and Word in vain, or at least have the consciousness that it is neither intended nor able to effect anything; which is an altogether unworthy use of the sacrament and a temptation and blasphemy of God. For that is not administering the sacrament, but making a mockery of it. But if the person baptized denies and does not believe, you have done right anyhow, and have administered the true sacrament with the good consciousness that it ought to be beneficial.

[42] However, those who do not come of themselves, but are brought, as Christ bids us to bring little children, the faith of these commit to him who bids them to be brought, and baptize them by his command, and say: Lord, thou dost bring them and command to baptize them. Thou wilt answer for them. On this I rely. I dare not drive them away nor forbid them. If they have not heard the Word, by which faith comes, as adults; hear it, they nevertheless hear it like little children. Adults take it up with their ears and reason, often without faith; but they hear it with their ears, without reason and with faith. And faith is nearer in proportion as reason is less, and he is stronger who brings them than the will of adults who come of themselves.

[43] These inventive spirits stumble mostly because in adults there is reason, which acts as if it believed the Word it hears. This then they call faith. Again they see that in children there is as yet no reason; for they act as if they did not believe. But they do not observe that faith in God's Word is quite a different and deeper thing than what reason does with the Word of God. For it is the work of God alone above all reason, to which the child is just as near as the adult, yes, much nearer, and from which the adult is just as far as the child, yea, much farther.

[44] But this that is contrived by reason is a human work. I think, if any baptism is certain, the baptism of children is most certain, because of the Word of Christ, where he commands to bring them, whereas the adults come of themselves. In adults there may be deception because of the reason that is manifest; but in children there can be no deception, because of their

hidden reason, in whom Christ works his blessing, even as he has bidden them to be brought to himself. It is a glorious word and not to be treated lightly, that he commands us to bring the children to him, and rebukes those who forbid it.

[45] But hereby we do not mean to weaken or destroy the office of preaching. For God indeed does not cause his Word to be preached for the sake of the rational hearing, since no fruit results from that; but for the sake of the spiritual hearing, which, as I have said, children also have as well and even better than adults; for they also hear the Word. For what else is baptism but the Gospel to which they are brought? However, they hear it only once, but they hear it more effectively, because Christ, who has commanded to bring them, receives them. For adults have the advantage that they frequently hear and can think of it again. Yet even in the case of adults it is a fact that the spiritual hearing is not affected by many sermons. But it may occur once during one sermon, and then he has enough forever. What he hears afterwards, he hears either to improve the first hearing or to destroy it again.

[46] In short, the baptism and consolation of children lie in the word: "Suffer the little children to come unto me; forbid them not; for to such belongeth the kingdom of God." He has spoken this and he does not lie. Therefore it must be right and Christian to bring little children to him. This can only be done in baptism. So also it must be certain that he blesses them, and bestows the kingdom of heaven upon all who come to him, according to the words: "To such belongeth the kingdom of God." Let this be enough for this time.

[47] Finally it would be in order here to treat of the spiritual meaning of leprosy and the palsy. But of leprosy much has been said in the Postil of the ten lepers. Therefore it need not be treated at length here.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany. Christ stilling the Tempest, or Faith and Unbelief, and Love Jesus Asleep in the Storm.

Text: Matthew 8:23-27.

23 And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.

24 And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.

25 And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

26 And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

27 But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him! Matthew 8:23-27

[1] This Gospel, as a narrative, gives us an example of faith and unbelief, in order that we may learn how mighty the power of faith is, and that it of necessity has to do with great and terrible things and that it accomplishes nothing but wonders; and that on the other hand unbelief is so fainthearted, shamefaced and trembling with fear that it can do nothing whatever. An illustration of this we see in this experience of the disciples, which shows the real state of their hearts. First, as they in company with Christ entered the ship, all was calm and they experienced nothing unusual, and had anyone asked them then if they believed, they would have answered, Yes. But they were not conscious of how their hearts trusted in the calm sea and

the signs for fair weather, and that thus their faith was founded upon what their natural eyes saw. But when the tempest comes and the waves fill the boat, their faith vanishes; because the calm and peace in which they trusted took wings and flew away, therefore they fly with the calm and peace, and nothing is left but unbelief.

[2] But what is this unbelief able to do? It sees nothing but what it experiences. It does not experience life, salvation and safety; but instead the waves coming into the boat and the sea threatening them with death and every danger. And because they experience these things and give heed to them and turn not their fear from them, trembling and despair cannot be suppressed. Yea, the more they see and experience it the harder death and despair torment them and every moment threatens to devour them. But unbelief cannot avoid such experiences and cannot think otherwise even for a second. For it has nothing besides to which it can hold and comfort itself, and therefore it has no peace or rest for a single minute. And thus will it also be in perdition, where there will be nothing but despair, trembling and fear, and that without end.

[3] But had they had faith, it would have driven the wind and the waves of the sea out of their minds, and pictured before their eyes in place of the wind and tempest the power and grace of God, promised in his Word; and it would have relied upon that Word, as though anchored to an immovable rock and would not float on the water, and as though the sun shined brightly and all was calm and no storm was raging. For it is the great characteristic and power of faith to see what is not visible, and not to see what is visible, yea, that which at the time drives and oppresses us; just as unbelief can see only what is visible and cannot in the least cleave to what is invisible.

[4] Therefore God bestows faith to the end that it should deal not with ordinary things, but with things no human being can master as death, sin, the world and Satan. For the whole world united is unable to stand before death, but flees from and is terrified by it, and is also conquered by it; but faith stands firm, opposes death that devours everything, and triumphs over it and even swallows the insatiable devourer of life. In like manner, no one can control or subdue the flesh, but it reigns everywhere in the world, and what it wills must be done, so that the whole world thereby is carnal; but faith lays hold of the flesh and subdues and bridles it, so that it must become a servant. And in like manner no one can endure the rage,

persecution, and blasphemy, infamy, hatred and envy of the world; everyone retreats and falls back exhausted before it, it gets the upper hand over all and triumphs; and if they are without faith, it mocks them besides and treads all under its feet, and takes pleasure and delight in doing so.

[5] Further, who could conquer Satan with his innumerable, subtle suggestions and temptations, by which he hinders the truth and God's Word, faith and hope, and starts so many false doctrines, sects, seductions, heresies, doubts, superstitions and innumerable abominations? The whole world compared with him is like a spark of fire compared with a fountain of water. All must be here subject to him; as we also see, hear and understand. But it is faith that keeps him busy, and it not only stands before him invulnerable, but also reveals his roguery and puts him to shame, so that his deception fails and he faints and falls; as now takes place with his indulgences and his papacy. Just so no one can allay and quiet the least sin, but it bites and devours the conscience, so that nothing avails, even if the whole world were to comfort and support such a person, he must be cast down into perdition. Here faith is a hero, it appeases all sins, even if they were as many as the whole world had committed.

[6] Is there now not something almighty and inexpressible about faith that it can withstand all our powerful enemies and gain the victory, so that St. John says in his first Epistle 1 John 5:4: "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith?" Not that this is done in peace and by quietly resting; for it is a battle that is carried on not without wounds and shedding of blood. Yea, the heart so severely experiences in this battle sin and death, the flesh, Satan and the world, that it has no other thought than that it is lost, that sin and death have triumphed, and that Satan holds the field of battle. The power of faith however experiences but little of that. This is set forth in our narrative, when the waves not only dashed into the boat, but even covered it, so that it was about to go under and sink, and Christ was lying asleep. Just then there was no hope of life, death had the upper hand and had triumphed; life was lying prostrate and was lost.

[7] As it went here, so it goes and must go in all other temptations of sin, Satan, etc. We must experience how sin has taken captive the conscience and nothing but wrath and perdition wish to reign, and how we must be eternally lost. Satan must start so many things by his error and false teaching that it appears God's Word must fall to the ground, and the world

must glory in falsehood. Likewise the world must rage and persecute to such an extent that it appears no one can stand or be saved, or even confess his faith; but Cain will rule alone and will not rest until his brother is dead, so that he may never be in his way. But we must not judge and act according to appearance and our experience, but according to our faith.

[8] Therefore this Gospel is a comforting example and doctrine, how we should conduct ourselves, so that we may not despair in the agony of sin, in the peril of death, and in the tumult of the world; but be assured that we are not lost, although the waves at once overwhelm our little boat; that we will not perish, although we experience in our evil conscience sin, wrath, and the lack of grace; that we will not die, although the whole world hates and persecutes us, although it opens its jaws as wide as the rosy dawn of the morning. These are all waves that fall over your little bark, cause to despair, and force you to cry out: "Save, Lord; we perish". Thus you have here the first part of this Gospel, faith, how it should thrive and succeed, and besides, how incapable and fainthearted unbelief is. II. Of Love

[9] The second part of our text, treating of love, shows forth Christ in that he rises, breaks his sleep for their sake, takes to heart their need as though it were his own, and ministers to them help out of free love, without any merit on their part. He neither receives nor seeks any reward for his help, but permits them to enjoy and use his power and resources. For as we have often heard, it is characteristic of Christian love to do all freely and gratuitously, to the praise and honor of God, that a Christian lives upon the earth for the sake of such love, just as Christ lived solely for the purpose of doing good; as he himself says: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Matthew 20:28. III. The Spiritual Meaning of the Narrative

[10] Christ pictured to us in this narrative the Christian life, especially the office of the ministry. The ship signifies Christendom; the sea, the world; the wind, Satan; his disciples are the preachers and pious Christians; Christ is the truth, the Gospel, and faith.

[11] Now, before Christ entered the ship with his disciples the sea and the wind were calm; but when Christ with his disciples entered, then the storm began, as he himself says, Matthew 10:34: "Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace but a sword." So, if Christ

had left the world in peace and never punished its works, then it would indeed have been quiet. But since he preaches that the wise are fools, the saints are sinners and the rich are lost, they become wild and raging; just as at present some critics think it would be fine if we merely preached the Gospel and allowed the office of the ministry to continue in its old way. This they would indeed tolerate; but that all their doings should be rebuked and avail nothing, that they call preaching discontent and revolution, and is not Christian teaching.

[12] But what does this Gospel say? There was a violent tempest on the lake when Christ and his disciples were in the ship. The sea and the wind allowed the other ships to sail in calm weather; but this ship had to suffer distress because of Christ being in it. The world can indeed tolerate all kinds of preaching except the preaching of Christ. Hence whenever he comes and wherever he is, there he preaches that he only is right and reproves all others; as he says in Matthew 12:30: "He that is not with me is against me", and again, John 16:8: "The spirit will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment;" he says that he will not only preach, but that he will convict the whole world and what is in the world. But it is this convicting that causes such tempests and dangers to this ship. Should he preach that he would allow the world to go unpunished and to continue in its old ways, he would have kept quiet before and never have entered the world; for if the world is good and is not to be convicted then there would never have been any need of him coming into the world.

[13] Now it is the consolation of Christians, and especially of preachers, to be sure and ponder well that when they present and preach Christ, that they must suffer persecution, and nothing can prevent it; and that it is a very good sign of the preaching being truly Christian, when they are thus persecuted, especially by the great, the saintly, the learned and the wise. And on the other hand that their preaching is not right, when it is praised and honored, as Christ says in Luke 6:22-26: "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you; for in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake; in the same manner did their fathers to the prophets." Behold our preachers, how their teachings are esteemed; the wealth, honor and power of the world have them fully under their control,

and still they wish to be Christian teachers, and whosoever praises and preaches their ideas, lives in honor and luxury.

[14] Hence, people have here an example where they are to seek their comfort and help, not in the world; they are not to guard the wisdom and power of men, but Christ himself and him alone; they are to cleave to him and depend on him in every need with all faithfulness and confidence as the disciples, do in our text. For had they not believed that he would help them, they would not have awakened him and called upon him. True their faith was weak and was mingled with much unbelief, so that they did not perfectly and freely surrender themselves to Christ and risk their life with him, nor did they believe he could rescue them in the midst of the sea and save them from death. Thus it is ordained that the Word of God has no master nor judge, no protector or patron can be given it besides God himself. It is his Word. Therefore, as he let it go forth without any merit or counsel of men, so will he himself without any human help and strength administer and defend it. And whoever seeks protection and comfort in these things among men, will both fall and fail, and be forsaken by both God and man.

[15] That Jesus slept indicates the condition of their hearts, namely, that they had a weak, sleepy faith, but especially that at the time of persecution, Christ withdraws and acts as though he were asleep, and gives neither strength nor power, neither peace nor rest, but lets us worry and labor in our weakness, and permits us to experience that we are nothing at all, and that all depends upon his grace and power, as Paul confesses in Corinthians 1:9, that he had to suffer great affliction, so as to learn to trust not in himself but in God, who raised the dead. Such a sleeping on the part of God David often experienced and refers to it in many places, as when he says in Psalm 44:23: "Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? Arise, cast us not off forever."

[16] The summary of this Gospel is this, it gives us two comforting, defying proverbs, that when persecution for the sake of God's Word arises, we may say: I indeed thought Christ was in the ship, therefore the sea and wind rage, and the waves dash over us and threaten to sink us; but let them rage, it is ordained that the wind and sea obey his will. The persecutions will not continue longer than is his pleasure; and although they overwhelm us, yet they must be subject to him; he is Lord over all, therefore nothing

will harm us. May he only give us his help that we may not despair in unbelief. Amen.

[17] That the people marveled and praised the Lord that the wind and sea were subject to him, signifies that the Gospel, God's Word, spreads farther through persecution, it thus becomes stronger and faith increases; and this is also a paradoxical characteristic of the Gospel compared with all worldly things which decrease through every misfortune and opposition, and increase through prosperity and peace. Christ's kingdom grows through tribulations and declines in times of peace, ease and luxury, as St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:9: "My power is made perfect in weakness, etc." To this end help us God! Amen.

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany. The Parable of the Tares.

Text: Matthew 13:24-30.

24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn. Matthew 13:24-30

[1] The Savior himself explained this parable in the same chapter upon the request of his disciples and says: He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; and the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the children of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy that sowed them is the devil; and the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. These seven points of explanation comprehend and clearly set forth what Christ meant by this parable. But who could have discovered such an interpretation, seeing that in this parable he calls people the seed and the world, the field; although in the parable preceding this one he defines the seed to be the Word of God and the field the people or the hearts of the people. If Christ himself had not here interpreted this parable everyone would have imitated his explanation of the preceding parable and considered the seed to be the Word of God, and thus the Savior's object and understanding of it would have been lost.

[2] Permit me to make an observation here for the benefit of the wise and learned who study the Scriptures. Imitating or guessing is not to be allowed in the explanation of Scripture; but one should and must be sure and firm. Just like Joseph in Genesis 40:12f. interpreted the two dreams of the butler and baker so differently, although they resembled each other, and he did not make the one a copy of the other. True, the danger would not have been great if the seed had been interpreted to be the Word of God; still had this been the case the parable would not have been thus understood correctly.

[3] Now this Gospel teaches us how the kingdom of God or Christianity fares in the world, especially on account of its teaching, namely, that we are not to think that only true Christians and the pure doctrine of God are to dwell upon the earth; but that there must be also false Christians and heretics in order that the true Christians may be approved, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:19. For this parable treats not of false Christians, who are so only outwardly in their lives, but of those who are unchristian in their doctrine and faith under the name Christian, who beautifully play the hypocrite and work harm. It is a matter of the conscience and not of the hand. And they must be very spiritual servants to be able to identify the tares among the wheat. And the sum of all is that we should not marvel nor

be terrified if there spring up among us many different false teachings and false faiths. Satan is constantly among the children of God. Job 1:6.

[4] Again this Gospel teaches how we should conduct ourselves toward these heretics and false teachers. We are not to uproot nor destroy them. Here he says publicly let both grow together. We have to do here with God's Word alone; for in this matter he who errs today may find the truth to-morrow. Who knows when the Word of God may touch his heart? But if he be burned at the stake, or otherwise destroyed, it is thereby assured that he can never find the truth; and thus the Word of God is snatched from him, and he must be lost, who otherwise might have been saved. Hence the Lord says here, that the wheat also will be uprooted if we weed out the tares. That is something awful in the eyes of God and never to be justified.

[5] From this observe what raging and furious people we have been these many years, in that we desired to force others to believe; the Turks with the sword, heretics with fire, the Jews with death, and thus outroot the tares by our own power, as if we were the ones who could reign over hearts and spirits, and make them pious and right, which God's Word alone must do. But by murder we separate the people from the Word, so that it cannot possibly work upon them and we bring thus with one stroke a double murder upon ourselves, as far as it lies in our power, namely, in that we murder the body for time and the soul for eternity, and afterwards say we did God a service by our actions, and wish to merit something special in heaven.

[6] Therefore this passage should in all reason terrify the grand inquisitors and murderers of the people, where they are not brazened faced, even if they have to deal with true heretics. But at present they burn the true saints and are themselves heretics. What is that but uprooting the wheat, and pretending to exterminate the tares, like insane people?

[7] Today's Gospel also teaches by this parable that our free will amounts to nothing, since the good seed is sowed only by Christ, and Satan can sow nothing but evil seed; as we also see that the field of itself yields nothing but tares, which the cattle eat, although the field receives them and they make the field green as if they were wheat. In the same way the false Christians among the true Christians are of no use but to feed the world and be food for Satan, and they are so beautifully green and hypocritical, as if

they alone were the saints, and hold the place in Christendom as if they were lords there, and the government and highest places belonged to them; and for no other reason than that they glory that they are Christians and are among Christians in the church of Christ, although they see and confess that they live unchristian lives.

[8] In that the Savior pictures here also Satan scattering his seed while the people sleep and no one sees who did it, he shows how Satan adorns and disguises himself so that he cannot be taken for Satan. As we experienced when Christianity was planted in the world Satan thrust into its midst false teachers. People securely think here God is enthroned without a rival and Satan is a thousand miles away, and no one sees anything except how they parade the Word, name and work of God. That course proves beautifully effective. But when the wheat springs up, then we see the tares, that is, if we are conscientious with God's Word and teach faith, we see that it brings forth fruit, then they go about and antagonize it, and wish to be masters of the field and fear lest only wheat grows in the field, and their interests be overlooked.

[9] Then the church and pastor marvel; but they are not allowed to pass judgment, and eagerly wish to interpret all for the best, since such persons bear the Christian name. But it is apparent they are tares and evil seed, have strayed from the faith and fallen to trust in works, and think of rooting out the tares. They lament because of it before the Lord, in the heartfelt prayer of their spirit. For the sower of the good seed says again, they should not uproot it, that is, they should have patience, and suffer such blasphemy, and commend all to God; for although the tares hinder the wheat, yet they make it the more beautiful to behold, compared with the tares, as St. Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 11:19: "For there must be false factions among you, that they that are approved may be made manifest among you." This is sufficient on today's text.

Septuagesima Sunday. The Labourers in the Vineyard.

Text: Matthew 20:1-16.

1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,

4 And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.

5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

6 And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

7 They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.

8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

9 And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

11 And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,

12 Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

14 Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.

15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen. Matthew 20:1-16

[1] Some church fathers applied this Gospel to all the preachers from the beginning to the end of the world, and taught the first hour was the time of Adam, the third that of Noah, the sixth that of Abraham, the ninth that of Moses, and the eleventh hour that of Christ and his apostles. Such talk is all right for pastime, if there is nothing else to preach. For it does not harmonize with Scripture to say that the shilling signifies eternal life, with which the first, or Adam and the holy patriarchs, were dissatisfied, and that such holy characters should murmur in the kingdom of heaven, and be rebuked by the householder and made the last, that is, be condemned.

[2] Therefore we will let such fables pass and abide by the simple teaching and meaning of Christ, who wishes to show by this parable how it actually is in the kingdom of heaven, or in Christendom upon the earth; that God here directs and works wonderfully by making the first last and the last first. And all is spoken to humble those who are great that they should trust in nothing but the goodness and mercy of God. And on the other hand that those who are nothing should not despair, but trust in the goodness of God just as the others do.

[3] Therefore we must not consider this parable in every detail, but confine ourselves to the leading thought, that which Christ designs to teach by it. We should not consider what the penny or shilling means, not what the first or the last hour signifies; but what the householder had in mind and what he aims to teach, how he desires to have his goodness esteemed higher than all human works and merit, yea, that his mercy alone must have all the praise. Like in the parable of the unrighteous steward, Luke 16:5f., the whole parable in its details is not held before our eyes, that we should also defraud our Lord; but it sets forth the wisdom of the steward in that he provided so well and wisely for himself and planned in the very best way, although at the injury of his Lord. Now whoever would investigate and preach long on that parable about the doctors, what the book of accounts, the oil, the wheat and the measure signify, would miss the true meaning and be led by his own ideas which would never be of any benefit to anyone. For such parables are never spoken for the purpose of being interpreted in all their minutia. For Paul compared Christ to Adam in Romans 5:18, and says, Adam was a figure of Christ; this Paul did because we inherited from Adam sin and death, and from Christ life and righteousness. But the lesson of the parable does not consist in the inheritance, but in the consequence of the

inheritance. That just like sin and death cling to those who are born of Adam and descend by heredity, so do life and righteousness cling to those who are born of Christ, they are inherited. Just as one might take an unchaste woman who adorns herself to please the world and commit sin, as a figure of a Christian soul that adorns itself also to please God, but not to commit sin as the woman does.

[4] Hence the substance of the parable in today's Gospel consists not in the penny, what it is, nor in the different hours; but in earning and acquiring, or how one can earn the penny; that as here the first presumed to obtain the penny and even more by their own merit, and yet the last received the same amount because of the goodness of the householder. Thus God will show it is nothing but mercy that he gives, and no one is to arrogate to himself more than another. Therefore he says I do thee no wrong, is not the money mine and not thine; if I had given away thy property, then thou wouldest have reason to murmur; is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own ?

[5] Now in this way Christ strikes a blow first against the presumption (as he also does in today's Epistle) of those who would storm their way into heaven by their good works; as the Jews did and wished to be next to God; as hitherto our own clergy have also done. These all labor for definite wages, that is, they take the law of God in no other sense than that they should fulfill it by certain defined works for a specified reward, and they never understand it correctly, and know not that before God all is pure grace. This signifies that they hire themselves out for wages, and agree with the householder for a penny a day; consequently their lives are bitter, and they lead a career that is indeed hard.

[6] Now when the Gospel comes and makes all alike, as Paul teaches in Romans 3:23, so that they who have done great works are no more than public sinners, and must also become sinners and tolerate the saying: "All have sinned", Romans 3:23, and that no one is justified before God by his works; then they look around and despise those who have done nothing at all, while their great worry and labor avail no more than such idleness and reckless living. Then they murmur against the householder, they imagine it is not right; they blaspheme the Gospel, and become hardened in their ways; then they lose the favor and grace of God, and are obliged to take their temporal reward and trot from him with their penny and be

condemned; for they served not for the sake of mercy but for the sake of reward, and they will receive that and nothing more, the others however must confess that they have merited neither the penny nor the grace, but more is given to them than they had ever thought was promised to them. These remained in grace and besides were saved, and besides this, here in time they had enough; for all depended upon the good pleasure of the householder.

[7] Therefore if one were to interpret it critically, the penny would have to signify temporal good, and the favor of the householder, eternal life. But the day and the heat we transfer from temporal things to the conscience, so that workrighteous persons do labor long and hard, that is, they do all with a heavy conscience and an unwilling heart, forced and coerced by the law; but the short time or last hours are the light consciences that live blessed lives, led by grace, and that willingly and without being driven by the law.

[8] Thus they have now each a penny, that is, a temporal reward is given to both. But the last did not seek it, it was added to them because they sought first the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 6:33, and consequently they have the grace to everlasting life and are happy. The first however seek the temporal reward, bargain for it and serve for it; and hence they fail to secure grace and by means of a hard life they merit perdition. For the last do not think of earning the penny, nor do they thus blunder, but they receive all. When the first saw this, by a miscalculation they thought they would receive more, and lost all. Therefore we clearly see, if we look into their hearts, that the last had no regard for their own merit, but enjoyed the goodness of the householder. The first however did not esteem the goodness of the householder, but looked to their own merits, and thought it was theirs by right and murmured about it.

[9] We must now look at these two words “last” and “first,” from two view points. Let us see what they mean before God, then what they mean before men. Thus, those who are the first in the eyes of man, that is, those who consider themselves, or let themselves be considered, as the nearest to or the first before God, they are just the opposite before God, they are the last in his eyes and the farthest from him. On the other hand, those who are the last in the eyes of man, those who consider themselves, or let themselves be considered, the farthest from God and the last before him, they also are just the opposite, in that they are the nearest and the first

before God. Now whoever desires to be secure, let him conduct himself according to the saying: “Whosoever exalteth himself, shall be humbled.” For it is here written: The first before men are the last before God; the last in the eyes of men are first in the eye of God. On the other hand, the first before God are the last before men; and those God esteems as the last are considered by men to be the first.

[10] But since this Gospel does not speak of first and last in a common, ordinary sense, as the exalted of the world are nothing before God, like heathen who know nothing of God; but it means those who imagine they are the first or the last in the eyes of God, the words ascend very high and apply to the better classes of people; yea, they terrify the greatest of the saints. Therefore it holds up Christ before the apostles themselves. For here it happens that one who in the eyes of the world is truly poor, weak, despised, yea, who indeed suffers for God’s sake, in whom there is no sign that he is anything, and yet in his heart he is so discouraged and bashful as to think he is the last, is secretly full of his own pleasure and delight, so that he thinks he is the first before God, and just because of that he is the last. On the contrary should one indeed be so discouraged and bashful as to think he is the last before God, although he at the time has money, honor and property in the eyes of the world, he is just because of this the first.

[11] One sees here also how the greatest saints have feared, how many also have fallen from high spiritual callings. David complains in Psalm 131:2: “Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with his mother.” Likewise in another place, Psalm 36:11: “Let not the foot of pride come against me”. How often he chastises the impudent, and haughty, Psalm 119:21. So Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7 says: “That I should not be exalted overmuch there was given to me a thorn in the flesh,” etc. And as we have heard in today’s Epistle, what honorable men have fallen. To all of whom without doubt the sad secret ill turn came because they became secure, and thought, we are now near to God, there is no need. we know God, we have done this and that; they did not see how they made themselves the first before God. Behold, how Saul fell! How God permitted David to fall! How Peter had to fall! How some disciples of Paul fell!

[12] Therefore it is indeed necessary to preach this Gospel in our times to those who now know the Gospel as myself and those like me, who imagine they can teach and govern the whole world, and therefore imagine

they are the nearest to God and have devoured the Holy Spirit, bones and feathers. For why is it that so many sects have already gone forth, this one making a hobby of one thing in the Gospel and that one of another? No doubt, because none of them considered that the saying, “the first are last,” meant and concerned them; or if applied to them, they were secure and without fear, considering themselves as the first. Therefore according to this saying, it must come to pass that they be the last, and hence rush ahead and spread shameful doctrines and blasphemies against God and his Word.

[13] Was not this the fate of the pope when he and his followers imagined they were the vice-regents and representatives of and the nearest to God, and persuaded the world to believe it? In that very act they were the vicegerents of Satan and the farthest from God, so that no mortals under the sun ever raged and foamed against God and his Word like they have done. And yet they did not see the horrible deceiver, because they were secure and feared not this keen, sharp, high and excellent judgment, “The first shall be the last.” For it strikes into the lowest depths of the heart, the real spiritual darkness, that considers itself as the first, even in the midst of poverty, dishonor and misfortune, yea, most of all then.

[14] Hence the substance of this Gospel is that no mortal is so high, nor will ever ascend so high, who will not have occasion to fear that he may become the very lowest. On the other hand, no mortal lies so low or can fall so low, to whom the hope is not extended that he may become the highest; because here all human merit is abolished and God’s goodness alone is praised, and it is decreed as on a festive occasion that the first shall be last and the last first. In that he says, “the first shall be last” he strips thee of all thy presumption and forbids thee to exalt thyself above the lowest outcast, even if thou wert like Abraham, David, Peter or Paul. However, in that he also says, “the last shall be first,” he checks thee against all doubting, and forbids thee to humble thyself below any saint, even if thou wert Pilate, Herod, Sodom and Gomorrah.

[15] For just as we have no reason to be presumptuous, so we have also no cause to doubt; but the golden mean is confirmed and fortified by this Gospel, so that we regard not the penny but the goodness of the householder, which is alike and the same to high and low, to the first and the last, to saints and sinners, and no one can boast nor comfort himself nor presume more than another; for he is God, not only of the Jews, but also of

the Gentiles, yea, especially of all, and it matters not who they are or what they are called.

Sexagesima Sunday. Parable of the Sower.

Text: Luke 8:4-15.

4 And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable:

5 A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.

6 And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.

7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.

8 And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

9 And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?

10 And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

12 Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

13 They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

14 And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this

life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

15 But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience. Luke 8:4-15

[1] This Gospel treats of the disciples and the fruits, which the Word of God develops in the world. It does not speak of the law nor of human institutions; but, as Christ himself says, of the Word of God, which he himself the sower preaches, for the law bears no fruit, just as little as do the institutions of men. Christ however sets forth here four kinds of disciples of the divine Word.

[2] The first class of disciples are those who hear the Word but neither understand nor esteem it. And these are not the mean people in the world, but the greatest, wisest and the most saintly, in short they are the greatest part of mankind; for Christ does not speak here of those who persecute the Word nor of those who fail to give their ear to it, but of those who hear it and are students of it, who also wish to be called true Christians and to live in Christian fellowship with Christians and are partakers of baptism and the Lord's Supper. But they are of a carnal heart, and remain so, failing to appropriate the Word of God to themselves, it goes in one ear and out the other. Just like the seed along the wayside did not fall into the earth, but remained lying on the ground in the wayside, because the road was tramped hard by the feet of man and beast and it could not take root.

[3] Therefore Christ says the devil cometh and taketh away the Word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved. What power of Satan this alone reveals, that hearts, hardened through a worldly mind and life, lose the Word and let it go, so that they never understand or confess it; but instead of the Word of God, Satan sends false teachers to tread it under foot by the doctrines of men. For it stands here written both that it was trodden under foot, and the birds of the heaven devoured it. The birds Christ himself interprets as the messengers of the devil, who snatch away the Word and devour it, which is done when he turns and blinds their hearts so that they neither understand nor esteem it, as St. Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:4: "They will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables." By the treading under foot of men, Christ means the teachings of men, that

rule in our hearts, as he says in Matthew 5:13 also of the salt that has lost its savor, it is cast out and trodden under foot of men; that is, as St. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:11, they must believe a lie because they have not been obedient to the truth.

[4] Thus all heretics, fanatics and sects belong to this number, who understand the Gospel in a carnal way and explain it as they please, to suit their own ideas, all of whom hear the Gospel and yet they bear no fruit, yea, more, they are governed by Satan and are harder oppressed by human institutions than they were before they heard the Word. For it is a dreadful utterance that Christ here gives that the devil taketh away the Word from their hearts, by which he clearly proves that the devil rules mightily in their hearts, notwithstanding they are called Christians and hear the Word. Likewise it sounds terrible that they are to be trodden under foot, and must be subject unto men and to their ruinous teachings, by which under the appearance and name of the Gospel, the devil takes the Word from them, so that they may never believe and be saved, but must be lost forever; as the fanatical spirits of our day do in all lands. For where this Word is not, there is no salvation, and great works or holy lives avail nothing, for with this, that he says: "They shall not be saved," since they have not the Word, he shows forcibly enough, that not their works but their faith in the Word alone saves, as Paul says to the Romans: "It is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." Romans 1:16.

[5] The second class of hearers are those who receive the Word with joy, but they do not persevere. These are also a large multitude who understand the Word correctly and lay hold of it in its purity without any spirit of sect, division or fanaticism, they rejoice also in that they know the real truth, and are able to know how they may be saved without works through faith. They also know that they are free from the bondage of the law, of their conscience and of human teachings; but when it comes to the test that they must suffer harm, disgrace and loss of life or property, then they fall and deny it; for they have not root enough, and are not planted deep enough in the soil. Hence they are like the growth on a rock, which springs forth fresh and green, that it is a pleasure to behold it and it awakens bright hopes. But when the sun shines hot, it withers, because it has no soil and moisture, and only rock is there. So these do; in times of persecution they deny or keep silence about the Word, and work, speak and suffer all that their persecutors

mention or wish, who formerly went forth and spoke, and confessed with a fresh and joyful spirit the same, while there was still peace and no heat, so that there was hope they would bear much fruit and serve the people. For these fruits are not only the works, but more the confession, preaching and spreading of the Word, so that many others may thereby be converted and the kingdom of God be developed.

[6] The third class are those who hear and understand the Word, but still it falls on the other side of the road, among the pleasures and cares of this life, so that they also do nothing with the Word. And there is quite a large multitude of these; for although they do not start heresies, like the first, but always possess the absolutely pure Word, they are also not attacked on the left as the others with opposition and persecution; yet they fall on the right side, and it is their ruin that they enjoy peace and good days. Therefore they do not earnestly give themselves to the Word, but become indifferent and sink in the cares, riches and pleasures of this life, so that they are of no benefit to anyone. Therefore they are like the seed that fell among the thorns. Although it is not rocky but good soil; not wayside but deeply plowed soil; yet, the thorns will not let it spring up, they choke it. Thus these have all in the Word that is needed for their salvation, but they do not make any use of it, and they rot in this life in carnal pleasures. To these belong those who hear the Word but do not bring under subjection their flesh. They know their duty but do it not, they teach but do not practice what they teach, and are this year as they were last.

[7] The fourth class are those who lay hold of and keep the Word in a good and honest heart, and bring forth fruit with patience, those who hear the Word and steadfastly retain it, meditate upon it and act in harmony with it. The devil does not snatch it away, nor are they thereby led astray, moreover the heat of persecution does not rob them of it, and the thorns of pleasure and the avarice of the times do not hinder its growth; but they bear fruit by teaching others and by developing the kingdom of God, hence they also do good to their neighbor in love; and therefore Christ adds, "they bring forth fruit with patience." For these must suffer much on account of the Word, shame and disgrace from fanatics and heretics, hatred and jealousy with injury to body and property from their persecutors, not to mention what the thorns and the temptations of their own flesh do, so that it

may well be called the Word of the cross; for he who would keep it must bear the cross and misfortune, and triumph.

[8] He says: “In honest and good hearts.” Like a field, that is without a thorn or brush, cleared and spacious, as a beautiful clean place: so a heart is also cleared and clean, broad and spacious, that is without cares and avarice as to temporal needs, so that the Word of God truly finds lodgment there. But the field is good, not only when it lies there cleared and level, but when it is also rich and fruitful, possesses soil and is productive, and not like a stony and gravelly field. Just so is the heart that has good soil and with a full spirit is strong, fertile and good to keep the Word and bring forth fruit with patience.

[9] Here we see why it is no wonder there are so few true Christians, for all the seed does not fall into good ground, but only the fourth and small part; and that they are not to be trusted who boast they are Christians and praise the teaching of the Gospel; like Demas, a disciple of St. Paul, who forsook him at last, 2 Timothy 4:10; like the disciples of Jesus, who turned their backs to him. John 6:66. For Christ himself cries out here: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,” as if he should say: O, how few true Christians there are; one dare not believe all to be Christians who are called Christians and hear the Gospel, more is required than that.

[10] All this is spoken for our instruction, that we may not go astray, since so many misuse the Gospel and few lay hold of it aright. True it is unpleasant to preach to those who treat the Gospel so shamefully and even oppose it. For preaching is to become so universal that the Gospel is to be proclaimed to all creatures, as Christ says in Mark 16:15: “Preach the Gospel to the whole creation;” and Psalm 19:4: “Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” What business is it of mine that many do not esteem it? It must be that many are called but few are chosen. For the sake of the good ground that brings forth fruit with patience, the seed must also fall fruitless by the wayside, on the rock and among the thorns; inasmuch as we are assured that the Word of God does not go forth without bearing some fruit, but it always finds also good ground; as Christ says here, some seed of the sower falls also into good ground, and not only by the wayside, among the thorns and on stony ground. For where-ever the Gospel goes you will find Christians. “My word shall not return unto me void.” Isaiah 55:11. III. The Fruit of this Word

[11] Here observe that Mark 4:8 and Matthew 13:8 say the seed yielded fruit some thirty, some sixty and some a hundredfold, which according to all interpretations is understood of three kinds of chastity, that of virgins, married persons and widows; and virgins are credited with a hundredfold of fruit, wedded persons with thirtyfold, the least of all, and widows with sixtyfold. But this is such coarse and corrupt talk that it is a sin and a shame that this interpretation has continued so long in Christendom and has been advocated by so many noted teachers, and criticized by none of them. In this one perceives how many wide-awake, well-armed and faithful teachers the church has had heretofore, and how one blindly believed another, and how God allowed many noted saints and people to play the fool so completely in these important matters pertaining to the soul that he warned us to believe no teacher, however saintly and great he may be, unless he comes with the pure Word of God.

[12] First, it would be doing the Word of God injustice to hold that it brings forth no other fruit than chastity, since St. Paul boasts quite differently in Galatians 5:22. In brief, the Word of God accomplishes all good, it makes us wise, sensible, prudent, cautious, pious, kind, patient, faithful, discreet, chaste, etc. Hence this comment referring only to three kinds of chastity is wholly unchristian. The heathen and wicked people, who neither possess the Gospel nor persecute it, have also virgins, widows and married persons. Doubtless Anna and Caiaphas had been properly married. Thus there were virgins, widows and consorts before the Word of God; for virgins were born, and when the Gospel comes it finds virgins, widows and wives; the Gospel did not first make them virgins, widows or wives.

[13] Secondly, thus marriage, virginity and widowhood are not fruits, nor virtues, nor good works; but three stations or states in life created and ordained by God, and are not creatures of our power. They are divine works and creations like all other creatures. For if it should be valid to interpret a station or state in life as good fruit, one would have to say the state of a lord, a servant, a man, a child and of officers was only fruit of the Gospel; in this way there would be no fruit at all left for the Gospel, since such states or callings are found everywhere regardless of the Gospel. But the chastity of virgins is paraded thus for the sake of a show, to the great danger

and injury of immortal souls; just as if no virtue adorns a Christian but virginity.

[14] I will say further, that chastity is a different and a far higher thing than virginity, and is nothing more than that a woman has never been under any obligation to a man. Besides, however, it is possible that a virgin has not only a desire and a passion for man, in harmony with the character and nature of her female body; but she must also be full of blood and life in order to bear children and multiply the race, for which God created her, and that creation is not her work but God's alone. Therefore that woman may not hinder God's work, nature as created by God must take its course, whether children be born or not. But chastity must indeed be a state of a woman's mind that has no or little desire for man, and has in her body also little or no seed to bear fruit or children.

[15] Now it is generally the case that a married woman does not so often experience such desire and lust, such a flow of love or life; for she will be relieved of the same by or through her husband; and besides, where a virgin has only passion in the thoughts of her heart and in the seed of her body, a married woman has much displeasure mingled with the pleasure of her husband, so that to speak in common terms, the high and best chastity is in the married state, because in it is the least lust and passion, while the least chastity is in the state of virgins, because in it there is much more lust and passion. Therefore chastity is a virtue far above virginity; for we call a bride still a virgin, although she is indeed full of desire, passion and love for her bridegroom. Chastity waves high over all three states, over marriage, over widowhood and over virginity. But when God does not work wonders it sinks low and exists most in the married state and least in the state of virgins, and there are not three kinds of chastity, but three states of chastity.

[16] True, when we consider virginity according to its outward appearance, it seems great that a woman restrains herself and never satisfies her desires with a man. But what does it help if persons restrain their passions longer without a man or a woman and then satisfy them more than with a man or woman? Is there not more unchastity where there is greater lust, love, lewdness and sensation than where there is less? Therefore to calculate according to the amount of lust and sensation, as unchastity should be considered, virginity is more unchaste than the state of marriage. This is very apparent among prostitutes, who are virgins and yet are very

forward and obscene, and cherish greater thoughts of the sin than the sin itself is. In short, I wonder if there is a virgin twenty years of age, who has a healthy, perfect female body.

[17] This is enough concerning chastity, that we know how the fruits of the Word must be understood differently and in a wider sense than pertaining to chastity, and be applied especially to the fruits, by which many are converted and come to the knowledge of the truth. For although works are also called fruits, yet Christ speaks here especially of the fruits the seed of the Word brings forth in hearts that become enlightened, believing, happy and wise in Christ, as St. Paul says in Romans 1:13: “That I might have some fruit in you also, even as in the rest of the Gentiles;” and Colossians 1:6: “Even as the Gospel is also in all the world bearing fruit and increasing, as it doth in you also;” that is, many will be made alive through the Gospel, delivered from their sins and be saved; for it is the characteristic work of the Gospel, as the Word of life, grace and salvation to release from sin, death and Satan. In harmony with this fruit follow the fruits of the Spirit, the good works of patience, love, faithfulness, etc.

[18] Now that some seed brings forth thirty, some sixty, and some a hundredfold, means that more people will be converted in some places than in others, and one apostle and minister may preach farther and more than another; for the people are not everywhere alike numerous and do not report the same number of Christians, and one minister may not preach as many sermons or cover as great a territory as another, which God foresaw and ordained. To the words of St. Paul, who preached the farthest and the most, we may indeed ascribe the hundredfold of fruit; although he was not a virgin.

IV. Why Christ Calls the Doctrine Concerning the Disciples and the Fruits of the Word a Mystery.

[19] But what does it mean when he says: “Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God”, etc.? What are the mysteries? Shall one not know them, why then are they preached? A “mystery” is a hidden secret, that is not known: and the “mysteries of the kingdom of God” are the things in the kingdom of God, as for example Christ with all his grace, which he manifests to us, as Paul describes him; for he who knows Christ

aright understands what God's kingdom is and what is in it. And it is called a mystery because it is spiritual and secret, and indeed it remains so, where the Spirit does not reveal it. For although there are many who see and hear it, yet they do not understand it. Just as there are many who preach and hear Christ, how he offered himself for us; but all that is only upon their tongue and not in their heart; for they themselves do not believe it, they do not experience it, as Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14 says: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." Therefore Christ says here: "Unto you it is given", the Spirit gives it to you that you not only hear and see it, but acknowledge and believe it with your heart. Therefore it is now no longer a mystery to you. But to the others who hear it as well as you, and have no faith in their heart, they see and understand it not; to them it is a mystery and it will continue unknown to them, and all that they hear is only like one hearing a parable or a dark saying. This is also proved by the fanatics of our day, who know so much to preach about Christ; but as they themselves do not experience it in their heart, they rush ahead and pass by the true foundation of the mystery and tramp around with questions and rare foundlings, and when it comes to the test they do not know the least thing about trusting in God and finding in Christ the forgiveness of their sins.

[20] But Mark says, Mark 4:33, Christ spake therefore to the people with parables, that they might understand, each according to his ability. How does that agree with what Matthew says, Matthew 13:13-14: He spake therefore unto them in parables, because they did not understand? It must surely be that Mark wishes to say that parables serve to the end that they may get a hold of coarse, rough people, although they do not indeed understand them, yet later, they may be taught and then they know: for parables are naturally pleasing to the common people, and they easily remember them since they are taken from common every day affairs, in the midst of which the people live. But Matthew means to say that these parables are of the nature that no one can understand them, they may grasp and hear them as often as they will, unless the Spirit makes them known and reveals them. Not that they should preach that we shall not understand them; but it naturally follows that wherever the Spirit does not reveal them, no one understands them. However, Christ took these words from Isaiah 6:9-10, where the high meaning of the divine foreknowledge is referred to, that God conceals and reveals to whom he will and whom he had in mind from eternity.

Quinquagesima Sunday. Christ's Passion and the Faith and Love of the Blind Man. The Blind Man Received his Sight.

Text: Luke 18:31-43.

31 Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.

32 For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on:

33 And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.

34 And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.

35 And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging:

36 And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant.

37 And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.

38 And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

39 And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

40 And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him,

41 Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.

42 And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.

43 And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying

God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God. Luke 18:31-43

[1] This Gospel presents to us again the two thoughts of faith and love, both in that Christ says he must go up to Jerusalem and suffer crucifixion; and in that Christ serves and helps the blind man. By the first thought, that of faith, it is proved that the Scriptures are not fulfilled except by Christ's sufferings; also that the Scriptures speak of no other theme than of Christ, and they treat only of Christ, who must fulfill the Scriptures by his death. But if his death must do this, then our death will add nothing to that end; for our death is a sinful and a cursed death. However, if our death be sin and cursed, which is the highest and severest suffering and misfortune, what can our suffering and death merit? And since our sufferings are nothing and are lost, what can our good works do, in view of the fact that suffering is always nobler and better than doing good works? Christ alone must be supreme here and faith must firmly lay hold of him.

[2] But Christ spoke these words before he finished his passion, when on his way to go up to Jerusalem at the time of the Easter festivities, when the disciples least expected to witness his sufferings, and instead anticipated a joyful occasion at the Feast of the Passover. These words Christ spoke for the purpose that his disciples might later grow stronger in their faith, when they recalled that he had before told them, that he had voluntarily offered himself as a sacrifice, and that he was not crucified by the power or strategy of his enemies, the Jews. Long before Isaiah also had prophesied that Christ would voluntarily and cheerfully give himself as a sacrifice, Isaiah 5:3-7; and the angel also on Easter morning, Luke 26:6, admonishes the women to call to mind what he here utters, in order that they might be assured and the firmer believe how he suffered thus willingly in our behalf.

[3] And this is the true foundation, thoroughly to know Christ's passion, when we not only understand and lay hold of Christ's sufferings, but also of his heart and will in those sufferings, for whoever views his sufferings in a way that they do not see his will and heart in them, must be more terrified before them than they are made to rejoice on account of them. But if one sees Christ's will and heart in his passion, they cause true comfort, assurance and pleasure in Christ. Therefore Psalm 40:7-8 also praises this

will of God and of Christ: “ In the roll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O, my God.” The Epistle to the Hebrews says on this point: “By which will we have been sanctified;” Hebrews 10:10; it does not say: Through the suffering and blood of Christ, which is also true, but through the will of God and of Christ, that they both were of one will, to sanctify us through the blood of Christ. This will to suffer he shows here in this Gospel when he first announced that he would go up to Jerusalem and allow them to crucify him; as if he had said, look into my heart and see that I do all willingly, freely and cheerfully, in order that it may not terrify nor shock you when you shall now soon see it, and you think I do it reluctantly, I must do it, I am forsaken, and the power of the Jews force me to it.

[4] “But the disciples understood none of these things,” says Christ, “And this saying was hid from them.” That is as much as to say: Reason, flesh and blood, cannot understand it nor grasp that the Scriptures should say how the Son of man must be crucified; much less does reason understand that this is Christ’s will and he does it cheerfully; for it does not believe it is necessary for him to suffer for us, it will deal directly with God through its own good works. But God must reveal it in their hearts by his Spirit more than is proclaimed by words into their ears; yea, even those to whom the Spirit reveals it in their hearts believe it with difficulty and must struggle with it. Such a great and wonderful thing it is that the Son of man died the death of the cross willingly and cheerfully to fulfill the Scriptures, that is, for our welfare; it is a mystery and it remains a mystery.

[5] From this it now follows how foolish they act who teach that people should patiently bear their sufferings and death in order to atone for their sins and obtain grace; and especially those who comfort such, who should be put out of the way by the civil law and the sentence of death, or who are to die in other ways; and pretend that if they suffer willingly all their sins will consequently be forgiven them. Such persons only mislead the people for they bury out of sight Christ and his death upon whom our comfort is founded, and bring the people to a false confidence in their own suffering and death. This is the worst of all things a man can experience at the end of his life, and by it he is led direct into perdition. But you learn and say. Whose death! Whose patience! My death is nothing; will not have it nor hear of it for my consolation. Christ’s suffering and death are my consolation, upon it I rely for the forgiveness of my sins; but my own death

I will suffer, to the praise and honor of my God, freely and gratuitously, and for the advantage and profit of my neighbor, and in no way whatever depend upon it to avail anything in my own behalf before God.

[6] It is indeed one thing to die boldly and fearlessly, or to suffer death patiently, or to bear other pain willingly; and another thing to atone for sin by such death and sufferings, and thus obtain grace from God. The first the heathen have done, and many reckless villains and rough people still do; but the other is a poisonous addition, devised by Satan, like all other lies, by which he founds our trust and consolation upon our own doings, and works, against which we are to guard. For as firmly as I should resist one, who teaches me to enter a monastery, when I wish to be saved; so firmly should I also oppose any who would in my last hour point me to my own death and suffering for consolation and hope, as if they would help to wash away my sins. For both deny God and his Christ, blaspheme his grace and pervert his Gospel. They, however, do much better who hold a crucifix before the dying and admonish them of Christ's death and sufferings.

[7] I must relate an example and experience that is in point here and is not to be despised. There was once a good hermit, reared in this faith of human merit, who was called upon to comfort a man of prominence upon his death bed, and he approached the sick man dauntlessly and consoled him thus: My dear friend, only suffer death patiently and willingly and I will pledge you my soul you will be a child of eternal life. Well, he promised him he would do so, and he passed away by death with this comfort. But three days later the hermit himself became sick unto death, when the true teacher, Rev. Reuling, came and opened his eyes so that he saw what he had done and taught, and he lay until he died and lamented that he had given such counsel and consolation: O, woe is me, what have I advised! Frivolous people laughed at him that he failed to do as he had taught others to do; he offered another the pledge of his own soul that he might die in peace and he himself now sinks in despair not only before death, but also at the advice he so confidently had given and now so publicly rebuked and recalled. But God surely said to him that which is written in Luke 4:23: "Physician, heal thyself;" and another passage, Luke 12:21; "So is he that layeth up treasures for himself, and is not rich toward God." For here surely the blind led the blind and both fell into the ditch, and both were condemned. Luke 6:39. The first, because he died trusting in his

own patient suffering and death, the other, because he despaired of God's grace and had not acknowledged it, and besides he also thought, had he not committed sin, he would have departed this life saved; and in both Christ remained unknown and was denied. On this point some books are misleading, in which the sayings also of St. Augustine and others are sounded forth, how death is only a door to life and a medicine against sin; for they do not see that these words are to be understood as referring to Christ's death and sufferings. But simple and plain as this example is, it teaches us in a masterly manner how no work, no human suffering, no death can help us or stand before God. For one cannot indeed deny here that the first did the highest work, namely, suffered death with patience, in which free will did its best; and yet he was lost as the other who confessed and clearly proved by his despair. And whoever will not believe these two examples must find it out by experience for himself.

[8] The above is said concerning faith in the sufferings of Christ. As he now offered himself for us, we should also follow the same example of love, and offer ourselves for the welfare of our neighbor, with all we have. We have spoken sufficiently on other occasions that Christ is to be preached in these two ways; but it is talk that no one desires to understand; the Word is hid from them; for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." 1 Corinthians 2:14. II. The Faith and Love of the Blind Man

[9] The second part of our Gospel treats of the blind man, in which we see beautifully and clearly illustrated both the love in Christ to the blind man and the faith of the blind man in Christ. At present we will briefly consider the faith of the blind man.

[10] First, he hears that Christ was passing by, he had also heard of him before, that Jesus of Nazareth was a kind man, and that he helps everyone who only calls upon him. His faith and confidence in Christ grew out of his hearing; so he did not doubt but that Christ would also help him. But such faith in his heart he would not have been able to possess had he not heard and known of Christ; for faith does not come except by hearing.

[11] Secondly, he firmly believes and doubts not but that it was true what he heard of Christ, as the following proves. Although he does not yet see nor know Christ, and although he at once knew him, yet he is not able to see or know whether Christ had a heart and will to help him; but he

immediately believed, when he heard of him; upon such a noise and report he founded his confidence, and therefore he did not make a mistake.

[12] Thirdly, in harmony with his faith, he calls on Christ and prays, as St. Paul in Romans 10:13-14 wrote: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed.” Also, “Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

[13] Fourthly, he also freely confesses Christ and fears no one; his need constrains him to the point that he inquires for no one else. For it is the nature of true faith to confess Christ to be the only one who can and will help, while others are ashamed and afraid to do this before the world.

[14] Fifthly, he struggles not only with his conscience, which doubtless moves him to think he is not worthy of such favor, but he also struggles, with those who threatened him and urged him to keep quiet. They wished thereby to terrify his conscience and make him bashful, so that he should see his own unworthiness, and then despair. For wherever faith begins, there begin also war and conflict.

[15] Sixthly, the blind man stands firm, presses through all obstacles and triumphs, he would not let the whole world sever him from his confidence, and not even his own conscience to do it. Therefore he obtained the answer of his prayer and received Christ, so that Christ stood and commanded him to be brought unto him, and he offered to do for him whatever he wished. So it goes with all who hold firmly only to the Word of God, close their eyes and ears against the devil, the world and themselves, and act just as if they and God were the only ones in heaven and on earth.

[16] Seventhly he follows Christ, that is he enters upon the road of love and of the cross, where Christ is walking, does righteous works, and is of a good character and calling, refrains from going about with foolish works as workrighteous persons do.

[17] Eighthly, he thanks and praises God, and offers a true sacrifice that is pleasing to God, Psalm 50:23: “Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth me; and to him that ordereth his way aright will I show the salvation of God.”

[18] Ninthly, he was the occasion that many others praised God, in that they saw what he did, for every Christian is helpful and a blessing to

everybody, and besides he praises and honors God upon earth.

[19] Finally, we see here how Christ encourages us both by his works and words. In the first place by his works, in that he sympathizes so strongly with the blind man and makes it clear, how pleasing faith is to him, so that Christ is at once absorbed with interest in the man, stops and does what the blind man desires in his faith. In the second place, that Christ praises his faith in words, and says: “Thy faith hath made thee whole;” he casts the honor of the miracle from himself and attributes it to the faith of the blind man. The summary is: to faith is vouchsafed what it asks, and it is moreover our great honor before God.

[20] This blind man represents the spiritually blind, the state of every man born of Adam, who neither sees nor knows the kingdom of God; but it is of grace that he feels and knows his blindness and would gladly be delivered from it. They are saintly sinners who feel their faults and sigh for grace. But he sits by the wayside and begs, that is, he sits among the teachers of the law and desires help; but it is begging, with works he must appear blue and help himself. The people pass him by and let him sit, that is the people of the law make a great noise and are heard among the teachers of good works, they go before Christ and Christ follows them. But when he heard Christ, that is, when a heart hears the Gospel of faith, it calls and cries, and has no rest until it comes to Christ. Those, however, who would silence and scold him are the teachers of works, who wish to quiet and suppress the doctrine and cry of faith; but they stir the heart the more. For the nature of the Gospel is, the more it is restrained the more progress it makes. Afterwards he received his sight, all his work and life are nothing but the praise and honor of God, and he follows Christ with joy, so that the whole world wonders and is thereby made better.

Invocavit First Sunday in Lent. The Fast and the Temptation of Christ. Temptation by the Devil.

Text: Matthew 4:1-11.

1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.

3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him. Matthew 4:1-11

[1] This Gospel is read today at the beginning of Lent in order to picture before Christians the example of Christ, that they may rightly observe Lent, which has become mere mockery: first, because no one can follow this example and fast forty days and nights as Christ did without eating any food. Christ rather followed the example of Moses, who fasted also forty days and nights, when he received the law of God on mount Sinai. Thus Christ also wished to fast when he was about to bring to us, and give expression to, the new law. In the second place, Lent has become mere mockery because our fasting is a perversion and an institution of man. For although Christ did fast forty days, yet there is no word of his that he

requires us to do the same and fast as he did. Indeed he did many other things, which he wishes us not to do; but whatever he calls us to do or leave undone, we should see to it that we have his Word to support our actions.

[2] But the worst of all is that we have adopted and practiced fasting as a good work: not to bring our flesh into subjection; but, as a meritorious work before God, to atone for our sins and obtain grace. And it is this that has made our fasting a stench and so blasphemous and shameful, so that no drinking and eating, no gluttony and drunkenness, could have been as bad and foul. It would have been better had people been drunk day and night than to fast thus. Moreover, even if all had gone well and right, so that their fasting had been applied to the mortification of the flesh; but since it was not voluntary, and it was not left to each to do according to their own free will, but was compulsory by virtue of human commandment, and they did it unwillingly, it was all lost and to no purpose. I will not mention the many other evils as the consequences, as that pregnant mothers and their offspring, the sick and the weak, were thereby ruined, so that it might be called a fasting of Satan instead of a fasting unto holiness. Therefore we will carefully consider how this Gospel teaches us by the example of Christ what true fasting is.

[3] The Scriptures present to us two kinds of true fasting: one, by which we try to bring the flesh into subjection to the spirit, of which St. Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians 6:5: "In labors, in watchings, in fastings." The other is that which we must bear patiently, and yet receive willingly because of our need and poverty, of which St. Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 4:11: "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst," and Christ in Matthew 9:15: "When the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, then will they fast." This kind of fasting Christ teaches us here while in the wilderness alone without anything to eat, and while he suffers his penury without murmuring. The first kind of fasting, one can end whenever he wills, and can satisfy it by food; but the other kind we must observe and bear until God himself changes it and satisfies us. Hence it is much more precious than the first, because it moves in greater faith.

[4] This is also the reason that the Evangelist with great care places it first: Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, that he might there fast and be tempted, so that no one might imitate his example of their own choice and make of it a selfish, arbitrary, and pleasant fasting; but

instead wait for the Spirit, who will send him enough fastings and temptations. For whoever, without being led by the Spirit, wantonly resorts to the danger of hunger or to any temptation, when it is truly a blessing of God that he can eat and drink and have other comforts, tempts God. We should not seek want and temptation, they will surely come of themselves; we ought then do our best and act honestly. The text reads: Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness; and not: Jesus himself chose to go into the wilderness. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Romans 8:14. God gives his blessings for the purpose that we may use them with thanksgiving, and not that we may let them lie idle, and thus tempt him; for he wishes it, and forces us to fast by the Spirit or by a need which we cannot avoid.

[5] This narrative, however, is written both for our instruction and admonition. First, for instruction, that we should know how Christ has served and helped us by his fasting, hunger, temptation and victory; also that whoever believes on Christ shall never suffer need, and that temptation shall never harm him; but we shall have enough in the midst of want and be safe in the midst of temptation; because his Lord and Head triumphed over these all in his behalf, and of this he is assured, as Christ says in John 16:33: “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” God, who was able to nourish Christ forty days without any food, can nourish also his Christians.

[6] Secondly, this is written for our admonition, that we may in the light of this example also cheerfully suffer want and temptation for the service of God and the good of our neighbor, like Christ did for us, as often as necessity requires it; which is surely accomplished if we learn and confess God’s Word. Therefore this Gospel is sweet consolation and power against the unbelief and infamy of the stomach, to awaken and strengthen the conscience, that we may not be anxious about the nourishment of our bodies, but be assured that he can and will give us our daily bread.

II. The Temptation of Christ.

[7] But as to how temptation takes place and how it is overcome, is all very beautifully pictured to us here in Christ. First, that he is led up into the wilderness, that is, he is left solitary and alone by God, angels and men, by

all creatures. What kind of a temptation would it be, if we were not forsaken and stood not alone? It is, however, painful when we do not feel anything that presents its back to us; as for example, that I should support myself and have not a nickel, not a thread, not a twig, and I experience no help from others, and no advice is offered. That means to be led into the desert and to be left alone. There I am in the true school, and I learn what I am, how weak my faith is, how great and rare true faith is, and how deeply unbelief is entrenched in the hearts of all men. But whoever has his purse, cellar and fields full, is not yet led into the desert, neither is he left alone; therefore he is not conscious of temptation.

[8] Secondly, the tempter came forward and attacked Christ with these very same cares of food for the body and with the unbelief in the goodness of God, and said: "If thou art the Son of God, command that these stones become bread," as if he should say: Yes, trust thou in God and bake and cook nothing; only wait patiently until a roasted fowl flies into your mouth; do you now say that you have a God who cares for you; where is now your heavenly Father, who has charge of you? Yea, it seems to me he lets you in a fine condition; eat now and drink from your faith, let us see how you will satisfy your hunger; yea, when you have stones for bread. What a fine Son of God you are! How fatherly he is disposed toward you in that he fails to send you a slice of bread and permits you to be so poor and needy; do you now continue to believe that you are his son and he is your father? With like thoughts, he truly attacks all the children of God. And Christ surely felt this temptation, for he was no stock nor stone; although he was and remained pure and without sin, as we cannot do.

[9] That Satan attacked Christ with the cares for daily food or with unbelief and avarice, Christ's answer proves, in that he says: "Man shall not live by bread alone;" that sounds as if he said: thou wilt direct me to bread alone and dost treat me as though I thought of nothing but the sustenance of my body. This temptation is very common also among pious people, and they especially feel it keenly who have children and a family, and have nothing to eat. Therefore St. Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:10 that avarice is a root of all kind of evil; for it is a fruit of unbelief. Do you not think that unbelief, care and avarice are the reasons people are afraid to enter married life? Why do people avoid it and live in unchastity, unless it be the fear that they must die of hunger and suffer want? But here we should consider

Christ's work and example, who suffered want forty days and nights, and finally was not forsaken, but was ministered to even by angels.

[10] Thirdly, behold how Christ resists this temptation of bread, and overcomes; he sees nothing but stones and what is uneatable, then he approaches and clings to the Word of God, strengthens himself by it and strikes the devil to the ground with it. This saying all Christians should lay hold of when they see that there is lack and want and everything has become stones, so that courage trembles, and they should say: What were it if the whole world were full of bread, still man does not live by bread alone, but more belongs to life, namely, the Word of God. The words, however, are so beautiful and powerful that we must not pass over them lightly, but carefully explain them.

[11] These words Christ quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3, where Moses says: "Thy God humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by everything that proceedeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live." That is as much as to say: Since God permits you to hunger and you still continue to live, you ought indeed to grasp the thought that God nourishes you without bread through his Word; for if you should live and sustain yourself by bread alone then you must continually be full of bread. But the Word, that nourishes us is, that he promises us and causes it to be published that he is our God and desires to be our God.

[12] Thus now the meaning of Moses and of Christ is: Whoever has here God's Word and believes, has both blessings; the first, where he is in want and has nothing, but must suffer hunger, that Word will sustain him, so that he will not die of hunger nor perish, just as well as if he had abundance to eat; for the Word he has in his heart nourishes and sustains him without eating and drinking. But has he little to eat, then a bite or slice of bread will feed and nourish him like a kingly meal; for not only bread but the Word of God also nourishes the body naturally, as it creates and upholds all things, Hebrews 1:3. The other blessing he will also enjoy, namely, that finally bread will surely be at hand, come whence it will, and should it rain from heaven like manna where none grows and none can grow. In these two thoughts every person can freely trust, namely, that he must in time of hunger receive bread or something to eat, or if not, then his hunger must

become so moderate and bearable that it will nourish him even as well as bread does.

[13] What has been said of eating and feeding the body should be understood also of drinking, clothing, house, and all our needs: namely that although he still permits us to become naked and suffer want for clothing, house etc., clothing must finally be at hand, and before it fails the leaves of the trees must become coats and mantles; or if not, then the coats and garments that we wear must never grow old; just as happened to the Children of Israel in the desert Deuteronomy 8:2-4, whose clothing and shoes never wore out. Likewise the wild wilderness must become their houses, and there must be a way where there is no way; and water, where there is no water; stones must become water. For here stands God's Word, which says: "He cares for you;" and St. Paul in 1 Timothy 6:17: "God giveth us richly all things to enjoy;" and Matthew 6:33-34: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore anxious for the morrow." These and like words must continue true and stand forever firm.

[14] All this one may indeed learn from his own daily experiences. For it is held, and I almost believe it, that there are not as many sheaves of wheat grown as there are people living on the earth; but God daily blesses and increases the wheat in the sack, the flour in the tray, the bread on the table and in the mouth, as Christ did. John 6:12 f. It is also noticeable that as a rule, poor people and their children are fatter and their food reaches farther and agrees with them better than is the case among the rich with all their provisions. However, that the godless at times suffer need, or in times of famine many die of hunger, is caused by a special plague as pestilence, war etc. In other ways, we see that in all things it is not the food, but the Word of God that nourishes every human being.

[15] Now that God sustains all mankind by bread, and not by the Word alone, without bread, is done to the end, that he conceals his work in the world in order to exercise believers; just as he commanded the children of Israel to arm themselves and to fight, and yet it was not his pleasure that victory should come through their own sword and deeds; but he himself was to slay their enemies and triumph with their swords and through their deeds. Here it might also be said: The warrior was not victorious through his sword alone, but by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God,

as David sings, Psalm 44:6: "For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me." Also Psalm 147:10 and Psalm 33:16-17: "He taketh no pleasure in the legs of a man. A mighty man is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a vain thing for safety." Yet he uses man and the horse, the sword and bow: but not because of the strength and power of man and of the horse, but under the veil and covering of man and the horse he fights and does all. This he proves in that he often did and daily does the same without man and the horse, where there is need and he is not tempted.

[16] Thus he does also with the bread; since it is at hand, he nourishes us through it and by means of it, so that we do not see it and we think the bread does it; but where it is not at hand, there he nourishes us without the bread, only through the Word, as he does by means of the bread; so that thus bread is God's helper, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:9: "We are God's fellow workers," that is, through and under our outward ministerial office he gives inwardly his grace, which he also could give and does give indeed without our office; but since the office is at hand, one should not despise it nor tempt God. Thus God sustains us outwardly by bread; but only inwardly he gives that growth and permanency, which the bread cannot give. And the summary is: All creatures are God's larva and mummery, which he permits to work with him and to help to do everything that he can do and does do otherwise without their cooperation, in order that we may cleave alone to his Word. Thus, if bread is at hand, that we do not therefore trust the more; or if there is no bread present, that we do not therefore despair the more; but use it when it is at hand, and do without it, when there is none; being assured that we shall still live and be sustained at both times by God's Word, whether there be bread or no bread. With such faith one overcomes avarice and temporal care for daily bread in the right way.

[17] Christ's second temptation is opposed to the first and is repugnant to common sense. Its substance is that the devil teaches us to tempt God; as he here calls to Christ to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, which was not at all necessary, since there were surely good steps upon which he could descend. And that this temptation was for the purpose of tempting or making trial of God, the answer of Christ also clearly proves, when he says: "Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord thy God." By this he shows that the devil wished to lead him into temptation.

[18] And this very appropriately follows the first temptation. For where the devil feels a heart trusts God in times of want and need, he soon ceases his temptation of bread and avarice and thinks: Wait, wilt thou be very spiritual and believing, I will assist you: He approaches and attacks on the other side, that we might believe where God has not commanded us to believe, nor wills that we should believe. For example, if God gave you bread in your homes, as he does yearly everywhere in the world, and you would not use it, but instead you would cause need and want yourselves, and say: Why, we are to believe God; I will not eat the bread, but will patiently wait until God sends me manna from heaven. See, that would be tempting God; for that is not believing where all is at hand that we need and should have. How can one believe that he will receive what he already has ?

[19] Thus you see here that Satan held before Christ want and need where there was neither want nor need; but where there was already good means by which to descend from the temple without such a newly devised and unnecessary way of descending. For this purpose Satan led Christ to the top of the temple, in the holy city, says the Evangelist, and placed him in a holy place. For he creates such precious thoughts in man that he thinks he is filled with faith and is on the true way of holiness; and yet he does not stand in the temple, but is only on the outside of the temple, that is, he is not in the true holy mind or life of faith; and yet he is in the holy city; that is, such persons are found only in Christendom and among true Christians, who hear a great deal of preaching about faith. To these persons he applies the sayings of Scripture. For such persons learn Scripture also by daily hearing it; but not farther than they can apply it to their erroneous opinions and their false faith. For Satan here quotes from the Psalter, Psalm 91:11-12, that God commanded the angels that they should protect the children of God and carry them on their hands. But Satan like a rogue and cheat fails to quote what follows, namely, that the angels shall protect the children of God in all their ways. For the Psalm reads thus: "For he will give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone;" hence the protection of the angels does not reach farther, according to the command of God, than the ways in which God has commanded us to walk. When we walk in these ways of God, his angels take care of us. But the devil omits to quote "the ways of God" and interprets and applies the protection of the angels to all

things, also to that which God has not commanded; then it fails and we tempt God.

[20] Now, this temptation seldom takes place in outward material things as bread, clothing, house, etc. For we find many foolhardy people, who risk and endanger their body and life, their property and honor, with out any need of doing so; as those do who willfully enter into battle or jump into the water, or gamble for money, or in other ways venture into danger, of whom the wise man says in Sirach 3:27: “Whoever takes pleasure in danger, will thereby be overcome;” for in the degree one struggles to get a thing, will he succeed in obtaining it; and good swimmers are likely to drown and good climbers likely to fall. Yet it is seldom that those of false faith in God abstain from bread, clothing and other necessities of life, when they are at hand. As we read of two hermits, who would not accept bread from the people, but thought God should send it to them directly from heaven; so the consequence was that one died and went to his father, the devil, who taught him such faith and left him fall from the pinnacle.

[21] But in spiritual matters this temptation is powerful when one has to do with the nourishment not of the body but of the soul. Here God has held before us the person and way, by which the soul can be forever nourished in the richest manner possible without any want, namely Christ, our Savior. But this way, this treasure, this provision no one desires. Everybody seeks another way, other provisions to help their souls. The real guilty ones are those who would be saved through their own work; these the devil sets conspicuously on the top of the temple. They follow him and go down where there is no stairway; they believe and trust in their own work where there is no faith nor trust, no way nor bridge, and break their necks. But Satan makes use of and persuades them through the Scriptures to believe that the angels will protect them, and that their way, works and faith are pleasing to God, and who called them through the Scriptures to do good works; but they do not care how falsely they explain the Scriptures.

[22] Who these are, we have identified often enough and very fully, namely, work-righteous persons and unbelieving hypocrites under the name of being Christians and among the congregation of Christian people. For the temptation must take place in the holy city and one temptation is seldom against another. In the first temptation want and hunger are the reasons that we should not believe; and by which we become anxious to have a full

sufficiency, so that there is no chance for us to believe. In the second temptation, however, the abundance and the full sufficiency are the reasons that we do not believe, by which we become tired of the common treasure, and everyone tries to do something through his own powers to provide for his soul. So we do; if we have nothing, then we doubt God and believe not; if we have abundance, then we become tired of it and wish to have something different, and again we fail to believe. There we flee and turn against want and seek abundance: here we seek want and flee from the abundance we have. No, whatever God does for us, is never right. Such is the bottomless wickedness of our unbelief.

[23] Christ's third temptation consists in temporal honor and power; as the words of the devil clearly teach, when Satan shows and offers Christ all the kingdoms of the world if he would worship him. To this class those belong who fall from their faith for the sake of honor and power, that they may enjoy good days, or not believe further than their honor and power extend. Such are also the heretics who start sects and factions in matters of faith among Christians, that they may make a great parade before the world and soar aloft in their own honor. Hence one may place this third temptation on the right, and the first on the left side. The first is the temptation of misfortune, by which man is stirred to anger, impatience and unbelief; the third and last, the temptation of prosperity, by which man is enticed to lust, honor, joy, and whatever is high. The second or middle temptation is spiritual and deals with the blind tricks and errors that mislead reason from faith.

[24] For whom the devil cannot overcome with poverty, want, need and misery, he attacks with riches, favor, honor, pleasure, power and the like, and contends on both sides against us; yea, "he walketh about," says St. Peter in 1 Peter 5:8, so that if he cannot overthrow us either with suffering or love, that is, with the first temptation on the left or the third on the right, he retires to a higher and different method and attacks us with error, blindness and a false understanding of the Scripture. If he wins there, we fare ill on all sides and in all things; and whether one suffers poverty or has abundance, whether he fights or surrenders, all is lost. For when one is in error, neither patience in misfortune nor firmness in prosperity helps him; seeing that in both heretics are often powerful and the devil deliberately acts as if he were overcome in the first and last temptations, although he is

not, if he has only won in the middle or second temptation. For he lets his own children suffer much and be patient, even at times to spurn the world; but never with a true and honest heart.

[25] Now these three temptations taken together are heavy and hard; but the middle one is the greatest; for it attacks the doctrine of faith itself in the soul, and is spiritual and in spiritual matters. The other two attack faith in outward things, in fortune and misfortune, in pleasure and pain etc., although both severely try us. For it is sad that one should lay hold of heaven and ever be in want and eat stones where there is no bread. Again, it is sad to despise favors, honor and possessions, friends and associates, and let go what one already has. But faith, rooted in God's Word, is able to do all things; is faith strong, then it is also easy for the believer to do this.

[26] The order of these temptations, as they met Christ, one cannot absolutely determine; for the Evangelists give them in different order. The temptation Matthew places as the middle one, Luke places last, Luke 4, 4f.; and again, the temptation Luke places in the middle, Matthew places last, as if little depended on the order. But if one wished to preach or speak of them, the order of Luke would be the better. For it is a fine opportunity to repeat and relate that the devil began with want and misfortune; when that did not work, then he began with prosperity and honor; and last, when all fails, that he wantonly and wickedly springs forth and strikes people with terror, lies and other spiritual tricks. And since they have no order in practice and experience, but as it happens that a Christian may be attacked at one time with the last, and another time with the first etc., Matthew gave little attention to the order for a preacher to observe in speaking of this theme. And perhaps it was also the same with Christ through the forty days that the devil held to no order, but today attacked him with this and tomorrow with another temptation, and again in ten days with the first and so on, just as occasion was given.

[27] At last angels approached and served him. This must have taken place in a literal sense, that they appeared in a bodily form and gave him to eat and drink, and just as at a table, they ministered to all his wants. For the service is offered outwardly to his body, just like, no doubt, the devil, his tempter, also appeared in a bodily form, perhaps like an angel. For, seeing that he places him on the pinnacle of the temple and shows him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment, he must have been a higher being than

a man, since he represents himself as a higher being, in that he offers him all the kingdoms of the world and permits himself to be worshiped. But he surely did not bear the form of the devil, for he desires to be beautiful when he lies and deceives, as St. Paul says of him in 2 Corinthians 11:14: “For even Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light.”

[28] This however is written for our comfort, that we may know that many angels minister also to us, where one devil attacks us; if we fight with a knightly spirit and firmly stand, God will not let us suffer want, the angels of heaven would sooner appear and be our bakers, waiters and cooks and minister to all our wants. This is not written for Christ’s sake for he does not need it. Did the angels serve him, then they may also serve us.

Reminiscere. Second Sunday in Lent. The Faith of the Syrophenician Woman. Woman at the Well.

Text: Matthew 15:21-28.

21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. Matthew 15:21-28

[1] This Gospel presents to us a true example of firm and perfect faith. For this woman endures and overcomes in three great and hard battles, and teaches us in a beautiful manner the true way and virtue of faith, namely, that it is a hearty trust in the grace and goodness of God as experienced and revealed through his Word. For St. Mark says, she heard some news about Jesus, Mark 7:25. What kind of news? Without doubt good news, and the good report that Christ was a pious man and cheerfully helped everybody. Such news about God is a true Gospel and a word of grace, out of which sprang the faith of this woman; for had she not believed, she would not have thus run after Christ etc. In like manner we have often heard how St. Paul in Romans 10:17 says that faith cometh by hearing, that the Word must go in advance and be the beginning of our salvation.

[2] But how is it that many more have heard this good news concerning Christ, who have not followed him, and did not esteem it as good news? Answer: The physician is helpful and welcome to the sick; the healthy have no use for him. But this woman felt her need, hence she followed the sweet scent, as is written in the Song of Solomon 1:3. In like manner Moses must precede and teach people to feel their sins in order that grace may be sweet and welcome to them. Therefore all is in vain, however friendly and lovely Christ may be pictured, if man is not first humbled by a knowledge of himself, and he possesses no longing for Christ, as Mary's Song says, "The hungry he hath filled with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away," Luke 1:53. All this is spoken and written for the comfort of the distressed, the poor, the needy, the sinful, the despised, so that they may know in all times of need to whom to flee and where to seek comfort and help.

[3] But see in this example how Christ like a hunter exercises and chases faith in his followers in order that it may become strong and firm. First when the woman follows him upon hearing of his fame and cries with

assured confidence that he would according to his reputation deal mercifully with her, Christ certainly acts differently, as if to let her faith and good confidence be in vain and turn his good reputation into a lie, so that she could have thought: Is this the gracious, friendly man? or: Are these the good words, that I have heard spoken about him, upon which I have depended? It must not be true; he is my enemy and will not receive me; nevertheless he might speak a word and tell me that he will have nothing to do with me. Now he is as silent as a stone. Behold, this is a very hard rebuff, when God appears so earnest and angry and conceals his grace so high and deep; as those know so well, who feel and experience it in their hearts. Therefore she imagines he will not fulfill what he has spoken, and will let his Word be false; as it happened to the children of Israel at the Red Sea and to many other saints.

[4] Now, what does the poor woman do? She turns her eyes from all this unfriendly treatment of Christ; all this does not lead her astray, neither does she take it to heart, but she continues immediately and firmly to cling in her confidence to the good news she had heard and embraced concerning him, and never gives up. We must also do the same and learn firmly to cling to the Word, even though God with all his creatures appears different than his Word teaches. But, oh, how painful it is to nature and reason, that this woman should strip herself of self and forsake all that she experienced, and cling alone to God's bare Word, until she experienced the contrary. May God help us in time of need and of death to possess like courage and faith!

[5] Secondly, since her cry and faith avail nothing, the disciples approach with their faith, and pray for her, and imagine they will surely be heard. But while they thought he should be more tenderhearted, he became only the more indifferent, as we see and think. For now he is silent no more nor leaves them in doubt; he declines their prayer and says: "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This rebuff is still harder since not only our own person is rejected, but the only comfort that remains to us, namely, the comfort and prayers of pious and holy persons, are rejected. For our last resort, when we feel that God is ungracious or we are in need, is that we go to pious, spiritual persons and there seek counsel and help, and they are willing to help as love demands; and yet, that may amount to nothing, even they may not be heard and our condition becomes only worse.

[6] Here one might upbraid Christ with all the words in which he promised to hear his saints, as Matthew 18:19: “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them.” Likewise, Mark 11:24: “All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them;” and many more like passages. What becomes of such promises in this woman’s case? Christ, however, promptly answers and says: Yes, it is true, I hear all prayers, but I gave these promises only to the house of Israel. What do you think? Is not that a thunderbolt that dashes both heart and faith into a thousand pieces, when one feels that God’s Word, upon which one trusts, was not spoken for him, but applies only to others? Here all saints and prayers must be speechless, yea, here the heart must let go of the Word, to which it would gladly hold, if it would consult its own feelings.

[7] But what does the poor woman do? She does not give up, she clings to the Word although it be torn out of her heart by force, is not turned away by this stern answer, still firmly believes his goodness is yet concealed in that answer, and still she will not pass judgment that Christ is or may be ungracious. That is persevering steadfastness.

[8] Thirdly, she follows Christ into the house, as Mark 7:24-25 informs us, perseveres, falls down at his feet, and says: “Lord, help me!” There she received her last mortal blow, in that Christ said in her face, as the words tell, that she was a dog, and not worthy to partake of the children’s bread. What will she say to this! Here he presents her in a bad light, she is a condemned and an outcast person, who is not to be reckoned among God’s chosen ones.

[9] That is an eternally unanswerable reply, to which no one can give a satisfactory answer. Yet she does not despair, but agrees with his judgment and concedes she is a dog, and desires also no more than a dog is entitled to, namely, that she may eat the crumbs that fall from the table of the Lord. Is not that a masterly stroke as a reply? She catches Christ with his own words. He compares her to a dog, she concedes it, and asks nothing more than that he let her be a dog, as he himself judged her to be. Where will Christ now take refuge? He is caught. Truly, people let the dog have the crumbs under the table; it is entitled to that. Therefore Christ now completely opens his heart to her and yields to her will, so that she is now no dog, but even a child of Israel.

[10] All this, however, is written for our comfort and instruction, that we may know how deeply God conceals his grace before our face, and that we may not estimate him according to our feelings and thinking, but strictly according to his Word. For here you see, though Christ appears to be even hardhearted, yet he gives no final decision by saying “No.” All his answers indeed sound like no, but they are not no, they remain undecided and pending. For he does not say: I will not hear thee; but is silent and passive, and says neither yes nor no. In like manner he does not say she is not of the house of Israel; but he is sent only to the house of Israel; he leaves it undecided and pending between yes and no. So he does not say, Thou art a dog, one should not give thee of the children’s bread; but it is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it to the dogs; leaving it undecided whether she is a dog or not. Yet all those trials of her faith sounded more like no than yes; but there was more yea in them than nay; ay, there is only yes in them, but it is very deep and very concealed, while there appears to be nothing but no.

[11] By this is set forth the condition of our heart in times of temptation; Christ here represents how it feels. It thinks there is nothing but no and yet that is not true. Therefore it must turn from this feeling and lay hold of and retain the deep spiritual yes under and above the no with a firm faith in God’s Word, as this poor woman does, and say God is right in his judgment which he visits upon us; then we have triumphed and caught Christ in his own words. As for example when we feel in our conscience that God rebukes us as sinners and judges us unworthy of the kingdom of heaven, then we experience hell, and we think we are lost forever. Now whoever understands here the actions of this poor woman and catches God in his own judgment, and says: Lord, it is true, I am a sinner and not worthy of thy grace; but still thou hast promised sinners forgiveness, and thou art come not to call the righteous, but, as St. Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:15, “to save sinners.” Behold, then must God according to his own judgment have mercy upon us.

[12] King Manasseh did likewise in his penitence as his prayer proves; he conceded that God was right in his judgment and accused himself as a great sinner and yet he laid hold of the promised forgiveness of sins. David also does likewise in Psalm 51:4 and says: “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight; that thou mayest be justified

when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.” For God’s disfavor in every way visits us when we cannot agree with his judgment nor say yea and amen, when he considers and judges us to be sinners. If the condemned could do this, they would that very moment be saved. We say indeed with our mouth that we are sinners; but when God himself says it in our hearts, then we are not sinners, and eagerly wish to be considered pious and free from that judgment. But it must be so; if God is to be righteous in his words that teach you are a sinner, then you may claim the rights of all sinners that God has given them, namely, the forgiveness of sins. Then you eat not only the crumbs under the table as the little dogs do; but you are also a child and have God as your portion according to the pleasure of your will.

[13] This is the spiritual meaning of our Gospel and the scriptural explanation of it. For what this poor woman experienced in the bodily affliction of her daughter, whom she miraculously caused to be restored to health again by her faith, that we also experience when we wish to be healed of our sins and of our spiritual diseases, which is truly a wicked devil possessing us; here she must become a dog and we become sinners and brands of hell, and then we have already recovered from our sickness and are saved.

[14] Whatever more there is in this Gospel worthy of notice, as that one can obtain grace and help through the faith of another without his own personal faith, as took place here in the daughter of this poor woman, has been sufficiently treated elsewhere. Furthermore, that Christ and his disciples along with the woman in this Gospel exhibit to us an example of love, in that no one acts, prays and cares for himself but each for others, is also clear enough and worthy of consideration.

Oculi. Third Sunday in Lent. Jesus Casts out a Demon, or Christ's Defense against his Blasphemers. The Gospel.

Text: Luke 11:14-23.

14 And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered.

15 But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils.

16 And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven.

17 But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth.

18 If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub.

19 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges.

20 But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.

21 When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace:

22 But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.

23 He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. Luke 11:14-23

[1] This is a beautiful Gospel from which we learn many different things, and in which nearly everything is set forth as to what Christ, his kingdom and his Gospel are: what they accomplish and how they fare in the world. In

the first place, like all the Gospels this one teaches us faith and love; for it presents Christ to us as a most loving Savior and Helper in every need and tells us that he who believes this is saved. For we see here that Christ had nothing to do with people who were healthy, but with a poor man who was greatly afflicted with many ills. He was blind, as Matthew says; also dumb and possessed with a demon, as Luke tells us here. Now all mutes are also deaf, so that in the Greek language deaf and dumb are one word. By this act Christ draws us to himself, leads us to look to him for every blessing, and to go to him in every time of need. He does this that we also, according to the nature of love, should do unto others as he does unto us. This is the universal and the most precious doctrine of this Gospel and of all the Gospels throughout the church year. This poor man, however, did not come to Christ without the Word; for those who brought him to Christ must have heard his love preached and were moved thereby to trust in him. We learn therefore that faith comes through the Word; but more of this elsewhere.

[2] Secondly, it is here demonstrated how Christ and his Gospel fare in the world, namely, that there are three kinds of hearers. Some marvel at him; these are pious and true Christians, who consider this deed so great that they are amazed at it. Some blaspheme the Gospel; these are the Pharisees and scribes, who were vexed because they could not do the like, and were worried lest the people should hold Christ in higher esteem than themselves. Some tempt him, like Herod desired a sign after his own heart, that they may make sport of it. But he answers both parties; at first, the blasphemers in this Gospel, and later on the tempters, saying that no sign shall be given this wicked generation except the sign of the prophet Jonah, of which we read in the verses following. He answers the blasphemers in a friendly way and argues five points with them.

[3] In the first place, with honest and reasonable arguments he concludes from two comparisons that one devil cannot cast out another; for if that were so, the devils would be divided among themselves and Satan's kingdom would indeed not stand. For nature teaches that if a kingdom is divided against itself and its citizens drive out each other, it is not necessary to go to war against it, for it will come to ruin soon enough of itself. Likewise, a house divided against itself needs no other destruction. Even the heathen author Sallust, teaching only from the light of nature and experience, says: "Great wealth passes away through discord, but through

concord small means become large.” If now the devils were divided among themselves to such a degree that one should drive out the other, Satan’s dominion would be at an end, and we would have rest from his attacks.

[4] What then were these blasphemers able to say to such clear arguments? They were put to silence, but their hearts were hardened, so that they did not heed his words. A hardened heart will not be instructed, no matter how plainly and clearly the truth is presented; but the faith of the righteous is strengthened when they see that the ground of their faith is right and good. And for the sake of such we must answer those whose hearts are hardened, and put them to silence. Even though they will not be converted nor keep silence, still it serves to reveal their hardened hearts, for the longer they talk, the more foolish they become, and they are caught in their folly, and their cause is robbed of the appearance of being right and good, as Solomon also says in Proverbs 26:5: “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.” That is, answer him according to his folly that his folly may be put to shame for the sake of others, that they may not follow him and be deceived, thinking that he is right. Otherwise, where no such condition exists, it is better to keep silent, as Solomon also says in the same chapter, verse 4 “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.”

[5] Nor could they say here that the devils only pretended to be divided among themselves and to yield to one another, in order to deceive the people, for it is publicly seen how they resist and contend, cry and rave, tear and rage, when they see that Christ means to expel them. It is then clearly seen that they are opposed to Christ and his Spirit, and they are not united with him, to whom they must yield so unwillingly. Therefore it is only a flagrant blasphemous lie, in which they are caught and put to shame, by which they try in venomous hate to give the devil credit for a work of God. From this we learn not to be surprised when our doctrine and life are blasphemed and stubborn hearts will not be convinced nor converted, although they are overwhelmed, as it were, with tangible truth and completely put to silence. It is enough that through our arguments their obstinate folly is revealed, acknowledged and made harmless to pious people, so that the latter may not be misled by its fine pretension. They may then go whither they will, they have condemned themselves as St. Paul says, Titus 3:11.

[6] In the second place, he replies with a public example and a similar work, when he says: “By whom do your sons cast them out?” As if he would say: “Is this not simple idiocy? Just what you praise in your sons, you condemn in me. Because your sons do it, it is of God; but because I do it, it must be of the devil.” So it is in this world. What Christ does, is of the devil; if someone else did it, it would be all right. Thus the tyrants and enemies of the Gospel do now, when they condemn in us what they themselves do, confess and teach; but they must proceed thus in order that their judgment may be publicly approved, when they are condemned by all justice. The sons, of whom Christ here says that they drive out devils, were, I think, certain exorcists among the people, for God, from the beginning, had given this people manifold spiritual gifts and he calls them their “sons,” as though to say: I am the Son of God and must be called a child of the devil, while those who are your sons, begotten by you, do the same things and are not to be considered children of the devil.

[7] “Therefore shall they be your judges,” that is, I appeal to them. They will be forced to decide that you wrongfully blaspheme me, and thus condemn yourselves. For if one devil does not drive out another then some other power must do it that is neither satanic nor human, but divine. Hence the words: “But if I by the finger of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you.” This finger of God is called in Matthew 12:28 the Holy Ghost, for the words read thus: “But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons,” etc. In short, Christ means to say: If the kingdom of God is to come unto you, the devil must be driven out, for his kingdom is against God’s kingdom, as you yourselves must confess. But demon is not driven out by demon, much less by men or the power of men, but alone by the Spirit and power of God.

[8] From this follows that where the finger of God does not cast out the devil, there the devil’s kingdom still exists; where Satan’s kingdom still exists, there the kingdom of God cannot be. The unavoidable conclusion then is that, as long as the Holy Spirit does not enter our hearts, we are not only incapable of any good, but are of necessity in the kingdom of Satan. And if we are in his kingdom, then we can do nothing but that which pleases him, else it could not be called his kingdom. As St. Paul says to Timothy: “The people are taken captive in the snares of the devil unto his will” 2 Timothy 2:26. How could Satan suffer one of his people to take a

notion to do something against, and not for, his kingdom? Oh, it is a striking, terrible and powerful statement that Christ here admits such a dominion, which we cannot escape except by the power of God; and that the kingdom of God cannot come to us until that kingdom is driven out by divine, heavenly power.

[9] This truth is proved in the case of this poor man, who was bodily possessed of the devil. Tell me, what could he and all mankind do to free him from the devil? Without a doubt, nothing. He had to do and suffer just as his master the devil willed, until Christ came, with the power of God. Now then, if he could not free himself from the devil as to his body, how could he, by his own power, deliver his soul from Satan's spiritual dominion? Especially is this the case since the soul, because possessed of sin, is the cause of all bodily possession as a punishment, and sins are more difficult to remove than the punishment of them, and the soul is always more firmly possessed than the body. This is proved by the fact that the devil permits the body to have its natural powers and functions; but he robs the soul of reason, judgment, sense, understanding, and all its powers, as you readily see in the case of this possessed man.

[10] He answers them in the third place, by a comparison taken from life, namely that of a strong man overcome by one stronger, and robbed of all his armor and goods etc. By this he testifies also that no one but God can overcome the devil, so that again no man can boast of being able of himself to drive out either sin or the devil. Notice how he pictures the devil! He calls him a mighty giant who guards his court and home, that is, the devil not only possesses the world as his own domain, but he has garrisoned and fortified it, so that no one can take it from him. He rules it also with undisputed sway, so that it does whatever he commands. Just as little as a house or court may withstand or contend against the tyrant who is its master, can man's free will and natural powers oppose sin and Satan, that is, not at all; but they are subject to them. And as that house must be conquered by a stronger man and thus wrested from the tyrant, so must man also be ransomed through Christ and wrested from Satan. We see again, therefore, that our works and righteousness contribute absolutely nothing toward our salvation; it is effected alone by the grace of God.

[11] He answers them fourthly, with pointed proverbs and teachings, as: "He that is not with me is against me," and, "He that gathereth not with me,

scattereth.” “The devil is not with me for I drive him out, hence he must of necessity be against me.” But this saying does not apply to the devil alone, but also to the blasphemers whom he here convicts and condemns, as being against him since they are not for him. “To be with Christ” is to have the same mind and purpose as Christ, that is, to believe in Christ that his works save us and not our own, for this is what Christ holds and teaches. But “to gather with Christ” is to do good out of love to him, and to become rich in good works. He that does not believe is, by his own free will, not with Christ but against him, because he depends upon his own works. Therefore, he that does not love, does not gather with Christ, but by fruitless works becomes only more sinful and drifts farther and farther from the faith.

[12] In the fifth place, he answers with a threat, namely, that the last state always is worse than the first. Therefore we should take heed that we not only refrain from blaspheming the Gospel and Christ, who does such great things for us and drives the devil out of us; but with zeal and fear hold fast to them, in order that we may not become possessed of seven worse devils whereas one possessed us before. For thus it was with the Jews, who had never been so wicked as while the Gospel was being preached to them. So also under the papacy, we have become seven times, (that is, many times) worse heathen under the name of Christ than we ever had been before as St. Peter says: “The last state is become worse with them than the first.” 2 Peter 2:20. And if we neglect the great light which we now have, it will come to pass in our case also, that we shall become worse than we were before, for the devil does not slumber. This should be sufficient warning.

[13] Finally, when the woman cries out to Christ and praises him, saying, “Blessed is the mother that bore such a son,” etc., he opposes her carnal worship and takes occasion to teach all of us the substance of this Gospel, namely, that we should not go gaping after the works or merits of the saints but rather see to it that we hear and keep the Word of God. For it does not concern or profit us in the least to know how holy and honorable the mother of this child might be, nor how noble this Son of hers may be; but rather what this Son has done for us, namely that, by grace, without any merit or worthiness on our part, he has redeemed us from the devil. This fact is proclaimed to us through the Word of God, and this we are to hear and hold in firm faith; then shall we too be blessed like this mother and her child. Although such a Word and work will be blasphemed, we should

suffer it and give an answer with meekness, as St. Peter teaches, for the improvement of others. II. The Allegorical or Spiritual Meaning of the Gospel

[14] This dumb, deaf, blind, and demon-possessed man represents all the children of Adam, who through the flesh are possessed of Satan in original sin, so that they must be his slaves and do according to his will. Hence they are also blind, that is, they do not see God. They are deaf, for they do not hear God's Word, and are not obedient or submissive to it. They are also dumb, for they do not give him one word of thanks or praise, nor do they preach and proclaim Christ and the grace of God. But they are all too talkative about the teachings of the devil and the opinions of men. In these things they see only too well and are wiser than the children of light in their undertakings, opinions, and desires. In these things they hear with both ears and readily adopt the suggestions of flesh and blood. So then, whatever we do, in word and deed, as to both body and soul, is of the devil, whether it be externally good or bad, and must be redeemed through the work of God. We are in his kingdom and therefore we acknowledge him, see, hear, and follow him and praise and proclaim his name. All this takes place through the Spirit of God in his Word, which casts out the devil and his kingdom.

[15] The Jews called the chief of the devils Beelzebub. The Hebrew word "sebug" means a fly; "baal" or "beel," a man or ruler, as a householder. When the two words form a combination, they mean an arch-fly or chief-fly, or, in plain German "Fliegenkoenig oder grosse Hummel," that is, king-fly or the great drone. They gave Satan this contemptuous epithet as though they were entirely free from him, secure against him, and lords over him. That is the way all conceited, corrupt hypocrites do; they imagine they are so pure and holy, that the devil is a helpless, feeble fly compared with them, and that they do not need the grace of Christ nor the Word of God. Still they think he is strong enough for others, yet, that whatever god-fearing people teach and do must be the devil's own work, and they consider it such a trifling thing as though it were a dead fly. The devil can well endure such contempt, for by it he is placed above the true God in their hearts.

[16] The tyrant in the court or palace is the devil, as I said before. He is in peace, however, as long as God's Word and finger do not oppose him, and just like this deaf-mute, his people do whatever he wishes, for they

know no better. His weapons and armor are the carnal conceit, doctrines and traditions of men, by which he terrifies the conscience and protects himself.

[17] But when the stronger man, the Gospel, comes, peace flees, and he rages like a madman, for he resents being condemned, unmasked, punished, and publicly branded. Then he gathers up his armor, the powerful, wise, rich and holy people, and sets them all to attacking God's Word, as we see in the persecution of the teachers of the Gospel. Such rage and persecution signify that the devil retires very unwillingly and raves in his whole body; for as he acts in the body and its members when he must depart, so he also behaves in the whole world, resisting with all his power when he is to give place to the Gospel; but it is all in vain, he must be expelled.

[18] For a Stronger One, that is, Christ, comes and overpowers him and takes away his whole armor, that is, he converts some of those same persecutors, and to that extent makes him weaker, and his own kingdom stronger. He divides the spoils too, that is, those he converts he uses for various offices, graces, and works in Christendom, of which Paul writes in Romans 12:6. He is also in the court yard or ante-room of the palace, for the devil's kingdom consists in outward appearances and pretenses of wisdom, holiness, and strength; but when it is captured by the Gospel it is found to consist of pure folly, sin and weakness.

[19] The text continues, "When the unclean spirit has gone out, he wanders through dry places, seeking rest," etc. This means as much as the saying, "The devil never takes a vacation" and "The devil never sleeps," for he is seeking how he may devour man. "Dry places" are not the hearts of the ungodly, for in such he rests and dwells like a mighty tyrant, as the Gospel here says; but there are dry and waste places here and there in the country where no people live, as forests and wildernesses. To these he flees in wicked rage because he is driven out. You will remember that the devil found Christ in the wilderness. Now, in Judea, there is not much water, hence we read that it contains many arid wastes. In other countries, however, as in our own, which are well watered, the devils stay in rivers and lakes, and there they sometimes drown those who bathe or sail upon them. Furthermore, at some places there are water spirits, who entice the children from the shores into the water and drown them. These are all devils.

[20] That he comes again and finds the house swept and garnished (Matthew adds “empty”) signifies that the man is sanctified and adorned with beautiful spiritual gifts, and that the evil spirit clearly sees that he can do nothing there with his familiar tricks, for he is too well known. Thus when the worship of idols was driven from the heathen, he never attacked the world with that device again. But what did he do then? He tried something else, went out, took with him seven spirits, more evil than himself, and entered in with them and dwelt there, and the last state of that man was worse than the first. So he has dealt with us. When Christ had become known in the world and the devil’s former kingdom with its idol worship had been destroyed, he adopted another plan and attacked us with heresy and introduced and established the papacy, in which Christ was entirely forgotten, and men became worse heathen under the name of Christ than before he was preached, as we can see now with our own eyes. Such also was the lot of the Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the Greeks under the Turks. And so all will fare, who at first hear the Word of God and afterwards become secure and weary of it. St. Matthew says, in Matthew 12:14, that Satan finds the house empty. And in Matthew 13:25, he sowed tares among the wheat, by night, while men slept. Therefore it is necessary for us to watch as the apostles always admonish us, especially St. Peter in 1 Peter 5:3: “Brethren, be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”; for wherever he overthrows faith, he easily restores again all former vices.

Laetare. Fourth Sunday in Lent. Jesus Feeds 5000 People Feeding the Five Thousand.

Text: John 6:1-5.

1 After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias.

2 And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.

3 And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples.

4 And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.

5 When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?
John 6:1-5

[1] In today's Gospel Christ gives us another lesson in faith, that we should not be overanxious about our daily bread and our temporal existence, and stirs us up by means of a miracle; as though to say by his act what he says by his words in Matthew 6:33: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." For here we see, since the people followed Christ for the sake of God's Word and the signs, and thus sought the Kingdom of God, he did not forsake them but richly fed them. He hereby also shows that, rather than those who seek the Kingdom of God should suffer need, the grass in the desert would become wheat, or a crumb of bread would be turned into a thousand loaves; or a morsel of bread would feed as many people and just as satisfactorily as a thousand loaves; in order that the words in Matthew 4:4 might stand firm, that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth

out of the mouth of God.” And to confirm these words Christ is the first to be concerned about the people, as to what they should eat, and asks Philip, before they complain or ask him; so that we may indeed let him care for us, remembering that he cares more and sooner for us than we do for ourselves.

[2] Secondly, he gives an example of great love, and he does this in many ways. First, in that he lets not only the pious, who followed him because of the signs and the Word, enjoy the food; but also the slaves of appetite, who only eat and drink, and seek in him temporal honor; as follows later when they disputed with him at Capernaum about the food, and he said to them in John 6:26: “Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves,” etc., also because they desired to make him king; thus here also he lets his sun shine on the evil and the good, Matthew 5:45. Secondly, in that he bears with the rudeness and weak faith of his disciples in such a friendly manner. For that he tests Philip, who thus comes with his reason, and Andrew speaks so childishly on the subject, all is done to bring to light the imperfections of the disciples, and on the contrary to set forth his love and dealings with them in a more beautiful and loving light, to encourage us to believe in him, and to give us an example to do likewise; as the members of our body and all God’s creatures in their relation to one another teach us. For these are full of love, so that one bears with the other, helps and preserves what God has created.

[3] That he now takes the five loaves and gives thanks etc., teaches that nothing is too small and insignificant for him to do for his followers, and he can indeed so bless their pittance that they have an abundance, whereas even the rich have not enough with all their riches; as Psalm 34:11 says: “They that seek Jehovah shall not want any good thing; but the rich must suffer hunger.” And Mary in her song of praise says: “The hungry he hath filled with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.” Luke 1:53.

[4] Again, that he tells them so faithfully to gather up the fragments, teaches us to be frugal and to preserve and use his gifts, in order that we may not tempt God. For just as it is God’s will that we should believe when we have nothing and be assured that he will provide; so he does not desire to be tempted, nor to allow the blessings he has bestowed to be despised, or lie unused and spoil, while we expect other blessings from heaven by means of miracles. Whatever he gives, we should receive and use, and what he

does not give, we should believe and expect he will bestow. II. The Allegorical Interpretation

[5] That Christ by the miraculous feeding of the five thousand has encouraged us to partake of a spiritual food, and taught that we should seek and expect from him nourishment for the soul, is clearly proved by the whole sixth chapter of John, in which he calls himself the bread from heaven and the true food, and says: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled. Work not for the food which perisheth, but for the food which abideth unto eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you.” John 6:26-27. In harmony with these words we will, explain also this evangelical history in its spiritual meaning and significance.

[6] First, there was much hay or grass in the place. The Evangelist could not fail to mention that, although it appears to be unnecessary; however it signifies the Jewish people, who flourished and blossomed like the grass through their outward holiness, wisdom, honor, riches etc., as Isaiah 40:6-7, says: “All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the breath of Jehovah bloweth upon it; surely the people is grass.” From the Jewish people the Word of God went forth and the true food was given to us; for salvation is of the Jews, John 4:22. Now, as grass is not food for man, but for cattle; so is all the holiness of the outward Jewish righteousness nothing but food for animals, for fleshly hearts, who know and possess nothing of the Spirit.

[7] The very same is taught by the people sitting on the grass; for the true saints despise outward holiness, as Paul does in Philippians 3:8, in that he counted his former righteousness to be filth and even a hindrance. Only common and hungry people receive the Word of God and are nourished by it. For here you see that neither Caiaphas nor Anna, neither the Pharisees nor the Scribes follow Christ and see Christ’s Signs; but they disregard them, they are grass and feed on grass. This miracle was also performed near the festive time of the Jewish passover; for the true Easter festival, when Christ should be offered as a sacrifice, was near, when he began to feed them with the Word of God.

[8] The five loaves signify the outward, natural word formed by the voice and understood by man's senses; for the number five signifies outward things pertaining to the five senses of man by which he lives; as also the five and five virgins illustrate in Matthew 25:1. These loaves are in the basket, that is, locked up in the Scriptures. And a lad carries them, that means the servant class and the priesthood among the Jews, who possessed the sayings of God, which were placed in their charge and entrusted to them, Romans 3:2, although they did not enjoy them. But that Christ took these into his own hands, and they were thereby blessed and increased, signifies that by Christ's works and deeds, and not by our deeds or reason, are the Scriptures explained, rightly understood and preached. This he gives to his disciples, and the disciples to the people. For Christ takes the Word out of the Scriptures; so all teachers receive it from Christ and give it to the people, by which is confirmed what Matthew 23:10 says: "For one is your master, even the Christ," who sits in heaven, and he teaches all only through the mouth and the word of preachers by his Spirit, that is, against false teachers, who teach their own wisdom.

[9] The two fishes are the example and witness of the patriarchs and prophets, who are also in the basket; for by them the Apostles confirm and strengthen their doctrine and the believers like St. Paul does in Romans 4:2-6, where he cites Abraham and David etc. But there are two, because the examples of the saints are full of love, which cannot be alone, as faith can, but must go out in exercise to its neighbor. Furthermore the fishes were prepared and cooked; for such examples are indeed put to death by many sufferings and martyrdoms, so that we find nothing carnal in them, and they comfort none by a false faith in his own works, but always point to faith and put to death works and their assurance.

[10] The twelve baskets of fragments are all the writings and books the Apostles and Evangelists bequeathed to us; therefore they are twelve, like the Apostles, and these books are nothing but that which remains from and has been developed out of the Old Testament. The fishes are also signified by the number five (Moses' books); as John 21:25 says: "Even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written" concerning Christ, all which nevertheless was written and proclaimed before in the Old Testament concerning Christ.

[11] That Philip gives counsel as how to feed the people with his few shillings, and yet doubts, signifies human teachers, who would gladly aid the soul with their teachings; but their conscience feels it helps nothing. For the discussion Christ here holds with his disciples takes place in order that we may see and understand that it is naturally impossible to feed so many people through our own counsel, and that this sign might be the more public. Thus he lets us also disgrace ourselves and labor with human doctrines, that we may see and understand how necessary and precious God's Word is and how doctrines do not help the least without God's Word.

[12] That Andrew pointed out the lad and the loaves, and yet doubted still more than Philip, signifies the teachers who wish to make the people pious and to quiet them with God's laws; but their conscience has no satisfaction or peace in them; but only becomes continually worse, until Christ comes with his Word of grace. He is the one, and he alone, who makes satisfaction, delivers from sin and death, gives peace and fullness of joy, and does it all of his own free will, gratuitously, against and above all hope and presumption, that we may know that the Gospel is devised and bestowed, not through our own merit, but out of pure grace.

[13] Finally, you see in this Gospel that Christ, though he held Gospel poverty in the highest esteem and was not anxious about the morrow, as he teaches in Matthew 6:34, had still some provisions, as the two hundred shillings, the five loaves and the two fishes; in order that we may learn how such poverty and freedom from care consist not in having nothing at all, as the barefooted fanatics and monks profess, and yet they themselves do not hold to it; but it consists in a free heart and a poor spirit. For even Abraham and Isaac had great possessions, and yet they lived without worry and in poverty, like the best Christians do.

Judica. Fifth Sunday in Lent. The Jews Try to Stone Jesus, or Christ Defends Himself Against His Enemies.

Text: John 8:46-59.

46 Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?

47 He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.

48 Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?

49 Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me.

50 And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth.

51 Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.

52 Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death.

53 Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself?

54 Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God:

55 Yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying.

56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

57 Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?

58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham

was, I am.

59 Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. John 8:46-59

[1] This Gospel teaches how hardened persons become the more furious, the more one teaches them and lovingly stirs them to do their duty. For Christ asks them here in a very loving way for a reason why they still disbelieve, since they can find fault neither with his life nor with his teaching. His life is blameless; for he defies them and says: “Which of you convicteth me of sin?” His teaching also is blameless; for he adds: “If I say truth, why do ye not believe me?” Thus Christ lives, as he teaches.

[2] And every preacher should prove that he possesses both: first a blameless life, by which he can defy his enemies, and no one may have occasion to slander his teachings; secondly, that he possesses the pure doctrine, so that he may not mislead those who follow him. And thus he will be right and firm on both sides: with his good life against his enemies, who look much more at life than at his doctrine, and despise the doctrine for the sake of the life; with his doctrine then for the kind of life he leads and will bear with his life for the sake of his teaching.

[3] For it is indeed true that no one lives so perfect a life as to be without sin before God. Therefore it is sufficient that he be blameless in the eyes of the people. But his doctrine must be so good and pure as to stand not only before man but also before God. Therefore every pious pastor may well ask: Who among you can find fault with my life? Among you, I say who are man; but before God I am a sinner. This Moses also boast in Numbers 16:15 that he took nothing from the people and he did them no injustice. Samuel did likewise in 1 Samuel 12:3 also Jeremiah and Hezekiah, who rightly boasted of their blameless life before the people, in order to stop the mouths of blasphemers. But Christ does not speak thus of his doctrine, he says not: “Who among you can find fault with my doctrine”; but “If I tell you the truth.” For one must be assured that his doctrine is right before God and that it is the truth, and accordingly care not how it is judged by the people.

[4] Hence the Jews have no ground for their unbelief than that they are not the children of God; therefore he passes judgment upon them and says: “He that is of God heareth the words of God; for this cause ye hear them not, because ye are not of God,” that cannot mean anything else than that you are of the devil.

[5] The Jews could not stand this, for they wished to be God’s children and people; therefore they are now raging and slander both Christ’s life and his doctrine; his doctrine, in that they say: “Thou hast a devil,” that is, thou speakest moved by the devil and thy doctrine is his lie; and they slander his life, in that they say, “Thou art a Samaritan,” which sounds among the Jews worse than any other crime. In this way Christ teaches us here the fate that awaits us Christians and his Word; both our life and our doctrine must be condemned and reviled, and that by the foremost, wisest and greatest of earth. Thus one knows the corrupt tree by its fruits, as they, under the pretense of being good, are so bitter, angry, impatient, cruel and mad as to condemn and pass sentence, when one touches them at their tender spot and rejects their ideas and ways.

[6] What does Christ do here? His life he abandons to shame and dishonor, is silent and suffers them to call him a Samaritan; while he takes pains to defend his doctrine. For the doctrine is not ours, but God’s, and God dare not suffer in the least, here patience is at an end; but I should stake all that I have and suffer, all that they do, in order that the honor of God and of his Word may not be injured. For if I perish, no great harm is done; but if I let God’s Word perish, and I remain silent, then I do harm to God and to the whole world. Although I cannot now close their mouth nor prevent their wickedness, I shall nevertheless not keep silent, nor act as if they are right, as I do about my good life, so that they retain their right. Although they do me injustice at the time, yet it remains right before God. Further, Christ excuses himself, and says: “I have not a demon,” that is, my doctrine is not of the devil’s lies; “but I honor my father,” that is, I preach in my doctrine the grace of God, through which he is to be praised, loved and honored by believers. For the evangelical office of the ministry is nothing but glorifying God, Psalm 19:2: “The heavens declare the glory of God” etc. “But you dishonor me,” that is, you call me the devil’s liar, who reviles and dishonors God.

[7] Why does he not say: I honor my father, and ye dishonor him; but says: “Ye dishonor me?” Impliedly he proves by this, that the father’s and his honor are alike and the same, as he and the Father are one God; yet along with this he also wishes to teach that if the office of the ministry, which God honors, is to be duly praised, then it must suffer disgrace. In like manner we will also do to our princes and priests; when they attack our manner of life, we should suffer it and show love for hatred, good for evil; but when they attack our doctrine, God’s honor is attacked, then love and patience should cease and we should not keep silent, but also say: I honor my Father, and you dishonor me; yet I do not inquire whether you dishonor me, for I do not seek my own honor. But nevertheless be on your guard, there is one who seeks it and judges, that is, the Father will require it of you, and judge you and never let you go unpunished. He seeks not only his honor, but also mine, because I seek his honor, as he says in 1 Samuel 2:30: “Them that honor me I will honor.” And it is our consolation that we are happy; although the whole world reviles and dishonors us, we are assured that God will advance our honor, and therefore will punish, judge and revenge. If one could only believe it and persevere, he will surely come. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my word, he shall never see death.”

[8] By these words he spoils it entirely, in that he does not only defend his doctrine as right and good, which they attribute to the devil; but also ascribes such virtue to his teaching that it becomes a powerful emperor over Satan, death and sin, to give and sustain eternal life. Behold here, how divine wisdom and human reason conflict with one another. How can a human being grasp the thought, that a corporeal, an oral word should redeem forever from death? But let blindness run its course; we shall consider this beautiful saying. Christ is speaking here not of the word of the law, but of the Gospel, which is a discourse about Christ, who died for our sins etc. For God did not wish to impart Christ to the world in any other way; he had to embody him in the Word and thus distribute him, and present him to everybody; otherwise Christ would have existed for himself alone and remained unknown to us; he would have thus died for himself. But since the Word places before us Christ, it thus places us before him who has triumphed over death, sin and Satan. Therefore he who grasps and retains Christ, has thus also eternal deliverance from death. Consequently, it

is a Word of life, and it is true, that whoever keeps the Word shall never see death.

[9] And from this we may well understand what Christ meant by the word “keep;” it does not refer to such keeping as one keeps the law by good works; for this word of Christ must be kept in the heart by faith and not with the fist or by good works, as the Jews in this case understand it; they fearfully rage against Christ, that Abraham and the prophets are dead; they know nothing of what it is “to keep,” “to die” or “to live.” And it is not called “to keep” in vain; for there is a conflict and battle when sin bites, death presses and hell faces us; then we are to be in earnest in holding firmly to the Word and let nothing separate us from it. Thus see now how Christ answers the Jews and praises his own teachings. You say, my Word is of the devil and wish to sink it to the bottom of perdition; on the contrary I say to you that it has divine power in it, and I exalt it higher than the heaven of heavens, and above all creatures.

[10] How does it then come to pass that man does not see nor taste death, and yet Abraham and all the prophets are dead, who notwithstanding had the Word of God as the Jews say? Here we must give attention to the words of Christ, who makes the distinction that death is a different thing than to see or taste death. We all must face death and die; but a Christian neither tastes nor sees it, that is, he does not feel it, he is not terrified before it, and he enters death calmly and quietly, as though falling asleep, and yet he does not die. But a godless person feels and experiences death, and is terrified before it forever. Thus to taste death may well be called the power and reign or the bitterness of death, yea, it is the eternal death and hell. The Word of God makes this difference. A Christian has that Word and clings firmly to it in death; therefore he does not see death, but his eyes are filled with the life and the Christ in that Word; therefore he never feels death. But the godless possess not that Word, therefore they see no life, but only death; and they must also feel death; that is then the bitter and eternal death.

[11] Now Christ means here that whoever clings to his Word will in the midst of death neither feel nor see death, as he also says in John 11:25: “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me though he die, yet shall he live,” that is, he will not experience real death. Here we see now what a glorious estate it is to be a Christian, who is already released from death forever and can never die. For his death or dying seems outwardly

indeed like the dying of the godless, but inwardly there is a difference as great as between heaven and earth. For the Christian sleeps in death and in that way enters into life, but the godless departs from life and experiences death forever; thus we may see how some tremble, doubt and despair, and become senseless and raging in the midst of the perils of death. Hence death is also called in the Scriptures a sleep. For just as he who falls asleep does not know how it happens, and he greets the morning when he awakes; so shall we suddenly arise on the last day, and never know how we entered and passed through death.

[12] Let us take another example. When Israel marched out of Egypt and came to the Red Sea, they were free and experienced no death, but only life. However when King Pharaoh arrived behind them with all his forces, then they stood in the midst of death, then no life was in sight. For before them was the sea, through which they could not pass, behind them King Pharaoh, and on both sides of them high mountains; on all sides they were seized and enclosed by death, so that they said to Moses: "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness?" Exodus 14:11, so completely and wholly did they despair of life. Just then Moses came and brought them God's Word that comforted them in the midst of death and preserved them alive, when he said in verse 13: "Fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah, which he will work for you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever." They clung to this Word and held out until victory came; through it life appeared in the presence of death, because they believed the Word, that it would come to pass, and relying upon it they marched into the midst of the Red Sea, which stood on both sides of them like two walls. Then it came to pass that nothing but life and safety were in the sea, where before there were only death and danger. For they would have never become so bold as to go into the sea, had it divided a hundred times, if God's Word had not been present, which comforted them and promised life. Thus man triumphs over death through the Word of Life, if he cleaves to it and believes, and marches into death with it.

[13] Likewise Christ also says here in replying to the Jews, that Abraham and the prophets still live and they never died, but have life in the midst of death; they however only lie and sleep in death. For "Abraham," he says, "rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad." Thus, the

prophets also saw it. Where and when did Abraham see it? Not with his bodily eyes, as the Jews interpret it, but with the sight of faith in the heart; that is, he recognized Christ when he was told in Genesis 22:18: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Then he saw and understood that Christ, born of his seed through a pure virgin, so as not to be cursed with Adam's children but to remain blessed, should suffer for the whole world, cause this to be preached, and thus overwhelm the whole world with blessing etc. This is the day of Christ, the dispensation of the Gospel, that is the light of this day, which radiates from Christ as from the sun of righteousness, and shines and enlightens the whole world. This is a spiritual day, yet it arose at the time Christ was on the earth in the flesh, a day like Abraham saw. But the Jews understood nothing about such a day because of their carnal minds, and hence they reviled Christ as a liar.

[14] Therefore Christ proceeds farther and gives the ground and reason why it is just his Word and not the word of anyone else, that giveth life, and says it is because he was before Abraham, or in other words, because he was the one true God. For if the person who offered himself as a sacrifice for us were not God, it would not help or avail anything, even if he were born of the Virgin Mary and suffered a thousand deaths. But the fact that the Seed of Abraham, who gave himself for us, is also true God, secures blessing and victory for all sinners. Therefore Christ speaks, not of his human nature that they saw and experienced; for they could easily see he was not yet fifty years of age, and did not live before Abraham. But with that nature by which he existed long before the time of Abraham, by which he existed also before all creatures and before the whole world. Just as he was man according to his spiritual nature before Abraham, that is. in his Word and in the knowledge of faith was he in the saints; for they all knew and believed that Christ, as God and man, should suffer for us, as is written in Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever;" and in the Revelation of John, 13:8: "The Lamb of God that hath been slain from the foundation of the world." Yet now he is speaking here especially of his divine nature.

[15] But here reason is terribly offended and becomes mad and furious because God should become man; this reason cannot harmonize and understand. And this is the article of faith to which the Jews still in our day cannot reconcile themselves, hence they cannot cease their throwing stones

and their blasphemy. But Christ also continues on the other hand to hide himself from them and to go out of their temple, so that they cannot see nor find him in the Scriptures, in which they search daily. Again, this narrative is not a little terror to all who are so foolhardy about the Scriptures and never approach them with a humble spirit. For even in our day it happens that many read and study in the Scriptures and yet they cannot find Christ, he is hid and has gone out of the temple. And how many there are who say with their mouth that God is become man, and yet they are without the Spirit in their hearts; who whenever tested, prove that they were never in real earnest. This is sufficient on this subject.

Palm Sunday. Christ Entry into Jerusalem.

Text: Matthew 21:1-9.

1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.

3 And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

4 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

6 And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,

7 And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.

8 And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.

9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. Matthew 21:1-9

[1] In the first place, some reflect upon the sufferings of Christ in a way that they become angry at the Jews, sing and lament about poor Judas, and are then satisfied; just like by habit they complain of other persons, and condemn and spend their time with their enemies. Such an exercise may truly be called a meditation not on the sufferings of Christ, but on the wickedness of Judas and the Jews.

[2] In the second place, others have pointed out the different benefits and fruits springing from a consideration of Christ's Passion. Here the saying ascribed to Albertus is misleading, that to think once superficially on the sufferings of Christ is better than to fast a whole year or to pray the Psalter every day, etc. The people thus blindly follow him and act contrary to the true fruits of Christ's Passion; for they seek therein their own selfish interests. Therefore they decorate themselves with pictures and booklets, with letters and crucifixes, and some go so far as to imagine that they thus protect themselves against the perils of water, of fire, and of the sword, and all other dangers. In this way the suffering of Christ is to work in them an absence of suffering, which is contrary to its nature and character.

[3] A third class so sympathize with Christ as to weep and lament for him because he was so innocent, like the women who followed Christ from Jerusalem, whom he rebuked, in that they should better weep for themselves and for their children. Such are they who run far away in the midst of the Passion season, and are greatly benefited by the departure of Christ from Bethany and by the pains and sorrows of the Virgin Mary, but they never get farther. Hence they postpone the Passion many hours, and God only knows whether it is devised more for sleeping than for watching. And among these fanatics are those who taught what great blessings come from the holy mass, and in their simple way they think it is enough if they attend mass. To this we are led through the sayings of certain teachers, that the mass *opere operati, non opere operantis*, is acceptable of itself, even without our merit and worthiness, just as if that were enough. Nevertheless the mass was not instituted for the sake of its own worthiness, but to prove

us, especially for the purpose of meditating upon the sufferings of Christ. For where this is not done, we make a temporal, unfruitful work out of the mass, however good it may be in itself. For what help is it to you, that God is God, if he is not God to you? What benefit is it that eating and drinking are in themselves healthful and good, if they are not healthful for you, and there is fear that we never grow better by reason of our many masses, if we fail to seek the true fruit in them? II. The True View of Christ's Sufferings

[4] Fourthly, they meditate on the Passion of Christ aright, who so view Christ that they become terror-stricken in heart at the sight, and their conscience at once sinks in despair. This terror-stricken feeling should spring forth, so that you see the severe wrath and the unchangeable earnestness of God in regard to sin and sinners, in that he was unwilling that his only and dearly beloved Son should set sinners free unless he paid the costly ransom for them as is mentioned in Isaiah 53:8: "For the transgression of my people was he stricken." What happens to the sinner, when the dear child is thus stricken? An earnestness must be present that is inexpressible and unbearable, which a person so immeasurably great goes to meet, and suffers and dies for it; and if you reflect upon it real deeply, that God's Son, the eternal wisdom of the Father, himself suffers, you will indeed be terror-stricken; and the more you reflect the deeper will be the impression.

[5] Fifthly, that you deeply believe and never doubt the least, that you are the one who thus martyred Christ. For your sins most surely did it. Thus St. Peter struck and terrified the Jews as with a thunderbolt in Acts 2:36-37, when he spoke to them all in common: "Him have ye crucified," so that three thousand were terror-stricken the same day and tremblingly cried to the apostles: "O beloved brethren what shall we do?" Therefore, when you view the nails piercing through his hands, firmly believe it is your work. Do you behold his crown of thorns, believe the thorns are your wicked thoughts, etc.

[6] Sixthly, now see, where one thorn pierces Christ, there more than a thousand thorns should pierce thee, yea, eternally should they thus and even more painfully pierce thee. Where one nail is driven through his hands and feet, thou shouldest eternally suffer such and even more painful nails; as will be also visited upon those who let Christ's sufferings be lost and

fruitless as far as they are concerned. For this earnest mirror, Christ, will neither lie nor mock; whatever he says must be fully realized.

[7] Seventhly, St. Bernard was so terror-stricken by Christ's sufferings that he said: I imagined I was secure and I knew nothing of the eternal judgment passed upon me in heaven, until I saw the eternal Son of God took mercy upon me, stepped forward and offered himself on my behalf in the same judgment. Ah, it does not become me still to play and remain secure when such earnestness is behind those sufferings. Hence he commanded the women: "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." Luke 23:28; and gives in the 31st verse the reason: "For if they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" As if to say: Learn from my martyrdom what you have merited and how you should be rewarded. For here it is true that a little dog was slain in order to terrorize a big one. Likewise the prophet also said: "All generations shall lament and bewail themselves more than him"; it is not said they shall lament him, but themselves rather than him. Likewise were also the apostles terror-stricken in Acts 2:27, as mentioned before, so that they said to the apostles: "O, brethren, what shall we do?" So the church also sings: I will diligently meditate thereon, and thus my soul in me will exhaust itself.

[8] Eighthly, one must skillfully exercise himself in this point, for the benefit of Christ's sufferings depends almost entirely upon man coming to a true knowledge of himself, and becoming terror-stricken and slain before himself. And where man does not come to this point, the sufferings of Christ have become of no true benefit to him. For the characteristic, natural work of Christ's sufferings is that they make all men equal and alike, so that as Christ was horribly martyred as to body and soul in our sins, we must also like him be martyred in our consciences by our sins. This does not take place by means of many words, but by means of deep thoughts and a profound realization of our sins. Take an illustration: If an evildoer were judged because he had slain the child of a prince or king, and you were in safety, and sang and played, as if you were entirely innocent, until one seized you in a horrible manner and convinced you that you had enabled the wicked person to do the act; behold, then you would be in the greatest straits, especially if your conscience also revolted against you. Thus much more anxious you should be, when you consider Christ's sufferings. For the evil doers, the Jews, although they have now judged and banished God,

they have still been the servants of your sins, and you are truly the one who strangled and crucified the Son of God through your sins, as has been said.

[9] Ninthly, whoever perceives himself to be so hard and sterile that he is not terror-stricken by Christ's sufferings and led to a knowledge of him, he should fear and tremble. For it cannot be otherwise; you must become like the picture and sufferings of Christ, be it realized in life or in hell; you must at the time of death, if not sooner, fall into terror, tremble, quake and experience all Christ suffered on the cross. It is truly terrible to attend to this on your deathbed; therefore you should pray God to soften your heart and permit you fruitfully to meditate upon Christ's Passion. For it is impossible for us profoundly to meditate upon the sufferings of Christ of ourselves, unless God sink them into our hearts. Further, neither this meditation nor any other doctrine is given to you to the end that you should fall fresh upon it of yourself, to accomplish the same; but you are first to seek and long for the grace of God, that you may accomplish it through God's grace and not through your own power. For in this way it happens that those referred to above never treat the sufferings of Christ aright; for they never call upon God to that end, but devise out of their own ability their own way, and treat those sufferings entirely in a human and an unfruitful manner.

[10] Tenthly, whoever meditates thus upon God's sufferings for a day, an hour, yea, for a quarter of an hour, we wish to say freely and publicly, that it is better than if he fasts a whole year, prays the Psalter every day, yea, than if he hears a hundred masses. For such a meditation changes a man's character and almost as in baptism he is born again, anew. Then Christ's suffering accomplishes its true, natural and noble work, it slays the old Adam, banishes all lust, pleasure and security that one may obtain from God's creatures; just like Christ was forsaken by all, even by God.

[11] Eleventhly, since then such a work is not in our hands, it happens that sometimes we pray and do not receive it at the time; in spite of this one should not despair nor cease to pray. At times it comes when we are not praying for it, as God knows and wills; for it will be free and unbound: then man is distressed in conscience and is wickedly displeased with his own life, and it may easily happen that he does not know that Christ's Passion is working this very thing in him, of which perhaps he was not aware, just like the others so exclusively meditated on Christ's Passion that in their

knowledge of self they could not extricate themselves out of that state of meditation. Among the first the sufferings of Christ are quite and true, among the others a show and false, and according to its nature God often turns the leaf, so that those who do not meditate on the Passion, really do meditate on it; and those who hear the mass, do not hear it; and those who hear it not, do hear it.

III. The Comfort of Christ's Sufferings

[12] Until the present we have been in the Passion week and have celebrated Good Friday in the right way: now we come to Easter and Christ's resurrection. When man perceives his sins in this light and is completely terror-stricken in his conscience, he must be on his guard that his sins do not thus remain in his conscience, and nothing but pure doubt certainly come out of it; but just as the sins flowed out of Christ and we became conscious of them, so should we pour them again upon him and set our conscience free. Therefore see well to it that you act not like perverted people, who bite and devour themselves with their sins in their heart, and run here and there with their good works or their own satisfaction, or even work themselves out of this condition by means of indulgences and become rid of their sins; which is impossible, and, alas, such a false refuge of satisfaction and pilgrimages has spread far and wide.

[13] Thirteenthly. Then cast your sins from yourself upon Christ, believe with a festive spirit that your sins are his wounds and sufferings, that he carries them and makes satisfaction for them, as Isaiah 53:6 says: "Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all;" and St. Peter in his first Epistle 1 Peter 2:24: "Who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree" of the cross; and St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "Him who knew no sin was made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him." Upon these and like passages you must rely with all your weight, and so much the more the harder your conscience martyrs you. For if you do not take this course, but miss the opportunity of stilling your heart, then you will never secure peace, and must yet finally despair in doubt. For if we deal with our sins in our conscience and let them continue within us and be cherished in our hearts, they become much too strong for us to manage and they will live forever. But when we see that they are laid on Christ and he has triumphed over them by his resurrection and we

fearlessly believe it, then they are dead and have become as nothing. For upon Christ they cannot rest, there they are swallowed up by his resurrection, and you see now no wound, no pain, in him, that is, no sign of sin. Thus St. Paul speaks in Romans 4:25, that he was delivered up for our trespasses and was raised for our justification; that is, in his sufferings he made known our sins and also crucified them; but by his resurrection he makes us righteous and free from all sin, even if we believe the same differently.

[14] Fourteenthly. Now if you are not able to believe, then, as I said before, you should pray to God for faith. For this is a matter in the hands of God that is entirely free, and is also bestowed alike at times knowingly, at times secretly, as was just said on the subject of suffering.

[15] But now bestir yourself to the end: first, not to behold Christ's sufferings any longer; for they have already done their work and terrified you; but press through all difficulties and behold his friendly heart, how full of love it is toward you, which love constrained him to bear the heavy load of your conscience and your sin. Thus will your heart be loving and sweet toward him, and the assurance of your faith be strengthened. Then ascend higher through the heart of Christ to the heart of God, and see that Christ would not have been able to love you if God had not willed it in eternal love, to which Christ is obedient in his love toward you; there you will find the divine, good father heart, and, as Christ says, be thus drawn to the Father through Christ. Then will you understand the saying of Christ in John 3:16: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son," etc. That means to know God aright, if we apprehend him not by his power and wisdom, which terrify us, but by his goodness and love; there our faith and confidence can then stand unmovable and man is truly thus born anew in God.

[16] Sixteenthly. When your heart is thus established in Christ, and you are an enemy of sin, out of love and not out of fear of punishment, Christ's sufferings should also be an example for your whole life, and you should meditate on the same in a different way. For hitherto we have considered Christ's Passion as a sacrament that works in us and we suffer; now we consider it, that we also work, namely thus: if a day of sorrow or sickness weighs you down, think, how trifling that is compared with the thorns and nails of Christ. If you must do or leave undone what is distasteful to you:

think, how Christ was led hither and thither, bound and a captive. Does pride attack you: behold, how your Lord was mocked and disgraced with murderers. Do unchastity and lust thrust themselves against you: think, how bitter it was for Christ to have his tender flesh torn, pierced and beaten again and again. Do hatred and envy war against you, or do you seek vengeance: remember how Christ with many tears and cries prayed for you and all his enemies, who indeed had more reason to seek revenge. If trouble or whatever adversity of body or soul afflict you, strengthen your heart and say: Ah, why then should I not also suffer a little since my Lord sweat blood in the garden because of anxiety and grief? That would be a lazy, disgraceful servant who would wish to lie in his bed while his lord was compelled to battle with the pangs of death.

[17] Behold, one can thus find in Christ strength and comfort against all vice and bad habits. That is the right observance of Christ's Passion, and that is the fruit of his suffering, and he who exercises himself thus in the same does better than by hearing the whole Passion or reading all masses. And they are called true Christians who incorporate the life and name of Christ into their own life, as St. Paul says in Galatians 5:24: "And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof." For Christ's Passion must be dealt with not in words and a show, but in our lives and in truth. Thus St. Paul admonishes us in Hebrews 12:3: "For consider him that hath endured such gainsaying of sinners against himself, that ye wax not weary, fainting in your souls;" and St. Peter in his 1 Epistle 1 Peter 4:1: "As Christ suffered in the flesh, arm ye yourselves also with the same mind." But this kind of meditation is now out of use and very rare, although the Epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter are full of it. We have changed the essence into a mere show, and painted the meditation of Christ's sufferings only in letters and on walls.

Confession and the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper.

[1] Although I have often preached and written on the Lord's Supper and Confession, yet annually the time appointed for the consideration of these subjects, for the sake of those who desire to commune, returns, and so we must review them in a summary and speak of them once more.

[2] In the first place, I have often enough said that Christians are not obliged to commune on this particular festive day, but that they have the right and authority to come whenever they desire; for God established the office of the ministers for the purpose that they might at all times serve the people and provide them with God's Word and the Sacraments. Therefore it is unchristian to force people under pain of committing mortal sin to commune just at this time; as has been done heretofore, and is still done in many places. For it is not and cannot be in keeping with the Lord's Supper to force or compel anyone to partake of it; on the contrary, it is intended only for a hungry soul that compels itself and rejoices in being permitted to come; those who must be driven are not desired.

[3] Therefore, until the present the devil has ruled with unrestrained power and authority through the pope, compelling him to drive and force the whole world to commune; and in fact, everybody did come running, like swine, because of the pope's command. In this way so much dishonor and shame have been brought upon the Lord's Supper, and the world has been so filled with sin that one is moved with compassion to think of it. But since we know these things we ought to let no command bind us, but to hold fast the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. I say this for the sake of those who will not commune except at this time of the year, and who come only because of the custom and the common practice. There is, to be sure, no harm in coming at this Easter festival, if only the conscience be free and not bound to the time, and is properly prepared to receive the Lord's Supper. II. of Confession

[4] In the second place, we must say the same thing concerning Confession. First of all we know that the Scriptures speak of three kinds of confession. The first is that which is made to God, of which the prophet David speaks in Psalm 32:5: "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and my iniquity did I not hide: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Likewise, in the

preceding third verse David says: “When I kept silence, my bones wasted away as with the drought of summer ;” that is, before God no one is able to stand unless he come with this confession, as Psalm 130:4 declares: “But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared ;” that is, whoever would deal with thee must deal so that this confession proceeds from his heart, which says: Lord, if thou be not merciful all is lost, no matter how pious I may be. Every saint must make this confession, as again we read in the Psalm mentioned, verse 6, “For this let everyone that is godly pray unto thee.” Therefore, this kind of confession teaches us that we are all alike wicked and sinners, as the saying is, If one of us is good, all of us are good. If anyone have special grace, let him thank God and refrain from boasting. Has anyone fallen into sin, it is because of his flesh and blood; nor has any fallen so low but that another who now stands may fall even lower. Therefore, as far as we are concerned, there is no difference among us, the grace of God alone is dividing us.

[5] This kind of confession is so highly necessary that it dare not cease for a moment, but must constitute the entire life of a Christian, so that without ceasing he praise the grace of God and reproach his own life in the eyes of God. Otherwise, if he dare to plead some good work or a good life before God, his judgment, which can tolerate nothing of the kind, would follow; and no one is able to stand before it. Therefore, this kind of confession must be made, that you may condemn yourself as worthy of death and the fire of hell; thus you will anticipate God so that he will not be able to judge and condemn you, but must show you mercy. Concerning this kind of confession, however, we will not speak at this time.

[6] The second kind of confession is that made to our neighbor, and is called the confession springing from love, as the other is called the confession springing from faith. Concerning this kind of confession we read in James 5:16: “Confess therefore your sins one to another.” In this confession, whenever we have wronged our neighbor, we are to acknowledge our fault to him, as Christ declares in Matthew 5:23-25: “If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art with him in the way etc.” God here requires of both parties that he who hath offended the other

ask forgiveness, and that he who is asked grant it. This kind of confession, like the former, is necessary and commanded; for God will be merciful to no one, nor forgive his sins, unless he also forgive his neighbor. In like manner, faith cannot be true unless it produce this fruit, that you forgive your neighbor, and that you ask for forgiveness; otherwise a man dare not appear before God. If this fruit is absent, faith and the first kind of confession are not honest.

[7] The third kind of confession is that ordered by the pope, which is privately spoken into the ears of the priest when sins are enumerated. This confession is not commanded by God; the pope, however, has forced the people to it and, in addition, has invented so many kinds and varieties of sin that no one is able to keep them in mind; thus consciences have been troubled and tortured in a manner that is pitiful and distressing. Concerning this, however, we will say that God does not force you to confess by faith to him, or by love to your neighbor, when you have no desire to be saved and to receive his grace. Neither does he want you to make confession against your will and desire; on the contrary, he wants you to confess of your own accord, heartily, with love and pleasure. In like manner, he does not compel you to make a private confession to the priest when you have no desire of your own to do so, and do not long for absolution. This the pope disregarded, and proceeded as though it were a part of the civil government requiring that force be employed; he did not inquire whether a person felt willing or not, but he simply issued the order, that whosoever does not confess at this time shall not have burial in the cemetery. But God cares not whether a thing is done or not, as long as it is not done with pleasure. It is better, therefore, to postpone a duty than to perform it unwillingly. For no one can come to God unless he come gladly and of his own free will; hence, no one can compel you to come. If you come because of the command and in order to show obedience to the pope, you do wrong. Yet it is the custom in the whole world that everybody runs to the Lord's Supper solely because it is commanded; hence this is very properly called the week of torture, since in it the consciences of the people are tortured and tormented so that they are really to be pitied, besides the injury and destruction of souls. Moreover, Christ himself is also tortured far more shamefully than when he hung upon the cross. Therefore, we may well lift up our hands and thank God for giving us such light. For although we do not bear much fruit and amend, still we have the right knowledge. Hence, it is much better to stay

away from confession and communion than to go unwillingly: then at least our consciences remain untortured.

[8] Hence we say of private confession, that no one is compelled to observe it. Still it is for this reason a commendable and good thing. Wherever and whenever you are able to hear God's Word you ought not to despise it, but receive it with heartfelt desire. Now, God has caused his Word to go forth through all the world, so that it fills every nook and corner, and wherever you go you find God's Word. If I preach the forgiveness of sins, I preach the true Gospel. For the sum of the Gospel is: Whosoever believeth in Christ shall receive the forgiveness of his sins. Thus a Christian preacher cannot open his mouth unless he pronounces an absolution. Christ also does the same in the Gospel lesson when he says, "Pax vobiscum," Peace be unto you. That is, I proclaim unto you, as of God, that you have peace and forgiveness of sins; this is even the Gospel itself, and absolution. So also the words of the Lord's Supper, "This is my body which is given for you; this is my blood which is shed for you for the remission of sins etc." If I were to say, I will not go to confession because I have the Word in the Lord's Supper, I will be like him who declares, Neither am I going to hear the preaching. The Gospel must ring and echo without ceasing in every Christian's mouth. Therefore we are to accept it with joy wherever and whenever we can hear it, lift up our hands, and thank God that we can hear it everywhere.

[9] Therefore, when you go to private confession give more heed to the priest's word than to your own confessing; and make this distinction, What you say is one thing, and what he says who hears you is another. Do not place much value on what you do, but give heed to what he says, to wit, that in God's stead he proclaims to you the forgiveness of sins. It makes no difference whatever whether he be a priest, called to preach, or merely a Christian. The word which he speaks is not his, but God's Word; and God will keep it as surely as if he had spoken it. This is the way he has placed his holy Word into every corner of the world. Since, therefore, we find it everywhere, we ought to receive it with great thankfulness, and not cast it to the winds.

[10] For in Confession as in the Lord's Supper you have the additional advantage, that the Word is applied to your person alone. For in preaching, it flies out into the whole congregation, and although it strikes you also, yet

you are not so sure of it; but here it does not apply to anyone except to you. Ought it not to fill your heart with joy to know a place where God is ready to speak to you personally? Yea, if we had a chance to hear an angel speak, we would surely run to the ends of the earth. Are we not then foolish, wretched and ungrateful people not to listen to what is told us? Here the Scriptures stand, and testify that God speaks through us, and that this is as valid as though he were to speak it with his own mouth; even as Christ declares in Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them;" again in John 20:23, "Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." Here God himself pronounces the absolution, just as he himself baptizes the child; and do you say we don't need Confession? For although you hear the same thing in the Lord's Supper you ought not on that account to reject it, especially since it applies to you, as already stated, personally.

[11] Besides this you have another advantage, in Confession you are enabled to disclose all your failings and to obtain counsel regarding them. And if there were no other reason, and God did not himself speak in Confession, I would not willingly give it up for this one reason, that here I am permitted to open my heart to my brother and tell him what troubles me. For it is a deplorable thing to have the conscience burdened and prostrate with fear, and to know neither counsel nor consolation. This is why it is such an excellent and comforting thing for two to come together, and the one to offer advice, help and consolation to the other, proceeding in a fine brotherly and affectionate manner. The one reveals his ailment; whereupon the other heals his wounds. Therefore I would not give Confession up for all the treasure of the world. Still it dare not be made a command, lest it be turned into a matter of conscience, as though a person would not dare to commune without first making confession; nevertheless, we ought never to despise Confession, you cannot hear God's Word too frequently, nor impress it so deeply upon your heart that it could not be done still better.

[12] Therefore I said that confession and absolution must be carefully distinguished from each other, that you give attention chiefly to the absolution, and that you attend confession not because of the command, or in order to do a good work by your confessing, thinking that because of this good work your sins are forgiven; on the contrary, we are to go only

because we there hear God's Word and by it receive consolation. To this incline your ears, and be persuaded that God speaks through men and forgives you your sins; this, of course, requires faith. Hitherto the manner of our Confession was as follows: when people were absolved so many works were required of them as to render satisfaction for their sins. This was called absolving, whereas in truth it meant binding worse than ever. Sins ought to be completely removed by the absolution; but they first imposed the task of rendering satisfaction for them, and thus force people away from faith and absolution, and induce them to rely upon their own works. They should be taught thus, Behold, this word which I speak to you in God's stead you must embrace in true faith. If you have not this faith postpone your confession; yet this does not mean that when your faith is too weak you are not to come and demand consolation and strength. If you cannot believe, tell the brother to whom you would confess of it, and say to him, I do indeed feel that I have need of confession and absolution, but I find I am too cold and too weak in faith. For to whom are you going to confide your weakness if not to God? And where can you find him except in your brother? He can strengthen and help you by his words. This is confessing in the right way; and would to God the whole world were brought far enough at least for everyone to confess that he cannot believe.

[13] Let it be said now concerning Confession that everything ought to be free, so that each person attends without constraint, of his own accord. But what ought one to confess? Here is where our preachers in the past have pounded a great deal into us by means of the five senses, the seven deadly sins, the ten commandments, etc., thereby perplexing our consciences. But it should be, that you first of all feel that which weighs you down, and the sins that pain you most and burden your conscience you ought to declare and confess to your brother. Then you need not search long nor seek all kinds of sins; just take the ones that come to your mind, and say, This is how frail I am and how I have fallen; this is where I crave consolation and counsel. For confession ought to be brief. If you recall something that you have forgotten, it is not to trouble you; for you confessed not in order to do a good work, or because you were compelled, but in order to be comforted by the word of absolution. Moreover, you can easily confess to God in secret what was forgotten, or you can hear the absolution for it during the communion service. We are therefore not to worry even if sins have been forgotten; though forgotten they are still

forgiven; for God looks, not to the excellence or completeness of your confession, but to his Word and how you believe it. So also the absolution does not state that some sins are forgiven and others not; on the contrary, it is a free proclamation declaring that God is merciful to you. But if God is merciful to you all your sins must be blotted out. Therefore, hold fast to the absolution alone and not to your confession; whether or not you have forgotten anything makes no difference; as much as you believe so much are you forgiven. This is the way we must ever trust in God's Word in spite of sin and an evil conscience.

III. Of the Lord's Supper

[14] In the third place we must speak of the Lord's Supper. We said above that no one should be compelled to commune at any special time, but that this should be left free. It remains for us to speak of the two elements in the Lord's Supper. I have already said that among us one element alone is not to be offered to the communicant; he who wants the Lord's Supper should receive the whole of it. For we have preached and practiced this long enough and cannot assume that there should be anyone unable to understand it; yet if there be one so dense, or claiming to be so weak that he cannot grasp the true meaning of it, we will excuse him; it is just as well that he remains away. For anyone to hear God's Word so long, to have himself coddled like a child, and after all to continue saying, I do not understand, is no good sign. For it is impossible for you to hear so long and still be unenlightened; since then you remain blind it is better for you not to receive the Lord's Supper. If you cannot grasp the Word that is bright, clear and certain, you need not grasp the sacrament; for the sacrament would be nothing if there were no Word. Moreover, this Word has now resounded again and again throughout the whole world, so that even they who oppose it know it. These, however, are not weak but obdurate and hardened; they set their heads against the doctrine they hear us prove from the Scriptures with such clearness that they are unable to reply or establish the contrary; yet they simply remain in the Romish Church and try to force us to follow them. Therefore, it is out of the question for us any longer to yield or to endure them, since they defy us and maintain as their right what they teach and practice. Hence we wish to receive both elements in the Lord's Supper, just because they wish to prevent us from having them. The thought of

causing offense no longer applies to those people. But if there were a locality where the Gospel had not been heard, it would be proper and Christian to adapt one's self for a time to those who are weak; as also we did in the beginning when our cause was entirely new. Now, however, since so much opposition is offered, and so many efforts at violent suppression are made, forbearance is out of the question.

[15] It is, moreover, a fine example of God's providential ruling and guidance that the Lord's Supper is not devoid of persecution, for in instituting it he intended it to be a token and mark whereby we might be identified as Christians. For if we were without it, it would be impossible to tell where to find Christians, and who are Christians, and where the Gospel has borne fruit. But when we go to the Lord's Supper people can see who they are that have heard the Gospel; moreover, they can observe whether we lead Christian lives. So this is a distinctive mark whereby we are recognized, whereby we also confess the name of God and show that we are not ashamed of his Word. When now the pope sees me going to the Lord's Supper and receiving both elements, the bread and the wine, according to the Gospel, it is a testimony that I am determined to cling to the Gospel. If then he grows angry and endeavors to slay me, it is just as it was in the early days of Christianity when the Christians confessed God in the same way by this token of the Lord's Supper. Our bishops have forbidden both elements as contrary to God's ordinance and command. If now we mean to confess Christ we must receive both elements, so that people may know that we are Christians and abide by the Word of God. If for this cause they slay us we ought to bear it, knowing that God will abundantly restore life to us again. Hence it is proper for us to suffer persecution on this account; otherwise, if everything were to go smoothly, there would be no real confession. In this way we remain in the right state, always expecting shame and disgrace, yea, even death for the Lord's sake, as it was in the ancient church.

[16] Furthermore, I said it is not enough to go to the Lord's Supper, unless you are assured and know a defense to which you can refer as the foundation and reason that you do right in going; in order that you may be armed when attacked, and able to defend yourself with the Word of God against the devil and the world. On this account you dare not commune on the strength of another's faith; for you must believe for yourself, even as I

must, just as you must defend yourself as well as I must defend myself. Therefore, above all you must know the words Christ used in instituting the Lord's Supper. They are these: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples and said, Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me." "After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, gave thanks and gave it to them, saying: Take, drink ye all of it; this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me."

[17] These are the words which neither our opponents nor Satan are able to deny, on them we must stand. Let them make whatever comments they please; we have the clear Word of God, saying, the bread is Christ's body given for us; and the cup his blood shed for us. This he bids us do in remembrance of him; but the pope commands that it be not done. Well, they say, we are only erring laymen, we do not understand, nor are we able to explain the words. But we reply: it is for us to explain just as much as it is for them; for we are commanded to believe in Christ, to confess our faith, and to keep all the commandments of God, just as well as they are. For we have the same God they claim to have. How then are we to believe without knowing and understanding his Word? Since I am commanded to believe I must know the words I am to believe; for how can I believe without the words? Moreover, it is my duty to stand firm, and I must know how to defend myself and how to refute the arguments to the contrary. This is how you can stop their mouths and bring them to silence. My faith must be as good as yours, therefore I must have and must know the Word as well as you. For example the Evangelist here says, "Jesus took the cup and gave it to his disciples, saying, Drink ye all of it; this is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for you," etc. These words are certainly clear enough; and there is no one so stupid that he cannot understand what is meant by, "Take, drink ye all of it; this is the cup of the New Testament in my blood" etc. Therefore we reply, Unless they prove to us that drinking here signifies something different from what all the world understands by the term, we shall stick to the interpretation, that we are all to drink of the cup. Let them bring forward what they please, custom or councils, we reply, God is older and greater than all things.

[18] Likewise, the words are clear, “This do in remembrance of me.” Tell me, who is to remember the Lord? Is this said to the priests alone, and not to all Christians? And to remember the Lord, what is that but to preach him and to confess him? Now if we are all to remember the Lord in his Supper we must certainly be permitted to receive both elements, to eat the bread and to drink the cup; this surely no one can deny. Therefore, there is no use for you to cover up these words and tell us that we are not to know them. If we are not to know them, what are you here for? You claim to be a shepherd, and therefore you ought to be here to teach these words and preach them to me, and now by your own rotten defense you are forced to confess your own shame and bite your own tongue, having so shamefully spoken in contradiction of the truth.

[19] Thus you see how we are to understand the words of the institution of the Lord’s Supper and firmly hold to them; for in them all the virtue is centered, we all must know them, understand them, and cling to them in faith, so as to be able to defend ourselves and to repulse the foe. When you wish to go to the Lord’s Supper listen to the words spoken, and be assured that they contain the whole treasure on which you are to stand and rely, for they are really spoken to you. My body is given, my blood is shed, Christ declares. Why? Just for you to eat and drink? No; but for the remission of sins. This is what strikes you; and everything else that is done and said has no other purpose than that your sins may be forgiven. But if it is to serve for the forgiveness of sins, it must be able also to overcome death. For where sin is gone, there death is gone, and hell besides; where these are gone, all sorrow is gone and all blessedness has come.

[20] Here, here the great treasure lies; on this keep your eyes and dismiss the follies which occupy and trouble the great schools when they inquire how the body of Christ can be present and concealed in so small a space. Be not puzzled about the marvel, but cleave to the Word, and endeavor to obtain the benefit and fruit of the Lord’s Supper, namely that your sins be forgiven. Therefore, you must act so that the words mean you. This will be when you feel the sting and terror of your sin, the assault of the flesh, the world, and the devil. At one time you are angry and impatient; at another you are assailed by the love of money and the cares of life etc.; so that you are constantly attacked, and at times even gross sins arise, and you fall and injure your soul. Thus you are a poor and wretched creature, afraid of death,

despondent, and unable to be happy. Then it is time, and you have reason enough to go, make confession, and confide your distress to God, saying, Lord, thou hast instituted and left us the sacrament of thy body and blood that in it we may find the forgiveness of sin. I now feel that I need it. I have fallen into sin. I am full of fear and despair. I am not bold to confess thy Word. I have all these failings, and these. Therefore, I come now that thou mayest heal, comfort, and strengthen me etc.

[21] For this reason I made the statement that the Lord's Supper is to be given only to him who is able to say that this is his condition; that is, he must state what troubles him, and must long to obtain strength and consolation by means of the Word and the symbol. Let him who is unable to use the Lord's Supper in this way remain away, nor let him do like those who wretchedly torture themselves at this time, when they come to the sacrament, and have no idea what they are doing. Now when you have received the Lord's Supper, go forth and exercise your faith. The sacrament serves to the end that you may be able to say, I have the public declaration that my sins are forgiven; besides, my mouth has received the public symbol, this I can testify, as also I have testified before the devil and all the world. When death now and an evil conscience assail you, you can rely on this and defy the devil and sin, and thus strengthen your faith and gladden your conscience towards God, and amend your life day by day, where otherwise you would be slothful and cold, and the longer you remained away the more unfit you would be. But if you feel that you are unfit, weak and lacking in faith, where will you obtain strength but here? Do you mean to wait until you have grown pure and strong, then indeed you will never come and you will never obtain any benefit from the holy communion.

[22] This is the right use of the Lord's Supper, serving not to torture, but to comfort and gladden the conscience. For by instituting it for us, God did not intend it to be poison and torture to frighten us; this is what we made of it by our false doctrine, when we imagined we were to bring the offering of our piety to God, and hid the words that were to give comfort and salvation, strengthen our consciences, refresh, gladden and free them from every distress. This is the meaning of the Lord's Supper, and we are to look upon it only as containing sweet grace, consolation, and life. It is poison and death to those who approach it with insolence, who feel no weakness, frailty, or distress to impel them, who act as if they were pure and pious

from the start. The Lord's Supper welcomes those who perceive their frailties and feel that they are not pious, yet would like to be. Thus it all depends on this feeling, for we are all frail and sinful, only we do not all confess it.

[23] Let this suffice on how we ought to prepare ourselves to receive the communion and conduct ourselves toward it, namely, that we are to exercise and strengthen our faith by the words of the institution of the Supper which say that Christ's body and blood are given and shed for the remission of sins. These words sufficiently show the benefit, fruit and use of the Lord's Supper as far as partaking of it for ourselves is concerned. But the second thought springing from the first is Christian love, and this also deserves attention. It is our duty to let the benefit and fruit of the Lord's Supper become manifest, and we ought to show that we have received it with profit. We at present see it received throughout all the world in so many celebrations of the mass, but where do you see the least fruit following from it?

[24] Now this is the fruit, that even as we have eaten and drunk the body and blood of Christ the Lord, we in turn permit ourselves to be eaten and drunk, and say the same words to our neighbor, Take, eat and drink; and this by no means in jest, but in all seriousness, meaning to offer yourself with all your life, even as Christ did with all that he had, in the sacramental words. As if to say, Here am I myself, given for you, and this treasure do I give to you; what I have you shall have; when you are in want, then will I also be in want; here, take my righteousness, life, and salvation, that neither sin, nor death, nor hell, nor any sorrow may overcome you; as long as I am righteous and alive, so long shall you also be righteous and alive. These are the words he speaks to us; these we must take, and repeat them to our neighbor, not by the mouth alone, but by our actions, saying, Behold, my dear brother, I have received my Lord; he is mine, and I have more than enough and great abundance. Now you take what I have, it shall be yours, and I place it at your disposal. Is it necessary for me to die for you, I will even do that. The goal placed before us in the Lord's Supper is that the attainment of such conduct toward our neighbor may appear in us.

[25] Of course, it is true, we will not become so perfect that one places his soul and body, goods and honor at the disposal of the other. We still live in the flesh, and this is so deeply rooted in us that we are unable to furnish

this symbol and evidence as perfectly as we should. On account of these our shortcomings Christ has instituted the Lord's Supper for our training, that here we may obtain what we lack. For what will you do when you miss in yourself what we have described? You must even come and tell him, Behold, this is what I need. Thou dost give thyself to me so richly and abundantly, but I am unable to do likewise toward my neighbor; this I lament before thee, and I pray thee, let me grow rich and strong enough to accomplish it. Though it is impossible for us to reach such perfection, we are nevertheless to sigh for it, and not to despair when we fall short, only so the desire to obtain it continue in our hearts.

[26] Yet the least part of love and devotion is not the sacrifice of my pride. I can indeed give my neighbor temporal goods and bodily service by my efforts and labor; I can also render him service by offering instruction and intercession; likewise I can visit and comfort him when he is sick and in sorrow, feed him when hungry, loose him when bound, etc. But to bear my neighbor's weakness is far greater than all these. Yet with us the trouble will always be that we will not be able to do it as perfectly as Christ did. He is the bright, radiant sun without a single shadow, whereas our light, compared with this sun, is only a gleaming bit of lighted straw. Yonder a glowing oven full of fire and perfect love; and he is satisfied if we light only a little taper and endeavor somewhat to let love shine forth and burn. This is the shortcoming we all see and feel in each other. But never let anyone conclude and say, This is not Christ. On the contrary, see what he did in the Gospel story when so often he suffered his disciples to stray and stumble, making his wisdom yield and serve their folly. He condemns them not, but endures their weakness and tells them in John 13:7-33: "Whither I go, ye cannot come." Likewise, to Peter, "What I do, thou knowest not now." By such love he abandons his righteousness, judgment, power, vengeance, and punishment, and his authority over us and our sins. He could indeed condemn us for our folly, but all he does is to say, You do wrong, you do not know; yet casts us not away, but comforts us. Therefore I said, it is no small evidence of love to be able to bear with one's neighbor when he is weak in faith or in love.

[27] On the other hand, Christ dealing so kindly with his disciples is no permission for us to approve of human weaknesses or of sin. For later he tells Peter, "What I do thou shalt understand hereafter." Here he merely

gives his weakness time and bears with it. It is as though he said, I will bear with your ignorance and weak faith for your sake and will spare you as long as you understand that you must do better, and intend to later on; not that you may grow idle and secure.

[28] Therefore, when we have received the Lord's Supper we must not allow ourselves to become indolent, but must be diligent and attentive to increase in love, aid our neighbor in distress, and lend him a helping hand when he suffers affliction and requires assistance. When you fail to do this you are not a Christian, or only a weak Christian, though you boast of having received the Lord and all that he is, in the Lord's Supper.

[29] If, however, you would be sure of partaking profitably of the Lord's Supper, there is no better way than to observe your conduct toward your neighbor. You need not reflect on the great devoutness you experienced, or on the sweetness of the words in your heart. These indeed are good thoughts, but they will not give you assurance, they may deceive you. However, you will be sure as to whether the sacrament is efficacious in your heart, if you watch your conduct toward your neighbor. If you discover that the words and the symbol soften and move you to be friendly to your enemy, to take an interest in your neighbor's welfare, and to help him bear his suffering and affliction, then it is well. On the other hand, if you do not find it so, you continue uncertain even if you were to commune a hundred times a day with devotions so great as to move you to tears for very joy; for wonderful devotions like this, very sweet to experience, yet as dangerous as sweet, amount to nothing before God. Therefore we must above all be certain for ourselves, as Peter writes in 2 Peter 1:10, "Give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure." The Word and the sacrament are indeed certain in themselves; for God himself, together with all the angels and saints, testify to this; the question is in regard to yourself whether you furnish the same testimony. Therefore, even if all the angels and the whole world were to testify that you had received the Lord's Supper profitably, it would be weaker testimony than that furnished by yourself. This you cannot reach unless you consider your conduct, whether it shines forth, works in you, and bears fruit.

[30] Now when fruit fails to appear, when you feel that constantly you remain just as you were, and when you care nothing for your neighbor, then you have reason to take a different attitude in these things; for this is no

good sign. Even Peter had to hear the same who was godly and ready to die and to do wonderful deeds for Christ. What then will you do? If you still experience evil desires, anger, impatience etc., you are again in trouble and that should urge and impel you to go to Christ and lay it before him, saying. I partake of the Lord's Supper, still I remain as I was, without fruit. I have received the great treasure, yet it remains inactive and dormant within me: This I lament before thee. As thou hast bestowed this treasure upon me, grant now that it may also produce fruit and a new life within me, manifesting themselves toward my neighbor. Now when you begin a little to prove this, you will continually grow stronger and break forth in good deeds to your neighbor more from day to day.

[31] For this life is nothing more than a life of faith, of love, and of sanctified affliction. But these three will never be perfect in us while we live here on earth, and no one possesses them in perfection except Christ. He is the sun and is set for our example, which we must imitate. For this reason there will always be found among us some that are weak, others that are strong, and again some that are stronger; these are able to suffer less, those more; and so they must all continue in the imitation of Christ. For this life is a constant progress from faith to faith, from love to love, from patience to patience, and from affliction to affliction. It is not righteousness, but justification; not purity, but purification; we have not yet arrived at our destination, but we are all on the road, and some are farther advanced than others. God is satisfied to find us busy at work and full of determination. When he is ready he will come quickly, strengthen faith and love, and in an instant take us from this life to heaven. But while we live on earth we must bear with one another, as Christ also bore with us, seeing that none of us is perfect.

[32] Christ has shown this to us not only by his own example and by his Word, but he has also pictured it to us in the form of the Sacrament of the Altar, namely, by means of the bread and the wine. We believe that the true body and blood of Christ is under the bread and wine, even as it is. Here we see one thing and believe another, which describes faith. For when we hear the Word and receive the Lord's Supper we have merely a word and an act, yet by it we embrace life and every treasure, even God himself. Likewise love is pictured in these signs and elements. First of all in the bread. For as long as the grains of wheat are in a pile before they are ground, each is a

body separate for itself, and is not mingled with the others; but when they are ground they all become one body. The same thing takes place with the wine. As long as the berries are not crushed each retains its own form, but when they are crushed they all flow together and become one drink. You cannot say, this is the flour from this grain, or this is a drop from that berry; for each has entered the form of the other, and thus was formed one bread and one drink. This is the interpretation of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:17: "Seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the one bread." We eat the Lord by the faith of the Word which the soul consumes and enjoys. In this way my neighbor also eats me: I give him my goods, body, and life and all that I have, and let him consume and use it in his want. Likewise, I also need my neighbor; I too am poor and afflicted, and suffer him to help and serve me in turn. Thus we are woven one into the other, helping one another even as Christ helped us. This is what it means spiritually to eat and drink one another.

[33] Let me say now in conclusion in regard to the Lord's Supper that when we have received it we ought to give heed to love, and in this way assure ourselves that we have received the sacrament profitably, and at the same time furnish evidence to others; so that we may not always come and still continue unchanged. Therefore, as I said, we must turn from our devotions and thoughts to our conduct toward our neighbor, and examine ourselves in this mirror with all seriousness. The sacrament is to act upon us so that we may be transformed and become different people. For God's word and work do not intend to be idle, but are bound to produce great things, to wit, set us free from sin, death, and the devil, and every kind of fear, and make us servants even of the least among men on earth, and this without the slightest complaint on our part, rejoicing rather to find someone in need of our help, and fearing only lest after receiving so much we may not apply it all.

[34] Whenever the Lord's Supper fails to produce this result there is reason to fear it has wrought injury. Nevertheless, even if the result is not great, we are not to reject those that are imperfect and weak, but those that are indolent and insolent, who imagine they have done enough when they have partaken of the sacrament. A change must take place in you, and there must be evidence of it, then you will be able to perceive through the symbol that God is with you, and your faith will grow sure and strong. For you can

easily feel whether you have grown more joyous and bold than you were before. Formerly the world seemed too narrow for us when we heard of death and thought of sin. If now we feel different it is not because of our own strength, for in the past we could not get so far, although we put forth greater exertions and endeavored to help ourselves by means of works. Likewise, you can feel whether you are kind to him who injured you, and whether you are merciful to him who is sick. Thus you can discover, whether the Lord's Supper is producing any fruit through your own life. If you experience nothing, go to God and tell him of your shortcomings and troubles; we all must do the same thing as long as we live, for, as we have said, not one of us is perfect. For the present let this suffice on this subject.

Easter Sunday. The Fruit and Power of Christ's Resurrection.

A Fine Sermon on the Reception of the Lord's Supper.

The Resurrection.

Text: Mark 16:1-8.

1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

2 And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

3 And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

4 And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

5 And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

7 But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

8 And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid. Mark 16:1-8

[1] As we heard while explaining the meaning of Christ's passion, that it was not enough to know its mere narrative and history; so it is not enough to learn only how and when Christ our Lord arose from the dead; we must also preach and understand the benefit and use both of the sufferings and the resurrection of Christ, namely, what he thereby acquired for us. For if we preach only its history, it is an unprofitable sermon, which Satan and the godless know, read and understand as well as true Christians; but when we preach to what end it serves, it becomes profitable, wholesome and comforting.

[2] Christ himself pointed out the benefit of his sufferings and resurrection when he said to the women in Matthew 28:10: "Fear not: go tell my brethren that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me." These are the very first words they heard from Christ after his resurrection from the dead, by which he confirmed all the former utterances and loving deeds he showed them, namely, that his resurrection avails in our behalf who believe, so that he therefore anticipates and calls Christians his brethren, who believe it, and yet they do not, like the apostles, witness his resurrection.

[3] The risen Christ waits not until we ask or call on him to become his brethren. Do we here speak of merit, by which we deserve anything? What did the apostles merit? Peter denied his Lord three times; the other disciples all fled from him; they tarried with him like a rabbit does with its young. He should have called them deserters, yea, betrayers, reprobates, anything but brethren. Therefore this word is sent to them through the women out of pure grace and mercy, as the apostles at the time keenly experienced, and we experience also, when we are mired fast in our sins, temptations and condemnation.

[4] These are words, full of all comfort that Christ receives desperate villains as you and I are and calls us his brethren. Is Christ really our brother, then I would like to know what we can be in need of? Just as it is among natural brothers, so is it also here. Brothers according to the flesh enjoy the same possessions, have the same father, the one inheritance, otherwise they would not be brothers: so we enjoy with Christ the same possessions, and have in common with him one Father and one inheritance, which never decreases by being distributed, as other inheritances do; but it ever grows larger and larger; for it is a spiritual inheritance. But an earthly

inheritance decreases when distributed among many persons. He who has a part of this spiritual inheritance, has it all.

[5] However, what is Christ's inheritance? His heritage is life and death, sin and grace, all that is in heaven and earth, eternal truth, power, wisdom, righteousness; he governs and rules over all, over hunger and thirst, over fortune and misfortune, over everything imaginable, whether in heaven or on earth, not only spiritual but also secular affairs; and the sum total of all is, he has all things in his hand, be they eternal or temporal. Now if I believe on him, I become partaker with him of all his possessions, and obtain not only a part or a piece; but, like him, I obtain all, eternal righteousness, eternal wisdom, eternal strength, and become a lord and reign over all. The stomach will not hunger, sins will not oppress, I will no more fear death, nor be terror-stricken by Satan, and I will never be in want, but will be like Christ the Lord himself.

[6] In the light of this we now easily understand the sayings here and there in the prophets and especially in the Psalms; as when David in Psalm 34:10 says: "The young lions (the rich) do lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek Jehovah shall not want any good thing." And in another Psalm: "Jehovah knoweth the days of the perfect; and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be put to shame in the time of evil; and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied." Psalm 37:18-19. And immediately following in verse 25: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." All this comes of itself from the fact that we are and are called Christ's brethren; not because of our worthiness, but because of God's pure grace. Yes, if God gave us this in our heart, so that we experience it, then we would be saved; but it goes in one ear and out the other. And this it is that Paul praises so highly and strongly to the Romans when he says: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him." Romans 8:14-17.

[7] The title of being Christ's brothers is so high that the heart of man cannot understand it. If the Holy Spirit bestows not this grace, none can say:

Christ is my brother. For reason is not bold enough to say so; although one may say it with the tongue, as the spirits of modern times do. It is not uttered in this way, it is necessary for the heart to experience it; otherwise it is pure hypocrisy. If you truly experience it in your heart it will be such a great thing that you will much prefer to keep silence than to speak about it, yea, in the presence of the magnitude of this inheritance you easily doubt and waver as to whether it is really true or not. Those who only cry: Christ is my brother! Christ is my brother! are not true Christians. A Christian acts quite differently, and it is very wonderful, so that the flesh shudders at it and dares indeed neither speak of it nor confess it.

[8] We should bestir ourselves to hear this, not only with the natural ear, but also to experience it in our hearts, for then we would not be so forward and impudent, but would be surprised and amazed over it. True and godly Christians go along in life in contempt of themselves and in fear; they think thus: Ah, shall I, a poor, miserable person, who am steeped in sin, be now so exalted that God's Son becomes my brother? Ay, how is it that I, a miserable poor creature, am thus honored? I am at once confounded before it and feed upon it; for it truly requires a great effort to believe it; yea, when one experiences it thus, how it is in truth, he must from that hour die; for man, since he is flesh and blood, cannot understand it. Here in this life man's heart is in too great straits to lay hold of it; but after death, when the heart becomes larger and broader, we experience what we have heard through the Word.

[9] In the Gospel of John, Christ tells Mary Magdalene of the benefit and use of his death and resurrection still more plainly, when he says: "But go unto my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God." John 20:17. This is one of the great and comforting passages upon which we can venture, and of which we dare boast. As if Christ had said: Go hence, Mary, and say to my disciples who have deserted me on the field of battle, and who have well merited punishment and eternal condemnation, that my resurrection has taken place for their benefit; that is, by my resurrection I have brought it to pass that my Father is their Father, and my God is their God. These are few words and very short; but they contain a great thought, namely, that we have as great a confidence and refuge in God as Christ his Son himself has. Who can grasp such exceeding joy, unless one speaks of himself when he says a poor,

corrupt sinner can and may call God his Father and his God, just like Christ himself does?

[10] The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has grasped the words of Psalm 22:23 and taken them well to heart, when he says of Christ: “For which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I sing thy praise.” Hebrews 2:11-12. If any worldly lord were to condescend so low as to say to a thief, or a murderer or to a low French character, Thou art my brother; that would be a great thing and everyone would be amazed at it; but that this King, who in his glory sits at the right hand of God, his Father, says to a poor sinner: Thou art my brother, that no one takes to heart, no one receives it in earnest, and yet on that hangs our highest comfort and courage against sin, death, Satan, hell, law, and against all misfortune, both of the body and of the soul.

[11] Since we are flesh and blood, and subject to all kinds of affliction, it follows that it must be thus also with our brother; or he would not be like us in all respects. Therefore, in that he becomes like us, he tastes of all that we do, in order to be our true brother and save us, so that we on the other hand may become like him. This the Epistle to the Hebrews paints and brings out very beautifully when it says: “Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to naught him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily not to angels doth he give help, but he giveth help to the seed of Abraham. Therefore it behooveth him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.” Hebrews 2:14-18.

[12] St. Paul in a very beautiful way condensed the benefit and use both of Christ’s sufferings and his resurrection in one short passage, as in a nutshell, when he says to the Romans: “Who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification.” Romans 4:25. But on this theme enough has been said for the present; whoever desires may with profit meditate on it; more is written about it in the Postil; whoever desires to have it let him get it and read. We will now discuss another subject. Since

people in many localities still cling to the papal abuses, so that they flock to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper on Easter, and this custom is so deeply drilled into them, that it is very difficult to root it out everywhere, we wish to give some instruction to the single-minded and plain people, how they should at the present time partake of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. (Rodt's Ed., 1525.)Of this the following sermon plainly speaks.

The Reception of the Holy Sacrament Sacraments.

I. The Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

[1] You, beloved, have often before heard how we should prepare for the time when we receive the most worthy Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ. But since this is the time appointed for the consideration of this subject, we must again speak of it, especially those features of it that are needed to be touched upon; for if I mistake not there are some who do not understand it. However, I hold that we cannot better grasp and understand it than by comparing the misuse of the Sacrament with the right Christian, evangelical use of it, which Christ instituted and prescribes.

[2] In the first place, hitherto we have taught that we should be of good cheer and firmly believe that under the bread is the true body of Christ and under the wine the true blood of Christ. This is the first thing that has been most emphasized, and when we planted this in the people, we thought we were very successful preachers. Afterwards however, we proceeded farther and asked the people whether they had a desire to receive the Sacrament, and thus freely gave it to them and then never concerned ourselves further. Thus it rested upon two thoughts, that we thus believe and that we desired the Sacrament; but to what end we should desire it and what more belongs to it, no one cared for that and no one saw that such faith might be, and is, in Satan and all unchristians; for we are easily persuaded to believe this much. For, if I can believe that Christ rose from the dead; likewise that he went through the stone at the mouth of the grave and made no hole in it; and if I can believe that he went through closed doors without breaking or damaging anything, thus that wood and his body were in one place, and yet true flesh and blood were there; then can I also readily believe that the body and blood of Christ are present in the bread and wine.

[3] Hence it is an unimportant matter if we let it rest there and believe only that much, although the communicants thought they thereby did a precious work. Such faith and desire are still not enough for the Sacrament, and all, who know no more about and have not higher faith and desire for it, should remain away; for giving the Holy Sacrament to such persons is not much different than when you thrust it down the throat of a pig. It is mockery and a dishonoring of the Sacrament. Therefore remember you must be different, or not approach the Lord's Supper.

[4] Therefore hereafter it shall be ordered that no one is to be admitted to the Sacrament unless he be asked first and it be learned from him what is the state of his heart, whether he knows what it is and why he goes to the communion. We have looked through our fingers at this long enough and tolerated the old misuse of it; but since the Gospel has now been working farther into the world, we must give attention to this matter and improve the imperfections. We should here act, as we do with a child or any other person we baptize. When one brings him to baptism, it is not enough for him to believe that that is baptism and a sacrament instituted by Christ. It is also not enough for one to inquire whether he wishes to be baptized, which is the last thing to be asked; but first one asks him: Dost thou renounce the devil, and all his works and ways? Then: Dost thou believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost? When the one baptizing inquires whether he has true faith and knows what he is seeking and why he is there and for what purpose he makes use of the Sacrament. Much more then should one do thus in the Lord's Supper, so that no one goes to the communion unless we first hear whether he is a vessel that can contain it, so that it is not thrust as it were into the throat of an unclean animal. For those who go to the Lord's Supper only with such a faith, think no farther than that they may only receive it, they hold it to be a meritorious work and think that is enough. They do it only because it is instituted and it is the custom to do so, just as when you ask one, why he desired to be baptized and he answers: I do not know; it is thus instituted, therefore I will also do like other people. I think it is a good thing to do.

[5] Now, one can in no way abuse and dishonor the most worthy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper more than by regarding it only as a good work. For a good work is that which I can do to another and it must be my work; but the Lord's Supper is not my work but God's work, with which I

permit myself to be served, and I receive a blessing, therefore, as far as God's work and my work are different from one another, so far are the thoughts separated from one another which hold the Sacrament to be God's and at the same time our own work. Hence it is now clear that it is a great abuse of the Sacrament and blasphemy, if you do not esteem it to be the work of God.

[6] Therefore the people should be asked when anyone desires to go to the Sacrament: first, what is the Sacrament? Then the answer should be: The words which Christ spoke at his Last Supper are the Sacrament: "Take ye, this is my body, which is given for you; this is my blood that is shed for you, for the remission of sins." Therefore Christ instituted by these words the bread and wine, under which are his flesh and blood, for a token and a seal that his words are true. Then ask further: To what end are these words a blessing which Christ here speaks and attaches to them a token? Answer: They are a blessing to the end that I believe in them, not that I make a good work out of them, thus that my faith clings to them with my heart, and I doubt not but that it is as the words read. How then do the words read? Thus: "This is my body, which is given for you." These words Christ says to all who receive the Lord's Supper, therefore you must cleave to them by faith, and say, I come and desire the Sacrament because I believe his body was given for me and his blood was shed for me, in order that thereby my faith may be strengthened, for this reason I desire to receive the token of bread and wine. Whoever cannot do this, or does not believe, should by no means go to the communion; for where this faith is not in the heart all is lost.

[7] Behold now how far that and this faith are from one another. For if you do even believe that the Sacrament is the body and blood of Christ, how are you made better? To what end does that profit you? The devil believes that too; but what does it help him? By it you do nothing but a good work, and you have no more benefit of it than the box in which the wafer is kept, or the cloth that is spread over it; for you are not a vessel prepared, in which true faith works. But when the faith comes that lays hold of the Word, and .says: These words Christ spoke and I believe they are true, and I am ready to die trusting in them, and I am certain and sure that he is there present, that he has given himself to me and he is mine, also that I appropriate him to myself, as if it were my own possession which God has

bestowed upon me. This is far different from the other faith; for that gives you nothing, but this gives you and brings you, as you believe, all the treasures of which the words speak.

[8] Therefore until the present time we have shown enough forbearance; but hereafter no one shall be given the Sacrament until it is known how he believes and that he is a vessel that can hold it, and knows how to give information concerning his faith. Moreover it is very necessary to do this, because the Sacrament is instituted in an outward form to the end that people may confess and prove their faith, in order that it may become manifest before the world. For before God it is enough that we believe in the Gospel, but now he wants us to remain upon the earth to serve the people and to confess before the world the faith we have in our hearts by means of certain tokens, that is, by means of baptism and the Lord's Supper. With the mouth we must confess the Gospel and then receive the Lord's Supper as a token that the world may know that we are Christians. And in this way I then become certain, as for my own person, that I have a gracious God, besides I have done enough before the world. If you do not do this, what do you accomplish then at the Lord's Supper? What will you do if it should cost you your life and you approach a cross? Likewise, when it comes to the point that you should die and the devil tests you? If you will then say: Yes, I believe that I received the Sacrament; I believe that it is the true body and blood of Christ; then the devil will reply: yes, that I also believe. Thus your faith will not help you, and the devil has triumphed and will remove you where there will never be any help for you.

[9] But if you say: Behold, thou tyrant, or thou devil and death, I have received the Sacrament, in which my Lord Christ confidently promised through his Word that his body and blood are mine, and this I believe: not only so far as you do, that it is his flesh and blood; but that all is given to me that the words imply. The words will not lie to me, for they are God's words and God's token. In this way you must be armed when you die; there neither I nor any other man can help you, even if all priests stood by your side with the Sacrament; like they heretofore did and accomplished no more than made a good work out of it and imagined it should help. Yes, indeed it should have helped them.

[10] We read in the books of the Kings, 1 Samuel 4:3 f., when the Israel warred against the Philistines and were defeated and put to flight, the elders

of Israel said to the people: The reason God permitted us to suffer defeat was because we have not the ark of the covenant with us. Then they went and brought the ark; when they had now returned they cried in a hostile, triumphant way, so that their enemies almost feared and thought they had now been defeated; but when they met one another, the Israelites were nevertheless again slain. What then was the cause? The ark or chest was in their midst, where God was, as surely as he is in the Lord's Supper; why would he not help them? Because they also made of it a work of merit. For they clung to it alone and had no faith; therefore God punished them and they were slain worse than before. We also do likewise, we cling only to our work, that we have received the Sacrament, and go ahead without any faith. Thus will also Satan, when the test comes, smite us worse than any time before.

[11] I know very well that this misuse of the Sacrament is, alas, a deeply spread evil; therefore we must indeed bestir ourselves to root out the error and give the alarm to those who think it is enough for one to believe that the body and blood of Christ are present in the Lord's Supper. True it is, the food is indeed there; but you do not eat and enjoy it. Christ does not say in his words: Behold, there it is, there it lies; but he says: "Take ye," it shall be yours. It is therefore not the nature of the Sacrament that we should have Christ lying there; but that we should make use of him and his.

[12] Then there is no right use of the Lord's Supper unless thou believest that this body was offered for thee and this blood was poured out for thee; then thou hast, what thou believest. When thy conscience troubles thee and says: There and there thou hast sinned and thou art anxious to be free from thy trouble, then go to the Sacrament, and say: Have I sinned, then this body has not sinned, it is without guilt; this body is offered for me, and this blood is shed for me for the remission of sins, this I do believe, and as a token of it I will receive the Sacrament. When thou dost this, then thy sins are taken away and can cause thee no more distress. For who then can do thee any harm? Everything must here close its mouth and remain speechless, in spite of Satan and all misfortune; for I am one bread (ein Kuchen) with Christ, and no suffering can befall me, of that I am certain; and there I have then triumphed.

[13] It is now necessary for every Christian to know this, so that he can also tell, when asked, that he knows why he takes the Sacrament. Therefore

I say again, although heretofore indeed according to the old custom, everyone who came was allowed to go to the Sacrament; yet from now on it shall not continue so, but be so ordered that whoever wishes to receive the Sacrament must be asked what the Lord's Supper is and what he seeks there; and that he answers as I just mentioned: First, that the words of Christ and the token of Christ's body and blood are the Lord's Supper. Secondly, that he seeks these to strengthen his faith and to console his conscience, so that we get out of ourselves and come to Christ. In this you must prepare yourself so that you may know how to make the right use of the Sacrament; can you not do this, then the Lord's Supper should not be administered to you.

[14] Besides, be on your guard not to make a false faith, even if you do believe that Christ is there given and is thine; and if your faith is only a human thought, that you have originated, then remain away from this Sacrament. For it must be a faith that God makes, you must know and feel that God works this in you, that this Word and token are given to you, and that you are so bold as to think you would be willing to die for it. And if you still waver and doubt, then kneel down and pray God to impart to you grace that you may forsake self and come to the true faith. Then you would see how few Christians there are and how few of them would go to the Sacrament.

[15] However we should plan and accomplish it, as I have earnestly wished, that we might gather into one place those who truly believe, and acknowledge our faith before others. I earnestly desired to have this done long ago, but circumstances did not permit; for this truth has not been preached and urged enough. That is the way Christ did; he delivered his sermons to the multitude for everybody as the apostles later did, so, that every person heard them, believers and unbelievers; whoever caught it, caught it. We must do the same. But we are not to cast the Sacrament among the people in a crowd, as the pope has done. When I preach the Gospel, I do not know to whom it applies; but here I should take it for granted that it applies to those who come to the Sacrament. Here I must not act in doubt, but be sure that the one to whom I give the Sacrament has laid hold of the Gospel and has true faith, just like when I baptize anyone; neither the one who receives the Sacrament should doubt, nor the one that is baptized. Thus you have now the right way and the Christian use of

receiving the Lord's Supper. In addition we will speak of the fruits that follow when one makes the right use of the Sacrament. We will now consider this thought. The Fruits of the Holy Spirit

[16] We have two blessings or fruits from the holy Sacrament. The one is that it makes us brethren and fellow-heirs with our Lord Jesus Christ, that thus he and we become one bread, (ein Kuchen, one cake). The second is that we become like, and one with, all other believers, wherever they are upon the earth, and all are thus one bread, one cake. St. Paul pathetically touches upon these two fruits in his first Epistle to the Corinthians: "Seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body; for we all partake of the one bread," 1 Corinthians 10:17. Likewise in the same connection Paul says in verse 16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?" These words should be very familiar and constantly repeated in Christendom and thoroughly understood, since so much is embodied in them. When we eat the bread, he says, then we all have the same food, you have just what I have, and there is no difference, whether you be a man or a woman; and in that we all receive it in common in the Sacrament. We receive all that Christ has and is. When I believe that his body and blood are mine, then I have the whole Christ, my Lord, and all he can do is to make my heart happy and bold, because I do not trust in my own goodness, but in the innocent blood and in the pure body, which I receive at the Communion.

[17] Now, what has our Lord Jesus Christ and what is he able to do? His body and blood are without sin, full of grace, yea, the bodily dwelling place of the divine majesty. In brief, all that the Lord God has is Christ's, and all these possessions become here mine. But in order to have a token and the assurance that such precious and indescribable treasures are mine, I appropriate to myself the body and blood of Christ. Therefore no sin will ever be blotted out by a work of mine, as the poor, raging multitude under the papacy has falsely taught; but through my fully and truly believing that the body and blood of Christ are given to me. Therefore I am fully assured and conscious that Christ, my Lord, bestows upon me all the treasures he has, and all his strength and authority. Thus his wisdom, truth and godliness take away and blot out all my sins; his eternal life swallows up death for me; through his strength and influence I conquer Satan. Then will the

Christian be an heir of eternal life and lord over all things, so that nothing can do him any harm.

[18] Such vast possessions you cannot acquire even if you held a thousand masses every day. Christ is a person who gives himself for you, so that it is impossible for sin, death, hell and Satan to stand before him, not to mention that they should gain a victory over the Divine Majesty. Now where his flesh and blood are, there he will always. without a doubt. have his eyes open and never permit them to be trodden under foot; you have all power that God himself has; that is, we become one bread, one cake, with Christ, our Lord, so that we enter into the fellowship of his treasures and he into the fellowship of our misfortune. For here his innocence and my sins, my weakness and his strength are thrust together, and all thus become one. What is mine is his, and what is his that I also have. This is high, inexpressible grace, because of which the heart must be happy and of good courage. If you are now one cake, as it were, with Christ, what more do you wish? You have all in superabundance whatever your heart desires; and you are now sitting in paradise.

[19] This is what we should have heretofore urged had we really treated of the Lord's Supper. But it has been so completely lost that not a word has been heard about it. When we wished to prove what kind of fruit and benefits the Lord's Supper brought, we taught whoever hears a mass on any day no harm would befall him that day (and like monkeyism, "Affenspiel," Ed. 1531): and they thus applied it to all outward fortune and misfortune. Besides this, they have done more, and so cancelled and covered up the words that no one should hear or speak them in Christendom except the priests only, because they were the holiest words in the mass. Who but the worst devil in hell has spoken and originated it, that we should keep that covered up and concealed which we are to tell forth and advocate above everything else in Christendom, and which should be the best known of all things? If that is governing Christendom, then may God have mercy. This is now the first fruit of the Lord's Supper.

[20] The other fruit or blessing of the Lord's Supper is, that we become also one bread and one drink among one another, as Paul says. These are marvelous words and out of the ordinary way of speaking, so that we do not understand them; and the only reason of this is that we make a meritorious work out of the Sacrament. How is it then that we are all one bread and eat

one another. It is done in this way. When I eat the Sacrament, then it eats me again: outwardly I eat the Sacrament; but inwardly and spiritually I receive all the treasures of Christ and even himself, just as when I eat my temporal bread it strengthens me inwardly as to my physical existence. So when I receive the Sacrament, then Christ receives me and consumes me also, and devours me and my sins, and I enjoy his righteousness. Thus his godliness and riches swallow up my sins and misery, so that afterwards I am nothing but righteousness (and nothing but riches, “reichthum,” Ed. 1531).

[21] Just so is it also among us, we all become one bread, one cake, and eat one another. You know when we make bread all the grains of wheat are crushed and ground, so that each grain becomes the flour of the others, they are then mixed together so that we see in a sack of flour all the grains joined together, and that each has become the flour of the other, and no grain of wheat retains its own form, but each gives the other its flour, and each loses its body, in order that the body of the many grains may become the body of one bread. The same way is it when we make wine, each grape mixes its juice with the juice of the other grapes, and each loses its form, so that there comes from it one drink. So should it also be with us. When I become a public servant and serve you so that you enjoy my service whenever you need me, then I am thus your food; even as you enjoy your daily bread when you are hungry so that it helps and gives strength to your weak body and your hungry stomach. Therefore when I help and serve you in every time of need, then I am thus your bread. Again, art thou also a Christian, then thou dost in return act so that thou dost serve me with all thou hast, that all may be benefited and that I may enjoy’ the same as my meat or drink. For example, am I a sinner and thou art pious through God’s grace, then thou approachest me and sharest thy piety with me, thou prayest for me, intercedest in my behalf before God, and dost interest thyself in me as if thou wast in my place. Thus thou dost swallow by thy godliness my sins, as Christ devoured our sins. Thus thou eatest me; then I in return eat you.

[22] Here you see what an exceedingly great thing this Sacrament is when a person uses it aright, that man would be terrified to death because of its greatness, if he fully experienced it; for reason can never grasp it. Is it not great that the High Majesty intercedes for me and even gives himself as my own? Afterwards, that all the saints step before me and stand there, are

interested in and care for me, and serve and help me? Thus God places us in fellowship with Christ and his elect; there we have great comfort upon which we can depend. Am I a sinner, Christ stands there and says: The sinner belongs to me, I will lay hold of him with my holy fingers, who will murmur against it? Thus my sins drop out of sight and I enjoy his righteousness. And we Christians do the same thing among one another, one becomes interested in the other, so that one bears the other's sins and infirmities and serves him with his piety. This we do not understand; and even if we did hear and understand it, we could not believe it; therefore we continually rush ahead and never experience any fruit or change for the better.

[23] These are the fruits of the wafer of the Sacrament and this is its true Christian use, and in brief it consists in this (we must soon conclude) that we believe the words to be true that belong to the Sacrament, and then go forth (receive the Sacrament, Ed. 1531) and confess that we are Christians. Later we can feel and see whether those who received the Lord's Supper also prove thus that the fruits follow and whether they show love for others; where they will not do as they thus profess, we can excommunicate them from the congregation. Thus may it come into use again, so that it may be known who are faithful Christians and who are not. II. Confession and Absolution

[24] This we have said for the present on the reception of the Lord's Supper; we will now speak a little on Confession and soon conclude. In confession certain words are also spoken, by which the minister absolves you as the representative of God; these same words we ought not to despise here. We will force no one to enumerate all his sins; still no one should go to the Lord's Supper who does not esteem the confession. But we have often preached on this; yet we wish now to say and admonish you: When you desire to confess, then be on your guard that you look to, and think about, your future more than your past life; and do not, as persons formerly did, go to confession because you were commanded to go once a year, by which the conscience was sorely oppressed, and especially, in that you were forced to relate all the details and the circumstances, when, how and where. The people only thought of going through the form of confession and never cared how they might live better lives in the future. Therefore, we should turn this around, so that you be wholly concerned about your future; for all

the sins you committed before are now forgiven. Therefore you are to see to it, how you may begin a different life, and that you grieve over, and are tired of, your former life.

[25] Then be on your guard that you be thus disposed. If you are not, then it will not help you, even if you confessed all your life. For when you go and confess it should serve to the end that you be absolved and think about beginning to live another life; so that you may now say that your sins are forgiven, and God is gracious to you. The pope commanded and by law forced people to go to confession every year at the time of the Easter festival when they went to the Sacrament, and all there confessed the sins they did during the entire year, and every year the same was to be repeated; when it should have been left free, only for the benefit of those who are prepared to begin a new life; then each may confess whenever he will. The papists thought it was in our power and free will to be penitent over our sins and begin a different life; therefore they urged it with laws. But here they bring the people to the point that they must lie and say they are sorry for their sins when it is not true. Therefore see to it that you thoroughly grasp this part.

[26] The other part that belongs in this connection is, that you hear with true faith the absolution, and doubt not that the words he speaks, to whom you confess, are spoken by God himself. For God thus humbled himself and condescended to lay his holy, divine Word in the mouth of man, so that the one confessing should in no way doubt that God himself said it. Therefore we should receive it as if God himself did it. He did it for your good; for perhaps you might not stand it, if he spake to you directly. How you would run, yes, to the end of the world, if you heard that God himself was announced to speak there. This you have at home at your door. Why do you not then see it? And it is as sure here as there, yea, even surer. For here I have his promise, there I have it not. Therefore prepare yourself to the end that you may believe and think how to lead a different life; otherwise it is better for you to remain away from the Confession and the Lord's Supper. We will let it rest at this for the present and call upon God for grace.

Easter Sunday. Second Sermon. The Story of Christ's Resurrection. The Empty Tomb.

Text: Mark 16:1-8.

1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

2 And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

3 And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

4 And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

5 And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

7 But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

8 And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid. Mark 16:1-8

[1] In the first place we shall briefly examine the text of this narrative, and afterwards speak of the benefits of the resurrection of Christ, and how we should build upon it. The text reads: "And when the sabbath was past." Here we must remember Mark writes of the sabbath according to the custom of the Hebrews, for according to the Jewish reckoning, the day

began in the evening and lasted until the evening of the next day, as the first chapter of Genesis says: “And there was evening and there was morning, one day,” “a second day,” “a third day,” and so forth. Thus the first and greatest sabbath began on the evening of the day when Christ was crucified, that is to say at the time of sunset on the evening of Friday. Our reckoning conveys the wrong sense. Yesterday was the great sabbath, when Christ lay in the grave; in addition to this the Jews had seven full days which they celebrated and all of which they called sabbaths, counting them from the first holiday after the great sabbath and calling it *prima sabbathorum* (first of the sabbaths), and the third holiday *secundam sabbathorum* (second of the sabbaths), and so forth. On these days they ate only wafers and unleavened bread, for which reason they are also called by the Evangelist the days of unleavened bread. From this we must conclude that Christ rose before sunrise and before the angel descended in the earthquake. Afterwards the angel only came to open the empty grave, etc., as has been clearly described by the Evangelists.

[2] The question now arises: How can we say that he rose on the third day, since he lay in the grave only one day and two nights? According to the Jewish calculation it was only a day and a half; how shall we then persist in believing there were three days? To this we reply that he was in the state of death for at least a part of all three days. For he died at about two o’clock on Friday and consequently was dead for about two hours on the first day. After that night he lay in the grave all day, which is the true sabbath. On the third day, which we commemorate now, he rose from the dead and so remained in the state of death a part of this day, just as if we say that something occurred on Easter-day, although it happens in the evening, only a portion of the day. In this sense Paul and the Evangelists say that he rose on the third day.

[3] For this period and no longer Christ was to lie in the grave, so that we might suppose that his body remained naturally uncorrupted and that decomposition had not yet set in. He came forth from the grave so soon that we might presume that corruption had not yet taken place according to the course of nature; for a corpse can lie no longer than three days before it begins to decompose. Therefore Christ was to rise on the third day, before he saw corruption.

[4] The great longing and love of the women for the Lord must also be particularly noted here, so that unadvised and alone they go early to the grave, not thinking of the great stone which was rolled before the tomb. They might have thought of this and taken a man with them. But they act like timid and sorrowing persons, and therefore they go on their way without even thinking of the most necessary things. They do not even think of the watchers who were clad in armor, nor of the wrath of Pilate and the Jews, but boldly they freely risk it and alone they venture on their way. What urged these good women to hazard life and body? It was nothing but the great love they bore to the Lord, which had sunk so deeply into their hearts that for his sake they would have risked a thousand lives. Such courage they had not of themselves, but here the power of the resurrection of Christ was revealed, whose Spirit makes these women, who by nature are timid, so bold and courageous that they venture to do things which might have daunted a man.

[5] These women also show us a beautiful example of a spiritual heart that undertakes an impossible task, of which the whole world would despair. Yet a heart like this stands firm and accomplishes it, not thinking the task impossible. So much we say for the present on this narrative, and now let us see what are the fruits and benefits of the resurrection of Christ.

II. The Fruits and Benefits of the Resurrection of Christ

[6] St. Paul writes in Romans 4:25 as follows: “Christ was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification.” Paul is indeed the man who extols Christ in a masterly manner, telling us exactly why and for what purpose he suffered and how we should conform ourselves to his sufferings, namely, that he died for our sins. This is a correct interpretation of the sufferings of Christ, by which we may profit. And as it is not sufficient to know and believe that Christ has died, so it will not suffice to know and believe that he rose with a transfigured body and is now in a state of joy and blessedness, no longer subject to mortality, for all this would profit me nothing or very little. But when I come to understand the fact that all the works God does in Christ are done for me, nay, they are bestowed upon and given to me, the effect of his resurrection being that I also will arise and live with him; that will cause me to rejoice. This must be brought home to our hearts, and we must not merely hear it with the ears of our body nor merely confess it with our mouth.

[7] You have heard in the story of the Passion how Christ is portrayed as our exemplar and helper, and that he who follows him and clings to him receives the Spirit, who will enable him also to suffer. But the words of Paul are more Christian and should come closer home to our hearts and comfort us more, when he says: “Christ was raised for our justification.” Here the Lamb is truly revealed, of whom John the Baptist testifies, when he says in John 1:29: “Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.” Here is fulfilled that which was spoken to the serpent: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head,” which means that for all those who believe in him, hell, death, and the devil and sin have been destroyed. In the same manner the promise is fulfilled today which God gave to Abraham, when he said in Genesis 22:18: “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Here Christ is meant, who takes away our curse and the power of sin, death and the devil.

[8] All this is done, I say, by faith. For if you believe that by this seed the serpent has been slain, then it is slain for you; and if you believe that in this seed all nations are to be blessed, then you are also blessed. For each one individually should have crushed the serpent under foot and redeemed himself from the curse, which would have been too difficult, nay impossible for us. But now it has been done easily, namely, by Christ, who has crushed the serpent once, who alone is given as a blessing and benediction, and who has caused this Gospel to be published throughout the world, so that he who believes, accepts it and clings to it, is also in possession of it, and is assured that it is as he believes. For in the heart of such a man the Word becomes so powerful that he will conquer death, the devil, sin and all adversity, like Christ himself did. So mighty is the Word that God himself would sooner be vanquished than that his Word should be conquered.

[9] This is the meaning of the words by St. Paul: “Christ was raised for our justification.” Here Paul turns my eyes away from my sins and directs them to Christ, for if I look at my sins, they will destroy me. Therefore I must look unto Christ who has taken my sins upon himself, crushed the head of the serpent and become the blessing. Now they no longer burden my conscience, but rest upon Christ, whom they desire to destroy. Let us see how they treat him. They hurl him to the ground and kill him. O God; where is now my Christ and my Savior? But then God appears, delivers

Christ and makes him alive; and not only does he make him alive, but he translates him into heaven and lets him rule over all. What has now become of sin. There it lies under his feet. If I then cling to this, I have a cheerful conscience like Christ, because I am without sin. Now I can defy death, the devil, sin and hell to do me any harm. As I am a child of Adam, they can indeed accomplish it that I must die. But since Christ has taken my sins upon himself, has died for them, has suffered himself to be slain on account of my sins, they can no longer harm me; for Christ is too strong for them, they cannot keep him, he breaks forth and overpowers them, ascends into heaven (takes sin and sorrow captive, Ed. 1531), and rules there over all throughout eternity. Now I have a clear conscience, am joyful and happy and am no longer afraid of this tyrant, for Christ has taken my sins away from me and made them his own. But they cannot remain upon him; what then becomes of them? They must disappear and be destroyed. This then is the effect of faith. He who believes that Christ has taken away our sin, is without sin, like Christ himself, and death, the devil and hell are vanquished as far as he is concerned and they can no longer harm him.

[10] Here we also refer to the passage in Hosea 13:14, which Paul quotes in reference to the victory that Christ has won by his resurrection and by which he has conquered sin, death, hell and all our enemies. Paul says that death is swallowed up in this victory, and he defies death with these words: "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" Just as if Paul would say: O death, where are thy teeth? Come, bite off one of my fingers. Thou formerly hadst a spear, what has become of it now? Christ has taken it from thee. Death, where is now thy spear, etc.? Sin, where is now the edge of thy sword and thy power? Paul says that the power of sin is the law. The more clearly we understand the law, the more sin oppresses and stings us. For this reason Paul says that Christ has completely destroyed and annihilated the spear and whetstone of death. Now, this Gospel he has not taken with him into heaven, but he caused it to be preached throughout the world, so that for him who believes in Christ, spear and whetstone, nay, sin and death, should be destroyed. This is the true Gospel, which bestows life, strength, power and marrow, and of which all the passages of Scripture speak.

[11] Therefore seek and learn to know Christ aright, for the whole Scriptures confer upon us the righteousness of the true knowledge of Christ.

But this must be brought about by the Holy Spirit. Let us therefore pray God that his Gospel may prosper, that we all may truly learn to know Christ and thus rise with him and be honored by God as he was honored.

[12] The question now arises: If Christ has taken away death and our sins by his resurrection and has justified us, why do we then still feel death and sin within us? For our sins torment us still, we are stung by our conscience, and this evil conscience creates the fear of hell.

[13] To this I reply: I have often said before that feeling and faith are two different things. It is the nature of faith not to feel, to lay aside reason and close the eyes, to submit absolutely to the Word, and follow it in life and death. Feeling however does not extend beyond that which may be apprehended by reason and the senses, which may be heard, seen, felt and known by the outward senses. For this cause feeling is opposed to faith and faith is opposed to feeling. Therefore the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes of faith: "Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen." For if we would see Christ visibly in heaven, like the visible sun, we would not need to believe it. But since Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification, we cannot see it nor feel it, neither can we comprehend it with our reason. Therefore we must disregard our feeling and accept only the Word, write it into our heart and cling to it, even though it seems as if my sins were not taken from me, and even though I still feel them within me. Our feelings must not be considered, but we must constantly insist that death, sin and hell have been conquered, although I feel that I am still under the power of death, sin and hell. For although we feel that sin is still in us, it is only permitted that our faith may be developed and strengthened, that in spite of all our feelings we accept the Word, and that we unite our hearts and consciences more and more to Christ. Thus faith leads us quietly, contrary to all feeling and comprehension of reason, through sin, through death and through hell. Then we shall see salvation before our eyes, and then we shall know perfectly what we have believed, namely, that death and all sorrow have been conquered.

[14] Take as an illustration the fish in the water. When they are caught in the net, you lead it quietly along, so that they imagine they are still in the water; but when you draw them to the shore, they are exposed and begin to struggle, and then they first feel they are caught. Thus it also happens with

souls that are caught with the Gospel, which Christ compares with a net, Matthew 13:47. When the heart has been conquered, the Word unites this poor heart to Christ and leads it gently and quietly from hell and from sin, although the soul still feels sin and imagines to be still under its power. Then a conflict begins, the feelings struggling against the Spirit and faith, and the Spirit and faith against our feelings; and the more faith increases, the more our feelings diminish, and vice versa. We have still sins within us, as for instance pride, avarice, anger and so forth, but only in order to lead us to faith, so that faith may increase from day to day, and the man become finally a thorough Christian and keep the true sabbath, consecrating himself to Christ entirely. Then the conscience must become calm and satisfied and all the surging waves of sin subside. For as upon the sea one billow follows and buffets the other, as though they would destroy the shore, yet they must disappear and destroy themselves, so also our sins strive against us and would fain bring us to despair, but finally they must desist, grow weary and disappear.

[15] In the second place, death is still at our elbow. It also is to exercise the faith of him who believes that death has been killed and all his power taken away. Now, reason feels that death is still at our elbow and is continually troubling us. He who follows his feelings will perish, but he who clings to the Word with his heart will be delivered. Now, if the heart clings to the Word, reason will also follow; but if reason follows, everything will follow, desire and love and all that is in man. Yea, we desire that all may come to the point when they may consider death to be dead and powerless. But this cannot come to pass until the old man, that is the old Adam, be entirely destroyed, and meanwhile that process has been going on of which Christ speaks in Matthew 13:33, where he compares the kingdom of God to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal. For even if the kneading has begun, the meal is not yet thoroughly leavened. So, it is here. Although the heart clings to the belief that death and hell are destroyed, yet the leaven has not yet worked through it entirely. For it must penetrate and impregnate all the members of the body, until everything becomes leavened and pure, and there remains nothing but a pure faith. This will not be brought about before the old man is entirely destroyed; then all that is in man is Christlike from center to circumference.

[16] These two things, sin and death, therefore remain with us to the end that we might cultivate and exercise our faith, in order that it may become more perfect in our heart from day to day and finally break forth, and all that we are, body and soul, become more Christlike. For when the heart clings to the Word, feelings and reasoning must fail. Then in the course of time the will also clings to the Word, and with the will everything else, our desire and love, till we surrender ourselves entirely to the Gospel, are renewed and leave the old sin behind. Then there comes a different light, different feelings, different seeing, different hearing, acting and speaking, and also a different outflow of good works. Now, our scholastics and papists have taught an external piety; they would command the eyes not to see, and the ears not to hear, and would put piety into our hearts from the outside. Ah, how far this is from the truth! But it comes in this way: When the heart and conscience cling to the Word in faith, they overflow in works, so that, when the heart is holy, all the members become holy, and good works follow naturally.

[17] This is signified by the sabbath that was to be hallowed and on which the Lord lay quietly in the grave. It signifies that we should rest from all our works, should not stir, nay, should not allow any sin to stir within us, but we should firmly believe that death, hell, sin and the devil are destroyed by the death of Christ, and we are righteous, pious, holy and therefore contented, experiencing no longer any sin. Then all the members are calm and quiet, being convinced that sin and death are vanquished and prostrated. But this cannot be brought about, as I have said, until this impotent, wretched body and the old Adam are destroyed. Therefore it is indeed necessary that we are required to keep this sabbath. For as Christ lies in the grave on the sabbath, never feels nor moves, so it must be with us, as we have heard: Our feelings and actions must cease. And I say again that this cannot be accomplished before the old Adam is annihilated. Nevertheless we still experience sin and death within us, wrestle with them and fight against them. You may tie a hog ever so well, but you cannot prevent it from grunting (until it is strangled and killed Ed. 1531). Thus it is with the sins in our flesh. As they are not yet entirely conquered and killed, they are still active, but when death comes, they must also die, and then we are perfect Christians and pure, but not before. This is the reason why we must die, namely, that we may be entirely freed from sin and death. These words on the fruits of the resurrection of Christ may suffice for the present, and

with them we will close. Let us pray God for grace that we may understand them and learn to know Christ aright.

Easter Sunday. Third Sermon. The Benefits and Comfort of Christ's Resurrection

Text: Mark 16:1-8.

1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

2 And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

3 And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

4 And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

5 And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

7 But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

8 And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid. Mark 16:1-8

[1] This Gospel lesson is part of the general account and the first announcement of the resurrection of Christ, which was made by the angel to the women who went early to the tomb to anoint the dead body of the Lord, before Christ showed himself to them and talked with them; inasmuch as he wanted to reveal his resurrection through the Word, even before they should see him and experience the power of his resurrection.

[2] And as we said there are two ways of considering Christ's passion and death and the other doctrines of Christ, so there are also two things concerning the Lord's resurrection that we ought to know and understand. First, the history which relates the events as they occurred, together with the different circumstances and how he revealed himself alive in various manifestations; so that we might have a sure record and testimony of everything as a foundation and support of our faith, inasmuch as this article of faith on the resurrection is the chief one upon which our salvation is finally based, and without which all others would be useless and altogether fruitless. Now, what a person ought to know about the historical events, namely in what order these two events, the appearance of the angel — which is reported in part in this Gospel — and the manifestation of the Lord occurred, that should be discussed in connection with the full account, compiled and arranged in order from all the Evangelists; therefore, we will treat the part mentioned in this Gospel in connection with that account.

II. The Benefit and Comfort of Christ's Resurrection

[3] The second point, that is more important and necessary, and on account of which the narrative has been recorded and is preached, is the power, benefit and comfort of the joyous resurrection of the Lord; and the use we are to make of the same faith. Concerning this Paul and all the apostles and the entire Scriptures teach and preach gloriously and richly; but most gloriously of all did Christ the Lord himself preach, when he manifested himself first of all to the women. Therefore, in order that we too may hear and gather something useful from it, let us consider the words Christ spoke unto Mary Magdalene, as recorded in the Gospel according to John 20:17: "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father; but go unto my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God."

[4] This is the first sermon our Lord delivered after his resurrection and, without doubt, also the most comforting; although in words very brief, but exceedingly kind and tender, and spoken first of all to his beloved Mary Magdalene, and through her also to his disciples after their deep woe, grief and sorrow, caused by his departure and death, that he might comfort and gladden them by his resurrection. And since this Mary is far more deeply and tenderly concerned about the Lord than the others, and is first at the grave to anoint the body of Christ with costly spices; and especially because, when she fails to find him, she is frightened and bewildered, deeply troubled and in tears, supposing him to have been taken away; therefore, he permits her to enjoy this evidence of his love, in that he appears first of all to her, comforting her in her fears, and preaching this beautiful sermon, which we will now consider.

[5] In the first place, when Jesus manifests himself to her not far from the tomb, before he speaks to her, she mistakes him for the gardener; but when he calls her by name and says “Mary,” she immediately recognizes the voice, and at once turns with that name upon her lips by which she as well as the other disciples had been accustomed to address him in their language, namely “Rabboni,” that is: O dear Master, or dear Lord, for they would say Master, whereas we generally say, My Lord, and immediately, as she was accustomed to do, she falls at his feet to touch him. But he restrains her and says: “Touch me not,” as though he meant to say: I know indeed that thou lovest me, but thou canst not yet rightly look upon nor touch me, as thou shouldest look upon and touch me. For her joy is no higher or greater than the mere bodily, fleshly pleasure of having her Lord alive again as she had him before; clinging thus only to the fact of his return, and thinking that he will again be with them as he had been before, to eat and drink with them, to preach and do miracles; intending therefore, by her service and by touching his feet, to show him that love she had shown him before, when she anointed him both in life and in death.

[6] He does not permit himself to be touched in this manner now, however, because he wants her to stand still and listen, and learn what as yet she knows not; namely, that he refuses to be touched and anointed or to be served and waited upon, as she had done heretofore; but he says ‘ I will tell thee something different and new’ I am not risen in order to walk and remain with you bodily and temporally, but that I may ascend to my Father;

hence I do not need or desire such service and attention, nor will it do to look upon me as you look upon Lazarus and others, still living in the body. For it is not here that I intend to dwell and abide; but I would have you believe that I go to the Father, where I will rule and reign with him eternally, and whither I will also bring you out of your death and sorrow. There you shall have me visibly and tangibly with you indeed, and you shall rejoice forever in eternal communion with me and the Father. Therefore, he wishes to say: Refrain henceforth from all such bodily service and reverence, and go rather and become a messenger, and proclaim what I tell thee unto my dear brethren, that I will no more be and abide here in bodily form, but that I have left this mortal state to enter upon a different existence, where ye may no more handle and touch me, but shall know and possess me only in faith.

[7] Here he uses language entirely new, when he says: “Go and tell my brethren,” taken from Psalm 22:22, which treats entirely of Christ, and in which he speaks both of his passion and resurrection, saying: “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, etc.” Never had he spoken in this manner to his apostles before. For at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, he indeed calls them his “dear children” and his “friends,” John 13:33; John 15:14; but now he employs the most affectionate and glorious name possible and calls them his “brethren.” And it is of great importance to him; for he does not delay, but as soon as he is risen, his first concern is to have them told what he intends to do and why he is risen from the dead.

[8] And, indeed, this is said in a manner that is lovely and sweet beyond all measure, so that whoever desires to believe, has reason enough to believe, all his life and as long as the world endures, that these things are true indeed; even as the dear apostles themselves had found in them encouragement enough, and more than enough, to believe. For the comfort is too great and the joy too glorious, and the heart of man too small and narrow to have attained it.

[9] The Apostles crouched behind barred doors, not only discouraged and cowed, as sheep that are scattered without a shepherd, but also troubled in conscience. Peter had denied and renounced his Lord with an oath, and cursed himself; and the others had all fled and proved themselves to be disloyal. That was indeed a fall so deep and terrible that they might well think they would never be forgiven for denying the Son of God, and so

shamefully forsaking their dear Lord and faithful Savior. How could it have ever entered their hearts that Christ would send such an affectionate greeting and such a kind good-morning to them who had been so disloyal and denied him, and would not only forgive everything, but also call them his dear brethren? Or who can believe and grasp it today? I myself would like to believe it at times, but I cannot get it into my heart so completely that I dare rely upon it wholly, and dare count it to be really true. Yea, if we only could, we would be in heavenly bliss already in this life, and would fear neither death, nor the devil, nor the world, but our hearts would constantly bound for joy, and sing to God an eternal *Te Deum Laudamus*, i.e. We praise thee, O God.

[10] But alas, this is not the case upon earth; our miserable beggar's bag, this old hide of ours, is too cramped. Therefore, the Holy Spirit must come to our rescue, not only to preach the Word to us, but also to enlarge and impel us from within, yea, even to employ the devil, the world and all kinds of afflictions and persecutions to this end. Just as a pig's bladder must be rubbed with salt and thoroughly worked to distend it, so this old hide of ours must be well salted and plagued until we call for help and cry aloud, and so stretch and expand ourselves, both through internal and through external suffering, that we may finally succeed and attain this heart and cheer, joy and consolation, from Christ's resurrection.

[11] For, let us consider for a moment what manner of words these are, which Christ here uses; and let us not pass lightly over them, as has been done heretofore, and is still done in all popedom, where we have read, heard and sung them until we are weary; and nevertheless we have passed over them, as a cow walks by a sanctuary; so that it is a sin and a shame to have heard and known such words, and still to let them lie, cold and dead, outside of the heart, as if they were spoken and written altogether for naught; and that even Christians themselves, though they do not despise them as others do but use them daily, neither appreciate them as highly nor believe them as firmly as they would like to do.

[12] For consider, I say, what these words contain and offer: Go my dear sister, for thus he would undoubtedly address these women, since he appeared unto them first, and tell the denying and disloyal disciples that they are called, and shall be, my dear brethren. Is not this, in a word, including and placing us with Christ into the complete tenure and

inheritance of heaven and of everything Christ has? Rich and blessed indeed must be the brethren and sisters who can boast of this Brother, not hanging now upon the cross, nor lying in the grave under the power of death, but a mighty Lord over sin, death, hell and the devil.

[13] But how have these poor, frightened and discouraged disciples come to such honor and grace, and wherein have they deserved such brotherhood? Was it by Peter's shameful denial of Christ, and by the disloyalty of all the others to him? And how have I and others deserved it to apply this also to ourselves? I, who have read the idolatrous mass for fifteen years blaspheming God and helping daily to crucify Christ afresh? Fine merit this, forsooth, riding to hell in the devil's service and looking to other brotherhoods, — those of the devil and his clique, bearing the names of dead saints, St. Anthony, St. Francis, St. Sebastian, St. Christopher, St. George, St. Ann, St. Barbara, concerning some of whom it is not known whether they were saintly, yea, whether they ever lived at all. Fie! what a sin and shame for us, who are called Christians, to have had this brotherhood of Christ the Lord, so graciously offered us, and then to despise and reject it, and fall into such deep blindness as to have ourselves inscribed in the rascally brotherhood of the shameful monks and of the whole herd of the pope, and to preach about and praise this as though it were a precious thing indeed! But that is what the world deserves. Why did we not appreciate the Word of God that was written, painted, played, sung and rung before our eyes and ears? And even now, that the Word of God itself points this out, and rebukes us, we cease not to blaspheme and to persecute; whereas we ought to thank and praise God for having so graciously delivered us, without, and contrary to, any merit of our own from such blindness and blasphemy, and for having vouchsafed unto us grace to recognize it.

[14] Now let him who can, believe it. For whether we believe it or not, it is the truth none the less. This brotherhood is founded among us, and is not such a brotherhood as our loose Kaland, and the brotherhood of the monks, but it is that of Christ, wherein God is our Father and his own Son our brother, and where such inheritance is bestowed upon us as assures not merely a hundred thousand dollars, one or more kingdoms, but in which we are redeemed from the fellowship of the devil, from sin and death, and obtain the inheritance and possession of eternal life and eternal

righteousness; and though we were once in sin, worthy of death and eternal damnation, and are so even now, we should know that this brotherhood is greater, mightier, stronger and superior to. the devil, sin and all things. We are not fallen so deeply', and things are not so bad and ruined that this brotherhood cannot arrange and fully restore everything again, inasmuch as it is eternal, infinite and inexhaustible.

[15] For who is he that has instituted this brotherhood? The only Son of God and almighty Lord of all creatures, so that on his own account he did not need to endure suffering or death. But I have done all this, he tells us, for your sake, as your dear Brother, who could not bear to see, that you, eternally separated from God by the devil, sin and death, should so miserably perish; hence I stepped into your place and took your misery upon myself, gave my body and life for you that you might be delivered; and I have risen again to proclaim and impart this deliverance and victory to you, and receive you into my brotherhood, that you might possess and enjoy with me all that I have and hold.

[16] Thus you see, it is not enough for Christ that the historical fact has occurred, and that as far as he is concerned everything is accomplished; he infuses it into us and creates a brotherhood from it, so that it may become the common possession and inheritance of us all; he does not place it in *praedicamento absoluto*, but *relationis*, namely, he has done this, not for himself personally nor for his own sake, but as our Brother and alone for our good. And he does not want to be considered and known otherwise than as being ours with all these blessings, and that we, on the other hand, are his; and that we are therefore so closely united that we could not be more intimately related, having a common Father, enjoying an equal, common and undivided estate, and authorized to use all his power, honor and estate, to boast of it, and to comfort ourselves with it, as though it were our own.

[17] Who can fully, comprehend this? and what heart can sufficiently believe that the Lord is so completely ours? For indeed, it is a thing too great and unspeakable, that we poor, miserable children of Adam, born and grown old in sin, are to be the real brethren of supreme Majesty, joint-heirs and joint-rulers in eternal life; as St. Paul so gloriously declares, Romans 8:17; Galatians 4:7: "And if children then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, etc." For all this follows in order: if we are called the

children of God, then we must truly be also his heirs, and brethren and joint-heirs of Christ the Lord, who is the only essential Son of God.

[18] Hence, let him who can learn rightly to begin to pray the Lord's Prayer; and to know what it signifies for me to call God my Father, and for me most truly and fully to regard and consider myself his dear child and the brother of Christ the Lord, who has shared with me everything that he has and placed me in possession of his eternal treasures. Here examine and ask your own heart, whether without doubt and wavering you can thus say from the bottom of your heart: "Our Father;" whether you are firmly grounded upon and can be assured before God: I consider myself thy dear child, and thee my dear Father, not because I have merited it, or could ever merit it, but because my dear Lord wants to be my Brother, and of his own accord has proclaimed it and invited me to regard him as my Brother, and has said that he would also regard me as such. Only begin this, I say, and see how you will succeed in the task; and you will soon discover what an unbelieving knave is hidden in your bosom, and that your heart is too dull to believe it. O, I am such a poor sinner, nature exclaims, how dare I exalt myself so highly, seat myself in heaven and boast that Christ is mine, and I am his brother! For this greatness and glory is so exceedingly high, beyond all human sense, heart and thought, that we cannot comprehend it; even as Paul himself also confesses in Philippians 3:12, that he is pressing on to. lay hold of it, but has not yet attained it. Yea, man is astounded and terrified at himself for presuming to receive and boast of such honor and glory.

[19] But, what shall we do? We must indeed say, and it is true, that we are poor sinners, and with St. Peter, we have denied our Lord (I especially above others). But what shall we do about it? It is enough and more than enough that which I did against him in falling away from him and making myself a knave. Should I, in addition, make him a liar and a knave, and deny this comforting proclamation, and blaspheme? God forbid!

[20] Yea, says the devil, through my flesh thou art not worthy of this. Alas, it is true; but if I would not believe and accept it, I would have to, make my Lord a liar, and declare that it is not true when he tells me that he is my Brother. God forbid that I should do this, for that would be rejecting my God and all my salvation and eternal blessedness, and to trample it under foot.

[21] This, therefore, will I say: I know very well that I am an unworthy being, worthy to be the brother of the devil, not of Christ and his saints; but now Christ has said that I, for whom he died and rose again, as well as for St. Peter, who like myself was a sinner, am his brother; and he earnestly would have me to believe him, without doubt and wavering, and would not have me consider that I am unworthy and full of sin, because he himself will not so consider nor remember it, as indeed he well might do, having abundant cause to repay his followers and visit upon them what they committed against him. But it is all forgotten and blotted out of his heart; yea, he has slain, covered and buried it; and he knows nothing to say of them now but that which is kind and good, and he greets them and addresses them affectionately as his faithful, dearest friends and pious children, as though they had not done any wrong, nor grieved him, but had done only good to him; so that their hearts may not be uneasy or worried with the thought that he would remember it and charge it against or visit it upon them. Since then he does not want it remembered, but wants it slain and buried, why should not I leave it at that, and thank, praise and love my dear Lord with my whole heart, for being so gracious and merciful? Even though I am laden with sin, why should I go on and brand as a falsehood this gracious Word, which I hear himself speak; and willfully reject the proffered brotherhood? If I do not believe it, I will not receive its benefits; but that neither renders it false nor proves that anything is lacking in Christ.

[22] If anyone now desires to load himself down with new sins, and does not want forgotten what he has forgotten, let him then so sin that it never will be forgotten, and he never can be helped; as we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 4:4-6, and Hebrews 10:26, concerning those who have sinned by falling away from God's Word and rebuking it as a lie. This is the sin against the Holy Ghost and is described as crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting the Spirit of grace to an open shame. From this may God protect all who desire to be Christians! Alas, there is too much of the old blindness and folly, in which we have been enveloped hitherto. This ought to perish and be forgotten, now that we have become his brethren, if we only accept it. If we cannot believe as firmly as we ought, let us begin, like young children, to drink at least a little spoonful of this milk, until we become stronger, and not thrust it from us altogether.

[23] Therefore, though your own unworthiness rebukes you, when you engage in prayer, and though you think: Alas, my sins are too many, and I am afraid that I cannot be Christ's brother, strike out about you and defend yourself as best you can, that such thoughts may find no room in your mind. For here you are in great danger of committing the sin against the Holy Ghost. With all confidence and boldness reply to such thoughts of the devil: I know very well what I am, and you need not tell nor teach me, for it is not your business to judge this case; therefore, away, thou lying spirit! I will not and must not listen to thee. Here is my Lord Jesus Christ, God's only Son, who died for me and rose again from the dead; he tells me that all my sins are forgotten, and that he will be my Brother, and that I likewise am to be his brother; and it is his will that I should believe this from my heart without wavering.

[24] A knave and a villain, yea, a brother of the wretched devil himself must he be who would not accept this. Though I be not worthy of it, yet am I in great need of it; and even if that were not so, God at least is worthy that I should honor him and judge him to be the true God. But should I not believe, I would, in addition to all other sins, in this worst possible way heap dishonor upon him in violation of the first commandment, in making him a liar and a vain God. What greater wickedness and blasphemy has any man ever heard or proclaimed? Much rather do thus: When you feel that it is too hard for you to believe, fall down upon your knees and complain to God of your inability; and say with the apostles: "O, Lord, increase our faith." Luke 17:57. I would at heart gladly count thee my dearest Father, and Christ my Brother, but my flesh, alas, will not submit; therefore help my unbelief that I may honor thy name and hold thy Word to be true.

[25] See, in this way you will yourself experience what a great conflict it requires to believe God's Word and to pray the Lord's Prayer aright; not as though this Word in itself were not sure, steadfast and strong enough, but that we are so weak, yea, so much like wretched, unstable mercury that we cannot hold fast that which is well worthy of being held with hands and hearts of steel and adamant.

[26] Formerly, when we were led astray and cheated with lies and false worship, we could hold fast and comfort ourselves with firm, though false, faith in all the saints and the brotherhoods of the monks; and joyfully said: Help, dear lord St. George, or St. Anthony, and St. Francis, and let me enjoy

the benefit of thy intercessions! There was no doubting or opposition then; this occupation was agreeable to us, and we had fists and strength of iron to believe. But here where Christ, the Truth itself, offers us his fellowship, even invites and urges us in the most affectionate manner, saying: Beloved, receive me as your Brother, he cannot succeed in leading us to believe and accept it. So mightily do the flesh and the devil resist and oppose it 186

[27] Therefore, I say, it is best for each one, when he goes into his closet and begins to pray, to make an effort to understand what he is saying, and properly to weigh two words, "Our Father." For example: My friend, what are you praying? How does your heart respond? Do you truly regard God as your Father, and yourself as his dear child? No, indeed, says the heart, I do not know; how can I presume to ascribe a thing so great and glorious to myself? Then why do you not refrain from prayer, when with your lips you call God your Father, while your heart gives the lie to yourself and to him as he has revealed himself in his Word? Rather, confess your weakness and say: I indeed call thee my Father, and ought to call thee so, according to thy Word and command; but I am afraid that my heart is lying like a knave. And the worst of it is, not that I myself alone am lying; but that I accuse thee also of falsehood. Help me, dear Lord and Father, that I may not make thee a liar; for I cannot become a liar myself without first having made thee one.

[28] Therefore, though I realize and experience, alas, that I cannot say "Our Father" with my whole heart, as indeed no man on earth fully can, else we would already be in heavenly blessedness, yet will I make an attempt and begin, as a little child begins to nurse at its mother's breast. If I cannot believe it fully, yet will not I count it a falsehood, nor say, nay. Though I cannot play the game as is proper, I will beware lest I play in opposition as the monks and the despairing hearts do, who fail to regard Christ as their Brother, but as an enemy and a taskmaster; for that would be turning him into the very devil. But I would daily spell at the letters, until I am able to repeat "Our Father" and this Sermon of Christ as well or as poorly as I may. God grant that though I stammer and stutter or lisp, I may to some degree at least accomplish it.

[29] For, as already stated, this is the sin of all sins, that when God is gracious and wants all our sins forgiven, man by his unbelief rejects God's truth and grace, and casts it away from him, and will not let the death and

resurrection of Christ the Lord avail. For, indeed, I cannot say that this brotherhood, which brings us forgiveness of sins and every blessing, is my work and doings, or that of any man, or that anybody labored or sought for it. For this resurrection occurred and was accomplished before any man knew aught about it; and that it is proclaimed and preached to us is likewise not done through the word of man, but by that of God; wherefore it cannot fail or lie. Since then it is solely the truth and work of God, it behooves us, under penalty of God's extreme wrath and displeasure, to accept it as coming from God, and to hold it fast by faith, so that we may not fall into the sin that is unpardonable.

[30] For whatever other sins there are, contrary to God's command and Law, which consist of all that we are to do and that God demands of us, these are all covered by forgiveness, since we are never entirely free from them during our whole life; and if God were to reckon with us according to our life and conduct, we could never be saved. But he who will not believe the Word of Christ nor accept his work, sins a hundred thousand times more; for he strives against grace, and robs himself of forgiveness. For it is grace that saith: The law shall not hurt nor condemn thee, although thou hast sinned against it exceedingly, but these sins shall all be forgiven and taken away by Christ; since that is why he died for thee and rose again, and now presents all this to thee, through this proclamation of his brotherhood. Now if you will not believe nor accept this, but stubbornly set your head against it, and say: I want no grace, what will then help you? Or what will you seek further, to obtain forgiveness and be saved? Yea, I will be a Carthusian friar, go barefooted to Rome and buy an indulgence, etc. Very well, go ahead as you will, not in God's, but in the wretched devil's name; for by this you have denied not only grace, but also the law, and are fallen from God completely, inasmuch as you seek such works and holiness as are not commanded by God, yea, are even forbidden.

[31] Should not God be angry and punish us for daily babbling, singing and reading the Lord's Prayer and the Creed without understanding, faith and heart, and for thinking nothing not only of Christ, but also of God's Law; boasting instead and bringing before God only our own efforts and false spirituality, over and above and opposed to his grace and command, expecting thereby to reconcile him and earn heaven from him? This is what we deserve for despising God's Word and this glorious, comforting

proclamation of Christ; to. be shamefully blinded and cheated by the devil, and punished and plagued by the pope; as though God thereby said: Very well, if you will not have my Son as your Brother, and me for your dear Father, then take the pope with his monks, who point you away from the Gospel, the Creed and the Ten Commandments, to their shabby, stinking cowls and the devil's brotherhood.

[32] For since they did not want Christ to be and remain our Brother without our merit and worthiness, and to bring us God's grace and forgiveness of sin; what is this but really and actually denying faith in God and his Son, as St. Paul says, Titus 1:16, even though they confess him with their lips? Just as I too did in my former blindness, when I helped to sing and read these words with others, and yet thought far more highly of my monkery and my own works. For if I had accepted as true and certain what St. Paul says in Romans 4:25 that Christ died for our sins and was raised again for our justification, in order that we might become his brethren, then I would thereby have learned that my own works and my monk's hood could not obtain this for me. Otherwise what need would there have been for Christ to go and take my sins and the wrath of God upon himself in his cross and death, and by his resurrection to place me into the inheritance of the forgiveness of sins, of eternal salvation and glory?

[33] But now, inasmuch as they cling to their monkery, and seek God's grace by their own merits, desiring thereby to get rid of and atone for their sins, they bear witness against themselves that they do not believe what they say with their lips: I believe in Jesus Christ who died for me and rose again, etc.; but they believe, on the contrary, in the cowl and cord of the barefooted monks, in St. Ann, St. Anthony, and in the devil (pardon me), in his rump. Because it is impossible for one who knows Christ in this brotherhood to be engaged in such follies as are taught and observed not only without faith and contrary to it, but also contrary to the commandments, and which are real diabolical sins, the sins of all sins.

[34] Therefore, in opposition to all this, a Christian ought to acquire the custom of praying the Lord's Prayer, firmly crossing himself and saying in thought: Keep me, dear Lord, from the sin against the Holy Ghost, that I may not fall from faith and thy Word, and may not become a Turk, a Jew or a monk and a papal saint, who believe and live contrary to this brotherhood; but that I may hold fast to a little fringe of the garment of this brotherhood.

Let it be sufficient that we have believed and lived contrary to it so long; now it is time to pray God to make this faith sure and steadfast in us. For if we have this faith, then are we healed and delivered from sin, death and hell, and are able to try all other spirits, to discern and reject all error, deception, and false faith, and to pronounce the sentence: He who dons the cowl and shaves his head in order to become holy, or joins the brotherhood of monks, is a mad, senseless fool, yea, a blind, miserable, unhappy and despairing creature; he who tortures himself with much fasting and castigation, like the Carthusian friars or Turkish saints, is already separated from God and Christ and condemned to hell. For all this is nothing but blasphemy and contradiction of the blessed heavenly brotherhood of Christ. They may indeed pray and read a great deal about it, as Isaiah 29:13 says: “This people draweth nigh to me with their lips,” cometh before my face in the churches: with singing and ringing, “but their hearts are far from me.” What pleasure, think you, can he have in such saints, who outwardly act as though they were real children of God, reading and singing the Gospel, employing the most beautiful words and celebrating a glorious Easter festival in processions, with banners and candles, and yet, do not try to understand or believe it, but rather oppose it by their doctrine and life?

[35] For if they understood and believed it, they would not cling to their mockery and vanities, but would forthwith trample their cowls and cords under foot, and say: Fie upon this shameful brotherhood! To the wretched devil with it, for opposing the brotherhood taught me by the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer! For it is not worthy of notice or attention. Thus Paul in Philippians 3:5, pronounces judgment upon his own holy life in Judaism: I was, says he, a pious, blameless man, not only in my own vain estimation, but according to the law of Moses; but when I learned to know Christ, I counted all my righteousness under the law loss, yea, not only loss, but I counted it refuse and filth. I indeed thought I was a great saint, that I had kept the law strictly and with all diligence, and counted this my highest treasure and greatest gain; but when I heard of this brotherhood and inheritance of the Lord Jesus Christ, O how my pride and the boast of my own righteousness left me so completely that I now shudder at it, and do not even want to think of it.

[36] See, he extols the righteousness this brotherhood brings us in such a way that he belittles and thoroughly despises the life and the holiness of all

men even when it is at its best according to the law of God, which law must indeed be kept, and than which there is verily nothing more praiseworthy and better on earth. And yet, because it still is our own effort and life, it cannot and shall not have the honor and glory of making us God's children, and of acquiring the forgiveness of sins and eternal life; but this is effected when you hear the word of Christ, saying: Good-morning, my dear brother; in me thy sin and death are overcome, for all I have done, I have done for thee, etc.

[37] This is the ground of St. Paul's defiance of sin and death: "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" 1 Corinthians 15:55 and Hosea 13:14. As though he wished to say: In times past you were mighty, terrible foes, before whom all men, no matter how holy and pious, had to tremble and despair; but where are you now? How did I lose you so completely? Why, he replies, everything is swallowed up and completely drowned in a victory. But where is the victory, or whose is the victory? "Thanks be to God", he replies in verse 51, "who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

[38] This indeed is glorious and great boldness, possible, however, for such faith alone as that of St. Paul; yet which, as he himself laments, was not as strong as he desired it to be; still, he certainly had it, and was able to maintain it against the wrath and power of the devil. That we are not able to do likewise and are still so fearful and terrified at death and hell, is an evidence that we still have too little faith. Therefore we have the more reason to impel us to call upon God and pray and also to ask the supplications of our brethren to that end, and daily to work the Word into our hearts, until we too, in some degree, obtain this assurance.

[39] Let our adversaries laugh us to scorn and derisively say that we know how to teach nothing but faith, and let them cry that we must rise far higher and do far more. But if we only had faith enough, we would soon attend to everything else. For the chief and most necessary thing, of which they know nothing, is, how to get rid of the terror of sin, death and hell, and how to acquire a peaceful conscience before God, so that we may be able truly and heartily to pray "Our Father." Where this has not been found everything else is in vain, though we should torture ourselves to death with our works. But since everybody comes short in this respect, we need not be ashamed of learning and being concerned about these things daily, as we are

about our daily bread, and in addition we should ask God to give us power and strength. Amen.

Easter Monday, or Second Easter Day. Emmaus. Explanation of this Gospel and the Lord's Supper Christ Died and Rose Again to Pay For Our Sins.

Text: Luke 24:13-35.

13 And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs.

14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

15 And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.

16 But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.

17 And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?

18 And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?

19 And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people:

20 And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him.

21 But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.
22 Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre;
23 And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.
24 And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.
25 Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:
26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?
27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.
28 And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further.
29 But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.
30 And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.
31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.
32 And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?
33 And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them,
34 Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.
35 And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread. Luke 24:13-35

I. The Preparation for Partaking of the Lord's Supper

[1] This Gospel, in one part, teaches and urges us to take pleasure in speaking and working for our Lord Jesus Christ. It does so by showing what fruit follows from such a course, although that fruit is not understood; and grasped so clearly as it ought to be. You see here that the two disciples are

still full of unbelief; yet, as they are speaking about Jesus, and seemingly in vain, he cannot remain absent from them; but draws near, opens their eyes and interprets to them the Scriptures. You ought to faithfully lay hold of this and retain it, for it is a precious thing. However, before I treat further of the Gospel, which is easy as to its history, I must first, for the sake of the simple and plain people, say a few things about the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

[2] Beloved, you have heard that we preached who are worthy to receive the Lord's Supper, namely, those who by the Word of God are moved in their hearts to believe, and that those who are not thus prepared ought to refrain from it. And it is right to deter everyone from rushing to it or going in one's own preparation, as was formerly common. That is the right way to preach, and I would to God that many might be thus terrified. But again I notice in many, and in myself also, that the devil spirit presses the other side also too much, so as to cause hearts to be weary and backward in partaking of the communion, so that they never approach it unless they feel for a certainty that they are fervid in faith. This is also dangerous, since thereby we would do away with the preparation which was formerly customary, but would establish a new preparation that would also not be right.

[3] We have rejected those who prepare to receive the sacrament by their own works, a thing that God abhors. But by so doing we may easily cause people to become slow, so as always to wait until God comes and gives us perfect faith, so that they may go. Hence we can never preach enough about faith, even if we preach long and earnestly about it, for our reason can never understand it. Hence, to meet this evil, we will treat it more at length and must divide it into two parts, or rather, into the two classes of persons who prepare to go to the Lord's Supper.

[4] In the first place we have taught that it did not profit anyone to prepare for the sacrament by his own strength, as those did who endeavored by their confession and other works to make themselves worthy to receive it. This is a terrible error and abuse, and the only true advice we can give those who undertake such things is to refrain from them and to keep far from the sacrament.

[5] The other preparation, that is made in faith, and of which we have said enough before, is right, as it comes and proceeds from God. It is not done in such a way that one always feels confident he is worthy. Where

would faith be if that were the case? But it takes place thus: Without any of my preparing and doing, God's Word comes to me. I may indeed go and hear it, or read and preach it, so that it thus enters my heart. And that is the right preparation, which is not made by the power and cunning of man, but by the strength of God. Hence there is no better preparation for all the sacraments than to permit and suffer God to prepare us. This is a brief talk about the preparation. And now we will consider the communicants.

II. Persons for Whom the Holy Supper is not and for Whom it Is

[6] The Gospel and Word of God, which is a speech or discourse about Christ, sometimes falls upon the ears of those who do not accept it or even despise it; and, as Christ says in Luke 8:5, it falls by the wayside, that is, into hard, unprepared hearts.

[7] Then there are others who are vile rascals and live in open vice. Matthew 13:22. Even though they hear the Gospel and never really oppose it, they are not much concerned about it. As you see our fanatics do now, who can greatly talk and spit about it, especially when they are full, and make light of it. They have grasped nothing of it, except a glibness in talking about it. They are all wicked hearts. Of this class are also those who live in deep avarice, so materialistic that they feel it. And thus they live in other gross sins and have little reverence for the holy Gospel, even if they are able to talk glibly about it. But we never care to preach to them, for all is lost on them and the Gospel makes them neither humble nor hungry.

[8] Thirdly, the very worst are those who besides persecute the Gospel. Of them Christ says in Matthew 7:6: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before the swine." These three sects do not belong to the Gospel Church, and we are not preaching to them. And I wish the law were enforced and they were punished, — these rude swine, — who talk so foolishly about the Gospel as if it were a story of Theodocius of Bern, or some other tale. If anyone will be a pig let him know what is becoming a pig. I really wish I could exclude them from my preaching, that they might never hear it, and be far away from it. They can do nothing but misuse the Gospel to their own injury, and disgrace us, so that for their own sake the Word of God must suffer dishonor and abuse. Out with the dirty swine!

[9] Finally, there are some who are like the people here in this Gospel. Behold, how they still lack in faith, for they speak in this wise: “We hoped he would redeem Israel.” As if they meant to say: We do not know what the result will be. It is clearly evident that it will amount to nothing. He is dead now and even if he came to life again and arose from the dead, he surely cannot redeem the people and become a king. And so they thought redemption was a failure. Therefore the two disciples here are the multitude that taste the Gospel in their hearts and dislike to have it despised and disobeyed; but still they are so timid that they hesitate to draw near because they feel they are neither strong nor fervid enough. They draw back and do not want to approach near until they feel and experience that they are strong in faith. These are persons to whom the Gospel belongs, even though they stumble at times, so that they become disgusted with themselves, feel their disease and wish to get rid of it, and are not hard of heart. These should be urged and drawn to Christ. We have never yet preached to any but such people.

[10] For it is the nature of faith that a man knows his faults and earnestly desires to be free from them. No one dare wait until God performs a miraculous sign for him, and treats him differently from other people to whom he gives the signs in the Gospel and in the sacraments. God gave us the treasure and revealed it for the purpose alone that we should go and get it. Hence, when you feel your weakness, you ought to go and say: My Lord, I have fallen. I want to be strong. Now thou hast instituted the Lord’s Supper for us to kindle and strengthen our faith thereby and that we might be thus helped. So here I am and wish to receive it. This should be our comfort and we ought joyfully to use the Word and the sacraments when we feel our lack of faith, and rejoice to receive aid to seek help and strength. There our souls find it within us.

[11] For you must not make Christ a tyrant, but accept him for what he in truth is and let him be unto you nothing but rich, abounding grace. However, if you feel in your heart you have not reached this point and do not believe, and yet would like to believe, you must after all not despair and shun the communion, but seek your help right there, so that your faith may be kindled and increased. For, though some have been terribly punished for partaking of the sacrament unworthily and without faith, they are only those whom we described above, namely, the hardened, wicked hearts. You must

do and think thus: Lord, see, that is thy Word and this is my sickness and failing. Thou thyself hast said, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28. Do you think he said that to those who are already fervid and strong in faith? His kingdom is not established to the end of furthering the righteous, Matthew 9:3, but of helping sinners and making them righteous. 1 Timothy 1:15. Hence, whoever is weak and experiences it, should go to the communion and let God help him.

[12] But there is another herd not on the right track. We have prophets abroad in the land who teach the people too freely to be bold and defiant, who speak with the divine Majesty as they would with a cobbler's apprentice. These impudent and proud spirits are by no means to be followed. It is well for you to be backward and timid, and to fear and tremble. I like such fear. You just abide in it and go and have your conscience calmed. But such proud minds and unbroken hearts that act so defiantly and deal with God as if he must be afraid of them, he cannot tolerate.

[13] Therefore you must humble yourself, and abide in fear so as to feel your struggles and weaknesses, and desire faith. If you experience that, then thank God, for that is a sure sign the Word has struck and moved you, and exercises, constrains and impels you. What sort of faith would that be if I went and had no fear and anguish of heart to exercise my faith? For it is the very nature of faith, that it proves its strength in fear, in death and sins, and in all things that make a human being afraid and timid. Therefore if you feel thus, it is the proper time for you to go, for then your faith will find something to do. And to this end private confession is helpful. It is well to go to a pious man, and point out your need to him and ask advice, whether he thinks you are worthy to go to the Lord's Supper, and then follow his advice. That is the real' purpose of confession and of the sacrament. They are of no other use and are instituted for the purpose of assisting weak consciences that are burdened by their sins.

[14] But you say: How then, if I am so inert and cold that I have no desire for it, still I feel that I need it; yet the Gospel and the sacrament do not satisfy me so that almost every spark in my heart is extinguished? Answer: You must not desist. For as long as you feel that you are not yet lost and not yet so wicked as those described above; for you always wish to

burn with zeal. Therefore you must do as follows: Take to yourself the Word of God, go and hear it preached, read it, write it or even sing it, only so you live it and keep busy with it, then you will experience something. Then go to the Lord's Supper and say: Lord, I am a lazy character; but I come that thou shouldst help me and kindle my heart. Add to it whatever words and thought you can think and say. You must not stop to think how to prepare yourself to be worthy for the communion; you are already prepared if you feel that you would gladly be helped, and your need constrains you to go.

[15] It has often happened to me that I hesitated and thus departed farther from it, until I saw nothing helped me and I had to go. Thus you also will find that it is the devil's spectre that draws people away so that the more they are afraid and wait until they experience faith in their hearts, the farther they drift from it. And at last, if they continue in this state, all desire and impulse, both toward the Word and the sacrament, dies out in them, and they never come. Hence you must put aside such thoughts and fear, and go and ask God to help you. If you do so often, you will experience that you will gain more and more desire for it, a thing you would not have gained otherwise. Therefore I wish you would do this, and that there were many to go to the sacrament in such a frame of mind and would gain more and more pleasure in it, and become stronger and stronger. But if you do not go, you will always remain cold and will ever grow colder and colder.

[16] This ought to comfort you, and you will experience it if you try it. For it is impossible for God's Word not to produce fruit and be a blessing. God spake as follows: "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven and returneth not thither but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, and giveth seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Isaiah 55:10-11. This Scripture ought to make us very bold and happy, if we have already grown cold. By the grace of God we have God's Word and we ought to raise our hands and thank him for it. How many are there in the world who do not possess it? How could you otherwise have obtained it? There you have the whole supply and the preparation that serves it, and yet you have knavery enough to contend with it. Therefore, as God says that his Word will not return without fruit and if

you use it not to make a mockery of it, but are in earnest about it, you will undoubtedly feel and experience something, and the more you use it, the more you will have this experience. You cannot have evil thoughts in your heart if you take a portion of the Scriptures before you and read it, or you meet another person and converse with him about it. If you do this, evil lusts will succumb and the flesh will be subdued. I have often tried it, and if you try it you will also find the fruits and experience that it is as God says. What more do you wish prepared for you?

[17] Isaiah it not enough that you possess God's Word that draws you, and besides that you feel your distress driving you to it? And then Christ is there and waits to help you. What more shall he do? And there is nobody excluded but proud, insolent persons and the castaways that are not in earnest. Therefore you must go and remember that Christ looks more deeply into your heart than you do yourself, as you see in this Gospel. These two poor men would not have dared to wish for what meets them. Yet such grace is bestowed upon them that Christ himself comes to them, while speaking of him, and reveals himself so that they know him. This fills their hearts with joy that they could not tarry there but ran and told the other disciples how the Lord manifested himself to them. Then they are full of joy, as they would not have dared to wish; but still it was so deep in their hearts that they themselves did not perceive that they desired it, although their hearts were so set upon it that they would have loved to see nothing better than for the Lord Jesus Christ to rise from the dead and be king. Therefore God looks more deeply into the depths of the heart than we ourselves, and he also gives us more than we desire. Thus he does also here. If you feel that you are not so fervent as you would like to be, he looks more deeply into your heart than you do, since you are anxious to be fully set on fire and become a burning light. Therefore you ought not to flee from him, but approach boldly.

[18] To this end many passages in Paul's writings serve. For example, he says to the Ephesians: "The Lord is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Ephesians 3:20. Now we clearly see what he gives us when we receive it and we feel that we receive it with joy. Therefore St. Paul says that we do not see nor even think of it while we desire it; but the Lord, who searcheth the hearts, sees and understands our desire, and therefore he bestows upon us his grace abundantly. Thus we read of

St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, that she wept for her son during nine long years. It was her heart's desire for him to become a Christian, and she devised many plans by which to bring him to Christ. She wanted him to marry a Christian woman who should make a plain Christian husband of him. But she did not dare to hope or expect him to become the man he did later, although she would have gladly seen it.

[19] Then look at the examples all through the Gospel. St. Peter was too timid when the Lord wished to wash his feet and said, "Shouldest thou wash my feet?" and did not understand that his need compelled him, and his heart urged him, to see the necessity of Christ's washing him, as he said soon after, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." John 13:9. And our heart is in the same condition, that we wish to see the Lord Jesus present, to help us, and yet we are so timid that we are afraid of him and do not think as much of his loving kindness as we freely profess to do. For, if we considered him to be what he is, we would say as Peter did, "Wash not my feet only, but also my hands and my head," and think, now I will gladly go to him, even if I had a greater burden of sin. There is likewise another example of St. Peter in Luke 5:6-8, when they sat in the ship and caught so many fishes that their nets broke. Then Peter was amazed, fell down at Jesus' knees and said, "Depart from me, I am a sinful man, O Lord." Notice he was frightened and bids him to go away at the very time he ought to pray him to come. Thus our timid nature is ever afraid of Christ, in whom there is nothing but good, and who has come to help everybody. That is why I said, we must not make a tyrant of Christ, but suffer him to be a dear Lord and Savior, who has no other desire but to help sinners, and to invite and attract everybody by his words and example.

[20] This exposition of the nature of faith is clear enough, for our great trouble is that we do not really understand the nature of faith. Therefore do this: Begin and try it and you will experience it; and the more you practice it, the more comfort and strength you will experience; and the more unworthy you feel you are, the more you must appropriate God's Word to yourself and practice it, hear or read it and speak about it, and you will always find and prove something that pleases and moves you. You should besides pray to God and say as the apostles did in Luke 17:5: "Lord, increase my faith." Thus go and you will be strengthened. But if you dwell too much on your timidity you will never go; for then you will persist to

feel and not to believe. You must experience your misery and struggles of conscience. Then is the time for you to go to the Lord's Supper. Even if you are weak in faith you must not on that account step back, for he will not reject you since he has come for the sole purpose of strengthening the weak and comforting the despondent.

[21] But I do not wish to have all this preached to hardened insolent characters and the fanatics, but only to consciences that are faint and weak, and occasionally fall, so that they do not despond, but know where to find help and comfort. On this point a father in the desert uttered a wise saying. When he saw that a brother was weak and faint, he said: No, my brother, thou must not withdraw thus and go back, for thou mightest go back so far that thou couldest not return. For it is to be feared that the longer we stay away, the colder and lazier we become. They ought to stay away, as we have said at length, who lead a wicked and immoral life and do not intend to amend their ways. But those who know their weaknesses and want to be rid of them and see that they cannot help themselves, they should come to the communion for help.

[22] From this you see why God instituted and ordained that his Word should be preached; and therefore it ought not to be despised. It is true that the Word without the Spirit is of no use; but since God Almighty himself said, as we have heard, "My Word that goeth forth out of my mouth, shall not return unto me void," it must not be despised. For through his Word he gives the Holy Spirit into your hearts and will not suffer you to gape and wait for a miraculous sign from heaven, to be done on you, and thus to ignore his Word and sacrament. He himself highly esteems and praises the Word, for he has decreed to give his grace through it, as Christ says, "No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me, draw him." John 6:44. How does the Father draw us? Through Christ. How through Christ? By the Word. Thus he invites and calls you. If your need impels you, go then joyfully, tell your trouble bravely; but always bring the Word with you.

[23] But leave it to God, how you may remain steadfast, and go now, while you have the Word and feel your misery. Then the Word itself will teach you how to prepare yourself aright. For then you must accuse yourself before God and say: Lord, I am a sinner and cannot help myself by my own strength, so I come to thee for help. If I have sufficient grace only to delight in the Word of God with my whole heart and I have joy and pleasure in it, I

can surely remain steadfast. For it must be something great for God to give me his Word and cause it to be pleasing and attractive to me. Even if I am not so strong now as I ought to be, I shall grow stronger in time and at last reach the point when I can confess his grace without fear and devote my life to it. Therefore Christ says: “Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you, for everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.” Matthew 7:7-8.

[24] Therefore I would faithfully admonish you to act wisely in this matter. We have justly condemned those who undertake to prepare themselves by their own works; but we have invited those who feel their need and see they can do nothing by their own power, and can find neither counsel nor help, for these use the Lord’s Supper unto their personal salvation. Therefore, if you feel thus, go first to a pious man and tell him your distress and say, Lo, I have fallen and would like to obtain help and I ask for counsel what to do. Then he should comfort him and welcome him to the sacrament, so that he may exercise his faith and be strengthened. For it is instituted for this very purpose of ministering comfort and strength. Therefore let nothing keep you from the communion. If you feel bashful, it is well, for you must feel your unworthiness. If you however do not feel your guilt, you are not in a fit frame of mind to go, and it will be better for you to refrain from going.

[25] Take the Gospel and the Holy Scriptures before you, the more the better, even if you already know them and have often read them. For it is certainly a suggestion of the devil who tries to tear from you your delight in the Word. He hates to have you come to it, for he knows very well what fruit it bears in you. If you are thus busy with the Word and strive to live it the best you can, you will see that Christ is with you and a fire is kindled in your heart. But the best is, for two or three earnestly to speak among themselves about it, so that the living voice is heard. Then you will be much stronger and the devil must yield. Thus all evil lust and thoughts disappear and thus will ensue such a light and knowledge, you have never before experienced. The only trouble is that we fools have such a great treasure lying before our doors and do not know how to use it. And the devil deceives us in order to draw us away from it and make us indifferent, because he cannot overcome it. Therefore we must prepare to resist the

devil's suggestions and influence. In like manner Christ will come and reveal himself even though at first you are not aware of it; the more you speak about it and discuss it the more clearly you will recognize Christ and feel that he kindles your heart within you, as you heard in this Gospel of the two disciples journeying to, the village of Emmaus. III. The Conclusion

[26] This I had to preach now concerning the Lord's Supper and the Gospel, as God gave us the light, and I admonish you, my friends, to grasp and faithfully use it. If there be fanatics, who disgrace the Gospel, they ought to be punished by the civil authorities. But we must let them also hear, for the sake of the righteous, for we are to preach God's Word publicly to everybody, since we do not know whom it may strike.

Easter Monday. Second Emmaus Sermon. Three Thoughts Taught by This Gospel. The Last Day. Jesus Will Return.

Text: Luke 24:13-35.

13 And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs.

14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

15 And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.

16 But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.

17 And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?

18 And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto

him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?

19 And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people:

20 And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him.

21 But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.

22 Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre;

23 And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.

24 And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.

25 Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

28 And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further.

29 But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.

30 And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.

31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

32 And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

33 And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them,

34 Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.

35 And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread. Luke 24:13-35

I. Three Thoughts Taught by this Gospel.

[1] This Gospel brings out and enforces especially three thoughts on the article of faith concerning Christ's resurrection. First, that this narrative transpired and was written along with others as a sure witness and proof of our faith in this article of our Creed. First, in that we see these two disciples leave the company of the others, full of unbelief in the resurrection. They commune together about the things that transpired as if they despair of Christ, and he is now dead and forever buried in their hearts, who does nothing more and is unable to do anything. This appears from their own confession where they say: "We hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel. Yea, and besides this, it is now the third day since he is dead." And though they had heard from the women that these had seen a vision of angels who told them that Christ had risen and was alive, yet they urged that he had not been seen or found by anyone. In the second place — and this is the most important fact — we here see Christ not only showing himself alive to the unbelieving disciples, so that they might become assured of his resurrection and return at once to announce it to the others, and to hear the same truth from them, the testimony on both sides agreeing and being thereby established; but also that Christ, before they knew him, proved fully and clearly from the Scriptures that it behooved Christ both to die and to rise again from the dead. For this reason he upbraided them for their unbelief because they ought to have known the Scriptures concerning Christ, since he himself had taught them that his sufferings were foretold in the Scriptures.

[2] The second thought this Gospel presents is an example of the power and fruit of the resurrection as manifested in these two disciples while they are talking of him and listening to his preaching. This also is nothing less than a portion of the proof of his resurrection. For Christ here proves by word and deed that he is not dead, as they believed before, but works in them and exercises his power through the Word, even before they know him, and makes believers of them who have another mind, reason, heart, and will. This they also recognize and confess, saying: "Was not our heart burning within us while he spake to us, etc?" After this manner he still works in the whole Christian church; though unseen, he yet carries on his work and shows his dominion in that, as the living Lord, he enlightens them

through his Word, comforts and strengthens them, defends them with his power and keeps them against the wrath of the devil and the world.

[3] As a third truth, we are here shown in what manner Christ reveals his resurrection, and how it may be known and apprehended, namely, above all first through the Word and faith, rather than through bodily vision or sensation. Therefore he is unknown to them at first when he comes to them and walks with them, though he is with them in very truth, the selfsame Christ whom they had so often seen and heard and known full well. Yet now they do not know him at all, because they know that he had died and had been buried the third day before; and hence can think of him only as a dead man. So strange and unknowable had he become to them that they would not have known him, had he stayed with them ever so long, until he announced to them his resurrection and preached about it. The text says: "Their eyes were holden, that they should not know him." It was not he who had been changed, nor was it his will to remain unknown to them, but their hearts and thoughts had become estranged and far removed from his. In the same way neither Magdalene nor the other disciples recognized him until they had heard the Word of his resurrection.

[4] His purpose is to show and teach us that the power of his resurrection and dominion will be exercised here on earth, and manifest itself in this life, only through the Word, and through faith which holds fast to Christ, though it does not see him, and thus conquers sin and death in him, lays hold of righteousness and life, etc. This is a brief summary of the story contained in this Gospel, in so far as it pertains to the article of faith on the resurrection in general; of which we lately heard more.

[5] But the special purpose of this Gospel is to show us how weak in faith the disciples were, and how Christ in his kingdom manifests himself to such persons of weak faith, and how he deals with them. For we see from the whole story of Christ's resurrection, as recorded in the Gospels, how the Apostles, and all the other disciples after them, were so weak in their faith in this doctrine, even to the time of his ascension, that he had to upbraid them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them that had seen him after he was risen, Mark 16:14. They manifested this weakness, though he had often told them from the Scriptures that he must be crucified and rise again on the third day, etc.

[6] From this we learn, in the first place, that even in those who have become true Christians, weakness and frailties remain, especially in the deeper matters of doctrine and faith, they being unable to understand them or to grasp them as firmly and strongly as they ought. For faith is not so light or easy a matter as ignorant and inexperienced people fancy, and as our coarse blockheads, the popish dunces, pretend, who believe that faith is no more than to have heard the history and to know it. Having heard or read just once what the Gospel tells of Christ, these people fancy that they have fully understood and believed it, and henceforth need no longer to learn and believe it.

[7] That this is naught but an idle, vain fancy, is proved by their own confession that this knowledge of the Bible story rests in their hearts as a cold, lifeless thing, a mere empty husk, lacking all life-giving power, of no use or help to them, neither giving strength nor making them better; whereas this great, exalted miracle of Christ's resurrection was performed and is to be preached, learned, and known, to the end that it may be fruitful in us, quicken and kindle our hearts, and work in us new thoughts, new knowledge, new forces, life, joy, comfort and strength. If this does not take place, the story has been heard in vain, and is dead within you, being of no more value to you than to Turks and heathen who have never heard it, or have not believed it to be true. You dare not boast of faith, though froth on your tongue, or a sound in your ears, or a dream in your memory give witness that you have heard the story, of which your heart has neither experienced nor tasted aught. The papists show plainly, in all their doctrine and life, that they do not from their hearts believe and hold fast to this article of faith, because they seek the power and effect which ought to come from the resurrection of Christ in themselves and outside of Christ, teaching that it must be sought and obtained through their own works and merits, while they condemn, blaspheme, and persecute the saving doctrine that tells us to turn from these foolish lies to Christ and to the power of his resurrection.

[8] Christians, however, and true believers know by sad experience in others as well as in themselves how weak they are, and they deplore the fact that they are unable to grasp this doctrine, or to hold it fast in their hearts with as strong a faith as they ought. Their entire life is spent in combating this weakness, as even Paul says in Philippians 3:12, that he had not

grasped it, nor was already made perfect, but that he was pressing on, if so be that he might lay hold of it, and obtain a knowledge of the power of Christ's resurrection, etc.

[9] For though this doctrine is most delightful and comforting in itself, full of joy and blessedness, and ought to find its way gently and easily into the heart, yet it is hindered by two great obstacles which make it difficult to believe. In the first place, this work of God is much too exalted and too great in itself for us ever to understand thoroughly in this life, even if our faith were perfectly strong and without weakness; for not until we are in the life beyond will we ever truly see and feel its full force and power. In the second place, our own flesh and blood, and the hearts of all men, are by nature much too weak and too fearful to believe God's Word; and must be filled with fear and terror when they contrast the greatness of this work with themselves and their own unworthiness.

[10] God cannot overlook the first cause and obstacle nor have patience with it; for this work must and shall remain as great as it is, and it dare not be belittled; yea, it must be the power to which all creatures, men, angels, the devil, and hell, must yield and be subjected, because it is necessary for our salvation. For if this were not so, we would continue in sin, death and the eternal wrath of God. The other obstacle, namely, that we are too weak to grasp this great work and power by our faith, God may overlook and have patience with; as we here see Christ doing with his disciples, who had certainly heard he had risen, and yet were full of such great and heavy doubts that they almost despaired of Christ entirely saying, "We hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel."

[11] Behold, how earnestly he looks after these two of weak faith, and cares for them, doing everything to lift them out of their weakness, and to strengthen their faith. Because he sees and knows that in great sorrow and sadness they had departed from the other Apostles and do not know what to think or hope, he is determined not to leave them in such doubt and temptation. In order to help them out of it, he becomes their companion on the way, leaving behind all the other Apostles, though they too were assembled in great sorrow and very weak faith. But because these two are in great danger of total unbelief, he at once comes to them, as if he had nothing else to do now that he was risen; he speaks to them in the friendliest way, and reasons with them from the Scriptures, gives them occasion to

retain him and to ask him to abide with them, to eat and to drink in their company, until their faith is quickened once more, and they are relieved of all doubts. Their faith grows so strong that they recognize him as the same Christ who had been with them before in life, and whom they had seen crucified three days ago, but had been unable to recognize on the way by reason of doubt and the weakness of their faith.

[12] It is, therefore, his purpose to teach us by this narrative, given for our instruction and consolation, how his work is to be done in the Christian church after his resurrection, namely, that he will not reject nor cast out those who are weak in their faith, yea, not even those who are held in error or ignorance, or who are otherwise weak, fearful, and despairing. They are rather the very persons in whom he will exercise and manifest the power of his resurrection, not only by inviting them to come to him, but also by coming to them, and treating them in the gentlest and kindest way, talking with them, teaching and instructing them, yea, even eating with them, until at length they grow strong and secure in their faith; while their hearts, so sad and sorrowful for a time, are again filled with joy. Thus we also should know and have this comforting assurance that he is our Lord who is able to bear with our infirmities and to overlook them; that he will not reject and condemn those unable to believe and live at once as they should, if only they do not in their hearts despise and deny Christ and his Word, but delight in him and love him, and truly desire to become strong and perfect in faith and life.

[13] Looking at these disciples, weak and unreasonable as they are, one sees that their hearts nevertheless were in a state that they felt kindly toward Christ, delighted both to speak of him and to hear him spoken of, and had no greater desire than that what they had heard concerning his resurrection might be true. But the thing was much too great for them to believe, so that they were as yet quite unable to accept it as true — just as it is also too high and too great for us. This our dear Lord knows and sees full well, and so he is better able to have patience with us, is satisfied and pleased if only we listen to him as his pupils and are willing to be taught and directed by him.

[14] Furthermore, he thereby wishes to teach us how to conduct ourselves in his kingdom, particularly towards those who are weak and infirm in faith. We also ought not hastily to reject and condemn those whom we see erring or stumbling; but also have patience with them, even as Christ

had with us and still must have every day. For though in his own person by virtue of his resurrection he is in divine might and power Lord of heaven and earth, yet he rules his Church in a way to exercise and manifest the power of his resurrection in his poor, weak band by serving them with this power and might for their consolation and growth.

[15] In harmony with this example, though we be strong, we ought not to take pleasure in ourselves nor boast, but rather let our gifts and powers serve the weak, striving to uphold and reform them by instruction, consolation, encouragement, friendly admonition and reproof, etc., just as one must act kindly and considerately toward weak, frail children and invalids, nursing, lifting and carrying them until they are grown and can stand on their own feet.

[16] This is one of the chief points of knowledge to be gained from the Gospel, in regard to the kingdom of Christ, how it is arranged and governed, namely that it is a government under which Christians, who have begun to believe and are holy, are nevertheless beset with frailty, ignorance, and other sinful infirmities. He bears and overlooks these shortcomings, but with the expectation that improvement shall ensue. Hence we must not dream of a church on earth in which there is neither frailty nor error in faith, as the papists boast that their church and church councils cannot err, etc. For here we are told that not only these two disciples, but all the other apostles erred in the leading and most necessary article of faith, abiding in their unbelief until Christ himself drew them out by means of many and various sermons and revelations. During the three days after Christ's crucifixion, faith in his resurrection had completely died in all hearts; indeed, that light was kept burning nowhere except with Mary, his mother, who preserved within her heart all that she had heard from him and others, and was comforted and sustained thereby in her great grief over the sufferings and death of her son.

[17] For faith in Christ must always continue and be preserved somewhere in the Church; there must always be some who have the truth and confess it, though their number be small, and the most fall into error, as they did here. If there are not more, there must be a Mary to keep the faith. He permits it to happen that many great saints err and stumble, in order that we may not trust in men, though they be many, great, and holy. We must be

led to rely upon the Word that is sure and cannot deceive, as here these two men, and all the others afterward, were directed to the Scriptures.

[18] Aside from this, let us not overlook the example contained in this Gospel which urges and admonishes us to speak and hear of Christ gladly, and to study the Scriptures and God's Word, though it may not always be understood and affect us as it ought. The Gospel also shows us the power, blessing and effect of the Word, if approached with a sincere heart.

[19] For, in the first place, although these two disciples were still filled with unbelief, yet he will not and cannot be separated from them, because they went their way communing sorrowfully with one another about Christ, and questioning together almost without result. He at once drew near and went with them and soon touched their hearts and minds. He began a beautiful, masterly sermon, such as they had never heard before, concerning the very article of faith which caused them trouble and doubt. Then, in the second place, they immediately feel its power; their hearts are no longer heavy, slow, and cold to believe as before, but are moved and kindled, and enlightened and receive a new understanding, so that now they begin to know the Scriptures aright, and what they had never understood before, becomes clear and manifest to their souls. Finally the mask and cover are taken away from their hearts and eyes, so that they no longer look upon him as a guest and a stranger, but truly know him and feel that he is no longer far from them, but at their side, and works certainty in their faith. Henceforth they no longer need bodily, visible revelations, but go forth at once to preach to others, and to strengthen and aid them against doubt and unbelief.

[20] Therefore we should follow their example, and gladly hear the Word of God, without growing weary. For this is not only a needful practice for the strong and for the weak, for the wise and for the unwise, by which a knowledge of everything we need unto salvation is given — such study can never exhaust it — but it is also the punishment through which God wishes to work within our hearts, to give faith and the Holy Ghost, as St. Paul says in Romans 10:17: "Belief cometh by hearing the Word of God." If man studies earnestly, even though the heart be cold and unwilling at first, if he only continues in the work, it will not be in vain, and the effect will be produced that the unwise and erring will be brought in and made better, the weak will be strengthened, and at last the heart will be kindled and

enlightened, so that Christ is better understood and known from the Scriptures.

[21] And even though there were no other benefit to be derived from this study, we ought to be urged to it by the fact that it pleases God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and renders him a service. We know that he will surely not be far from us when we do so, as he himself has promised, Matthew 18:20: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” If he is with us, the angels certainly are near also and take pleasure in our work, while the devil is driven away and has to retreat as he left Christ when he conquered him with the Word of God. Matthew 4:11.

[22] There is a legend, telling us that an old patriarch living in the desert received peculiar visions and revelations from God. When he happened to be among young people, listening to their conversation, he saw that whenever they spoke of the Scriptures and things divine, beautiful young men consorted with them and joyfully smiled upon them; but on the other hand, whenever their conversation became wanton and silly, the same young men turned away displeased and sad, and dirty black hogs came and wallowed at their feet etc.

II. The Sermon the Risen Christ Preached to his Disciples.

[23] Let this be enough concerning the chief points of the story of this Gospel. There remains one other important part, the sermon Christ preached to the disciples from the Scriptures, in which he briefly showed them that it behooved Christ to suffer and thus to enter into his glory etc. Of this, sermon the Evangelist speaks as follows: “And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”

[24] Without doubt this was a very beautiful and a model sermon. Now it is true we all would gladly know just the passages the Lord quoted referring to himself, by which he thereby enlightened, strengthened and convinced these disciples, since Moses contains so little, or nothing, as it would seem, of a plain statement on that of which Christ here speaks, that it behooved him to suffer, and to rise on the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name etc. For the Jews, who

have had Moses so long and read him diligently enough even until the present day, have never yet discovered this rare truth in Moses.

[25] But the Evangelist answers this and analyzes this argument by stating their heart burned within them while he opened to them the Scriptures, and in the Gospel following says Christ opened their mind to understand the Scriptures. Here is the point: Moses certainly writes concerning Christ and Christ is found in the books, of Moses; but it is necessary not only to read, but also to understand what is said. Hence Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:14-15 that the veil of Moses remains before the face of the Jews when they read the Old Testament, which only Christ alone can take away. And to his apostles Christ says, in Matthew 13:11: "Unto you is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; the others, however, though they see and hear, yet they do not understand."

[26] Therefore the Bible is a book that must not only be read and preached, but it also requires the true interpreter, that is, the revelation of the Holy Spirit; as we learn from our own experience now-a-days that it is of no avail to prove most clearly from Scripture the articles of the true doctrine to our opponents and to point out their errors. Not a single article of faith has ever been preached that was not more than once attacked and denied by heretics, though they read the same Scriptures that we have.

[27] But this revelation also requires pupils of the right kind, who are willing to learn and to be instructed, like these pious and simple-minded disciples, not wise and puffed up minds and self-made masters who reach beyond the very heavens with their knowledge. For this is a doctrine that makes our wisdom foolishness and blinds our own reason, before it can be believed and understood; for it is not born of man's wisdom, like other sciences and arts on earth, which have sprung from reason and can be grasped by means of reason. Hence it is impossible to attain to it by reason, and if you undertake to measure and reckon how far it agrees with reason, you will not succeed. All heresies from the beginning have had their origin here, and both Jew's and Gentiles, and the Turks at present, grow foolishly violent in regard to our doctrine because it does not agree with reason and human wisdom. Only the pious, simple-minded people can grasp and understand it, who are true to this rule, and say: "God hath said it, therefore will I believe it;" as Christ himself declares in Matthew 11:25 and thanks

the Father with a joyful heart that he hides these things from the wise and understanding and reveals them unto babes.

[28] There is no way out of it, wise people and proud reason cannot be taught these wonderful things, concerning Christ, that true man is God's Son from eternity, and yet he died and rose again, that in his human nature he has become Lord of heaven and earth, that he rules all creatures with divine power though no one sees him, and that we are saved by his merits alone, if we believe in him etc. Therefore God must needs establish the order that no one shall understand unless he is willing to be a fool, become a child, and believe in the simplicity of the heart.

[29] Behold, what kind of people did he employ to be his first messengers, to proclaim and to witness his grandest work, the resurrection? Poor, ignorant women came to the sepulcher after useless expense and trouble in purchasing costly ointment and without considering that the tomb was covered with a heavy stone, yea, even sealed and guarded by soldiers. Yet these foolish persons are the first to whom Christ reveals his resurrection, and calls to be its preachers and witnesses. So also does he give these disciples a knowledge of the Scriptures which all the learned scribes did not possess, so that now they view Moses with different eyes and are forced to say: Behold, how often have I read and heard this before, but never understood it.

[30] God would seem to say by this act: Very well, I see plainly that it is of no avail though everything be spoken and written in the very clearest manner; for in truth, all articles of faith are set forth clearly and tersely enough in the Scriptures. Take only the article on God and the creation, which certainly is told and given in the very plainest way; yet see the rabble of heretics it has made, Manichaeans, Valentinians, Marcionites, etc. Again, what did it avail that Christ himself, among his own people, confirmed his doctrine clearly and publicly by great miracles? Nothing more than that they began to twist both his words and his deeds, and called them the words and deeds of the devil and Beelzebub. Hence God must continue and say: Since they will not have and receive this Word as I give it to them, it shall remain hidden and unknown to them. I shall indeed have it written and preached in clear language; but reveal it to some few, simpleminded people who seek my Word. To the others it shall be mere darkness which may be felt, as among the Egyptians (though it shines and is preached most clearly),

yea, it shall be naught but an offense and poison, against which they must stumble and fall in their blasphemies and contradictions, until they break to pieces.

[31] Thus the Jews have had and have read Moses unto this day; yet all of them know nothing of what he speaks concerning Christ, yea, not even in minor articles of faith, just as their forefathers knew nothing of it, save some few who believed, as the prophets and the apostles after them, who elaborated their whole books from a single Bible passage. This enabled them to preach what everyone was compelled to acknowledge as true.

[32] How did Christ stop the mouth of the Sadducees (who did not believe the resurrection of the dead and accepted no other Scripture but Moses), and convince them of the resurrection of the dead? He took the commonest saying in their religion, which all Jews knew and quoted every day, when God says, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob etc.” With these words he revealed Moses and drew the following conclusion: If you believe God to be God of those that are dead, how can he be God of those who have altogether ceased to be? Therefore, if he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as he himself declares, these men must be alive, though they have died as far as this life is concerned, and lie in their graves; for he cannot be God of that which does not exist. Hence Abraham, who now lies under the earth, and all the saints, must be alive before God, though they are dead before you; for this is, and will be, his name forever that he is the God of Abraham and of all who believe as he had promised him and all believers, saying: “I shall be thy God” etc.

[33] Now who would have thought that these short, simple words are so full of meaning and furnish such an excellent, rich sermon, yea, that a big book might be written upon them? Though they know the books of Moses well enough, they yet declared that not a word concerning the resurrection of the dead was to be found in them. This was also the reason why they accepted Moses alone and rejected the prophets who nevertheless based all their preaching of the important articles of the faith in Christ upon Moses.

[34] But let us look more closely at Christ’s sermon and consider one of the passages from Moses which he quoted. Genesis 3:15 is the first word which promises grace, and was given to Adam and Eve, when he spoke to the serpent, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between

thy seed and her seed; he shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel.” These words are read by Jews, Turks and heathens, and by human reason, but they all find them to be only hard pebbles, yea, dead and useless words, from which they cannot take anything even by their best efforts. But as soon as revelation comes to our aid, we understand them to mean: Through sin the serpent, that is the devil, has brought upon Adam and Eve sin and the eternal wrath of God. But in order to help them out of this dreadful fall and misery, into which they were led by Satan, God in his unfathomable mercy has found within himself this remedy that by the woman’s seed, that is, by the natural offspring of a woman, that very head of the serpent, that is, sin, death, and everlasting wrath, shall be crushed and robbed of his power, so that he may no longer be lord of death, nor be able to keep man either in sin, or in God’s wrath and condemnation.

[35] From this an entire New Testament springs forth, all the discourses of St. Paul and the apostles, who do not tell a great deal of the life and miracles of Christ, but, where it is possible, use such a passage as a flower, so to say, with which to cover a great meadow, doing so by the aid of revelation and the Holy Ghost who knows how to grind and press the words thoroughly, so that they give forth the juice and power they possess. For these words show, in the first place, that this seed must be a natural child, born of a woman, but without sin; for the Scriptures testify that whatever is born into this world of man and woman, is born in sin and is under the wrath of God, as David says, Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity” etc. For this flesh and blood is completely permeated and corrupted with evil lusts and disobedience against God, and as this substance is corrupted in father and mother, it must remain so in the child; hence no man can be born from man and woman without a sinful nature. God, therefore, hath ordained to take a woman alone for the conception and birth of Christ, the promised seed; without a man, she becomes, the little child’s mother, by the Holy Ghost, who causes this conception and birth in her, in order that he may be a natural man, having our flesh and blood, but without sin and power of Satan, whose head he was to bruise.

[36] In the second place, if he was to be lord over sin and death, to subdue the devil and pluck us out of his hand, he had to have divine, almighty power. For though a man were altogether pure and without blemish of body or soul, as Adam was first created, yet were it not in his

power and strength to take away this eternal misery and corruption, and to obtain and give in their stead unchangeable blessings and eternal life. Thus it follows that his power must be greater than that of all creatures, even all angels. Such power is found nowhere except in God himself, the Lord of all creation.

[37] From this follows further that if he is born of a woman he is also mortal and must die in the body as others. And since he became man for our sake, and was sent by God to deliver us from sin and death, he had to take our place, to become a sacrifice for us, to bear and atone for that wrath and curse under which we had fallen and lay. But it was not possible for him to remain in death; since he was an eternal being he could not be held by it, as St. Peter says in Acts 2:31 and in like passages; but even his body ere it had seen corruption and decay, must needs pass through death unscathed and by his resurrection and eternal life begin to rule in everlasting power and eternal glory, in order to bring his own out of sin and death, and the power of Satan unto everlasting righteousness and life.

[38] Note that this is but a simple passage, which Christ surely did not overlook but interpreted from his own wealth of knowledge, as being the first and chief passage, from which later on all the others; flow. Here we see that these are words, or miracles, rather, which reason can never grasp or fathom. They can only be understood when the Holy Ghost accompanies them, and preaches and reveals them unto those who believe with singleness of heart and abide in them. Then they begin to taste the sweet savor, and receive spiritual nourishment, so that they must say: This will do it, this will enlighten the heart and set it aflame.

[39] Thus the prophets viewed the saying of Moses and drew therefrom their glorious prophecies concerning Christ, as Isaiah 7:14 bases his prophecy of Christ's birth upon this passage with the plain statement, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son" etc., also the whole 53 chapter concerning his suffering and resurrection, how that he would offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins etc. All these words Christ doubtless quoted in his sermon.

[40] The apostles likewise, being ignorant fishermen, learned to know the Scriptures, not in the schools of the great scribes, but through the revelation by which Christ led them into the Scriptures. Thus they were

enabled to understand and to write on the basis of a single passage a book or a sermon the world cannot understand. And if I had the same Spirit Isaiah or Paul had, I could take this passage and develop from it a New Testament, if that were not already written.

[41] How did St. Peter know, or where is written in Moses that which he says in 1 Peter 10-11: “Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto?” Who told him that the Spirit of Christ existed and prophesied of Christ, before there were prophets and, above all, before Christ and the Holy Ghost were present? Are these the words of a fisherman, or of a learned, wise scribe? Nay, it is the revelation of the Holy Spirit who had also revealed it to the prophets before. Again, where is written in Moses what the Epistle to the Hebrews says in Hebrews 1:3-4, that Christ sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, to be Lord over all, having become much better and higher than the angels? etc. He certainly took it from the Old Testament, but he found it not by his own reason, but by revelation, hence he argues thus: If Christ is a Son of God and Lord of the angels, he must certainly be more and of a better nature than the angels. Now every angel is more powerful than all the world and combined human nature; yet if this true child of a virgin is to be Lord, not alone of the evil spirits, but also of the good and holy angels, he must be of one power and essence with God. This nobody will say or believe, except by revelation. Therefore I would agree to take Moses, the Psalms, Isaiah, together with the Spirit whom these men had, and make a New Testament every whit as good as that which the apostles wrote; but because we have not the same wealth and power of the Spirit, we must be taught by them and drink from the fountain which they gave us.

[42] Let this be enough concerning a single portion or a single passage of the sermon Christ spoke to these disciples, and wherewith he well and fully earned, yea, paid for the entertainment they furnished him at the inn. But to set forth all the other words of Moses and the prophets which they spoke of Christ, and which he explained, would be by far too great a task for one sermon; for it would in itself amount to a book as large as the Bible. But without doubt they were the same passages the apostles quoted afterwards as they heard them from his own mouth on this occasion, and

learned to understand them better on the following day of Pentecost. A goodly number of these passages were quoted by them in their sermons, in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles; and they are recommended for close study to every Christian, as he reads and ponders the Holy Scriptures. Then the Holy Ghost will be present with his power to give the right understanding, as we have heard, since he is the true interpreter, if only we treat them seriously and in the simplicity of the heart. The fruit thereof will be that we shall find Christ therein and learn to know him aright. This will quicken and kindle the heart, and fill it with comfort and joy.

Easter Tuesday or Third Easter Day. Christ's Manifestation after His Resurrection.

Text: Luke 24:36-47.

36 And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

37 But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.

38 And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?

39 Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.

40 And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet.

41 And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?

42 And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb.

43 And he took it, and did eat before them.

44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.

45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Luke 24:36-47

I. Christ's Manifestation after his Resurrection.

[1] I think, beloved, you have heard enough in these days on the resurrection of Christ, what it works, why it came to pass, and what fruit it bears. But since the Lord has commanded those who preach the Gospel to be steadfast and diligent in this proclamation, we must dwell upon it ever more and more. Our Gospel shows, first, who hear of the Lord's resurrection profitably and fruitfully, namely they that are here assembled in fear and dread behind closed doors. To them it ought also to be preached most of all, although it must be preached to all nations, as the Lord says at the end of the Gospel of Matthew. Therefore let us learn first of all what kind of persons hear the Gospel aright.

[2] The disciples are gathered there together in seclusion. They are afraid of the Jews and are, indeed, in danger of their lives; they are fearful and fainthearted and afraid of sin and death. Had they been strong and courageous, they would not thus have crept into a corner; even as afterward they were made so courageous, when the Holy Spirit came and strengthened and comforted them, that they stepped forth and preached publicly without fear. This is written for us, that we might learn that the Gospel of Christ's resurrection comforts only the fainthearted. And who are these? They are the poor, conscience-stricken ones, whose sins lie heavily upon them, who feel their faint heart, are loth to die, and are well-nigh startled by the sound of a rustling leaf. To these contrite, poor, and needy souls, the Gospel offers comfort, to them it is a sweet savor.

[3] This is also learned from the nature of the Gospel, for the Gospel is a message and a testimony, which declares how the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead, that he might remove sin, death and all evil from all who believe on him. If I recognize him as such a Savior, I have heard the Gospel aright, and he has in truth revealed himself to me. If now the Gospel teaches naught but that Christ has overcome sin and death by his resurrection, then we must indeed confess that it can be of service to none save those who feel sin and death. For they who do not feel their sin, and are not dismayed, nor see their infirmities, profit not a whit by it, nor do they delight in it. And though they hear the Gospel, it has no effect upon them, except that they learn the words, and speak of what they heard. They do not treasure them in their hearts, and receive neither comfort nor joy from them.

[4] Hence it were well, if the Gospel could be preached only where such fainthearted and conscience-stricken ones are found. But this cannot be, and for this reason it bears so little fruit. For this they reproach us and say that we wish to preach many new things, and yet no one is better because of our doctrine. The fault is not in the Gospel, but in the hearers. They hear it, indeed, but they do not feel their own affliction and misery, nor have they ever tried to feel it, they simply go on, secure and reprobate, like dumb brutes. Hence none need marvel if the Gospel does not everywhere bring forth fruit. For beside the good hearers, of whom we have spoken, there are many others that have no regard for it at all, have neither a conscience nor a heart for it, and think neither of death nor of the salvation of souls. These must be driven by force, like asses and dumb brutes, and for this purpose the civil sword is established. Again there are some who do not despise the Gospel, but fully understand it, yet do not amend their lives, nor strive to walk in it. They carry away only the words and prate much about them, but neither deeds nor fruit follow. The third class, however, are they that taste it and use it aright so that it bears fruit in them.

[5] This is then the conclusion of the matter, the Gospel is a testimony of the resurrection of Christ, which serves to comfort and refresh the poor, sorrowing, and terrified consciences. There is need that we have clearly apprehended this truth when we come to die, and also that we may provide for it in every other need. If you think: Behold, now death is approaching and staring me in the face; would that I had someone to comfort me, that I might not despair, then know that for this purpose the Gospel is good, here it belongs, here its use is blessed and salutary. As soon as a man knows and understands this, and believes the Gospel, his heart finds peace and says: If Christ, my Lord, has overcome my sin, and trodden it under foot by his resurrection, — wherefore should I fear, and of what should I be afraid? Why should not my heart rejoice and be of good cheer? But such comfort, peace and joy of heart, are felt by none save by the small company which was before greatly dismayed and full of sorrow, and felt its infirmities. Hence also the rude and impenitent understand neither this nor any other Gospel, for he that has not tasted the bitter cannot relish the sweet, and he that has not seen adversity does not understand happiness. For as in the world that man who neither cares nor attempts to do anything, and endures naught, is good for nothing; so in a more eminent degree in spiritual things

it is not possible that anyone should understand the Gospel except he who has such a dismayed and terrified heart.

[6] From this you should learn that it is no marvel, that many who hear the Gospel do not receive it nor live according to it. Everywhere there are many who reject and persecute it, but we must let them go and grow accustomed to their work. Where the Gospel is preached, such people will surely be found; and if it were otherwise, it would not be right, for there must be many kinds of hearers. Again, many will be found, who do not persecute it and yet do not receive it, for they bear no fruit and continue to live as before. Be not worried because of this! For even though a man preach and continue in the Gospel for many years, he must still lament and say: Aye, no one will come, and all continue in their former state. Therefore you must not let that grieve nor terrify you.

[7] For note what took place at Jerusalem, where the Gospel was first heard, and where there were so many people that it is said, there were in the city at the feast of the Passover eleven hundred thousand men. How many of these were converted? When St. Peter stood up and preached, they made a mockery of it and considered the apostles drunken fools. When they had urged the Gospel a long time, they gathered together three thousand men and women. But what were they among so many? Yea, no one could discern that the Gospel had accomplished anything, for all things continued in the same state as before. No change was seen, and scarcely anyone knew that there were Christians there. And so it will be at all times.

[8] Hence the Gospel must not be measured by the multitude that hear, but by the small company that receive it. They, indeed, appear as nothing, they are despised and persecuted, and yet God secretly works in them.

[9] Besides this there is another thing that hinders the free movement of the Gospel, namely the infirmities of the believers. This we see in many examples. Thus although Peter was filled with faith and the Holy Spirit, yet he fell and stumbled, — he and all that were with him, — when he walked not according to the Gospel nor according as he had taught, so that Paul had to reprove him openly, Galatians 2:14. There clung to him many great and holy men, and all stumbled with him. Again, we read that Mark journeyed with Paul, but afterward fell away and withdrew from him; and in Acts 15:37 we read again that Paul and Barnabas strove together, and there arose

a sharp contention between them. And, before this, we read in the Gospels how often the apostles erred in weighty matters. though they were the best of Christians.

[10] These infirmities of Christians and believers darken the Gospel most of all, so that men who deem themselves wise and learned stumble and are offended in them. Few there are who can well reconcile these things so as to take no offense and hence say: Yes, these desire to be good Christians, and are still so wayward, envious, filled with hate and wrath, that one thinks the Gospel has been preached in vain. This really signifies to be offended in the weak and sick Christ.

[11] It was also thus with the disciples. At first, when Christ wrought great and excellent works, and gained great honors, and began the work only to fulfill it, they remained steadfast, though many great and noble saints and learned men were offended, because he would not join them. The common man on the contrary was instructed; and the people clung to him, because they saw that with great power he wrought such excellent works; and also walked so that none could reproach him, but all must needs say: Truly this is a great and holy prophet! But when his suffering began, they all turned back and forsook him, and not one of his disciples continued with him. Why was this? Because they considered him not the strong, but the weak Christ. He now was in the hands of the Jews, did no more works and miracles just as if he had lost all his power and was forsaken of God. Then perished completely his power and his great name. Before, they counted him a prophet, the like of whom had never appeared; now he is rated as a murderer and a condemned man. Who could now see that this was Christ, the Son of God? Here all reason must fall, yea, all the great and holy saints; for they thought: If he were the Christ, there would needs appear the fruits whereby we might know that it is he, but now we see in him only weakness and sin and death.

[12] Therefore it is the highest wisdom on earth, though it is known by very few men, how to bear with the weak Christ. For if I see a pious, holy man leading a beautiful godly life, who will thank me for praising him and saying: There is Christ, and there is righteousness? For although bishops and great dunces be offended in such an one, the common people will be instructed. But if he be feeble and falter, straightway everyone will be offended and say: Alas! I had imagined him to be a good Christian, but I see

that he falls short of it. However, if they look about them, they will find none without like infirmities, yea, they will perceive it in themselves. Still they think that the Gospel has come to naught. Thus might they think, if God were not able, in his wisdom, to hide it, even as he put a covering over Christ when he drew over him death and weakness, and Christ was under it, though no man could see it. Hence he told his disciples in advance, Matthew 26:31: "All, all ye, shall be offended in me, and shall no more think nor believe that I am the Christ." Hence, if we judge the Gospel, as I have said, according to the infirmity and weakness of Christians, as they stumble at times, a very great obstacle is presented at which offense is taken and the Gospel is thought to be without power.

[13] Therefore he that would know Christ aright must not give heed to the covering. And though you see another stumble, do not despair, nor think all hope is lost; but rather think: God, perchance, will have this one bear the weak Christ, even as another bears the strong; for both must be and abide on earth, though the greater part appear weak and are such especially in our day. But if you pierce through such weakness, you will find that Christ lies hidden in that weak person, he will come forth and show himself.

[14] That is what Paul means when he says to the Corinthians, in his First Epistle 1 Corinthians 2:2: "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." What kind of glory is this that impels him to write that he knows nothing, save Christ crucified? It is a thing, that neither reason nor human wisdom can understand, nor yet they who have studied and learned the Gospel; for this wisdom is mighty, hidden and mysterious, and seems of no value, because he was crucified and emptied himself of all power and divine strength, and hung upon the cross like a wretched, forsaken man, and it seemed as if God would not help him. Of him alone I speak and preach, says St. Paul. For the Christ, that sits on high, does wonders, comes and breaks through with power, that all may see who he is, and may quickly come to know him. But to know the weak Christ, that is hanging upon the cross and lying in death, one needs great wisdom; for they who know him not, must needs stumble and be offended.

[15] Yea, some are also found who really know the Gospel, but are offended at their own manner of life. They have a desire to walk in godliness, but they feel they make no progress. They begin to despair and think that with them all is lost because they do not feel the strength which

they ought to have, also earnestly desire Christ to become strong in them and manifest himself in mighty deeds. But Jehovah, our God, hereby designs to humble us, that we may see what feeble creatures we are, what wretched, lost and condemned men, if Christ had not come and helped us. Behold, that is the great wisdom we have, and at which all the world is offended.

[16] But thereby we have no furlough, to continue for all time in weakness, for we do not preach that any should be weak, but that we should know the weakness of Christians and bear with it. Christ did not hang upon the cross, that he might appear as a murderer and evildoer, but that we might learn thereby how deeply strength lies hidden under weakness, and might learn to know God's strength in weakness. Thus our weakness is not to be praised, as though we should abide in it, but rather must we learn not to think that those who are weak are not Christians, nor yet to despair when we feel our own weakness. Therefore it behooves us to know our own weaknesses and ever to seek to wax stronger, for Christ must not suffer always, nor remain in the grave, but must come forth again and live.

[17] Hence, let none say that this is the true course and condition. It is only a beginning, in which we must grow day by day, giving heed only that we turn not away and despair when we are so weak, as though all were lost. Rather must we continue to exercise ourselves till we wax stronger and stronger, and endure and bear the weakness, until God helps and takes it away. Hence, even though you see your neighbor so weak that he stumbles, think not that he is beyond hope. God will not have one judge another and be pleased with himself, inasmuch as we are all sinners, but that one bear the infirmity of the other. (Romans 14 and Galatians 5). And if you will not do that, he will let you fall and cast you down, and raise the other up. He desires to have us help one another and bear each other's weaknesses.

[18] I have thus spoken of our infirmity in order that you may have a good understanding of it, for such knowledge is very necessary, especially at this time. Oh, if our bishops, pastors, and prelates had had this wisdom, for they needed it the most, how much better would conditions be in Christendom! They would then be able to bear with the weak consciences, and would know how to minister to them. But now it has come to this, that they look only to the strong Christians, and can never bear with the weak; but deal only harshly with them and proceed with force. In times past, when

conditions were yet good, the bishops were sorely wanting in this, for, though they were great and holy men, they yet constrained and oppressed the consciences too much. Such things do not take place among Christians, for it is Christ's will to be weak and sickly yet a while, and to have both flesh and bones together, as he says here in the Gospel: "Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye behold me having." He would have both, not bones only, nor flesh only. Thus we read in Genesis 2:23, that when God created Eve, Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." He says not flesh only nor bones only; speaks of having both himself, for he too must needs have both. So it is also with Christ and with us, and hence he says here: I have both flesh and bones, you will find in me not only bones, nor yet only flesh; you will find that I am both strong and sick.

[19] Thus also my Christians must be so mingled together, that some are strong and some weak. They that are strong, walk uprightly, are hale and hearty, and must bear the others; they are the bones. The others are the weak that cleave unto the strong. They are also the greater number, as in a body there will always be found more flesh than bones. Hence, Jesus was crucified and died, and likewise was quickened again and glorified, that he might not be a spirit, as the disciples here deem him to be and were filled with fear of him, thinking that because he is not only bone and the strong Christ, it is not he, but a ghost.

[20] This wisdom was diligently urged by the apostles and by Christ himself, and, beside this, I know of no book, in which it is urged. It is, indeed, sometimes touched upon, but nowhere urged. Only this one book, the New Testament, urges it constantly, and everywhere strives to set before the people the weak and strong Christ. Thus says St. Paul to the Romans 15:1-3: "Now we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good, unto edifying. For Christ also pleased not himself." Hence we must do the same, and this is the wisdom we are to learn here.

[21] To this school belong all that are pictured here in this Gospel, whom Christ finds terrified and affrighted. The others, who do not belong here, are easily identified, for they reject and despise the Gospel. In like manner everyone can know himself, whether he truly takes pleasure in the Gospel.

And if you see in another's behavior evidence of an earnest desire to be made holy, you should not despise him.

[22] This Gospel therefore shows the following: First, that the Lord stands among the disciples and is now strong, having overcome sin, death, and the devil; but they do not stand as yet, but sit there, and he comes and stands in the midst of them. Where does he stand at the present time? In the midst of the weak and fainthearted company, that sit in fear and weakness, while he is strong and mighty, though it is not yet apparent to the world. But even though the world does not see it, God sees it. Secondly, he shows them his hands and his feet, and comforts them, saying: "Why are ye troubled? and wherefore do questionings arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones," etc.

[23] This is nothing but a sermon that teaches us not to be offended in the weak Christ. He does not rebuke the disciples harshly, does not say: Away with you; I do not want you. You should be strong and courageous, but here you sit and are dismayed and terrified! He does not do these things; but lovingly comforts them, that he might make them strong and fearless. Hence they were also made strong and fearless, and not only this, but also cheerful and of good courage. Therefore we ought not to cast away the weak, but so deal with them that, from day to day, we may bring them to a condition that they may become strong and of good cheer. This does not signify that it is well, if they are weak, and that they should continue weak; for Christ does not stand among them for that purpose, but that they might grow in faith and be made fearless.

[24] Here we may also speak, as the text gives occasion, of ghosts or walking spirits, for we see here that the Jews and the apostles themselves held that spirits roam about and are seen by night and at other times. Thus Matthew 14:25 f, when the disciples sailed in a ship by night, and saw Jesus walking on the sea, they were affrighted, as before a ghost, and cried out in fear. And here we learn that Jesus does not deny it but confirms it by his answer that spirits do appear, for he says: "A spirit has not flesh and bones," etc.

[25] But the Scriptures do not say, nor give any example, that such are the souls of dead persons walking among the people and seeking help, as

we, in our blindness and deluded by the devil, have heretofore believed. Hence the pope has, also, invented purgatory and established his shameful annual market of masses. We may well see in this false doctrine and abomination as a fruit, that the foundation on which it is built, namely the doctrine of the migration of souls, comes from the father of lies, the devil, who has deluded the people in the name of the dead.

[26] We have good reason not to believe such apparitions of roaming erring spirits that profess to be souls. First, because the Scriptures nowhere say that the souls of the deceased, that have not yet risen, should wander about among the people; whereas everything else we need to know, is clearly revealed in the Scriptures. Not one word concerning this is given for our instruction, nor is it possible that we should grasp and understand the state of the spirits that have departed from the body, before the resurrection and the day of judgment; for they are sundered and separated altogether from the world and from this generation. Moreover, it is clearly forbidden in the Scriptures to consult the dead or to believe them who do. Deuteronomy 18:11; Isaiah 28:19. And Luke 16:31 proves that God will neither let one rise from the dead nor preach, because we have Moses and the Scriptures.

[27] Know therefore that all ghosts and visions, which cause themselves to be seen and heard, especially with din and noise, are not men's souls, but evidently devils that amuse themselves thus either to deceive the people with false claims and lies, or unnecessarily frighten and trouble them. Hence with a specter that makes a pretense in the name of a soul a Christian should not deal otherwise than as with the very devil himself. He should be well girded with God's Word and faith, that he may not be deceived nor affrighted, but abide in the doctrine that he has learned and confessed from the Gospel of Christ, and cheerfully despise the devil with his noise. Nor does he tarry long where he feels a soul trusts in Christ and despise him. This I say that we may be wise and not suffer ourselves to be misled by such deception and lies, as in the past he deceived and mocked even excellent men, like St. Gregory, under the name of being a soul.

[28] Now what does it, signify that he shows the disciples his hands and his feet? He would thereby say: Come, and learn to know me. Now I am strong, but you are weak, as I also was. Therefore see to it now that you become strong also. II. The Sermon Christ Preached to His Disciples

[29] The above is one chief part of this Gospel; the other follows at the end of the Gospel, where the Lord concludes by saying: “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations.”

[30] Here you see that the Gospel is the preaching of repentance and remission of sins. And it should not be preached in a corner, but before all men, whether it be received or not, for it is to spread even farther that it may be heard and bear fruit. Hence we are not to be offended though but few receive it, nor say it has been given in vain. We should, rather, be content with it, that Christ has given command to preach it in all the world, that he who will may receive it. But we must note here in particular, that he says: 31. First, let us consider two thoughts. By repentance he means a change for the better; not as we have called it repentance, when one scourges and castigates himself and does penance to atone for his sin, or when the priest imposes this or that upon anyone for penance. Scripture does not speak of it in this sense. Repentance rather signifies here a change and reformation of the whole life; so that when one knows that he is a sinner, and feels the iniquity of his life, he desists from it and enters upon a better course of life, in word and deed, and that he does it from his heart.

[32] What then is repentance in his name? Hereby he singles out the repentance that is not made in his name, and hence the text compels us to consider two kinds of repentance. First, a repentance not in his name is, when I come with my own works and undertake to blot out sin with them; as we all have hitherto been taught and have tried to do. This is not repentance in God’s name, but in the devil’s name. For this is striving to propitiate God by our own works and by our own strength, a thing God cannot allow.

[33] But on the other hand, to repent in his name is done thus: in those who believe in Christ God through the same faith works a change for the better, not for a moment, nor for an hour, but for their whole life. For a Christian is not instantaneously or suddenly cleansed perfectly, but the reformation and change continue as long as he lives. Though we use the utmost diligence, we will always find something to sweep or clean. For even though all wickedness be overcome, we have not yet overcome the fear of death, for few have come so far as to desire death with a spirit of

rejoicing; hence, we must grow better day by day. This is what Paul means, when he says in 2 Corinthians 4:16: "Though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day." For we hear the Gospel every day, and Christ shows us his hands and his feet every day that our minds may be still more enlightened, and we be made more and more godly.

[34] For this reason Christ would say, let no one strive to amend his life by his own works and in his own name; for of themselves no one is an enemy of sin, no one will come to repentance and think of amending his life. Nothing will be accomplished except in my name. That name alone has power to do it, and brings with it willingness and desire to be changed. But if the works and doctrines of men be taught, I will go and say to myself: O, that I might not need to pray, nor make confession, nor go to the Lord's Supper! What will your repentance profit you, if you fail to do it gladly or willingly, but are constrained by the commandment or by fear of shame, otherwise you would rather not do it? But what is the reason? Because it is a repentance in the devil's name, in your own name or in the pope's name. Hence you go on and do worse things, and wish there were no confession and sacrament, so that you might not be constrained to attend them. This is repentance in our own name, and proceeds from our own strength.

[35] But when I begin to believe in Christ, lay hold of the Gospel, and doubt not that he has taken away my sin and blotted it out, and comforts me with his resurrection; my heart is filled with such gladness that I myself take hold willingly, not through persuasion, nor of necessity, I gladly do what I ought and say: Because my Lord has done this for me, I will also do his will in this, that I may amend my ways and repent out of love to him and to his glory. In this way a true reformation begins that proceeds from the innermost heart, and that is brought forth by the joy that flows from faith, when I apprehend the greatness of the love Christ has bestowed upon me.

[36] Secondly, we should preach also forgiveness of sins in his name. This signifies nothing else than that the Gospel should be preached, which declares unto all the world that in Christ the sins of all the world are swallowed up, and that he suffered death to put away sin from us, and arose to devour it and blot it out. All did he do, that whoever believeth, should have the comfort and assurance, that it is reckoned unto him even as if he himself had done it; that his work is mine and thine and all men's; yea, that

he gives himself to us with all his gifts to be our own personal property. Hence, as he is without sin and never (lies by virtue of his resurrection, even so I also am, if I believe in him; and I will therefore strive to become more and more godly, till there be no more sin in me. This continues as long as we live, until the day of judgment. As he is without sin, he sets before us an example, that we might be fashioned like unto him, though while we live here, we shall be fully like the image.

[37] St. Paul speaks of this in writing to the Corinthians: “We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” 2 Corinthians 3:8. Christ, even as he is risen, is the image, and is set before us that we might know that he rose from the dead to overcome our sin. This image stands before us and is set before our eyes by the Gospel, and is so mirrored in our hearts that we may grasp it by faith, if we hold it to be true and daily exercise ourselves in it. Thus the glory is imparted by him to us, and it comes to pass that we become ever more glorious, and grow into the same image that he is. Hence he also says, that we are not at once made perfect and strong, but must grow from day to day till we become like him. Many similar passages are here and there in the Scriptures.

[38] This then is preaching the forgiveness of sins in his name, that we do not point only to confession, or to a certain hour; for we must act in view of the fact that it deals not with our works but with the whole person. Even when we begin to believe, our sin and infirmity are always present so that there is nothing pure in us, and we are indeed worthy of condemnation. But now forgiveness is so great and powerful, that God not only forgives the former sins you have committed; but looks through his fingers and forgives the sins you will yet commit. He will not condemn us for our daily infirmities, but forgives all, in view of our faith in him, if we only strive to press onward and get rid of sin.

[39] Here you may see what a difference there is between this and that which has heretofore been preached, of buying letters of indulgence, and of confessions, by which it was thought sin could be blotted out. So far as this pressed and such confidence was there put in it, that men were persuaded if anyone should die upon it, he would straightway mount to heaven. They did not know that we have still more sin and will not be rid of it, as long as we live. They supposed that all is well if only we have been to confession.

Hence this is a forgiveness in the name of the devil. But see that you understand it correctly: By absolution you are absolved and declared free from sin, that is, you are put into that state, where there is forgiveness of sin that never ends. And not only is there forgiveness of past sins, but of those also you now have, if you believe that God overlooks and forgives your sins; and although you stumble still, yet he will neither reject nor condemn you, if you continue in faith. This teaching is heard indeed in all the world, but few there be that understand it.

[40] Thus you have heard what the Gospel is, and what repentance and forgiveness of sins are, whereby we enter into another, a new state, out of the old. But take heed, lest you trust in this and become sluggish, thinking that when you sin there is no danger, and thus boldly persist in sin. This would be sinning in spite of God's mercy and would tempt God. But if you desire to be delivered from sin, it is well with you, and all is forgiven. So much then on the second part of this Gospel, and with it we shall, for the present, content ourselves.

Tuesday after Easter. Second Sermon. A Comforting Example and Picture of Christ.

Text: Luke 24:36-47.

36 And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

37 But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.

38 And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?

39 Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.

40 And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet.
41 And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?
42 And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb.
43 And he took it, and did eat before them.
44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.
45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,
46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:
47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Luke 24:36-47

I. A Comforting Example and Picture of Christ

[1] In the first part of this Gospel we have for our consolation another example showing how Christ manifests himself and how he is wont to act toward his beloved disciples. They have scarcely begun to speak of him, when he himself comes and stands in their midst and greets them with these kind and cheerful words: "Pax vobis!" (Peace be unto you!) The disciples, however, are frightened at this and suppose they behold a spirit. But he suffers them not to be thus frightened, rebukes them for allowing such thoughts to enter their hearts, and shows them his hands and feet; that they may see that he is not a spirit, nor another Christ than he has been in the past, but is of their own flesh and bones and of the selfsame nature as they. This he does that they may not be afraid of him, but may rejoice in him and be comforted, and look to him for good things.

[2] For this example of his conduct is to serve as an object lesson as it were, instilling comfort into all terrified hearts; especially against that spectre called a false Christ. For the devil also has the habit of coming to people, both in public and in private, either through false doctrine or through secret inward working, and he even pretends to be Christ himself.

He begins with a pleasant greeting, with a smiling “good morning;” but ere long he smites the heart with sorrow and dread, that it knows not what has become of Christ.

[3] For his delight is to deceive us under the name and guise of Christ; and he is ever desirous of aping God and of imitating him in all that he sees him do. Now, when God reveals himself he employs the following manner: First, in deed, he terrifies those who have not been terrified as yet. Besides, hearts that are naturally timid always stand in dread of his words and works by reason of their timid nature. But those who are terrified already, he comforts again and speaks kindly to them. The devil imitates this and likewise comes with the name and works of Christ; but both his comfort and his terrors are counterfeit. For he reverses the two, terrifying and dismaying those who stand in need of comfort, and comforting and strengthening those who should be afraid and stand in fear of God’s wrath. To shield ourselves against this deception, we should learn from this Gospel to distinguish correctly between the doctrines and ideas that come to our notice, both such as terrify and such as comfort, that we may know which of them are of God and which of the devil.

[4] For, in the first place, that lying spirit, already in Paradise, began this sweet deception when he approached Eve with his courteous, kind, and honeyed words: Why, there is no danger. You need not stand in fear and dread of eating of one single tree. Do you suppose that God has really forbidden you this one fruit, that he begrudges you the eating of this one tree? Indeed, he knows, if you eat thereof, you will become much wiser and will be as God. This was, indeed, very encouraging and a pleasing sermon, but it left an abominable stench behind, and by it the whole human race was led into the evil, which we all to this day deplore. For this reason it has become a common saying among men who have striven to be devout and sought to discern the spirits, that the devil always comes with winning and cheering words at first, but leaves terror and a troubled conscience in his wake, while the Good Spirit does the contrary.

[5] And it is true, this is one of the wanton tricks he practices. He creeps in unawares, like a serpent, and first makes himself attractive, in the manner indicated, and insinuates himself into favor; but before one is aware of it he strikes with his tail and leaves a poisoned wound. For this reason one should not be too credulous when a preacher comes softly like an angel of

God, recommends himself very highly, and swears that his sole aim is to save souls, and says: “Pax vobis!” For those are the very fellows the devil employs to honey people’s mouths. Through them he gains an entrance to preach and to teach, in order that he may afterward inflict his injuries, and that though he accomplish nothing more for the present, he may, at least, confound the people’s consciences and finally lead them into misery and despair.

[6] This same thing he does by means of thoughts which he causes to arise within the heart, by which he tempts people and even entices them to gross sins. Here, too, he invariably begins with the word “Peace!” that he may first cause the people to lose sight of the fear of God; making light of grave matters, and always preaching and proclaiming: “Pax et securitas!” There is no cause for worry! But much more does he do this with those great and serious sins pertaining to the faith and the glory of God, in which he moves people to idolatry and to a trust in their own works and holiness. Here he at first pretends to be holy and pious and impart the very sweetest of thoughts: Oh, there is no cause for alarm, God is not angry with you. Even as the prophets say of such. Jeremiah 6:14; Ezekiel 33:30. They will hear thee and suffer thee to preach, but they will ever comfort and bless themselves and say: Oh, there is no reason to fear; hell’ is not so hot, the devil is not so black as he is painted. This is the devil’s entrance and deception, even though he speak peace and extend a friendly greeting. Not until afterwards, when one is already enmeshed and cannot escape, does one see what injury and distress he has caused. Thus experience teaches that many a man falls into sin, shame, and punishment, so easily that he himself is not aware of it, being drawn in by means of subtle and pleasant thoughts, as it were by a hair or a straw.

[7] Behold, this is one of his ways, by which he misleads many foolish, secure, and careless minds; he leads them to imagine that they are resting in God’s lap and playing with dolls, with him. And they become so intoxicated with these imaginations and this sweet poison of the devil, so proud, hardened, and obstinate, that they simply will not listen nor give heed to anybody. However, some God-fearing people have noticed this and have warned others against the devil’s wiles, declaring how he enters in so softly and pretends he is bringing divine comfort, but at last leaves a stench behind betraying that he has been about. But this is comparatively easy and

a matter for younger disciples. Every Christian should certainly possess enough wisdom to be on his guard against such pleasant poison. For he who insists on learning by experience to guard against the devil's wiles, pays dearly for his learning and then he doesn't fully understand the devil's trickery.

[8] His second way of doing is this: He frightens people, even in trifling matters, by means of jugglery, for example, and by apparitions. He has been very busy in the past with tappings which were supposed to be the work of departed souls. In this way, he harasses and terrifies timid and fearful hearts and thus passes on, leaving no comfort behind. Much worse, however, is it, when he comes into the heart and there begins to argue and reason, quoting even such passages as Christ himself uttered, thereby causing the heart to become so awe-stricken that it has no other thought than that it hears the voice of God and Christ. And when thoughts of this kind prevail the heart must at last despair, for where else shall it hope to find comfort when it feels that God himself, who should be its comfort, is terrifying it and aiming his arrows at it; as Job complains in 6, 4: "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof my spirit drinketh up: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me." Though it is not God that does this but the devil, who takes pleasure in thus piercing hearts with his arrows (as also he did to St. Paul, 2 Corinthians 12), yet Satan had gained such a hold on Job's heart that the poor man could say and think nothing but this: It is God that doeth these things.

[9] This, then, is a much greater and more dangerous deception of Satan's, when he comes without any kindly greeting, bidding us neither "Good morning" nor "Peace" but frightens and terrifies the heart — and all in the voice and guise of God. So that man, overpowered and stricken down hereby is unable to raise himself up and think: It is the devil. For since his heart imagines and feels as if it were God, against whom no man can prevail, heaven and earth seem to him as a narrow cell, the hand of every creature is against him and everything he sees and hears affrights him.

[10] As contrasted with this shameless lying Satan, Christ has here portrayed and pictured himself as he really is. For although it is true that he, too, sometimes comes with terrors, sometimes with comfort, still it is his sole and final purpose to give life and comfort and make glad the heart. And yet the heart of man is so void of understanding in both cases that it does

not recognize him (the devil at the same time assisting in the delusion with his suggestions), and does not think that it is Christ, or straightway makes of him a false Christ, even as the Apostles here take him for a spirit or spectre; and they have neither heart nor mind to believe it is Christ, in spite of the fact that they see Christ's form and features. It is, therefore, the part of great art and understanding to tear the false Christ out of one's heart and to learn to picture him truly, because as has been said, one must bear in mind that the devil pictures to us a false Christ, yea clothes himself in Christ's form.

[11] So then, this Gospel shows what the true Christ and his Word are, namely, in the first place, that he says, "Peace be unto you," which is a portion of the comfort that he brings; and, in the second place, that he reproves the people and will not suffer them to form false and fretful ideas of himself and says: "Why are ye troubled? and wherefore do questionings arise in your hearts?" No wealth of money or goods could ever pay for this text, because a troubled heart may learn from it and conclude: Even though the devil quote all the passages in the Bible in order to terrify the heart, yet if he continue too long and fail to bring comfort afterward, then it is surely the devil, even if you see the form of Christ as plainly as when he hung upon the cross or as he sits at the right hand of the Father. For it may, indeed, happen, that Christ comes and terrifies you at first; though it is by no means his fault, but the fault of your nature, that you do not rightly know him. But he that assails you with terrors and ceases not until he leads you into despair, is the devil himself.

[12] Therefore you must clearly distinguish between the terrors of Christ and those of the devil. For even though Christ begin by terrifying, yet he is certain to bring comfort with him and does not will that you remain in terror. The devil, however, cannot cease from his terrifying although at first he comforts and acts pleasantly. This a Christian must know: he must learn to discern Christ from the devil. Especially in great afflictions, when he feels anxiety and dread, he must bear in mind that there will not be terrors only and continually, but that they will cease and that comfort will follow.

[13] But, you say, it is Christ and his Word after all, for he, too, preaches about God's wrath on account of sin, as he says, Luke 13:5: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," etc. I answer: Indeed, with this he is pleased and it must come to pass that you become terrified on account of

your sins (in case you have not yet experienced this terror). Yea, by reason of your timid nature he must let it come to pass that you be terrified even at him, as these disciples were. But it is not his intention to have you remain in terror; on the contrary, he wills that you cease from it. Yes, he even reproves you for it, and says that you are doing him an injustice by such thoughts, imputing such things to him. In short, he does not desire that you should be frightened at him, but that you should take comfort and joyful assurance, thus driving away your terror.

[14] Now, if these thoughts which terrify you arise from his words and works, let him thus begin with you, but then simply send him away to those who are still secure, hardhearted, and obdurate, for whom his terrors are intended. Upon them he must cry out his woes and them he must threaten with the eternal fire of hell. For they are people who in no wise fear God; on the contrary, when one wishes to put them in awe with the name and Word of God, they throw up their horns, toss their heads at God, and grow harder than steel or flint. But you, when you feel that you have become terrified (God grant it, whether the true Christ does it, or not), just remember to make an end of it and cease your fears. For if it be Christ indeed, it is not his will that you continue thus; but if it be not he, still less should you do so.

[15] Therefore mark and keep in mind this text and its example: Christ does not will that his own be terrified, and it does not please him to find you appalled at the sight of him. On the contrary, it is his will that you learn to know him as one who, when he finds you troubled and alarmed, rejoices to come to you, and that you too should rejoice over him and dismiss your thoughts of fear. And do not fail to learn that this is his way of speaking: "Why are ye troubled, and why permit ye such thoughts to arise in your hearts?" Ye picture me as a spectre and as one that cometh only to terrify you, and lo! I am come to comfort you and to make you glad.

[16] For these reasons, when such oppressive thoughts concerning Christ come to you, be wise and understand that they assuredly come not from Christ but from the devil; and that even though you be terrified at him, a little sudden terror shall do you no harm. For it is in accord with our nature that it never prompts us to anything good, especially when the heart is naturally timid and fretful. Never mind your thoughts and notions. Take heed to hear Christ's words, who takes no pleasure in seeing you terrified in

his name, but desires that you rejoice in him and receive him as one who would comfort your poor, sinful and troubled heart. Let the others be terrified, those headstrong, impenitent sinners, the pope, the tyrants, and all of Christ's enemies and blasphemers. These people need a sledge hammer that will shatter boulders, rocks and mountains.

[17] Therefore, if there be a Christ who terrifies, he is and desires to be such only to these obstinate heads; although they themselves do not believe this, but proudly disregard it until their last hour has come, and the time when he without any mercy whatever must trample them under his feet. But he does not desire to be such to his beloved disciples and believers, who are too backward and timid as it is, insomuch that they become alarmed even in the presence of their beloved Savior. For it is by no means his intention, as St. Matthew says in 12:20, quoting from the prophet Isaiah 42:3, to utterly break and quench the bruised reed and the smoking flax; that is, broken, troubled, humbled, and fearsome consciences. Now, what if these hardened, proud, and brazen, Satanic minds do pay no heed at all to his terrifyingings? Should timid, fearful hearts suffer these terrors in their stead and bring such fear upon themselves, when in short he wants them to be of good courage? Or, since no terrors and threats avail with the former, should therefore no comfort avail with the latter? In this case Christ's cause were lost entirely, and his kingdom would find no room and bear no fruit on earth.

[18] Hence, if you feel terrified and faint-hearted, let your heart herein take comfort, so that Christ may find room in you; for he does not by any means find in you a proud, impenitent heart, unwilling to humble itself; otherwise you would have good cause and need to fear him as one who is set to be a judge over the wicked and the scorners. But he comes to you in order to bring and offer you grace and peace, even as you desire and pray. I say again, take care in this matter, lest you cast from you this friendly greeting and your own salvation, and lest you make a Satan of this dear Savior, or rather, lest you, instead of hearkening to Christ, hearken to the devil, who is a liar and a murderer and takes delight in vexing weak and troubled hearts. And he never desists from so doing; and if he finds himself unable to cause enough terror with one verse he comes with ten or a hundred, and continues to oppress until the heart is completely overwhelmed and drowned in sorrow.

[19] Now, you as a Christian can conclude with certainty that such thoughts are not and cannot be of Christ. Yea, even if it were possible that it were Christ himself, nevertheless you here have his Word and true testimony, which you should believe more than all apparitions. And surely this is to be preferred to all private visions of Christ or of an angel from heaven, for these can err and deceive and are naught but speechless images. But here you have his living voice and Word, publicly speaking before all his disciples and reprovng them for such thoughts, that we may know he is displeased with them.

[20] Besides he shows the very same thing by his outward signs and works: the words with which he reprovng their thoughts do not suffice him, he also shows them his hands and feet that they may feel and see it is he himself. As though he thus would say: Why will ye still have doubts concerning me and in your thoughts make a spectre of me? Ye surely have never yet handled a devil or a spirit, nor seen one having flesh and blood as I have, although they at times assume such form and deceive the senses.

[21] Thus he gives them, in addition to his Word, a sure and potent sign and comforts them by his actions, that they may fear him not in the least. He shows them what he has done for them. For this is in truth a lovely, comforting, and cheerful picture, the sight of this dear Savior's hands and feet, pierced for my sake, and together with which also my sins are nailed to the cross. This he shows me as a token and testimony that he has suffered, has been crucified, and has died for me, and is by no means disposed to be angry with me and cast me into hell.

[22] For this is really seeing his hands and feet, if I, through his Word and faith, perceive that what he has done was done for my good, my salvation and comfort. Here I see no executioner, surely no death nor hell, but only sweet, delightful grace toward all poor, sorrowing souls, at which grace I cannot be affrighted or terrified; excepting only in this, that his work is entirely too great for the heart sufficiently to grasp and understand. Thus he would, both by word and deed, free us from fear even though at first we be terrified at the sight of him.

[23] On the other hand the devil, although at first he comforts us, at last he also shows his hands and feet; these are the horrible, abominable claws of the wrath of God and of eternal death. So finally he comes with naught

but terrors, murder, and slaughter, which are his works from the beginning, He knows how to portray to the soul all the terrible scenes, examples, and histories of all the abominable sins, murders, and terrible punishments that have ever taken place, and the number and prominence of the people whom he has ever misled, blinded, and cast into perdition.

[24] Now, where Christ is thus rightly understood, there, in consequence, true joy begins, and in such measure, like the Evangelist says, as to make the disciples marvel in their faith for very joy, and as to hamper them still. This again is a peculiar text and a strange saying. At first their faith was hampered by fear and dreadful thoughts; now their joy hampers their faith, a joy which even is far greater than at first their terror was. The disciples are now so full of joy at the reproof of the Lord and the sight of his hands and feet that they are still unable to believe.

[25] This, too, is one of the Christian's afflictions, as we have said before, that grace is entirely too great and glorious a thing when we look upon our littleness and unworthiness in comparison with Christ, and that the comfort is so exceedingly abundant that our hearts are far too small to receive it. For who could have the boldness to conceive in his heart the truth that Christ proves himself to be so kind a Savior to me, a poor, sinful man, that he gives me at once all that he has done? Must not the heart presently start with alarm at its own boldness and say: Do you really think it is true that the great and majestic God, the Maker of heaven and earth, has so regarded my misery and so mercifully looked upon me, deeply and manifoldly as I have sinned against him, having deserved and brought upon myself wrath, death, and hell a thousand times? How can such grace and such a treasure be grasped by the human heart, or in fact by any creature?

[26] To sum up all, faith in man's heart is assailed on both sides and upon both occasions, in terror and melancholy and also in joy. Either the lack or the abundance is too great, and the consolations too few or too many. At first, while the disciples were yearning for something great, all the blessings of God were too small and too insignificant to comfort their hearts, when Christ was still hidden from them; but now that he is come and shows himself to them, this is far too much for their hearts, and for very wonderment they cannot believe he is risen from the dead and is standing before them alive.

[27] Finally he shows himself even still more friendly: he sits down with them at the table, eats with them of broiled fish and honeycomb, and preaches to them a beautiful sermon, to establish them in the faith, that they may nevermore fear nor doubt, but may now grow strong in the faith: and thus all their melancholy passes away.

[28] Therefore let us learn from this to understand Christ's character and manner, to-wit, that when he comes and manifests himself, he thereupon takes leave and bids us adieu, leaving naught but comfort and joy; for at the last he must come with comfort, otherwise it is not Christ. But when constant fear and dread remain in the heart, you may freely conclude that it is not Christ, though it may seem so to the heart, but the accursed devil. Therefore pay no heed to such thoughts, but cling fast to the words he speaks to you, "See my hands and my feet," etc. In this way your heart will again be made glad, and afterward the fruit will follow, that you will understand the Scriptures aright, and his Word will taste pleasant to you, being naught but honey and the sweetest consolation. II. Sermon Christ Preached to his Disciples after His Resurrection 29. The second and chief part of this Gospel is that in which Christ, after he expounded the Scripture to them and opened their minds, says in conclusion: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations."

[30] Here you see how the Lord again directs and leads his disciples into the Scriptures, there to strengthen and confirm their faith. So that, though he was revealing and showing himself to them in visible form, yet in the future, when they no longer beheld him, he desired them to cling to the Word and by the testimony of the Scripture make sure both their own and the faith of others. For after all, the power and the comfort of the resurrection are not understood nor received except through faith in the Word, as we have heard: although the disciples see him, still they do not recognize him, but are rather terrified at the sight of him until he speaks to them and opens their minds by means of the Scriptures.

[31] Furthermore he wished to teach them by these testimonies of Scripture how his kingdom on earth is to continue and wherein it is to consist; namely, that it is not to be a new government or kingdom, concerned with earthly and temporal things, but a spiritual and divine

power, whereby he would everywhere rule invisibly within the hearts of men through the Word and ministry and would cause them to pass from sin, God's wrath, and eternal death into grace and eternal life in heaven: for which purpose, in truth, he also suffered and rose again from the dead.

[32] All this he shows and indicates in these few words, and in them includes the sum and substance of the entire Gospel and the chief parts of Christian doctrine, which we should at all times preach and practice in the church: namely, repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Therefore we must say something on these themes also.

[33] Concerning repentance, the whole papal church has until now known nothing else to teach than that it consists of three parts, which they call contrition, confession, and satisfaction (compensation). And yet in regard to none of these could they rightly instruct the people. Now, the Latin word "satisfactio," meaning "compensation," we have, to please them, allowed to stand, hoping that by moderation on our part we might be able to lead them to the true doctrine; but with the understanding that this means not our compensation, as we in reality can render none, but Christ's satisfaction, in that he by his blood and death has paid for our sins and reconciled God. Since, however, we have heretofore so many times experienced and still plainly see that nothing whatever can be gained from them by moderation, and that they steadily continue the more violently to oppose the true doctrine, we will and must cleanly strip and sunder ourselves from them, and refuse in any way to recognize the fictitious names which they use in their schools and with which they now only strive to establish their old errors and falsehoods. For this reason also this word "satisfaction" shall hereafter in our church and our theology be null and dead, and referred to the judiciary and the schools of law, where it properly belongs and whence the papists borrowed it. Let these use this word and by it teach people who have stolen, robbed, or who are in possession of goods gotten by unrighteousness, how they are to make compensation and restitution.

[34] The word "contrition" (Latin "contritio") is, to be sure, taken from the Scriptures, which speak of a "cor contritum," that is, a broken, troubled, and miserable heart, Psalm 51:17; but neither has this word been rightly understood and explained by the monks. For they have called contrition the act, extorted from one's own thoughts and free will, of sitting in a corner,

hanging one's head, and with bitter meditation contemplating the sins one has committed; from which process, however, no real sorrow or displeasure on account of their sins followed, but they have rather tickled themselves with such thoughts and strengthened their sinful lust. And no matter how long they talked of it, still they could not decide how great one's contrition should be in order to be adequate to the sin. Wherefore they were compelled to console and help themselves out by this piece of patchwork, that he who could not attain to truly perfect contrition should, at least, have what they called "attritio," a sort of half-contrition, and be, at least, somewhat sorry for his sins.

[35] Then they made of confession an unbearable torment and anxiety; for they thought that it was everyone's duty at least once a year to enumerate all of one's sins, mentioning all the details, including also those sins one might have forgotten and might later recall. And yet they gave men's consciences no real instruction concerning the comfort of absolution, but directed the people to trust in their own works, and informed them that when they had become sufficiently contrite to make a clean confession of sin (which was, according to their own teaching, impossible), and also render satisfaction for the same, then their sins would be forgiven. Here not a word was said of Christ or of faith, so that unenlightened and afflicted souls who earnestly desired to be free from sin and sought comfort were kept in eternal suspense on this doubtful foundation.

[36] And—this was the worst feature of the matter—they did not rightly teach what constitutes sin; they knew nothing more of it than what lawyers call sin or offenses, and what comes within the sphere of the courts and of peace statutes. Their knowledge did not enable them to speak of original sin or of the inward impurity of the heart. For they even claimed that human nature and the powers of man's free will were so perfect that a man might in his own strength manage to fulfill God's law and thereby earn God's grace, and be so free from sin that he would not have need of any repentance. However, that they might nevertheless have something to make confession of, they were compelled to invent sin where there was none, just as on the other hand they invented good works of their own. And these sins they considered the greatest and most grievous of all, as for instance, when a layman chanced to touch a consecrated chalice or if a priest stammered while reading the canon in the mass, and other foolishness of that sort.

[37] Such nonsensical, visionary doctrine of the papacy concerning repentance one must therefore not lose sight of, first in order to be able to convince them of their error and blindness, since they are at present in every way whitewashing themselves and disporting themselves as though they had never taught anything wrong. Secondly, in order that by contrasting the two one may better understand the true Christian doctrine. Therefore we will speak according to Scripture on what the real Christian repentance and forgiveness of sins are which Christ here commands man to proclaim in his name.

[38] In the first place, these thoughts of our own invention, which the monks call “contritio” and “attritio” (whole and half contrition), are in all the Scriptures never called true contrition; but you are contrite when your heart becomes seriously alarmed at God’s wrath and judgment, not only on account of outward, gross sins, but on account of the real and unyielding hardness you see and feel within, the presence in your flesh and blood of nothing but unbelief, contempt and disobedience to God, and as St. Paul says in Romans 8:7, “enmity against God,” your flesh and blood being excited with all manner of evil lust and desire and the like, whereby you have brought upon yourself God’s wrath and have deserved to be cast out eternally from his presence and to burn in hell fire. Contrition, according to the Scriptures, is not partial, pertaining merely to certain acts you have committed openly against the ten commandments, and leaving undisturbed the dream and delusion of the hypocritical monkish repentance which for its own convenience invents a distinction in its works and after all discovers some good in itself; but it extends over your whole person with all its life and being, yes, over your whole nature, and shows you that you are an object of God’s wrath and condemned to hell. Otherwise the word “contrition” would still be too judicial, as in earthly matters one speaks of sin and sorrow as of a work one has done and afterwards thinks differently, and wishes he had not done it.

[39] This contrition and earnest fear is not the product of man’s own resolutions or thoughts, as the monks fancy. It must be wrought in a man by God’s Word, which reveals God’s wrath and smites the heart so that it begins to tremble and despair and knows not what to do with itself. For human reason cannot of itself perceive and understand that everything

which lies in the power and ability of man is an object of God's wrath and, at the bar of his judgment, already condemned to hell.

[40] Therefore this thing must be preached and proclaimed as Christ here says, if one is to direct and lead people to true repentance: they must be led to know their sins and God's wrath, and thus first suffer themselves to be cast by the Word beneath God's wrath and condemnation; in order that on the other hand by the preaching of the other truth, of the forgiveness of sins, they may be helped to gain true consolation, divine grace, and their salvation. Otherwise a man would never attain to a knowledge of his misery and distress and to a yearning for grace. Still less would he ever learn how he may pass from God's wrath and damnation into grace and the forgiveness of sins.

[41] And this preaching of repentance, says he, shall go forth unto all nations. Surely, a sweeping accusation, one that embraces the whole world, both Jews and Gentiles, and whomsoever they wish. Without a single exception, he concludes all—as he finds them and whatever their rank and pretensions—apart from Christ under the wrath of God and says: Ye are all condemned together, with all that ye do and are, be ye what ye may, be ye ever so many, ever so great, ever so high and holy.

[42] Yea, he terrifies and condemns those most of all who parade their own holiness and never once imagine that they are sinners and need repentance. Among the Jews the holiest Pharisees were such (of whom also Paul before his conversion was one), who lived and walked zealously according to the law; among the heathen certain cultured, highly intelligent, wise, and respectable people; among ourselves, those who may have been pious monks, Carthusians, or hermits, who sincerely undertook to be pious in God's sight and so lived that they were not conscious of having committed any sin unto death, and in addition to this in the severest manner chastised their bodies with fasting, vigils, sleeping on hard couches, some even with bloody flagellations and the like; so that they themselves and everybody else thought that in view of such works and such a life they surely had no need of contrition and repentance. Yes, they thought therewith, as with the best and most meritorious work, to pay for whatever sins they had previously done, and honestly to earn heaven from God by such a holy life, paying for it dearly enough. Against just such people as these this preaching of repentance should be carried on most zealously, and

as with a thunderbolt it should hurl to the ground and cast into hell and perdition all who are secure and presumptuous and do not yet perceive their misery and God's wrath.

[43] Even as St. John the Baptist, who prepared the way before Christ, publicly began such preaching; he courageously and spiritedly attacks the entire Jewish nation with this battle-ax and assails the holy Pharisees and Sadducees harder than all the others, saying: "Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Matthew 3:7. For they need repentance most of all and in God's sight they also merit a greater measure of wrath than other and more open sinners (whom at least their own consciences reprove), because they lie in blindness and indulge the fancy that they have no sin, while in reality before God they are full of filth and abomination and do sin against God's law in the worst possible way, in that they lack the fear of God and make light of his wrath, and are haughty and proud and full of presumption by reason of their own good works and their own holiness, practicing idolatry with their self-chosen service of God, in addition to the fact that their hearts are full of uncleanness and inward disobedience to God's commandments, though outwardly they keep themselves from evil works; even as we ourselves in times past while pretending to be the most pious, did provoke God to the uttermost with the horrible idolatry of the mass, the worship of the saints, and our own monkish righteousness, wherewith we thought we were earning heaven to the disparagement of Christ's death and resurrection and to the lamentable delusion of ourselves and others.

[44] For this reason St. John also continues his preaching of repentance and in verse 8 says to such people, "Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance," etc.; that is, take my advice and do not become secure and proud from the start, but perceive your sin and God's wrath upon you, humble yourselves before him, and implore his mercy. If ye do this not, judgment is already passed upon you, yea, the ax is already laid to the tree to destroy it, both trunk and root, as one that beareth no good fruit and is good for nothing but to be cast into the fire and reduced to ashes, notwithstanding it is so tall and sturdy and has beautiful leaves: you, namely, priding yourselves upon being Abraham's children and the like.

[45] This same preaching was later continued by the apostles. St. Peter, for instance, on the day of Pentecost and thereafter pointed out to the Jews

what pious children they were and how they had earned God's favor by denying his dear Son, nailing him to the cross and slaying him. And St. Paul says in Acts 17:30-31: "But now he (God) commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent, inasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness," etc.: that is, it is his will that all people, everywhere upon the earth, should know themselves, tremble at God's wrath, and understand that he will judge and condemn them unless they repent and obey this preaching.

[46] So Christ also says in John 16:8 that the Holy Ghost will convict the world in respect of sin, etc. (by such preaching of repentance). For, as said above, such repentance reason cannot teach, much less accomplish, by its own strength; but, as Christ here says, it must be preached as a revelation, surpassing the understanding and wisdom of reason. As St. Paul also in Romans 1:18 calls it a revelation from heaven, saying, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven," etc. For no man's reason and no lawyer will say that I am a sinner and an object of God's wrath and condemnation if I do not steal, rob, commit adultery, and the like, but am a pious, respectable man in whom no one can find anything to reprove or censure, and I am a pious monk besides. Who would believe that I, if I be without faith, merit only God's wrath by this fine, honorable life and that I am practicing naught but abominable idolatry with this glorious service of God and this rigid training which, without God's command, I have undertaken of my own pleasure, and that thereby I am condemning myself to a deeper hell than others who are open sinners?

[47] It is no wonder then, that, when the world hears this preaching unto repentance, whereby it is reproved, the lesser portion accepts it, while the greater masses, especially the knowing and righteous ones, despise it, toss their heads in defiance and say: Ho, how can that be true? Shall I suffer myself to be upbraided as a sinner and as an accursed man by people who come along with a new and unknown doctrine? Why, what have I done? I have surely kept myself with all earnestness from sin and have striven to do good. Shall all this be accounted nothing? Has all the world before our time been engrossed in errors? Have the lives and doings of all men been vain? How is it possible that God should take such a risk with the whole world and say they are all lost and condemned? Ha! The devil has commanded you so to preach. Thus they defend and confirm themselves in their,

impenitence and by blasphemy and persecution of God's Word heap his wrath upon themselves all the more.

[48] But in spite of this, such judgment and preaching ever continues and forces its way farther, as Christ here commands them simply to preach among all nations, to tell everybody, wherever they go, to repent, and to say that no one can escape God's wrath or be saved who does not accept this preaching. That to this end he rose from the dead, that he might found this kingdom, in order that this might be preached to them who should and would be saved and might be accepted and believed by them, though it anger the world, the devil, or hell.

[49] Notice, we have considered the first part of this sermon, true repentance, which convicts not only a mass of evildoers whom all the world and the lawyers call transgressors (they, to be sure, also deserve severe punishment), but attacks the very people who in the sight of the world are the most pious and righteous, (yet are without knowledge of their sin and of Christ), and condemns them. It makes of repentance, not a work of ours brought about by our own thinking, and partial, pertaining to only a portion of our deeds and making it necessary for a man to search and consider a long time as to how, when, where, and how often he has sinned (although it is true that one single sin may give rise to this, as when David was reprov'd on account of adultery and murder). But repentance is a thing extending over the whole of your life and casting you all of a sudden, as by a thunderbolt from the skies, wholly and entirely under God's wrath, telling you that you are a child of hell, and terrifying your heart so that the world becomes too small for you.

[50] Therefore you must make this distinction: You may refer to the repentance which may be called our own work, namely our own sorrow, confession, and satisfaction, to the schools of lawyers, or to children's schools, where it may serve for discipline and outward training; but you must keep it clearly apart from the true spiritual repentance wrought by God's Word wherever and whenever this Word smites the heart, making it tremble and quake at God's zealous and terrible wrath, and filling it so with dread that it knows not whither to flee.

[51] Such contrition and repentance the Bible illustrates by means of numerous examples: as that of St. Paul when he was about to be converted,

Acts 9:4, where Christ himself preaches repentance to him from heaven saying, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” etc. And presently action and power accompany the words, so that he suddenly falls to the earth trembling and says in verse 6, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” This is true contrition, not the product of his own mind; for he goes his way holding a strong conviction and assurance of his own holiness according to the law, conscious of no sin whereby he might have deserved God’s wrath. But suddenly Christ shows him what he is, namely, a persecutor and murderer of Christ and of his church, a thing which hitherto he had not perceived, rather regarding his actions as manifestations of splendid virtue and of a godly zeal. Now, however, he is seized with such terror on their account as plainly indicates that with all his righteousness according to the law. he is condemned before God; and he is only too glad to hear from Christ the gracious assurance that he may obtain mercy and the forgiveness of his sins. In like manner we are told in Acts 2 how Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and thereafter and hurled this thunderbolt at the whole Jewish nation that they were betrayers and murderers of their promised Christ, the Son of God; as the text says in verse 37: “Now when they heard this they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?”

[52] Behold, here too there is true repentance, which suddenly seizes the heart and fills it with mortal dread, because it feels God’s wrath and condemnation weighing upon it, and begins to realize its real fault, of which it has heretofore known nothing, and is constrained to say, Ah, now what shall I do? Here is naught save only sin and wrath, a thing which hitherto, alas, I have neither known nor surmised. As St. Paul also says of the power of the Word which confronts men with God’s wrath, Romans 7:9, “And I was alive apart from the law once,” that is, presumptuous and secure, knowing of no sin nor of God’s wrath. But when the commandment came and smote my heart then sin revived, so that I began to feel God’s wrath and, thus, died; that is, I fell into fear, anxiety and despair, which I could not endure and in which I must have perished and fallen a prey to eternal death had I not again found help.

[53] Now, when this has been duly preached, the other message must follow which Christ here commands us to preach, to wit, the forgiveness of sins. For it is not sufficient to speak only of sin and God’s wrath and terrify

the people. It is necessary, indeed, to begin one's preaching thus, so that the people may know and feel their sins and may also have a desire for grace, but this must not be our whole message, otherwise there would be no Christ and no salvation but only death and hell. Thus Judas, Christ's betrayer, made a strong enough beginning in the first part of his repentance, remorse and knowledge of his sin; yea, he was too strong on this point, because no consolation followed; so that he was unable to bear it and hurled himself forthwith into destruction and eternal death; as also did King Saul and many others. But this cannot be considered preaching aright or fully concerning repentance, as Christ would have this doctrine preached. For to this extent the devil himself is willing to serve as a preacher, though he has no call to preach, just as he is ever willing to use the name and Word of God, albeit but to deceive and work mischief. For he perverts both doctrines, comforting where comfort is not in place, or engaging solely in terrifying the people and leading them into despair. But Christ's intention is not that repentance shall be so preached as to leave the conscience in its terror-stricken state but that those who have been brought to a knowledge of their sins and are contrite in heart shall again be comforted and lifted up. For this reason he straightway adds the other part and commands us to preach not only repentance but also the forgiveness of sins. This, then, as he also says, is preaching in his name.

[54] Therefore, when your conscience has become terrified by the preaching of repentance, whether it be through the spoken word or otherwise within your heart, you must remember that you are also to hear and grasp the other part Christ commanded to be preached to you, to wit: that, although you have merited eternal wrath and are deserving of hell-fire, yet God in his boundless goodness and mercy does not desire to leave you and see you perish in perdition, but he desires to forgive your sins, so that his wrath and your condemnation may be removed from you.

[55] This is the comforting message of the Gospel, which a man cannot, of himself, understand as he of himself understands the preaching of the law (which was at the beginning implanted in his nature) when his heart is thereby smitten; but it is a special revelation and Christ's own peculiar voice. For human nature and reason cannot rise above the judgment of the law, which concludes and says: He that is a sinner is condemned of God. Wherefore all men would have to remain forever objects of wrath and

condemnation if another and a new teaching had not been given from heaven. This teaching, in which God offers his grace and mercy to those who feel their sins and God's wrath, God's own Son himself must institute and command to be spread abroad in the world.

[56] But in order that it may be apprehended and faithfully believed, this preaching must be done, as he here says, in his name; that is, not only in pursuance of his command, but also with the proclamation that sins are to be forgiven on his account and by reason of his merits. Hence we must acknowledge neither I nor any other man, with the exception of Christ, have accomplished or merited this, nor could have merited it in eternity. For how should I be able to merit it when I and all my life and whatever I may be able to do, is, according to the first part of this sermon, condemned before God?

[57] But now, if God's wrath is to be taken away from me and I am to obtain grace and forgiveness, some one must merit this; for God cannot be a friend of sin nor gracious to it, nor can he remit the punishment and wrath, unless payment and satisfaction be made. Now, no one, not even an angel of heaven, could make restitution for the infinite and irreparable injury and appease the eternal wrath of God which we had merited by our sins; except that eternal person, the Son of God himself, and he could do it only by taking our place, assuming our sins, and answering for them as though he himself were guilty of them. This our dear Lord and only Savior and Mediator before God, Jesus Christ, did for us by his blood and death, in which he became a sacrifice for us; and with his purity, innocence, and righteousness, which was divine and eternal, he outweighed all sin and wrath he was compelled to bear on our account; yea, he entirely engulfed and swallowed it up, and his merit is so great that God is now satisfied and says, If he wills thereby to save, then there shall be a salvation. As Christ also says of his Father's will, John 6:40: "This is the will of my Father, that everyone that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life." Also Matthew 28:18: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." And in his prayer in John 17:1-2 he says: "Father, glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee; even as thou gavest him authority over all flesh, that to all whom thou hast given him he should give eternal life."

[58] This now he has not only actually fulfilled, but he has done and accomplished it for the very purpose of having it preached and proclaimed to us; otherwise we would know nothing of it, nor would we be able to attain to it. Therefore it is absolutely unmerited on our part and is given to us entirely free and out of pure grace, and just for the reason that we may be assured of such grace and have no cause for doubt in regard to it; for indeed, we must remain forever in doubt if we were required to look for merit of our own and to seek worthiness inhering in us, till our attainments were such that God would consider them and be gracious to us on their account. But now Christ commands that forgiveness of sins be preached in his name, so that I may know that they are undoubtedly remitted unto me on account of that which he has merited, and this he reveals and communicates to me through the Word.

[59] And moreover I and everyone else for his own personal good may take comfort in this, and besides no one has any cause to be troubled and worried as to whether he dare appropriate this great mercy unto himself, for it is natural for man's heart to doubt and to argue thus with itself: Yes, I can easily believe that God has elected certain great men thereto, as, for instance, St. Peter, Paul, and others, but who knows whether I too am one of those to whom he is willing to grant grace? Perhaps I have not been ordained thereto—therefore Christ wills and herewith commands that this doctrine be spread, not in a corner nor to certain individuals only, yea, not even solely to the Jews, or to a few other nations at most, but throughout the whole wide world, or, as he says, to all nations; yes, as he says in Mark 16:15, to the whole creation. This Christ spoke in order that we may know that it is not his will that anybody anywhere should be cut off or barred out from the blessings of this preaching if he is only willing to accept them and does not bar himself out. For, as the preaching of repentance is to be a general preaching and to extend over all people so that all may perceive that they are sinners, just so general shall also this preaching of forgiveness be, and it shall be accepted by all, even as all men have stood in need of it from the beginning, and will continue so until the end of the world. For, why should the forgiveness of sins be offered and preached to all if they did not all have sin? That the truth may remain as St. Paul says, Romans 11:32: "God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all," etc.

[60] Hence this preaching also calls for faith; that is, I am to conclude from it with certainty and without a doubt, that for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, forgiveness of sins is granted me from the terrible wrath of God and from eternal death, and that it is God's will that I believe this preaching, not despising the proffered grace of Christ, not casting it aside, not making the Word of God a lie. For, since he commands that this Word be preached in all the world, he therewith and at the same time demands of everyone that he receive this preaching and hold and confess it to be the invariable, divine truth, that we assuredly receive these things for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ; and, no matter how unworthy I feel myself to be, this must not hinder nor deter me from having this faith, if only my heart be so disposed that I feel sincerely displeased with my sins and heartily desire to get rid of them. For, as such forgiveness is not offered and preached to me on account of my worthiness, for I have clearly contributed nothing, neither labored to the end that Christ should merit forgiveness for me and have it proclaimed to me as he did and does; so, on the other hand, I am not to suffer any nor be deprived of forgiveness so long as I really desire it.

[61] Finally, that our comfort may abound the more, Christ here makes the following arrangement respecting this preaching of repentance and of the forgiveness of sins: It shall not be merely temporary and momentary, as it were, but shall be in continual operation, never ceasing in Christendom so long as Christ's kingdom endures. For he wants us to have therein a lasting, eternal treasure and everlasting grace, which effectually worketh alway; so that we must not consider the forgiveness as being restricted to that one moment when the absolution was pronounced, nor as extending over previous and past sins only, as though thenceforward our works must render us perfectly clean and sinless.

[62] For it is not possible in this present life on earth that we should so live as to be entirely free from sin and infirmity—not though we received grace and the Holy Spirit—owing to our sinful, depraved flesh and blood, which never ceases, this side of the grave, to bring forth evil lusts and desires, no, not in the saints; though they, on receiving grace, abstain from, and guard against, sin and resist their evil lusts, even as repentance requires; wherefore they too are still in daily need of forgiveness, even as they daily exercise themselves in repentance, by reason of these selfsame abiding infirmities and weaknesses; knowing, as they do, that their lives and works

are yet sinful and merit God's wrath (to which they would also expose them) were it not for the fact that these things are forgiven for Christ's sake.

[63] Therefore Christ has herewith instituted a kingdom on earth to be called an eternal kingdom of grace and always to be governed by the forgiveness of sins; and so powerful it is to protect those who believe that, although sin still lurks in their flesh and blood and is so deeply rooted that it cannot, in this life, be entirely eradicated, still it shall not bring injury upon them, but be remitted and not imputed to them, provided, however, that we abide in the faith and daily make endeavors to stamp out the remaining evil lust, until it has been exterminated, and utterly destroyed by death, and has rotted away in the grave and fallen a prey to the worms, that man may arise unto eternal life perfectly renewed and cleansed.

[64] Yea, even though a man who is under grace and is sanctified fall away again from repentance and faith and thus lose his forgiveness, nevertheless this kingdom of grace stands firm and unmovable, so that one may at any time be reinstated in it, if one again belong to it by repentance and conversion: in like manner as the sun rises daily in the heavens, and not only banishes the past night but proceeds without interruption to shine throughout the day, even though it be darkened and covered with thick clouds, yes, even though someone close his doors and windows against its light, still it remains the selfsame sun and, breaking all barriers down, it again and again presents itself to view.

[65] Behold, this is the true doctrine of the Gospel concerning Christian repentance, laid hold of and conceived in these two parts, to wit, contrition, or a sincere alarm on account of sin, and faith in forgiveness for Christ's sake. The entire papal church has hitherto taught nothing of this; and especially have they nowhere shown any knowledge of the faith in Christ which should be the chief part of this preaching: they have only directed people to their own works, and pronounced the absolution with this proviso that we have been duly contrite and properly made confession. And thus Christ has been so entirely forgotten and ignored, and the preaching he here commands has been so utterly perverted and beclouded, that there has been no repentance and absolution in his name but in our own names and for the sake of our works of contrition, confession, and satisfaction. This I call suppressing by force the faith and knowledge of Christ, yea, exterminating it, and taking from troubled consciences their comfort, leading them alone

to perish in doubt, if they are not to be certain of the forgiveness of sin until they have sufficiently tortured, and made martyrs of themselves by their self-invented and involuntary contrition and confession.

[66] And so the pope and all his band have by this one thing, that they have thus perverted and corrupted the doctrine of Christian repentance and forgiveness of sin, well enough deserved, and they daily still more deserve (since besides they refuse to repent of all this error and deception, which they themselves are forced to acknowledge, but rather blaspheme and storm against the plain truth) that they be cursed by all Christians into the abyss of hell, as Paul to the Galatians curses all those who teach another Gospel, etc. Galatians 1:9.

[67] Here we should also say a word on the confession which we retain and which we commend as a beneficial, salutary thing. For although, properly speaking, it is not a part of repentance, and is not necessary and enjoined, still it serves us well in receiving absolution, which is nothing else than simply the preaching and announcement of the forgiveness of sins, which Christ here commands men both to preach and to hear. Since, however, it is necessary to retain such preaching in the church, the absolution should also be retained; for the only difference between the two is this: in the preaching of the Gospel the Word is publicly preached in a general way, to all who are present; and in absolution this same Word is spoken especially and privately to one or more who so desire it. This is in accord with Christ's institution, that such preaching of the forgiveness of sins should be carried on at all times and in all places, not only in a general way before a whole company but also before individual persons, wherever there are people who stand in need of it: as he says in the Gospel for the following Sunday, "Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them."

[68] Therefore we do not teach confession like the pope's theologians, that one must recite his sins, than which, according to the papists, there is no other way to confess, or that thereby one receives forgiveness and becomes worthy of absolution, as they say, On account of thy contrition and confession I declare thee free from thy sins. But we teach that one should use confession in order to hear the comfort of the Gospel and thus to awaken and to strengthen his faith in the forgiveness of sins, which is the main thing in repentance. So that "to confess" means not, as it does among

the papists, to recount a long list of sins, but to desire absolution, which is in itself confession enough; that is, to acknowledge your guilt and confess that you are a sinner. And no more shall it be demanded or required that you mention by name all or several, many or few, of your sins, unless of yourself you have a desire to mention something which especially burdens your conscience and wherein you need instruction and advice or particular comfort, as is often necessary with young and inexperienced people, and also with others.

[69] Therefore we commend and retain confession not on its own account but for the sake of absolution. And in confession this feature is the golden treasure, that there you hear proclaimed to you the words Christ commanded to be preached in his name to you and to all the world, so that even if you should not hear it in the confessional, still you otherwise hear the Gospel daily, which is nothing else than the word of absolution. For to preach the forgiveness of sins means nothing else than to absolve or to declare free from sin, which also takes place in baptism and in the Lord's Supper, which were also instituted for the purpose of showing to us this forgiveness of sins and assuring us of it. Thus to be baptized or to receive the communion is also an absolution, where forgiveness is, in Christ's name and at his command, promised and communicated to each one in particular. This forgiveness you should hear wherever and whenever you are in need of it, and should receive and believe it as though you heard it from Christ himself. For, because it is not our absolution but Christ's command and word, therefore it is just as good and valid as though it were heard proceeding from his own mouth.

[70] Thus you see that everything that is taught concerning Christian repentance according to Scripture is wholly contained in the two parts called contrition, or alarm at God's wrath on account of our sins, and its antidote, faith that our sins are forgiven us for Christ's sake. For it has not been commanded that more than these two tidings be preached, to wit: the Law, which charges us with our sin and shows us the judgment of God; and the Gospel, which directs us to Christ and proclaims God's grace and mercy in him. And, to sum up all, repentance in its entirety is just that which the Scripture describes in other words in Psalm 147:11 and elsewhere, "Jehovah taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his lovingkindness." For there these two parts are also stated: the fear of God,

which proceeds from a knowledge of our sins; and reliance upon his grace, as exhibited in the promises concerning Christ, etc.

[71] What the papists say concerning “satisfaction,” however, is, as said above, by no means to be tolerated; for that which in former times was called satisfaction and whereof one may still read in the writings of the ancient teachers, was nothing else than an outward and public punishment of those who were guilty of manifest vices, which they were compelled to bear before men, just as a thief or a murderer in the world’s courts pays for his crime on the gallows or the wheel. Of this the Scripture nowhere teaches anything, nor does this contribute anything toward the forgiveness of sin, but may, as I have said, among other temporal things, be referred to the lawyers. But their claim that God punishes sins with temporal punishments and plagues, sometimes even when they have been forgiven, is true; but that is no satisfaction or redemption from sin, nor is it a merit on account of which sin is forgiven, but a chastisement which God inflicts to urge us to repentance.

[72] And even if one wished to retain the word “satisfaction” and explained it as meaning that Christ made satisfaction for our sins, it is nevertheless too weak and says too little concerning the grace of Christ and does not do honor enough to his sufferings, to which one should give higher honor, confessing that he not only has made satisfaction for sin but has also redeemed us from the power of death, the devil, and hell, and established an everlasting kingdom of grace and of daily forgiveness of the sin that remains in us; and thus is become for us, as St. Paul says in Corinthians 1:30, an eternal redemption and sanctification, as has been more fully discussed above.

Quasimodo Sunday After Easter. Jesus Appears to His Disciples, or the Nature, Fruit, and Power of Faith. Doubting Thomas.

Text: John 20:19-31.

19 Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.
29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.
30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:
31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. John 20:19-31

[1] This Gospel praises the fruit of faith, and illustrates its nature and character. Among the fruits of faith are these two: peace and joy, as St. Paul writes to the Galatians, where he mentions in order all kinds of fruit saying: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." Galatians 5:22. Thus these two fruits are also mentioned in our text. In the first place, Christ stands there among the disciples, who sit in fear and terror, and whose hearts are greatly troubled every hour expecting death; to them he comes and comforts them, saying: "Peace be unto you." This is one fruit. In the second place, there follows from this sweet word the other fruit, that they were glad when they saw the Lord. Then he further bestows upon faith power and authority over all things in heaven and on earth, and truly extols it in that he says: "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." And again: "Receive ye the Holy Spirit: who so ever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." Let us now consider each thought in order.

[2] Faith, as we have often said, is of the nature, that everyone appropriates to himself the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, of which we have already said enough; namely, that it is not sufficient simply to believe Christ rose from the dead, for this produces neither peace nor joy, neither power nor authority; but you must believe that he rose for your sake, for your benefit, and was not glorified for his own sake; but that he might help you and all who believe in him, and that through his resurrection sin, death and hell are vanquished and the victory given to you.

[3] This is signified by Christ entering through closed doors, and standing in the midst of his disciples. For this standing denotes nothing else

than that he is standing in our hearts; there he is in the midst of us, so that he is ours, as he stands there and they have him among them. And when he thus stands within our hearts, we at once hear his loving voice saying to the troubled consciences: Peace, there is no danger; your sins are forgiven and blotted out, and they shall harm you no more.

[4] And this entrance the Lord made here through barred doors, going through wood and stone, and still leaving everything whole, breaking nothing, yet getting in among his disciples. This illustrates how the Lord comes into our hearts and stands in us, namely, through the office of the ministry. Therefore, since God has commanded men to preach his Word, one should in no wise despise a mortal man into whose mouth he has put his Word; lest we get the idea that everyone must expect a special message from heaven, and that God should speak to him by the word of his mouth. For if he imparts faith to anyone, he does it by means of the preaching of man and the external word of man. This is going through closed doors, when he comes into the heart through the Word, not breaking nor displacing anything. For when the Word of God comes, it neither injures the conscience, nor deranges the understanding of the heart and the external senses; as the false teachers do who break all the doors and windows, breaking through like thieves, leaving nothing whole and undamaged, and perverting, falsifying and injuring all life, conscience, reason, and the senses. Christ does not do thus. Such now is the power of the Word of God. Thus we have two parts, preaching and believing. His coming to us is preaching; his standing in our hearts is faith. For it is not sufficient that he stands before our eyes and ears; he must stand in the midst of us in our hearts, and offer and impart to us peace.

[5] For the fruit of faith is peace; not only that which one has outwardly, but that of which Paul speaks to the Philippians (Philippians 4:7) saying it is a peace that passeth all reason, sense and understanding. And where this peace is, one shall not and cannot judge according to reason. This we shall see still farther in our Gospel lesson.

[6] First, the disciples sit there behind barred doors in great fear of the Jews, afraid to venture outside, with death staring them in the face. Outwardly they indeed have peace, no one is doing them any harm; but inwardly their hearts are troubled, and they have neither peace nor rest. Amid their fear and anguish the Lord comes, quiets their hearts and makes

them glad, so that their fear is removed, not by removing the danger, but in that their hearts were no more afraid. For thereby the malice of the Jews is not taken away, nor changed; they rave and rage as before, and outwardly everything remains the same. But they are changed inwardly, receiving such boldness and joy as to declare: "We have seen the Lord." Thus he quiets their hearts, so that they become cheerful and fearless, not caring how the Jews rage.

[7] This is the true peace that satisfies and quiets the heart; not in times when no adversity is at hand, but in the midst of adversity, when outwardly there is nothing but strife before the eyes. And this is the difference between worldly and spiritual peace. Worldly peace consists in removing the outward evil that disturbs the peace; as when the enemies besiege a city there is no peace; but when they depart peace returns. Such is the case with poverty and sickness. While they afflict you, you are not contented; but when they are removed and you are rid of the distress, there is peace and rest again from without. But he who experiences this is not changed, being just as fainthearted whether the evil be present or not; only he feels it and is frightened when it is present.

[8] Christian or spiritual peace, however, just turns the thing about, so that outwardly the evil remains, as enemies, sickness, poverty, sin, death and the devil. These are there and never desist, encompassing us on every side; nevertheless, within there is peace, strength and comfort in the heart, so that the heart cares for no evil, yea, is really bolder and more joyful in its presence than in its absence. Therefore it is peace which passeth and transcendeth all understanding and all the senses. For reason cannot grasp any peace except worldly or external peace, for it cannot reconcile itself to it nor understand how that is peace if evil is present, and it knows not how to satisfy and comfort a person; hence it thinks if the evil depart, peace departs also. When however the Spirit comes, he lets outward adversity remain, but strengthens the person, making the timid fearless, the trembling bold, changing the troubled into a quite, peaceful conscience, and such an one is bold, fearless and joyful in things by which all the world otherwise is terrified.

[9] Whence does he receive this? From his faith in Christ. For if I truly believe in the Lord from the real depth of my heart, that my heart can truly say: My Lord Christ has by his resurrection conquered my need, my sin,

death and all evil, and will be thus with and in me, so that body and soul shall want nothing, that I shall have all I need, and no evil shall harm me: if I believe this, it is impossible for me to be faint-hearted and timid no matter how much sin and death oppress me. For faith is ever present and says: Does sin burden you, does death terrify you, look to Christ who died for your sake and rose again, and conquered every evil; what can harm you? Why will you then fear? So also in case other misfortunes burden you, as sickness or poverty, turn your eyes from it, lock the door to reason and cast yourself upon Christ and cleave to him, so shall you be strengthened and comforted. If you look to Christ and believe on him, no evil that may befall you is so great that it can harm you and cause you to despair. Therefore it is impossible for this fruit to remain outside, where faith is, so that peace does not follow.

[10] From peace the other fruit now follows, as is taught in this Gospel. When Christ came to the disciples and said: "Peace be unto you!" and showed them his hands and feet; then they were glad that they saw the Lord. Yes, to be sure they had to be glad, for that they saw Christ was the greatest joy the heart of man can experience. Hitherto we have been permitted to see our hands, that is, we have been taught to trust in our works; this brought no gladness. But to see Christ makes us glad. And this takes place by faith; for thus St. Paul in Romans 5:1-2 says: "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

[11] Thus we have the fruit whereby we know who are true Christians. For he who has no peace in that in which the world finds nothing but unrest, and is joyful in that which in the world is nothing but gloom and sorrow, is not yet a Christian, and does not yet believe. This truth is being also sung at this season everywhere in the hymn on the Lord's resurrection; but hardly anybody understands it. He who composed it surely understood it aright. He does not stop at the Lord is risen, when he says: "Christ is risen from his Passion;" as though this were sufficient, but brings it home to us and adds: Let us all rejoice in this. But how can we rejoice in it, if we have nothing of it and it is not ours? Therefore, if I am to rejoice in it, it must be mine, that I may claim it as my own property, that it may profit me. And finally he closes: Christ will be our consolation, that we can and shall have no other

consolation but Christ. He wants to be it himself and he alone, that we should cling to him in every time of need; for he has conquered all for our benefit, and by his resurrection he comforts all troubled consciences and sad hearts. This the Gospel teaches concerning faith and its fruits.

[12] Now follows the office of the ministry. The power of faith now develops love. For it does not yet suffice that I have the Lord so that he is mine, and that I find in him all comfort, peace and joy; but I must henceforth also do as he has done: for it follows thus in the text: “As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”

[13] The first and highest work of love a Christian ought to do when he has become a believer, is to bring others also to believe in the way he himself came to believe. And here you notice Christ begins and institutes the office of the ministry of the external Word in every Christian; for he himself came with this office and the external Word. Let us lay hold of this, for we must admit it was spoken to us. In this way the Lord desires to say: You have now received enough from me, peace and joy, and all you should have; for your person you need nothing more. Therefore labor now and follow my example, as I have done, so do ye. My Father sent me into the world only for your sake, that I might serve you, not for my own benefit. I have finished the work, have died for you, and given you all that I am and have; remember and do ye also likewise, that henceforth ye may only serve and help everybody, otherwise ye would have nothing to do on earth. For by faith ye have enough of everything. Hence I send you into the world as my Father hath sent me; namely, that every Christian should instruct and teach his neighbor, that he may also come to Christ. By this, no power is delegated exclusively to popes and bishops, but all Christians are commanded to profess their faith publicly and also to lead

[14] Secondly, if you have exercised yourself in this highest work and taught others the right way of truth, then make up your mind to keep on and serve everybody. Then the example of your life and good works follows; not that you can thereby merit and acquire anything, seeing you have beforehand everything that is necessary to salvation. Furthermore Christ now gives a command, he breathes upon the disciples and says: “Receive ye the Holy Spirit: whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

[15] This is a great and mighty power which no one can sufficiently extol, given to mortal men of flesh and blood over sin, death and hell, and over all things. The pope too boasts in the canon law that Christ has given to him power over all earthly things; which would indeed be correct if the people rightly understood it. For they apply it to the civil government; this is not Christ's thought; but he gives spiritual power and rule, and wishes to say this much: When ye speak a word concerning a sinner, it shall be spoken in heaven, and shall avail so much as if God himself spake it in heaven; for he is in your mouth, therefore it has the same force as if he himself spoke it. Now it is always true, if Christ speaks a word, since he is Lord over sin and hell, and says to you: Thy sins are forgiven; then they must be forgiven and nothing can prevent it. Again, if he says: Thy sins shall not be forgiven thee; then they remain unforgiven, so that neither you, nor an angel, nor a saint, nor any creature, can forgive your sin, even if you martyred yourself to death.

[16] This same power belongs to every Christian, since Christ has made us all partakers of his power and dominion; and here his is not a civil but a spiritual rule, and his Christians also rule spiritually. For he does not say: This city, this country, this bishopric or kingdom you shall rule, as the pope does; but he says: Ye shall have power to forgive and to retain sins. Hence this power pertains to the conscience, so that by virtue of God's Word I can pass judgment as to what the conscience can cleave to, so that against and above that no creature can do anything, neither sin, nor the world nor Satan. This is true power. But thereby no power is given me to rule over temporal matters, over a country and people, externally after the manner of civil governments, but a much higher and nobler power, which can in no sense be compared with it.

[17] Therefore we shall thank God, that we now know the great power and glory given us through Christ in his plain Word, as St. Paul also highly praises and extols it to the Ephesians, saying: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Ephesians 1:3. And again: "God made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus: for by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of

yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:5-10.

[18] Observe, what great transcendent comfort we have in that God awakens in us also the same power he exercises in Christ, and bestows upon us equal authority. As he made him sit in heavenly places, above all power and might, and everything that can be named; so has he invested us also with the same power, that those who believe have all power over heaven and earth. This we have in the words he left behind him; and they are so powerful, that when they are spoken by us, they avail as much as if he himself were on earth and spake them in the majesty and glory in which he now exists. And this is the power we have from his resurrection and ascension; there he gives us power to. kill and to make alive, to consign to the devil and to rescue from him.

[19] But in this matter one must proceed carefully, and not do like the popes. For they have reached the point to have the power, that however and whatever they say, so it must be, because they say it. Nay, this power you have not, but the divine Majesty alone has. it. They say thus: If the pope speaks a word and says: Thy sins are forgiven thee, they are blotted out, even though you neither repent nor believe. They mean by this, that they have the power to bestow and withhold heaven, to open or shut it, to locate one in heaven or cast into hell; far from it that it should be so. For from this it would then follow that our salvation depended on the works, authority and power of man. Therefore, since this is in conflict with all the Scriptures it cannot be true that when you open or shut, it must be open or shut.

[20] Therefore we must rightly understand Christ when he says: “Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained,” that this does not establish the power of him who speaks but of those who believe. Now the power of him who speaks and of him who believes are as far apart as heaven and earth. God has given us the Word and the authority to speak; but it does not therefore follow from this that it must so be done, as Christ also preached and taught the Word, and yet not all who heard it believed, and it was not everywhere done as he spake the Word, although it was God’s Word. Therefore Christ’s meaning is: Ye shall have the power to speak the Word, and to preach the Gospel, saying, Whosoever believeth, has the remission of his sins; but whosoever

believeth not, has no remission of sin. But ye have not the power to create faith. For there is a great difference between planting and giving the growth; as Paul says to the Corinthians: “I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” 1 Corinthians 3:6. Hence we have no authority to rule as lords; but to be servants and ministers who shall preach the Word, by means of which we incite people to believe. Therefore, if you believe the Word, you gain this power; but if you believe not, then what I speak or preach will avail nothing even though it be God’s Word; and if you believe not these words you are not treating me but God himself with dishonor and contempt.

[21] Therefore, unbelief is nothing but blasphemy, which makes God a liar. For if I say, your sins are forgiven you in God’s name, and you believe it not, it is the same as if you said: who knows whether it be true, and whether he be in earnest? by this you charge God and his Word with lying. Therefore you better be far from the Word, if you believe it not. For when a man preaches his Word, God would have it as highly esteemed as if he himself had preached it. This then is the power given by God. which every Christian has, and of which we have already spoken much and often; hence this is enough for the present.

Quasimodo. Sunday after Easter. Second Sermon. True Piety, the Law and Faith, and Love to our Neighbor.

Text: John 20:19-31.

19 Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:

31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. John 20:19-31

[1] In today's Gospel is presented to us, what the life of a Christian is to be and that it consists of two parts: first, that the Lord shows Thomas his hands and feet; secondly, that he is sent as Christ is sent. This is nothing else than faith and love, the two thoughts that are preached to us in all the Gospel texts.

[2] Formerly you heard, and alas! it is preached in all the world, that if anyone desires to become righteous, he must begin with human laws. This was done under the reign of the pope, and nearly all the very best preachers preached nothing else than how one is to be outwardly pious, and about good works which glitter before the world. But this is still far from the true righteousness that avails before God.

[3] There is another way to begin to become righteous, which commences by teaching us the laws of God, from which we learn to know ourselves, what we are, and how impossible it is for us to fulfill the divine commandments. The law speaks thus: Thou shalt have one God, worship him alone, trust in him alone, seek help and comfort from him alone. Exodus 20. The heart hears this and yet it cannot do it. Why then does the law command such an impossible thing? In order, as I have said, to show us our inability, and that we may learn to know ourselves and to see ourselves as we are, even as one sees himself in a mirror. When now the conscience, thus smitten by God's law, begins to quake and finds that it does not keep God's commandment, then the law does its proper work; for the true mission of the law is only to terrify the conscience.

[4] But there are two classes of men who fulfill the law, or who imagine they fulfill it. The first are those who, when they have heard it, begin with outward works; they desire to perform and fulfill it by works. How do they proceed? They say: God has commanded thou shalt have one God; I surely will worship no other God; I will serve him and no idol, and will have no heathen idolatrous image in my house or in my church; why should I do this? Such persons make a show with their glittering, fabricated service of God, like the clergy in our day, and they think they keep this law, when they bend their knees and are able to sing and prate much about God. By this show the poor laity also are deceived; they follow after and also desire to obey the law by their works. But the blind guides the blind and both fall into a pit, Luke 6:39. This is the first class, who take hold and imagine they will keep the law, and yet they do not.

[5] The other class are those who know themselves by the law and study what it seeks and requires. For instance, when the law speaks: "Thou shalt have one God, and worship and honor him alone," this same heart meditates: What does this mean? Shalt thou bend the knees? Or what is it to have one God? It surely is something else than a bodily, outward reverence;

and finally it perceives that is a very different thing than is generally supposed; that it is nothing but having trust and hope in God, that he will help and assist in all anxiety and distress, in every temptation and adversity, that he will save him from sin, from death, from hell and from the devil, without whose help and salvation he alone can do nothing. And this is the meaning of having one God. A heart, so thoroughly humble, desires to have God, namely, a heart that has become quite terrified and shaken by this commandment, and in its anxiety and trouble flees to God alone.

[6] This now the hypocrites and work-saints, who lead a fine life before the world, are not able to do; for their confidence is based alone upon their own righteousness and outward piety. Therefore, when God attacks them with the law and causes the poor people to see that they have not kept the law, aye, not the least of it, and when overwhelmed by anxiety and distress, and an evil conscience, and they perceive that external works will not suffice and that keeping the commandments of God is a very different thing from what they thought; then they rush ahead and seek ever more and more, and other and still other works, and fancy that they will thereby quiet their conscience; but they greatly miss the right way. Hence it comes to pass that one wishes to do it by rosaries, another by fasting; this one by prayer and that one by torturing his body; one runs to St. James, another to Rome, this man to Jerusalem, that to Aix; here one becomes a monk, another a nun, and they seek their end in so many ways that they can scarcely be enumerated.

[7] Why do they do all this? Because they wish to save themselves, to rescue and help themselves. The consequence of this is great blasphemy of God, for they also boast mightily of these works, and vaunt and say: I have been in an order so long, I have prayed so many rosaries, have fasted so much, have done this and that; God will give me heaven as a reward. This then means to have an idol. This also is the meaning of Isaiah, when he says: "They worship the work of their own hands," Isaiah 2:8. He is not speaking of stone and wood, but of the external works, which have a show of goodness and beauty before men. These hypocrites are ingenious enough to give the chaff to God and to keep the wheat for themselves. This then is true idolatry, as St. Paul writes to the Romans: "Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou rob temples?" Romans 2:22. This is spiritual robbery.

[8] Therefore you will find that there is nothing good in any man of himself. But you have this distinction, that the upright, in whom the law has exercised its work, when they feel their sickness and weakness, say: God will help me; I trust in him; I build upon him; he is my rock and hope. But the others, as hypocrites and work-saints, when trial, distress and anxiety are at hand, lament and say: Oh, whither shall I go? They must at last despair of God, of themselves and of their works, even if they have ever so many of them.

[9] Such in the first place are these false and unrighteous pupils of the law, who presume to fulfill it by their works. For they have an appearance and glitter outwardly, but in their hearts they have nothing but filth and uncleanness. Therefore they also merit nothing before God, who regards not external works that are done without any heart in them.

[10] In the second place they are the true and real pupils, who keep the law, who know and are conscious that they do evil, and make naught of themselves, surrender themselves, count all their works unclean in the eyes of God, and despair of themselves and all their own works. They who do this, shall have no trouble, except that they must not deceive themselves with vain fruitless thoughts and defer this matter until death; for if anyone persistently postpones this until death, he will have a sad future.

[11] But we must give heed that we do not despair, even if we still feel sinful inclinations and are not as pure as we would like to be. You will not entirely sweep out of your heart all this rubbish, because we are still flesh and blood. This much can surely be done: outward wicked deeds can be prevented and carnal, shameful words and works avoided, although it is attained with difficulty. But it will never come to pass here that you are free from lust and evil inclination. St. Jerome undertook to root such inclinations out of his heart by prayer, fasting, work and torture of the body; but he found out what he accomplished; it was of no avail, the concupiscence remained. Works and words can be restrained, but lust and inclinations no one can root out of himself.

[12] In short, if you desire to attain the true righteousness that avails before God, you must despair altogether of yourself and trust in God alone; you must surrender yourself entirely to Christ and accept him, so that all that he has is yours, and all that is yours, becomes his. For in this way you

begin to burn with divine love and become quite another man, completely born anew, and all that is in you is converted. Then you will have as much delight in chastity as before you had pleasure in unchastity, and so forth with all lusts and inclinations.

[13] This now is the first work of God, that we know ourselves, how condemned, miserable, weak and sickly we are. It is then good and God's will, that a man desponds and despairs of himself, when he hears: This shalt thou do and that shalt thou do. For everybody must feel and experience in himself, that he does not and cannot do it. The law is neither able nor is it designed to give you this power of obeying it; but it effects what St. Paul says: "The law worketh wrath," Romans 4:15, that is, nature rages against the law, and wishes the law did not exist.

[14] Therefore they who presume to satisfy the law by outward deeds, become hypocrites; but in the others it works wrath only, and causes sins to increase, as St. Paul says in another place: "The power of sin is the law." 1 Corinthians 15:56. For the law does not take sin away, aye, it multiplies sin, and causes me to feel my sin. So he says again to the Corinthians: "The letter killeth," 2 Corinthians 3:6, that is, the law works death in you; in other words, it reduces you to nothing; "but the Spirit giveth life." For when he comes through the Gospel, the law is already fulfilled, as we shall hear.

[15] Therefore the world errs, when it tries to make men righteous through laws; only pretenders and hypocrites result from such efforts. But reverse this and say as St. Paul says: The law produces sin. For the law does not help me the least, except that it teaches me to know myself; there I find nothing but sin; how then should it take sin away? We will now see how this thought is set forth in this Gospel. The text says: "When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were shut where disciples were for fear of the Jews."

[16] What do the disciples fear? They fear death; aye they were in the very midst of death. Whence came their fear of death? From sin, for if they had not sinned, they would not have feared. Nor could death have injured them; for the sting of death, by means of which it kills, is sin, Corinthians 15:56. But they, like us all, had not yet a true knowledge of God. For if they had esteemed God as God, they would have been without fear and in security; as David says: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither

shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.” Psalm 139:7-10. And as he says in another place: “In peace will I both lay me down and sleep; for thou, Jehovah, alone makest me dwell in safety,” Psalm 4:8. It is easy to die, if I believe in God; for then I fear no death. But whoever does not believe in God, must fear death, and can never have a joyful and secure conscience.

[17] Now God drives us to this by holding the law before us, in order that through the law we may come to a knowledge of ourselves. For where there is not this knowledge, one can never be saved. He that is well needs no physician; but if a man is sick and desires to become well, he must know that he is weak and sick, otherwise he cannot be helped. But if one is a fool and refuses to take the remedy that will restore him to health he must certainly die and perish. But our papists have closed our eyes, so that we were not compelled, and not able, to know ourselves, and they failed to preach the true power of the law. For where the law is not properly preached, there can be no self-knowledge.

[18] David had such knowledge, when he said: “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness; according to the multitude of thy mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, that thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Psalm 51:1ff. Just as if David wished to say: Behold, I am so formed of flesh and blood, which of itself is sin, that I cannot but sin. For although you restrain your hands and feet or tongue, that they sin not; the inclinations and lusts always remain, because flesh and blood are present, you may go whither you please, to Rome or to St. James.

[19] If now an upright heart that comes to the point of knowing itself is met by the law, it verily will not begin and seek to help itself by works; but it confesses its sin and helplessness, its infirmity and sickness, and says: Lord God, I am a sinner, a transgressor of thy divine commandments: help thou, for I am lost. Now when a man is in such fear and cries out thus to

God, God cannot refrain from helping him; as in this case Christ was not long absent from the disciples tormented by fear; but he is soon present, comforts them and says: "Peace be unto you!" Be of good courage; it is I; fear not. The same happens now. When we come to a knowledge of ourselves through the law and are now in deep fear, God arouses us and has the Gospel preached to us, by which he gives us a joyful and secure conscience.

[20] But what is the Gospel? It is this, that God has sent his Son into the world to save sinners, John 3:16, and to crush hell, overcome death, take away sin and satisfy the law. But what must you do? Nothing but accept this and look up to your Redeemer and firmly believe that he has done all this for your good and freely gives you all as your own, so that in the terrors of death, sin and hell you can confidently say and boldly depend upon it, and say: Although I do not fulfill the law, although sin is still present and I fear death and hell, nevertheless from the Gospel I know that Christ has bestowed upon me all his works. I am sure he will not lie, his promise he will surely fulfill. And as a sign of this I have received baptism. For he says to his apostles and disciples: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned," Mark 16:15-16. Upon this I anchor my confidence. For I know that my Lord Christ has overcome death, sin, hell and the devil all for my good. For he was innocent, as Peter says: "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." 1 Peter 2:22. Therefore sin and death were not able to slay him, hell could not hold him, and he has become their Lord, and has granted this to all who accept and believe it. All this is effected not by my works or merits; but by pure grace, goodness and mercy.

[21] Now whoever does not appropriate this faith to himself, must perish; and whoever possesses this faith, shall be saved. For where Christ is, the Father will come and also the Holy Spirit. There will then be pure grace, no law; pure mercy, no sin; pure life, no death; pure heaven, no hell. There I will comfort myself with the works of Christ, as if I myself had done them. There I will no longer concern myself about cowls or tonsures, St. James or Rome, rosaries or scapularies, praying or fasting, priests or monks.

[22] Behold, how beautiful the confidence towards God that arises in us through Christ! You may be rich or poor, sick or well, yet you will always say: God is mine, I am willing to die; for this is acceptable to my Father, and death cannot harm me; it is swallowed up in victory, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:57, yet not through us, but “Thanks be to God,” says he, “who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Therefore although we must die, we have no fear of death, for its power and might are broken by Christ, our Savior.

[23] So then you understand that the Gospel is nothing but preaching and glad tidings, how Christ entered into the throes of death for us, took upon himself all our sins and abolished them; not that it was needful for him to do it, but it was pleasing to the Father; and that he has bestowed all this upon us, in order that we might boldly stand upon it against sin, death, Satan and hell. Hence arises great, unspeakable joy, such as the disciples here experience. The text says: “The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord” — not a Lord, who inspired them with terror or burdened them with labor and toil, but who provided for them and watched over them like a father is the lord of his estate and cares for his own. Aye, then first they rejoiced most on his account, when he spake to them: “Peace be unto you! It is I”, and when he had showed unto them his hands and feet, that is, his works, all which were to be theirs.

[24] In the same manner he still comes to us through the Gospel, offers us peace and bestows his works upon us: if we believe, we have them; if we believe not, we have them not. For the Lord’s hands and feet really signify nothing but his works, which he has done here upon earth for men. And the showing of his side is nothing but the showing of his heart, in order that we may see how kind, loving and fatherlike his mind is toward us. All this is set forth for us in the Gospel as certainly and clearly as it was revealed and shown to the disciples bodily in our text. And it is much better that it is done through the Gospel than if he now entered here by the door; for you would not know him, even if you saw him standing before you, even much less than the Jews recognized him.

[25] This is the true way to become righteous, not by human commandments, but by keeping the commandments of God. Now nobody can do this except by faith in Christ alone. From this flows love that is the fulfillment of the law, as St. Paul says in Romans 13:10. And this results not

from the exercise of virtues and good works, as was taught hitherto, which produced only true martyrs of Satan and hypocrites; but faith makes righteous, holy, chaste, humble and so forth. For as Paul says to the Romans: “The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith: as is written, But the righteous shall live by faith.” Romans 1:16-17. As if St. Paul should say: Your works will not save you but the Gospel will, if you believe; your righteousness is nothing, but Christ’s righteousness avails before God; the Gospel speaks of this and no other writing does. Whoever now wishes to overcome death and blot out sins by his works, says that Christ has not died; as St. Paul says to the Galatians, “If righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for naught.” Galatians 2:21. And they who preach otherwise are wolves and seducers.

[26] This has been said of the first part of our Gospel, to show what is to be our attitude toward God, namely, we are to cling to him in faith; and it shows what true righteousness is that is availing before God and how it is attained, namely, by faith in Christ, who has redeemed us from the law, from death, sin, hell and the devil; and who has freely given us all this in order that we may rely upon it in defiance of the law, death, sin, hell and the devil. Now follows how we are to conduct ourselves toward our neighbor; this is also shown to us in the text, where the Lord speaks thus: II. Of Love of Your Neighbor “As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”

[27] Why did God the Father send Christ? For no other purpose than to do the Father’s will, namely, to redeem the world. He was not sent to merit heaven by good works or to become righteous thereby. He did many good works, aye, his whole life was nothing else than a continual doing good. But for whom did he do it? For the people who stood in need of it, as we read here and there in the Evangelists; for all he did, he did for the purpose of serving us. “As the Father hath sent me,” he says here, “even so send I you.” My Father hath sent me to fulfill the law, take the sin of the world upon myself, slay Death and overcome hell and the devil; not for my own sake, for I am not in need of it; but all for your sakes and in your behalf, in order that I may serve you. So shall you also do.

[28] By faith you will accomplish all this. It will make you righteous before God and save you, and likewise also overcome death, sin, hell and

the devil. But this faith you are to show in love, so that all your works may be directed to this end; not that you are to seek to merit anything by them; for all in heaven and earth is yours beforehand; but that you serve your neighbor thereby. For if you do not give forth such proofs of faith, it is certain that your faith is not right. Not that good works are commanded us by this Word; for where faith in the heart is right, there is no need of much commanding good works to be done; they follow of themselves. But the works of love are only an evidence of the existence of faith.

[29] This also is the intent of St. Peter, when he admonishes us in Peter 1:5, to give diligence to make our faith sure and to prove it by our good works. But good works are those we do to our neighbor in serving him, and the only one thing demanded of a Christian is to love. For by faith he is already righteous and saved; as St. Paul says in Romans 13:8: “Owe no man anything, save to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law.” Therefore Christ says to his disciples in John 13:34-35: “A new commandment I give unto, you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

[30] In this way we must give proof of ourselves before the world, that everyone may see that we keep God’s commandment; and yet not that we would be saved or become righteous thereby. So then I obey the civil government for I know that Christ was obedient to the government, and yet he had no need to be; he did it only for our sakes. Therefore I will also do it for Christ’s sake and in behalf of my neighbor, and for the reason alone that I may prove my faith by my love; and so on through all commandments. In this manner the Apostles exhort us to good works in their writings; not that we become righteous and are saved by them, but only to prove our faith both to ourselves and others, and to make it sure. The Gospel continues: “Receive ye the Holy Spirit: Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

[31] This power is here given to all Christians, although some have appropriated it to themselves alone, like the pope, bishops, priests and monks have done: they declare publicly and arrogantly that this power was given to them alone and not to the laity. But Christ here speaks neither of priests nor of monks, but says: “Receive ye the Holy Spirit,” Whoever has the Holy Spirit, power is given to him, that is, to everyone that is a

Christian. But who is a Christian? He that believes. Whoever believes has the Holy Spirit. Therefore every Christian has the power, which the pope, bishops, priests and monks have in this case, to forgive sins or to retain them.

[32] Do I hear then, that I can institute confession, baptize, preach and administer the Lord's supper? No. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:40: "Let all things be done decently and in order." If everybody wished to hear confession, baptize and administer the Lord's supper, what order would there be? Likewise, if everybody wished to preach, who would hear? If we all preached at the same time, what a confused babble it would be, like the noise of frogs! Therefore the following order is to be observed: the congregation shall elect one, who is qualified, and he shall administer the Lord's supper, preach, hear confession and baptize. True we all have this power; but no one shall presume to exercise it publicly, except the one who has been elected by the congregation to do so. But in private I may freely exercise it. For instance, if my neighbor comes and says: Friend, I am burdened in my conscience; speak the absolution to me; then I am free to do so, but I say it must be done privately. If I were to take my seat in the church, and another and all would hear confession, what order and harmony would there be? Take an illustration: If there are many heirs among the nobility, with the consent of all the others they elect one, who alone administers the estate in behalf of the others; for if everyone wished to rule the country and people, how would it be? Still they all alike have the power that he has who rules. So also is it with this power to forgive sins and to retain them.

[33] But this word, to forgive sins or to retain sins, concerns those who confess and receive more than those who are to impart the absolution. And thereby we serve our neighbor. For in all services the greatest is to release from sin, to deliver from the devil and hell. But how is this done? Through the Gospel, when I preach it to a person and tell him to appropriate the words of Christ and to believe firmly that Christ's righteousness is his own and his sins are Christ's. This I say, is the greatest service I can render to my neighbor.

[34] Accursed be the life, where one lives only for himself and not for his neighbor; and on the contrary, blessed be the life, in which one lives not for himself but for his neighbor and serves him by teaching, by rebuke, by

help and by whatever manner and means. If my neighbor errs, I am to correct him; if he cannot immediately follow me, then I am to bear patiently with him; as Christ did with Judas, who had the purse with the money and went wrong and stole from it. Christ knew this very well; yet he had patience with him, admonished him diligently, although it did no good, until he disgraced himself.

[35] So we are to give heed to do everything in behalf of our neighbor, and ever to be mindful, that Christ has done this and that for me; why should I not also for his sake freely do all for my neighbor? And see to it that all the works you do, are directed not to God, but to your neighbor. Whoever is a ruler, a prince, a mayor, a judge, let him not think that he is a ruler to gain heaven thereby or to seek his own advantage; but to serve the public. And so with other works, I assume to do for the good of my neighbor. For example if I take a wife, I make myself a captive; why do I do this? In order that I may not do harm to my neighbor's wife and daughters, and thus may bring my body into subjection; and so forth with all other works.

[36] Thus then you have finely portrayed in this Gospel, as in almost all the Gospel lessons these two thoughts, faith and love. Through faith we belong above to God: through love below to our neighbor. That we may thus lay hold of this truth may God give us his help! Amen.

Quasimodo. Sunday After Easter. Third Sermon. The Fruit of Christ's Resurrection.

Text: John 20:19-31.

19 Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews,

came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.
20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.
21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.
22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:
23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.
24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.
25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.
26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.
27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.
28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.
29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.
30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:
31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. John 20:19-31

[1] The first part of this Gospel lesson is the same narrative we heard in the Gospel for Tuesday after Easter. The incident occurred on the evening of Easter, called by the Evangelists the first Sabbath, when Christ appeared for the first time to his frightened disciples, as they all with the exception of Thomas were assembled, and comforted and strengthened them in the faith

of his resurrection. Thus we hear again what the power and benefit of Christ's resurrection are, namely, that Christ, when he comes with such a sermon, brings peace and joy; and these are the true fruits of faith as they are mentioned among the other fruits of the Spirit by St. Paul in Galatians 5:22.

[2] For when he comes he finds his disciples still sitting in fear and terror both from without because of the Jews and from within because of their consciences, and yet very weak and slow of heart to believe, although they had heard from the women and some of the disciples that he had risen from the dead. But while this saddened their hearts and they were talking with one another about it, behold, Christ appears and hails them with the friendly greeting after the Hebrew custom, "Peace be unto you!" which means in our language, to wish one everything good. For we call that peace where all goes well, the heart is contented, and prosperity reigns. This is the joyful message Christ always brings with him, as he repeats it the second and third time in this narrative.

[3] But this Peace of Christ is very secret and hidden from the eyes and the senses, for it is not of the nature that the world pictures and seeks, or as flesh and blood understand. For Christians can for the sake of Christ never expect any peace or any good from his enemies, the devil and the world. They must daily suffer misfortune and contention, for they are alarmed and afflicted and harassed by the devil with the terrors of sin and its punishment, by the world with its persecution and tyranny, and by the flesh with its own weakness, impatience, etc. Hence this is not a visible or tangible peace, consisting of bodily feeling, but an inner and spiritual peace, consisting in faith, which grasps and holds fast to nothing but what it hears in our text, namely, these gracious Words of Christ, which he speaks to all frightened and troubled souls: "Pax tibi; Peace be unto thee. Fear not" etc. And such a Christian, therefore, is contented and satisfied with having Christ as his friend and with having a gracious God who desires his constant welfare, even though, materially speaking, he has no peace in the world, but constant strife and contention. This is the peace of which St. Paul speaks in Philippians 4:7: "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus," and of which Christ says in John 16:33: "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation,"

[4] For the devil will not allow a Christian to have peace; therefore Christ must bestow it in a manner different from that in which the world has and gives, in that he quiets the heart and removes from within fear and terror, although without there remain contention and misfortune. And this we see in the example of these disciples of Christ, who are in great fear on account of the Jews; they are behind barred doors, not daring to go forth, and are in constant dread of death. Although they have peace without and are annoyed by no one, nevertheless their hearts are all aflutter, and they have neither rest nor peace. While they are thus in fear and terror, the Lord enters; he quiets their hearts and brings them peace, not by removing the danger, but by quieting their hearts. For the wickedness of the Jews is neither removed nor changed thereby, for they are as full of hatred and rage as before, and without there is no change whatever, but within the disciples are changed, they have become courageous and bold, and the hatred of the Jews is for them now of but little concern.

[5] This is the true peace, which is able to calm the heart, not in time of good fortune, but in the midst of misfortune, when without there is nothing but contention. For here is the difference between worldly and spiritual peace. Worldly peace consists in removing the external evils which cause the contention, as for example, when enemies besiege a city, there is war, but when they are gone, peace returns. Thus also, when poverty and sickness are pressing thee, thou art not contented, but when they are removed, and thou art rid of the misfortune externally, thou art again at peace and rest. But he who endures this is not changed; he remains just as discouraged when these things exist as when they do not, the only difference being that he is feeling it and that it oppresses him when it is present.

[6] But with the Christian or spiritual peace we find just the opposite conditions, namely, that the evils without remain, such as foes, sickness, poverty, sin, the devil, and death. They are ever present and are surrounding us; nevertheless there is internal peace, strength and comfort in the heart, so that the heart does not concern itself about misfortune, yea, is even more courageous and joyful in the presence than in the absence of misfortune. It can therefore indeed be called a peace, which passeth all understanding. For reason understands and seeks no other peace but that which comes from without through possessions which the world can give, but which knows

not how to quiet and comfort the heart in times of need, when all else fails. But when Christ comes, he does not change the outward unpleasant conditions, but strengthens the person, and makes out of a timid, a fearless heart, out of a trembling, a bold heart; and out of a disquieted, a peaceful, quiet conscience, so that the person is courageous, bold, and joyful in the midst of those things in which otherwise all the world is terrified; that is, in death, terror of sin, and all distress, in which the world with its comfort and possessions can render no help. This, then, is a true and constant peace, which remains forever and is invincible as long as the heart clings to Christ.

[7] Hence, this peace is nothing else than that the heart is certain that it has a merciful God and the forgiveness of sins, for without this it can neither stand in the time of need and danger, nor be satisfied by any earthly fortune.

[8] But this takes place and is accomplished only when Christ shows us his hands and his side; that is, when he shows us through the Word how he was crucified for us and shed his blood and died, in order that he might pay the debt of our sins and reconcile and avert the wrath of God. This is the sure token that comforts the frightened conscience and heart and gives assurance of divine grace and forgiveness of sin. These he shows, so that they may never doubt, but be sure that it is he himself, who is not angry with them, but is their dear Savior; for this peace is not so easily grasped by them nor by any troubled consciences, as long as they are terrified and in the conflict. Therefore he comes and strengthens them both with the Word and with visible signs.

[9] This he still does constantly after his resurrection, not visibly but through the voice of the ministry, which we are to believe, even though we do not see him, as he also says at the close of this Gospel, through which he also shows how he shed his blood for us; for it is indeed sufficient that he showed this once to his disciples, to strengthen their and our faith and to show that he is truly risen and is the same Christ who for our sakes was nailed to the cross and pierced.

[10] Therefore, the second thing which follows the friendly greeting of Christ, or the offering of peace, and the showing of his hands and side, if it is received by faith, is called joy, as the text says: "The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord." For it is indeed the greatest joy the

heart of man can experience, again to see and recognize Christ, who had been dead to him before, and with whom all comfort and joy had fled; and when he can now again have the joyful comfort in him, and know that he has in him a dear Savior, and through him has found grace and comfort with God against all the terror of sin and death, and against the power of the world and of hell. This is what St. Paul means in Romans 5:1: “Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand” etc.

[11] Of this we sing also at this season in the old Easter hymn on the resurrection of the Lord: “Christ is risen from all his pangs,” for we are not only told of the story of his resurrection, but it is also brought close to us, and we are told to rejoice in it as our treasure and salvation, through which we have peace and every good gift from God. For how could we rejoice in him, if we had nothing of him nor appropriated as our own possession that which he has done for us. Therefore he also wishes to teach us that Christ is our comfort, and this comfort we should surely obtain and desire no other on which we can depend in every time of need. For through his resurrection he has conquered all and bestows upon us as our own all that he has done and suffered.

[12] But from the fact that Christ comes to the disciples through the door that is closed, we are to learn that after his resurrection and in his kingdom here upon earth he is no longer bound by bodily, visible, tangible and worldly things, as time, place, space and the like, but that he is to be recognized and believed in as one who through his power can reign everywhere, who can be present with us at all places and at all times, when and wherever necessary, and who will help us without being taken captive and hindered by the world and its power.

[13] In the second place, he also shows that wherever he comes with his government and rule, through the office of the Word, he does not come with a great noise, with storm and commotion, but very orderly; not changing nor breaking anything in the outward affairs of human life and government. He simply permits these things to remain in their condition and office as he finds them, and governs Christendom in a way that orderly government is neither abolished nor weakened upon the earth. Thus he does not derange

and displace anything in man, neither his senses nor his reason; but he illuminates and changes for the better his heart and reason.

[14] The devil, on the contrary, disorganizes and ruins everything through his factious and disturbing spirits, his ratling and boisterous servants, in the external and worldly government and life as well as internally in the hearts of men, whom he really makes insane and blind by his evil spirits, as we now have experienced with his insurrectional prophets, fanatics, and Anabaptists.

[15] This the first part of this Gospel treats of how Christ comforts and gladdens his dear disciples through his resurrection, and resurrects them, together with himself, from the heavy death and sorrow of their hearts, in that Christ was now lost and eternally dead to them. And as they now have this benefit and fruit, and in order that this power and comfort of the resurrection be made known to others, he continues and gives the command to spread the same in the world through their office, as we read: II. The Government and Office of the Keys Christ Instituted “Jesus therefore said to them again, Peace be unto you; as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and saith unto them. Receive ye the Holy Spirit: whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

[16] The Lord shows with these words what he accomplished through his resurrection, namely, that he established a government, which shall have nothing to do with money and gold, or anything that pertains to the temporal life, or how we are to acquire and keep them. For such a government already existed, being established from the beginning of the world, and being made subject to the reason of man through the Word of God, as he says in Genesis 1:28: “Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” This is the ancient government, in which the worldly power legislates and executes, for which the Holy Spirit is not needed, and concerning which little need be taught in Christianity. Jurists may counsel and help as to how that shall be carried on.

[17] But in addition to this there is another government, which is above the conscience and is concerned with things that relate to God. This government is of two kinds: One was founded by Moses, and the other the

Lord established here, when he said: “As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you,” etc. The government of Moses is to serve to the end that it may teach us what sin is and what sin is not, and it belongs to those who neither know nor feel sin, as at present the Antinomians who say the law need not be preached. It is fruitless to teach much of grace among these people, for if the law is not preached, we cannot know sin, as St. Paul says: “Without the law sin is dead,” which means where no law is, there is no transgression; for sin, no matter how great it may be, and the wrath of God, are known only through the law. Therefore, when the law is not preached, the people become perfect heathen, and think they do right, although they sin grossly against the commandment of God.

[18] Worldly authority indeed may punish and restrain open sin; but it does this too little, though it take to its aid all the books of the jurists, in order to illustrate or teach what sin is before God. Therefore the law is given that people may learn from it what is sin. Where sin continues unknown we cannot understand, much less desire, forgiveness and grace. Yea, even grace itself is then of no avail, for grace should fight and conquer in us against the law and sin, that we despair not. Just as a good physician must be experienced in his profession, first to know the nature of the disease, for otherwise, if he wishes to help the patient without knowing the cause of the sickness, he might give him dangerous poison instead of helpful medicine. Thus sin must first be known and experienced before we can preach grace. But the law is needed to gain such a knowledge, and it is necessary to instruct the people in the catechism, and diligently to teach them the ten commandments. For, as I have already said, human reason with all its wisdom and all the skill of the jurist, is unable to gain this knowledge. And although there is implanted into it a little of this knowledge, yet this is too insignificant; therefore God established the preaching of the law of Moses, which he had first received from the patriarchs.

[19] Such preaching Christ himself instituted, when he commanded his disciples, as we have heard in the last Gospel lesson, first to preach repentance in his name; and John 16:8 says: “The Holy Spirit will convict the world in respect of sin” etc., for although it really belongs to the government of Moses to expose sin, nevertheless, that Christ may come to his government and work the beginning must be made by preaching the law

where there is no consciousness of sin; for where that is not done, sin cannot be forgiven.

[20] The other government or kingdom is that founded on the resurrection of Christ, for thereby he desired to establish a new kingdom which has to do with sin that has been awakened by the law, and with death and hell. This does not teach us anything about marriage, the household, the rule of a city and country, how to preserve the worldly peace, how to build and plant etc., but its aim is to show us where we may abide when this temporal, perishable kingdom and existence have passed away, when we must leave behind possessions, honor, home, farm, world and all that is upon the earth, together with this life, as we expect every moment. Now to this end has been established the kingdom of Christ, who is enthroned therefore as an eternal King, that he is Lord over sin and righteousness, over death and life. His kingdom has to do with, and to rule over, these things. This is what the Lord means when he says: "Receive ye the Holy Spirit: whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." Here you can see that his object is to deliver the people from sin, or to permit them to remain in sin, and show that they are condemned.

[21] Certainly, we cannot say that he has thereby founded a worldly kingdom, as the pope boasts of his power of the keys, that he has the power to loosen and to bind even that which is not sin, yea, even that which Christ neither binds nor loosens, thereby making of it a worldly power. But Christ shows clearly enough here what his keys are, namely, they are not to make laws and abolish them again, as the pope is doing, but to remit or retain sin. He wishes to say: For this purpose shall my kingdom exist: First, that people may become conscious that they are sinners. This I have commanded Moses to teach, not for the purpose, however, of binding them, for they are indeed already bound; neither for the purpose of creating sin nor having anything to do with created sin, as the pope through his commandments and with his power of the keys is doing, creating sin where there is no sin: but for the purpose of dealing with those transgressions which naturally are sins against the commandments of God, as for example, despising God and unbelief, blaspheming his name, despising his Word, disobedience etc., which are indeed not sin by virtue of the commandments of the pope, but sins in truth, which are ingrained into the flesh and blood of

man, which cannot be absolved nor removed through the loosing key of the pope as he uses it, but remain in man until he is in his grave.

[22] It is the purpose of the kingdom of Christ that we may know now how we may be freed from sin. It is, therefore, called not a temporal or earthly kingdom, but the kingdom of heaven; for it shall just commence when this temporal kingdom ceases through death, in order that the people may know how they shall then reach heaven. This kingdom, he says, shall begin and continue thus: “As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”

[23] With these words he takes away from his disciples first their carnal mind, which they still possessed after his resurrection, that he would, like a temporal King and Lord, rule and reign with external and carnal power. Therefore he says: You have now seen what kind of an office I have filled upon the earth, for which I was sent by my Father, that I should establish a spiritual kingdom against that of the devil, sin and death, and thereby to bring them that believe on me to eternal life. This I have now done, and finished it as far as my person is concerned, and have not taken upon myself anything of a worldly character and rule. Yea, I have also been put to death by the world because of this my office and service, and am separated from it, but now through my resurrection I have entered into that glory where I shall reign forever over all creatures at the right hand of my Father. Therefore I send you also forth in like manner to be my messengers, not to engage in temporal affairs, but to conduct the same office as I have hitherto filled, namely: to preach the Word you have heard and received from me, an office through which people are delivered from sin and death, who experience sin and death, and wish to be delivered from them.

[24] By means of this office the apostles and their successors are exalted also as lords unto the end of the world, and there is given to them such great authority and power as Christ, the Son of God, himself possessed, in comparison with which the power and dominion of all the world is nothing (although before the world it neither resembles nor is called dominion). And yet this office shall not and cannot extend further than over that alone which before God is called sin; so that wherever sin begins and works their government or rule shall also begin and work, and everything that lives and is called human upon the earth, shall be in subjection to their rule, whether it be emperor or king, great or small, no one is excluded. Therefore he says: “Whose soever sins ye remit.” This “whose soever” means nothing else

than that all are included, Jews, Gentiles, great and small, wise and ignorant, holy or unholy; that no one shall enter heaven and come to eternal life, except he receive it from you, that is, through the office which you have received.

[25] For they all are also subject to and concluded under sin through these words, by which he shows that upon earth they shall find nothing but sin, and he pronounces the judgment, that all mankind to whom the apostles and their successors shall be sent are sinners and condemned before God in their person and life, and that one of two things must take place: either their sins are forgiven, if they confess and desire forgiveness, or they must remain eternally bound in sin unto death and condemnation.

[26] Now in order to exercise and accomplish the end of this authority and government, special power is required that is not human but divine. Therefore he does not give them swords and weapons, neither does he equip them with armor and worldly power, but he breathes on them and says: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," namely, they are to know that such an office and work cannot be carried on in their own strength, but in his power through the Holy Spirit, who operates through their office and word; and it shall thus be the office of the Holy Spirit, who is given for this purpose by Christ, that although the message seems but weak, and nothing more than a weak breath out of the mouth of man, yet such power shall be exercised through it, that sin, God's wrath, death, and hell must yield to it.

[27] For this we can also easily give an answer, if anyone should ask and critically question how can man forgive sins, since this belongs to God alone? For it is indeed true that it is not in the power nor ability of man, nor of his merit and worthiness, to forgive sins, even though he were as holy as all the apostles together and all the angels in heaven. Therefore we condemn the pope himself with his monks, who promise the people forgiveness of sins by virtue of their own merit, works and holiness, and give them absolution, and thus shamefully deceive the poor people, who long for true and sure comfort.

[28] But here we must make a true difference, which the papists and their rabble neither know nor can give, namely, between that which man is able to do by his own power and worthiness, and that which is commanded to be done in the name of Christ, and which he accomplishes through his

power. It avails nothing, to be sure, when a barefooted trickster comes along and undertakes to give absolution and forgiveness to a poor conscience by virtue of his own sorrow and repentance, and the merits of the saints and his order, as indeed their indulgences read (of which they can be convicted through the letters of their brotherhood which they have sold to the people): “The merits of the sufferings of Christ and of Mary, the blessed Virgin, and all the saints; the merits of this severe and grievous order, the humility of thy repentance and sorrow of heart, and all good works that thou hast done or shalt do, shall serve thee to the forgiveness of thy sins and eternal life,” etc. This is indeed nothing else than fearful blasphemy of Christ, and the perversion of the right absolution, for even though they remember his sufferings, yet they are not sincere in it, for they do not consider it efficacious enough for the forgiveness of sins, but must add the merits of Mary and of the saints, and especially of their own order and monkish doings and put them on an equality with Christ’s sufferings. This they do without any command from Christ; yea, against his Word and command. This is not from the Holy Spirit, but from their own spirit, the devil, who is the father and founder of this false doctrine.

[29] But for the absolution to be right and efficacious, it must spring from the command of Christ, which is as follows: I declare thee free from all thy sins, not in my own name, nor in the name of any saint, nor for the sake of any human merit, but in the name of Christ and by the authority of his command, who has commissioned me to say to you that all your sins are forgiven, hence, not I but he himself by his own mouth forgives thee thy sins, and thou art under obligation to receive this and believe it firmly, not as the word of man, but as if thou hadst heard it from the lips of the Lord Christ himself.

[30] Therefore, although this power to forgive sins belongs to God only, we should nevertheless know that he exercises and imparts this power through this external office, to which Christ has called his apostles, and commands them to proclaim in his name forgiveness of sins to all who desire it. Sins, are forgiven, therefore, not by human will and power, but by the command of Christ, for this purpose he then also sends the Holy Spirit, namely, in order to forgive sins.

[31] God also does this for our welfare, so that we need not look up to heaven in vain, when we receive it not, and be compelled to say as St. Paul

does, when he quotes Moses: “Who shall ascend unto heaven?” etc. But he does this that we may have the assurance of it, he has placed the forgiveness of sins in the public office and the Word, in order that we may continually have it with us, upon our lips and in our hearts. There we shall find absolution and forgiveness, and we know that where we hear this message proclaimed to us by the command of Christ we are bound to believe it as if it were announced to us by Christ himself.

[32] Behold, such is the authority given through this office of the apostles to the church which extends farther and higher than all the authority upon earth, that without it no one, and it matters not how great and mighty he may be, shall come nor can come to God, nor have the comfort of conscience, nor be free from God’s wrath and eternal death. For although all emperors and kings were to concentrate their might and power, their money and possessions, they could deliver neither themselves nor any human being from the least sin, for if the heart of man is intimidated, what matters it whether he be a mighty king or emperor? What did it help the great and mighty king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon when he became insane, so that he was rejected by his people and had to lie with the irrational beasts of the field and eat grass, and nothing could help him except that the prophet Daniel had to absolve him from his sins?

[33] But who can express what an unspeakable, mighty and blessed comfort it is that a human being can with one word open heaven and lock hell to a fellow mortal? For in this kingdom of Grace Christ has founded through his resurrection, we do indeed nothing else than open our mouth and say, I forgive thee thy sins, not on my account, nor by my power, but in the place of, and in the name of, Jesus Christ, for he does not say: ye shall forgive sins on your own account, but: “I send you, as my Father hath sent me.” I myself do not do this of my own choice or counsel, but I am sent by the Father. This same commandment I give to you unto the end of the world, that both ye and all the world shall know that such forgiveness or retaining of sin is not done by human power or might, but by the command of him who is sending you.

[34] This is not said alone to the ministers or the servants of the church, but also to every Christian. Here each may serve another in the hour of death, or wherever there is need, and give him absolution. If you now hear from me the words, “Thy sins are forgiven thee,” then you hear that God

wants to be gracious to you, deliver you from sin and death, and make you righteous and blessed.

[35] Yea, you say, thou hast indeed given me absolution, but who knows whether it is certain and true with God that my sins are forgiven? Answer: If I have done this and said this as a man, then thou mayest well say: I do not know whether thy absolution is effective and efficacious or not, but that thou mayest be sure concerning this, thou must be instructed in the Word of God, that thou canst say, I have been absolved neither by the minister nor by any other man; for thus the minister has not taught me to believe: but God has spoken and done it through him; of this I am sure, for my Lord Christ has commanded and said: As my Father hath sent me, so also send I you. Here he indeed puts those to whom he gives the command on an equality with himself, because they are sent by him to accomplish that for which he is sent by God, namely, to remit and retain sins. There it rests and that does it, otherwise, without such a command, absolution would amount to nothing.

[36] If thou, therefore, art sad and worried on account of thy sins, and art afraid of death, with which God eternally punishes sin, and thou hearest of thy minister, — -or if thou canst not have access to him, — -of a Christian neighbor comforting thee with these or similar words: Dear brother or sister, I see that thou art timid and in despair, and fearest the wrath and judgment of God on account of thy sins, of which thou art conscious, and on whose account thou art terrified — listen to me and let me announce to you, Be of good comfort and cheer, for Christ thy Lord and Savior, who came into the world for the sake of sinners in order to save them, has given the command through the public office to his called servants, and wherever necessary, to everyone in particular, that one is to comfort another for Christ's sake, and in his name acquit him of his sins. I say, when thou therefore hearest this comfort, then receive it with joy and thanksgiving, as if thou didst hear it from Christ himself; then thy heart shall indeed be at peace, established and comforted, and thou canst then joyfully say: I have heard a man speak to me and comfort me; for the sake of himself I did not believe a single word, but I believe my Lord Christ, who has established this kingdom of Grace and forgiveness of sins, and has given this commandment and authority unto men to remit and retain sins in his name.

[37] Therefore every Christian when the devil attacks him and suggests that he is a great sinner, and he must be lost and condemned etc., should not long contend with him or remain alone, but go or call to him his minister, or any other good friend, lay his difficulty before him, and seek counsel and comfort from him, and remain firm in that which Christ here declares: “Whose soever sins ye remit etc.,” and as he says in another place: “Where two or more are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them,” and whatever this person says to him in the name of Christ from the Scriptures, let him believe it, for according to his faith it shall be done unto him. For two or more come together in the name of Christ when they converse with one another, not on temporal things, how money and riches may be acquired or gained; but on what would be of service for the salvation and happiness of their souls; as for instance, when thou art in the confessional or anywhere else art making known thy weaknesses and temptations, and he to whom thou art disclosing it sees that Moses through the law has thee in a dilemma; that thy sin is oppressing thee; that death is alarming and frightening thee, and thou groanest and complainest concerning thine own life, so that even words like these are apt to fall: Oh, that I had never been born, or, Oh, that God would prolong my life, I would amend my life, etc.

[38] If then thy pastor of anyone else begins to comfort thee, not in a worldly way nor for the sake of money, but because he sees thou art in anxiety and fear of sin and death, and says to thee, Let everything go that is upon earth — -money, goods, everything that pertains to man, and pay now attention to this; thy heart is indeed in great pangs and asks: Can I be freed from my suffering, misery, and evil conscience? How can I escape Moses with his fearful threats? I say, listen to him when he speaks to thee in this manner: I say to thee in the name of the Lord Christ, who died for thy sins, that thou art to permit thyself to be comforted, to believe and be sure that thy sins are forgiven, and that death cannot harm thee.

[39] Yea, my dear brother, you say, how wilt thou prove that this is true? Answer: Christ our Lord said to his disciples and to entire Christendom: I command and bid you, that ye shall forgive and retain sin. Whatever ye do then in this, ye do not of yourselves; but because ye are doing it at my command and bidding, therefore I do it myself. Therefore thy minister or pastor as the one who cares for thy soul (Seelsorger), or any Christian in

such a case is called for and sent to comfort thee. And because he is seeking only the salvation of thy soul, thou art, therefore, bound to believe him as though Christ were standing there himself and would lay his hand upon thee and speak the absolution.

[40] Behold, this is the way we deal with sins, retaining or forgiving them. Besides this there is no counsel nor help for them; as the pope pretends to do with his false doctrine, points the people to their own works or sufficiency, tells them to go into cloisters, to Rome, to the saints, torture themselves, build churches, heavily endow cloisters, hold mass, etc. This is indeed not the right way. Thou canst indeed employ thy going, money, and works in a better manner. Here the matter is entirely different, as has already been said. For when Moses comes with his fearful threats, that is, when he through the law reveals to thee thy sins and shows how great and many they are, and brings thee into great fear and despair, when thou art no more in the great, wicked, and hardened multitude, but with the little flock, which realizes and feels, its misery and despair, and would therefore indeed be frightened even at the rustling of a leaf, then this is the only help: I, I have founded, says Christ, the kingdom of Grace. It shall consume and destroy sin and death, and bring to light righteousness and life.

[41] Therefore do not say: Where shall I find this? Shall I go to Rome or Jerusalem for it? Not in this way; yea, even if thou couldst ascend to heaven, and if possible on a golden ladder, thou couldst accomplish nothing; but it must come thus: give heed to his Word and command when he says: "I send you," etc., as if he wanted to say: I must first come to you to announce to you the will of my Father through the Gospel; institute the holy sacraments: and absolution. You should not come to me in a different way. But since I cannot be bodily at all places in the whole world, and shall not be visibly present with you always, I will do as my Father hath done. He took a small corner of the earth, namely, the land of Judea, to which he sent me, that I should be a preacher there; I traveled through Galilee and Judea; so much I could accomplish personally; I preached the Gospel to the comfort of the poor sinners among the Jewish people, healed the sick and raised the dead etc. This, you will notice, was the work entrusted to him. For this purpose he was sent by the Father. There he was found, not in the courts of kings among the debauchers, not with Annas, Caiaphas, and other holy, rich, and learned people; but among the blind, lame, lepers, the deaf,

the dead, and the tempted, the poor and afflicted sheep. To this he brings help for soul and body. He brings to them the most costly treasure, which no one has, much less can give, unless he receives it from him, namely, righteousness and salvation. And thus, he says, ye shall also do at all places wherever ye go, and to this purpose I send you, that ye shall run as my messengers through the entire world. And besides you and after you I will ordain others who shall run and preach, as I sent you, even unto the end of the world, and I will continue to be with you that ye may know that it is not you who are accomplishing this, but I through you.

[42] From this command we also have the power to comfort the sorrowful consciences and to absolve from sin, and we know that, wherever we exercise this office, not we but Christ himself is doing it. Therefore every Christian, in this case as well as when he hears the Word preached in the pulpit, should hear the same, not as the word of man, but as the Word of God himself; then he can indeed be sure and need not doubt a moment that he has the forgiveness of sins, for Christ has established through his resurrection that whenever a called servant of the Church, or someone else in the time of need, absolves his neighbor who is distressed and desires comfort, it shall count as much as if Christ had done it himself, because it was done at his command and in his name.

[43] Therefore, when two deal thus with each other they are gathered together in the name of Christ, for, as we have said before, none is seeking the money or goods of the other, as the servants of the pope are doing, who speak to the sick and say: My dear man, the time is at hand when thou must die. Where shall thy possessions go? Think of thy poor soul and give a portion to us and we will pray to God for thee, and do much with it afterwards etc.; instead he ought to speak to the sick and say: This is no time to be occupied with your money and property, let others care for that. I see very well thy heart is despondent and terrified; thou art wrestling with doubts and canst not help thyself nor deliver thyself; but Christ has established upon the earth a comforting and blessed kingdom, when he says: "As my Father hath sent me, so send I you." He has consecrated us all to be priests, in order that one may proclaim to the other forgiveness of sins. Therefore I come to thee in the name of this our blessed Lord Christ, and tell thee not to be so despondent and terrified as though there were no comfort, help, and counsel any more to be had. Dost thou not hear what

Christ says, that he came for the sake of the sinners, not the righteous, to save them? Therefore be at peace, receive these glad tidings with joy and thank him for them most heartily, that he permits me to announce to thee without any trouble and expense on thy part; yea, he even gives command to the effect that thy sins are remitted. Therefore I absolve and make thee free from all thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. To this thou shalt reply joyfully: I thank thee, merciful God, thou heavenly Father, that thou hast forgiven me my sins through thy dear Son Christ; and do not doubt that thou art surely absolved by God the Father himself.

[44] From this you can see that this paragraph concerning the office of the keys does not at all confirm the tyranny of the pope, but it is there for the purpose, not that thou makest me, or I thee, rich, nor that I be thy Lord and thou my subject, as the pope, the arch-rogue and denier of God, indeed is making out of it worldly pomp and power; but that I can come to thee, when thy conscience is worried, to help and counsel thee in thy last hour, or at other times, and say: Power, money, honor and goods, everything must be set aside; we have now only to speak of the kingdom of Christ — only through this and through nothing else must thou be helped from sin and death.

[45] This signifies indeed not an external and worldly dominion or power but a service, for I am seeking nothing from thee, I want to serve thee and bring thee a great and precious treasure, but not gold and silver; because thy heart desires to be comforted and to have a merciful God in heaven I come to thee and bring thee this joyful message, not of my own will or choice, but at the command and commission of Christ, who says: “Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Also, “Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven,” or as he says in this connection, “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.”

[46] Cannot this be called a service and the gratuitous bringing of an unspeakable, heavenly, eternal treasure, which neither thou nor the world can purchase with all its possessions and riches? For what are all the treasures of the world and all the crowns of kings, gold, silver, precious stones, and whatever the world counts great in comparison to this treasure called the forgiveness of sins, through which thou art made free from the

power of the devil, of death and of hell, and art assured that God in heaven will now be gracious unto thee, and gracious in a way that thou shalt be his child and heir, and the brother and joint-heir of Christ, for the sake of Christ? Therefore it is impossible to sell such a precious treasure for money, or to purchase it with money, as our Judas Iscariot, the pope, has done. This treasure must be given and received gratuitously or thou art not helped by it, for the gift of God cannot be purchased with money. Acts 18:20.

[47] But this I say not to the end that people shall give nothing to the servants of the Church, who teach God's Word in its truth and purity, as, alas, they are eager to do, and many are ready to begrudge their minister every bite, and, if they could they would rob the possessions of the Church and ministers, and prove by their actions that they would gladly starve out their ministers and get rid of them. But what a wild state and calamity would follow, would be soon experienced, if the government did not intervene. Nay, this is by no means my meaning. Your pastors should be properly supported, for if they have nothing to eat, drink and wear, and for their other needs, they cannot very long fill their office, for they would have to think on how to support themselves in other ways. Thus the Gospel would not continue long, and it is this that the devil is seeking through these people.

[48] But that we are under obligations properly to support our pastors is also stated by Christ himself, when he says in Luke 10:7: "The laborer is worthy of his hire." As St. Paul says in Galatians 6:6: "But let him that is taught in the Word, communicate unto him that teacheth, in all good things," adding in verse 7 a sharp word, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked," and in 1 Timothy 5:17: "Let elders, or priests, that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the Word and in teaching." We support others, who are engaged in worldly offices, in which they serve the public, in order that they may be able to perform their service. How much more do we owe it to them that serve in the Word of God, as St. Paul says, they are "worthy of double honor."

[49] And in order that the doctrine of the Gospel may remain pure in our pulpits in the future, and that our posterity may retain and hear these doctrines, we are not only bound properly to support those who serve the Church, but we must also with all diligence see to it that our schools are supplied with competent teachers, who should also be properly supported, so that the people may be trained to become not only common ministers,

who are simply prepared to instruct the Christian congregation in the Word, but learned men, who will be capable of contending against the rabble and factious spirits. To this end it is the duty of everyone to contribute willingly and cheerfully, not alone the princes and lords, but also the citizens and peasants.

[50] From what has been said each one can see for himself what a great and precious treasure it is to hear the Gospel or the absolution in its true meaning from the preacher or pastor. If he comes to thee in the time of sickness and comforts thee, then thou canst be assured that Christ the Lord himself visits and comforts thee. For no one could possibly come to thee in this capacity without divine commandment, and he would know neither how to help nor to counsel; but since thou hearest that he himself has commanded it, thou canst be fully assured and say joyfully: Here Christ himself comes to me in my confessor, for he does not speak his own word, but the Word of God, to do which he is sent, and the command to do it he has.

[51] Here thou hast then sure support against the terror and despair of conscience. Thou dost not need to float and bob in uncertainty, as the doctrine of the pope would teach us, which never absolves anyone from sin unless he has been sorry enough and confessed enough until he is clean. There was not the least thought about faith and the power of the keys as instituted by Christ, for such doctrines and knowledge was so completely unknown that I myself, a Doctor of Divinity, who should indeed have known better, did not hold and teach differently than that my sins were forgiven, if my penitence and confession were sufficient. But if our sins are not forgiven, before we outweigh them with our sorrow, penitence and good works, we can never hope to receive forgiveness. For I can never come to the conclusion that my sorrow and repentance have been sufficient; hence, no man, be he called pope or anything else, is able for that reason to absolve or acquit me.

[52] In this manner the conscience has been lamentably misled from the Word of Faith and the commandment of God to their uncertain sorrow and repentance, through the falsehoods of the pope. This has brought a large income, and from it have been built many churches, cloisters, chapels, altars, that are richly endowed. Yes, there are still extant bulls and letters of the pope that refer to this, and confirm these things, through which he has

deceived the world woefully, so that it is impossible to estimate much less to describe the damage and the sorrow that have arisen therefrom. For this reason we are faithfully and constantly admonishing, and let him who can help so that we may maintain schools, ministers and pulpits that such or worse error may not increase among us, as the devil indeed desires.

[53] This is the true doctrine concerning the kingdom of Christ and the office of the Keys, and if we act accordingly, then we will remain Christians, and are prepared for everything in our relation to God and man. We will also heartily thank God that he has delivered us from the constraint and tyranny of the pope, who made out of the power of the Keys a mere show and worldly dominion, although they were established and ordained by Christ to help the whole world obtain a treasure that cannot be bought with money.

[54] Let us therefore be truly grateful to our dear Lord and Savior, who through his resurrection founded this Kingdom of Grace, which is established for the purpose that we should constantly find therein for all our needs and anxiety sure help and comfort. And we need not go very far for this precious treasure, nor do we need to secure it at any great expense, for he has given command and full power to his apostles and their successors, and in case of need to every Christian, even unto the end of the world, that they should comfort and strengthen the weak and discouraged souls, and should remit unto them their sins in his name etc.

Quasimodo. Sunday after Easter. Fourth Sermon. Thomas Delivered from His Unbelief. Jesus Raises Lazarus.

Text: John 20:19-31.

19 Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:

31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. John 20:19-31

[1] John the Evangelist further writes that Thomas was not present when the Lord appeared the first time to his assembled disciples on Easter evening. Now that the Lord comes just at the time St. Thomas is the first time absent

does not take place without a reason; for Christ could have easily chosen an hour when Thomas could have been found in company with the other apostles. But it took place for our instruction and consolation that the Lord's resurrection might receive more and stronger evidence and documentary testimony. Now, on Easter he appeared to the assembled eleven; one week later, that is today, he appeared to them again and at the same time also to Thomas for whose sake alone this appearance or revelation took place which is more beautiful and glorious than that of eight days before.

[2] Here we see what a poor thing the human heart is when it begins to grow faint, that we cannot strengthen and comfort it again. Both the other disciples and Thomas did not only hear during the time they were with the Lord that he taught the people with great authority, and later also saw how he confirmed his doctrine by the great miracles performed on the blind, the lame, the lepers, the dumb etc., whom he cured; but also that he raised three persons from the dead, especially Lazarus who had been four days in his grave. And, as it appears, St. Thomas was the most fearless and courageous of all the disciples, in that he said when Christ wished to go again into Judea to Lazarus who was dead: "Let us also go, that we may die with him," John 11:16. Such fine characters were the disciples of Christ and especially St. Thomas, who it appears, had a more manly heart than the others, and besides had recently witnessed how Christ raised Lazarus who had been in the grave four days, and ate and drank with him; yet he could not believe that the Lord himself arose from the dead and was alive.

[3] Moreover, we see in the apostles that we are truly nothing when Christ withdraws his hand and we are left to ourselves. The women, Mary Magdalene and the others, announced it, and now the disciples themselves proclaim that they had seen the risen Lord. Yet St. Thomas is stubborn and will not believe it; yea, and he will not be satisfied even if he see him, unless it be that he sees the print of the nails in his hands and puts his fingers into the print of the nails and his hand into his side. And the beloved disciple will thus himself also be lost and condemned, in that he will not believe. For there can be neither forgiveness of sins nor salvation if one believes not, since therein lies all the virtue and power of faith and eternal life, as St. Paul says: "And if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith is also vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished," etc. 1 Corinthians 15:14-

18. To perdition will St. Thomas also go, he will not be saved but wills to be lost, because he will not believe that Christ is risen. And he would have perished and been condemned in his unbelief had not Christ rescued him from it by this revelation.

[4] So the Holy Spirit illustrates and teaches now in this example that without faith we are simply blind and completely hardened, as we see everywhere in the holy Scriptures that the human heart is the hardest thing in the world, harder than steel and adamant. And on the other hand, if it be bashful, despondent and soft, there is no water nor oil so soft as the human heart.

[5] You find many examples and narratives illustrating this in the Scripture. Pharaoh, before whom Moses performed so many terrible signs and wonders that he could not reply to them, yea, he had to admit that it was God's finger and therefore also confessed he had sinned against God and his people etc.: yet his heart became harder and more obdurate continually until the Lord drowned him with all his army in the sea. Likewise also the Jews; the more powerfully Christ proved both by word and deed that he was the one who was promised by their fathers that he should be a blessing to them and to the whole world, the more vehemently and bitterly they raged against him and their hatred, blasphemy and persecution knew no measure nor end until they condemned their Lord and God to the most ignominious death and crucified him between two malefactors, nothing could prevent it although Pilate the judge himself declared against them that he was innocent, creation acted differently than usual and thereby testified that its Lord and Creator hung there on the cross etc.; likewise the thief freely confessed publicly, although Christ truly hung there and died, yet he was a king who had an eternal heavenly kingdom; and the heathen centurion publicly cried: "Truly this was the Son of God," etc. Matthew 27:54. This all, I say, helped nothing to bring about this conversion.

[6] This is the way the godless, condemned world does: the more grace and kindness God shows it, the more unthankful and wicked it becomes. Now it is meet and right for us all to thank God from our hearts that he has revealed his holy Word so pure and clear before the day of judgment, from which we learn what inexpressible treasures he has given us in Christ, namely, that we are saved by him from sin and death, and shall now be

righteous and blessed, etc. What is the attitude of the world to this? As its custom is, it does not know how to abuse, blaspheme and condemn this Word of grace and life enough, and wherever possible to persecute and destroy those who confess it, and although the world hears that God will severely punish such sin with hellfire and eternal condemnation, it thinks little about it, goes ahead securely and obdurately, as if it were nothing, and enjoys its sport as we clearly see now in the pope and his following. And yet it is such horrible and dreadful wrath that all creatures are terrified by it. Therefore it is certainly true that no stone, steel, adamant, yea, nothing on earth is as hard as the impenitent heart of man.

[7] On the other hand, if the heart loses courage and is terrified it is softer than water and oil, so that, as Scripture says, it is frightened at a rustling leaf. And when such a person is alone in a room and hears a little cracking of a rafter or a beam, he thinks thunder and lightning are striking him and he is in such anxiety and fear (as I have often seen), that no one can comfort or strengthen him, and all the preachers and all consoling proverbs are too few to calm him. So there is no moderation with the human heart; it is either entirely too hard like wood and stone, that it inquires about neither God nor Satan, or, on the other hand, it is entirely too timid, fickle and despondent.

[8] Thus the apostles are here too scared and terror-stricken by the scandal they saw in their Lord being so ignominiously mocked, spit upon, scourged, pierced and finally crucified, so that they no longer had a heart in their bodies, who before while they had Christ among them were so bold and courageous, that James and John ventured to bid fire to come down from heaven and consume the Samaritans who would not receive Christ, Luke 9:54. They also knew how gloriously to boast that the devils were in the name of Jesus subject unto them; and Thomas admonished the others and said: "Let us go that we may die with him;" and Peter, more impetuous than the others, smites with the sword among the crowd when they wished to seize and take Christ captive. But now they lie prostrate in great fear and terror, locked up, and will let no one come to them. For this reason they were also terrified at the Lord when he comes and greets them, and they still think (which is indeed a sign that they are completely overcome by fear and despair) they see a spirit or a ghost. So soon they had forgotten all the miracles, signs and words they had seen and heard from him, that the Lord

had enough to do during the forty days after his resurrection before he separated from them, in his appearances and revelations in various ways, now to the women, then to the disciples, both individually and collectively, besides eating and drinking with them; all for the purpose that they might be assured that he is risen. Yet it is so hard for this truth to enter their hearts.

[9] Likewise, when after forty days he spoke with them out of the Scriptures about the kingdom of God, which should now commence and be a kingdom in which should be proclaimed in his name repentance and the forgiveness of sins among all nations, they raise the cry and ask him when he was about to ascend from them in a cloud, and say: “Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” they have entirely different thoughts of the kingdom of Christ than those he had been teaching them. Here you see how exceedingly difficult it is for bashful and despondent hearts to be comforted and strengthened, even after being rightly instructed, so that they know what kind of a king Christ is and what he has accomplished by his death and resurrection.

[10] Thus both the obduracy and the bashfulness of the human heart are indescribable. When out of danger it is hard and obdurate beyond measure, so that it cares nothing for the wrath or the threatening of God. Although it hears for a long time that God will punish sin with eternal death and condemnation, yet it goes ahead and is drowned in pride, avarice, etc. On the other hand, when the heart begins to fear it becomes so despondent that it cannot be again reclaimed. It is indeed a great pity that we are such wicked people. If we are not in want we continue to live on in sin without the least fear or shame, yea, to grow stiff like a dead corpse; what is spoken to us is as if spoken to a rock. On the contrary, if there is a change in us that we feel our sins, we are terrified by death, God’s wrath and judgment; we on the other hand grow stiff at the great anxiety and sorrow, so that no one can strengthen us; yea, we are even terrified before that which should comfort us, like the disciples were before Christ, who came to them for the very purpose that they might be comforted and made happy. Although he does not at once set them right he has to doctor them during the forty days, as I said. He takes and uses all kinds of comfort and medicine and still he can hardly strengthen them again, until he gives them the right strong drink, namely, the Holy Spirit, of which they drank and were comforted in the right way so that they are no more as before, bashful and terrified.

II. Thomas Saved from his Unbelief

[11] Finally, we have in St. Thomas an illustration of the power of Christ's resurrection. We just heard how firm and even stiff-necked he was in unbelief, that although the other disciples unitedly testified that they had seen the risen Lord, yet he simply will not believe it. He appears to have been a fine and brave character who had thoroughly concluded that he would not so soon believe the others. For he had seen that the Lord only three days before was put to death on the cross and the nails driven through his hands and feet and the spear pierced his side. This picture was so indelibly and deeply impressed upon him that he simply could not in the least believe what the others told him, that Christ was risen. Therefore he promptly and defiantly says: "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." He thus utters a hyperbole, an exaggerated statement, that he will not believe his eyes alone, but will feel and grope about Christ's body with his hands. As if he would say: No one shall persuade me to believe, but I will stand so firmly upon no, that I will not believe even if I see him, as you say you saw him. But should I believe it, then he must come so near to me, that, if it were possible, I may touch his soul and put my hands into his eyes.

[12] That is to be steeped very firmly and deeply in unbelief. And it is wonderful what he means by it that he at once proposes a thing absurd, to put his hand and finger into the openings of his wounds. For he had always been so smart as to think: Since Christ was again alive, had conquered death and was rid of all the bruises from the scourging and the crown of thorns, he would surely have healed and removed also the five wounds.

[13] Now, this has happened for our example and consolation, that the great apostle also had to fail and stumble, in which we see how Christ shows and conducts himself toward his weak disciples, that he can tolerate also such who are still as hard and stubborn as St. Thomas is here, and that he will not on that account condemn and disown them, if only in other respects they sincerely wish to continue to be his disciples, and not maliciously blaspheme him and become his enemies; and by this he teaches us that we should become neither offended nor despondent because of that;

but in harmony with this his example gently go on with them, serve their weakness, with our strength until they become established and grow strong.

[14] But it serves more to the end, as I began to say, that the resurrection of the Lord is not only clearly shown and proved by this unbelieving and stubborn Thomas, who persevered for eight days in his unbelief, and he lay there grown almost stiff; but also that the power of the resurrection becomes known, and is of benefit to us; as appears in Thomas who thereby was brought from unbelief to faith, from doubt to certain knowledge and to a beautiful and glorious confession.

[15] Now it happens, says the Evangelist, first on the eighth day after his resurrection, when Thomas had established himself in his unbelief in the face of the testimony of all the others, and by this time he is dead and no one hopes he will show himself in a special manner to Thomas. Just then Christ comes and shows him the same scars and wounds, as fresh as he had shown them to the other disciples eight days before, and tells him to reach hither his finger and hand and place them into the prints of the nails and into his side. Christ yields to Thomas so much that he not only sees as others did, but he also seizes him and feels, as he had said: "Except I shall see in his hands," etc., and he says in addition: "Be not faithless, but believing."

[16] Here you see Christ is not satisfied to stop with the narrative; but he is concerned only that Thomas becomes believing and is resurrected from his stubborn unbelief and sin. This follows in a powerful way in that St. Thomas soon begins and says to Christ: "My Lord and my God!" There is at once a different man, not the old Thomas Didymus (which means in English a twin, not a doubter, as has been wrongly interpreted from this text), as just before, when he was so cold and stiff and dead in his unbelief, that he would not believe unless he puts his finger into his wounds; but he commenced suddenly to deliver a glorious confession and sermon about Christ, the equal of which no apostle to that time had yet preached, namely, that the person, the risen one, is true God and man. For they are admirable words he utters: "My Lord and my God! He is not drunken, he is not jesting nor mocking; he does not mean a false God; therefore he certainly does not tell a lie. Besides he is not here chastised by Christ, but his faith is confirmed, and it must be the truth and sincere.

[17] It is now the power of the resurrection of Christ that St. Thomas, who was so deep and obdurate in unbelief, even more than any other disciple, was so suddenly changed, becomes an entirely different man, who publicly and freely confesses that he not only believes that Christ is risen but is also enlightened by the power of Christ's resurrection so that he firmly believes and confesses that he, his Lord, is true God and man, through whom, as he is now resurrected from unbelief, the fountain of all sin; so he will also arise from the dead at the judgment day and live forever with him in indescribable glory and blessedness. And not only he, but all who believe thus, as Christ himself further says to him: "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

[18] Finally, that Thomas puts his finger into the wounds. I will not argue whether Christ always after his resurrection retained the wounds and prints of the nails; yet I argue they did not appear hideous, as otherwise they might, but fresh and comforting. And whether they were still fresh, open and red as artists paint them, I will leave for others to decide. Otherwise it is a fine idea to picture them before the ordinary person so that he has a memorial and a picture that will remind and admonish him of the sufferings and wounds of Christ. It is possible that he retained the same signs or marks which will likely enlighten much more beautifully and gloriously at the day of judgment his whole body and he will show them before the whole world, as the Scriptures say: "They shall look unto me whom they have pierced," Zechariah 12:10. This I would commend to every devotional exercise for consideration.

[19] The leading thought, however, for us to learn and retain from this Gospel is, that we believe that Christ's resurrection is sure and that it works in us so that we be resurrected both from sin and death; as St. Paul richly and consolingly speaks of it, and Christ himself here, when he says: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," and St. John concluding this Gospel teaches and admonishes about the use and benefit of the resurrection: "These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and believing ye may have life in his name."

[20] This is indeed a powerful and clear passage, which highly praises faith and gives the testimony that we certainly have eternal life through the same; and that this faith is not an empty, dead thought on the history about

Christ, but that which concludes and is sure that he is the Christ, that is, the promised King and Savior, God's Son, through whom we all are delivered from sin and eternal death; for which purpose he also died and rose again; and that we alone for his sake acquire eternal life, in a way that is called in his name, not in Moses' nor in our nor any other man's name, that is, not because of the law, nor of our worthiness and doings, but alone on account of Christ's merits, as Peter says in Acts 4:12: "There is none other name among men, wherein we must be saved," etc.

Misericordias Domini. Second Sunday after Easter. Christ's Office and Kingdom, or How Christ Is the True Shepherd.

Text: John 10:11-16

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

15 As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

16 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. John 10:11-16

[1] This is a comforting Gospel, which so beautifully portrays the Lord Jesus and teaches us what manner of person he is, what kind of works he does, and how he is disposed toward men. And there is no better way to understand it than to contrast light and darkness and day and night; that is, the good shepherd with the wicked one, as the Lord himself does.

[2] Now, you have often heard that God has given the world two different proclamations. One is that which is declared in the Word of God

when it says: Thou shalt not kill, not commit adultery, not steal (Exodus 20:13-15), and when it adds the threat that all who do not keep these commandments shall die. But this declaration will make no one godly at heart. For though it may compel a man outwardly to appear godly before men, inwardly it leaves the heart at enmity with the Law, and wishing that there were no such Law.

[3] The other proclamation is that of the Gospel. It tells where one may obtain that which will meet the demands of the Law. It does not drive or threaten, but tenderly invites us. It does not say, Do this and do that, but rather: Come, I will show you where you may find and obtain what you need to make you godly. See, here is the Lord Jesus; he will give it to you. Therefore, the two are as contrary to each other as taking and giving, demanding and presenting; and this distinction must be well observed. Thus God ever has ruled and still rules the world today. To coarse and rude persons, who are not influenced by the Gospel, the Law must be declared, and they must be driven until they are humbled and acknowledge their imperfections. When this has been accomplished, the Gospel is to be applied.

[4] These are the two divine proclamations, which come from heaven. Besides these there are others that are not from heaven, but are human prattle, which the pope and our bishops have invented that they might terrify our consciences. Such men are not worthy of being called shepherds or hirelings, but they are here designated by the Lord Jesus as thieves, murderers and wolves. For if men are to be savingly governed, it must be done with the Word of God; and if it is not done by the Word of God, they are not properly governed.

I. The Nature of the Office and Kingdom of God Explained.

[5] Now, here Jesus has in mind the second proclamation. He explains it and sets himself forth as the chief shepherd, yea, as the only shepherd; for that which he does not tend is not kept. This comforting and sweet proclamation we will now consider.

[6] You have heard that after his sufferings and death Christ our Lord arose from the dead and entered upon, and was enthroned in, an immortal existence. Not that he might sit up there in heaven idly and find pleasure in

himself, but that he might take charge of the kingdom of which the prophets and all the Scriptures have so fully spoken, and might rule as a king. Therefore, we should think of him as being present and reigning among us continually, and never think of him as sitting up there doing nothing, but rather that he from above fills and rules all things, as Paul says to the Ephesians 4:10, and especially that he is taking care of his kingdom, which is the Christian faith, and that therefore his kingdom among us here on earth must prosper. This kingdom, as we have said, is so constituted that we all must daily increase and grow in holiness, and it is not governed by any other power save the oral proclamation of the Gospel.

[7] This proclamation is not of men, but Christ himself sent it forth, and then put it into the hearts of the apostles and their successors so that they understood it, and into their mouths so that they spoke and declared it. This is his kingdom, and so does he rule that all of his power is comprehended in and connected with the Word of God. They who hear and believe it belong to this kingdom, and the Word then becomes so mighty that it provides all that man may need and bestows all the blessings that we may desire. For it is the power of God, and it can and will save all who believe it, as St. Paul declared to the Romans 1:16. If you believe that Christ died to save you from all evil, and will hold fast to that Word, you will find it so certain and sure that no creature can overthrow it; and as no one can overthrow the Word, neither can anyone harm you who believe it. Accordingly, with the Word you will overcome sin, death, devil and hell, and you will find a refuge in the Word and attain that which is found where the Word is, namely, everlasting peace, joy and life. In short, you will be participants in all the power that is in the Word. Therefore, it is a peculiar kingdom. The Word is present and is orally proclaimed to all the world, but its power is deeply hidden, so that none but they who believe realize that it is so effective and that it accomplishes such great things. It must be experienced and realized by the heart.

[8] Hence, all that we preachers can do is to become the mouthpieces and instruments of Christ our Lord, through whom he proclaims the Word bodily. He sends forth the Word publicly so that all may hear it, but that the heart inwardly experiences it, that is effected through faith and is wrought by Christ in secret where he perceives that it can be done according to his divine knowledge and pleasure. That is why he says: "I am the good

shepherd.” And what is a good shepherd? “The good shepherd,” says Christ, “layeth down his life for the sheep; and I lay down my life for the sheep.” In this one virtue the Lord comprehends and exemplifies all others in the beautiful parable of the sheep. Sheep, you know, are most foolish and stupid animals. When we want to speak of anybody’s stupidity we say, “He is a sheep.” Nevertheless, it has this trait above all other animals, that it soon learns to heed its shepherd’s voice and will follow no one but its shepherd, and though it cannot help and keep and heal itself, nor guard itself against the wolf, but is dependent upon others, yet it always knows enough to keep close to its shepherd and look to him for help.

[9] Now, Christ uses this trait or nature of the animal as an illustration in explaining that he is the good shepherd. In this manner he plainly shows what his kingdom is, and wherein it consists, and would say: My kingdom is only to rule the sheep; that is poor, needy wretched men, who well see and realize that there is no other help or counsel for them.

[10] But that we may make it the plainer, and may understand it the better, we will cite a passage from the prophet Ezekiel, where he speaks of the wicked shepherds that are against Christ, when he says (34:2ff): “Should not the Shepherds feed the sheep? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill the fatlings; but ye feed not the sheep. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought back that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with rigor have ye ruled over them. And they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and they become food to all the beasts of the field and were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my sheep were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and there was none that did search or seek after them,” and so forth. Accordingly, God reproves the shepherds who do not keep the sheep. And now mark well what he has written. His earnest intent in this paragraph is that the weak, sick, broken, those who are driven away and the lost, are to be strengthened, bound up, healed, and sought again, and that they are not to be torn to pieces and scattered. This you should have done, says he to the shepherds, but you have not done it; therefore, I will do it myself. As he says further on, in verse 16: “I will seek that which was lost, I

will bring back that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick.”

[11] Here you see that Christ’s kingdom is to be concerned about the weak, the sick, the broken, that he may help them. That is, indeed, a comforting declaration. The only trouble is that we do not realize our needs and infirmities. If we realized them, we would soon flee to him. But how did those shepherds act? They ruled with rigor, and applied God’s Law with great severity; and, moreover, they added their own commandments, as they still do, and when these were not fulfilled, they raved and condemned, so that they were driving and driving and exhorting and exacting, continually. That is no proper way to tend and keep souls, says Christ. He is no such shepherd as that; for no one is benefited, but is rather wholly undone, by such a course, as we shall presently hear. Now let us consider this citation from the prophet in its order.

[12] First, he says: The sheep that are weak are to be strengthened; that is, consciences weak in faith and troubled in spirit and of tender disposition are not to be driven and told: You must do this. You must be strong. If you are weak, you are lost. That is not strengthening the weak. St. Paul, speaking to the Romans (Romans 14:1) says: “But him that is weak in faith receive ye, yet not for decision of scruples.” And shortly afterwards (Romans 15:1) he says: “Now we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.” Accordingly, they should not be driven with rigor, but should be comforted, even though they are weak, lest they be driven to despair; and in time they will grow stronger.

[13] Isaiah, the prophet, speaks of Christ likewise (Isaiah 42:3): “A bruised reed will he not break, and a dimly burning wick will he not quench.” The bruised reeds are poor, tender consciences, which are easily distracted so that they tremble and despair of God. He does not fly at them then, and trample them under foot; that is not his way. But he deals with them gently, lest he break them to pieces. Again, the dimly burning wick, which still burns at least, though there be more smoke than fire there, he does not wholly quench, but lights, and again and again trims it. That is a great consolation, indeed, to such as experience it; and, therefore, he who does not deal gently with tender consciences is no good shepherd.

[14] Secondly, the prophet says: “Neither have ye healed the sick.” Who are the sick? They are those who are manifestly deficient in certain of their works. The first clause has reference to tender consciences; the second, to outward conduct. As, for instance, when one growls and sulks, and now and then lapses, and in anger and other foolish ways oversteps the bounds; even as the apostles, at times, grievously stumbled. But even those who in their outward works before men manifest their shortcomings, so that people are offended at them and say that they are rude and peculiar, he will not cast away; for his kingdom here below is not so constituted as to embrace only the strong and the whole, as it will be in the life to come. Christ is sent here that he might receive and help just such people.

[15] Therefore, even though we are weak and sick, we must not despair and say we are not in the kingdom of Christ. But the more we realize our sickness, all the more should we turn to him; for that is what he is here for, to heal and make us whole. Accordingly, if you are sick and a sinner, and realize your condition, you have all the more reason to go to him and say: Dear Lord, I come just because I am a sinner; that thou mayest help me, and make me good. Thus, necessity drives you to him; for the greater your ailment, the more imperative it is that you seek relief. And that is what he wants; therefore, he tenderly bids us to be of good cheer, and to come unto him. They who are not good shepherds, however, expect to make people good by hatefully scolding and driving them, whereas they are thereby only making matters worse. And this may be seen when we look upon present conditions, brought about by this wrong method, when everything is so piteously scattered, even as the prophet has here said.

[16] Thirdly: “Neither have ye bound up that which was broken.” To be broken is as though one had a bone fractured or were otherwise wounded. As when a Christian is not only weak and infirm, so that he makes a misstep at times, but when he falls into such great temptation that he breaks his leg; for instance, if he should fall and deny the Gospel, as St. Peter did, when he denied Christ. Well, even though one should make such a misstep as to be impeded or overthrown — even then you should not cast him away, as though he no more belonged to this kingdom. For you must not rob Christ of his characteristic, that in his kingdom abounding grace and mercy alone prevail, so that he helps those who realize their misery and wretchedness, and desire to be helped, and that his kingdom is wholly one

of consolation, and that he is a comforting, friendly shepherd, who tenderly invites, and would induce, all men to come unto him.

[17] Now, all this is effected through the Gospel alone, by means of which we are to strengthen all the weak and heal all the sick; for this Word will satisfy every want of those whose consciences are troubled, and will give full consolation to all, so that no one, no matter how great a sinner he has been, need despair. Hence, Christ alone is the good shepherd, who heals all our infirmities and raises up again those who have fallen. He who does not do that is no shepherd.

[18] Fourthly, the prophet says: “Neither have ye brought back that which was driven away.” What is meant by “that which was driven away”? It is that despised soul that is fallen so low that all efforts to reclaim it seem to be in vain. Nevertheless, Christ would not have dealt with such rigor. He would not have his kingdom narrowed down so as to include only such as are strong and healthy and perfect. That will be the case in the future kingdom that follows this life, as has been said: Now, because he reigns, pure grace and bliss only shall prevail. Even as God promised the children of Israel (Exodus 3:8) that the promised land would be a land flowing with milk and honey. Likewise St. Paul says that our uncomely parts shall have more abundant comeliness (1 Corinthians 12:23).

[19] Fifthly, he concludes: “Neither have ye sought that which was lost.” That which was lost is that which is given up as already condemned, so that there is no expectation that it ever will return; as the publicans and harlots mentioned in the Gospel, and as the dissolute and intractable in our day, were and are. And yet, even these he would not have us pass by, but would have everything possible done to reclaim them. This was done by St. Paul, on different occasions; as, for example, when he delivered two men unto Satan, as he said to Timothy (1 Timothy 1:20): “Whom I delivered unto Satan that they might be taught not to blaspheme.” And, again, to the Corinthians he said (1 Corinthians 5:5): “I have concluded to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” He had cast these away as condemned, and yet he goes after them again.

[20] Therefore, we should so preach Christ as one who will reject nobody, however weak he may be, but will gladly receive and comfort and

strengthen everybody; that we may always picture him to ourselves as a good shepherd. Then hearts will turn to him of their own accord, and need not be forced and driven. The Gospel graciously invites and makes men willing, so that they desire to go, and do go, to him with all confidence. And it begets a love for Christ in their hearts, so that they willingly do what they should, whereas formerly they had to be driven and forced. When we are driven, we do a thing with displeasure and against our will. That is not what God desires; therefore it is done in vain. But when I see that God deals with me graciously, he wins my heart, so that I am constrained to fly to him; consequently, my heart is filled with happiness and joy.

[21] Now see what an evil it is when one person judges another. Christ's kingdom, as we have heard, is calculated to heal and sanctify only such souls as are sick and needy; therefore all must err who look only upon those who are strong and holy. Consequently, the knowledge that rightly apprehends Christ is great and mighty. By our nature we are knaves to the very hide, and yet we expect everyone to be pious. With open mouth, we do not want to look at anybody but strong Christians. We ignore the sick and weak, and think that if they are not strong then they are not Christians at all. And others who are not perfectly holy we reckon among the wicked, and yet we, ourselves, are more wicked than they. That is what our evil nature does, and our blind reason, that wants to measure God's kingdom by its own imagination, and thinks that whatever does not appear pure in its eyes is not pure in the sight of God.

[22] Therefore we must get that idea out of our minds; for if we keep it before us too much, we will finally get into such a state of mind as to think: Oh, what will become of me if only they are Christians who are strong and healthy and holy? When will I ever reach that state? And thus we, ourselves, will make it impossible. Therefore, we must eventually be driven to say: Dear Lord, I realize that I am very weak, very sick and despondent. Nevertheless, I will not allow that to confound me, but I will come to thee, that thou mayest help me; for thou art ever the good and pious shepherd, which I also confess thee to be, and therefore will I despair of my own works.

[23] Let us, therefore, ever be wise and learn to know Christ well, and to know that in his kingdom there are only weak and sickly people, and that it is nothing but a hospital, where the sick and infirm, who need care, are

gathered. And yet there are so few who understand that! And this fact seems so obscured that even they who have the Gospel and the Spirit are lacking in the knowledge of it; for it is the most profound wisdom that man can attain. For even though they see that the Scriptures praise this kingdom and speak of its preciousness, yet they do not realize what the words mean, and do not understand that they contain that true wisdom which is far above the wisdom of men. For it is not our wisdom that we deal with, and that we speak of and preach to sensible, prudent and wise people; but it is this, that we go among fools and simpletons, and care for them, not because we find pleasure in so doing, but in order that we may help them to get rid of their sins and foolishness and to find righteousness and true knowledge.

[24] So you see that Christian wisdom does not consist in raising our eyes to that which is lofty and wise, to see ourselves reflected there, but in lowering our eyes to that which is lowly and foolish. Let him who knows this, thank God; for such knowledge will fit him to accommodate himself to, and guide him under, all circumstances in this life. Therefore you will yet find many even among those who preach the Gospel, who have not yet attained it. They never taught us thus before, and we were accustomed to think we did not dare to come to Christ until we had first become perfectly pure. Now you must get out of that way of thinking and come to a proper understanding of Jesus, and learn to know him as a true shepherd. But we have heard enough on this point for the present.

II. Christ Illustrates His Office and Kingdom by Comparing the Good Shepherd with the Hireling.

[25] Now, he contrasts the good shepherd with a wicked one, or a hireling, and says: “The good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep. He that is a hireling, and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, beholdeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth, and the wolf snatcheth them and scattereth them: he fleeth because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep.”

[26] In the strictest sense, he alone is the shepherd; and yet, as he alone is Christ but nevertheless calls us by the same name — Christians — even so, though he alone is the shepherd, he designates all those who exercise the office of the ministry among Christians by that name also. In like manner in

Matthew 23:9 he forbids us to call any man on earth father, for one is our father, even he who is in heaven, yet Paul calls himself a father of the Corinthians when he says: "I begat you through the Gospel." Corinthians 4:15. Thus God acts as though he alone would be our father, and yet he attributes the name to men also, so that they are called fathers. But they have no right to this name in themselves; only in Christ is it theirs: even as we are called Christians though we have nothing of our own, but all we have has been given to us, in him. Now, "the hireling," says he, "whose own the sheep are not, beholdeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth," etc. That is a hard saying, indeed, that some who truly preach and administer the Gospel and strengthen and heal the sheep, finally allow themselves to be carried away and leave the sheep when they are most in need of help. As long as no wolf is in sight, they are active and tend the sheep; but when they see the wolf breaking in, they forsake the sheep. If the sheep have been well kept, till they are strong and healthy and fat, they will then be all the more acceptable to the wolf, for whom they have been kept.

[27] How does that happen? Well, says Christ, in my kingdom, whose whole object is to strengthen the weak, heal the sick, comfort the sorrowing, and so forth, the holy cross will not be wanting. For, if we preach that Christ alone must receive, strengthen, heal and help us poor sheep, and that we cannot, by our own strength and works, help ourselves, and that, therefore, all works and whatever else the world pretends to offer in its many religious services are of no avail, the world cannot abide such preaching. Hence, it is but natural that the Gospel should bring with it the holy cross, and that they who confess it before the world should risk their necks in so doing.

[28] Because this is so, the good shepherds are thus distinguished from the hirelings. Whoever is a hireling will preach the Gospel only so long as they say of him that he is a learned, pious and good man; but when he is attacked, and men begin to denounce him as a heretic and a knave, and challenge him to a dispute, he recants or runs away, and abandons the poor sheep in their distress, and things are in a worse state than they were before. For what advantage has it been to the poor sheep that they had once been well kept? Had the shepherds been faithful, they would have sacrificed their bodies and lives for the sake of the sheep, and would have given their necks to the executioner for the Gospel's sake. Accordingly, they are never true

shepherds who, in preaching, have their own popularity, profit and advantage in view. They are surely hirelings; for they seek their own advantage, even when they dispense the true doctrine and Word of God. Therefore they continue only as long as they are honored and praised. Hence they retract, and deny the Word, when the wolf comes, or flee and leave the sheep in the lurch. The sheep bleat for pasture and for the shepherd to protect them from the wolves, but there is no one to succor them; thus they are deserted when they most need someone to help them.

[29] Such will be the result when men once begin to lay hands on and persecute us in earnest. There will be preachers who will hold their tongues and flee, and the sheep will be pitiably scattered, the one running here and the other there. God grant that there may be at least some who will stand firm and risk their lives to rescue the sheep. Thus Christ has here portrayed the hireling. He then proceeds: "I am the good shepherd; and I know mine own."

[30] There is a great deal contained in these words, far too much to be exhaustively treated here. He speaks here of his own peculiar calling. "I know mine own," he says, "and mine own know me." How is this to be understood? That he explains further when he says: "Even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father."

III. The Special Office Christ Administers Explained.

[31] How is he known of the Father? Not with an earthly, but with a heavenly, knowledge. Of that we have spoken more fully before, and the substance of it is this: Christ recognizes us as his sheep, and we recognize him as our shepherd. Now, we have heard what a good shepherd is, and also who the weak sheep are. He knows us to be such sheep as are weak, sick and broken. That is: It does not make any difference in his regard for them that they are weak and sickly, and he does not despise and reject them on that account; but he pities and heals them, even though they be so diseased that the whole world concludes they are not his sheep. Such is the world's knowledge, but that is not the way that Christ distinguishes them. He does not look upon their condition, but looks to see whether they are sheep, whether they may be designated sheep. He looks at the sheep, not at the wool.

[32] Now, they are good shepherds who imitate Christ and know the sheep in the same way; who look at the person, not at the faults, and know how to distinguish between the sheep and the disease.

[33] Even so the Father knows me also, says Christ, but the world does not know me. When the time comes for me to die a shameful death upon the cross, all the world will say: Well, is that the Son of God? That must be a malefactor, owned, body and soul, by the devil. And thus the world will look upon and know me; but my Father will say: This is my beloved Son, my King, my Savior. For he will not look upon my sorrows, nor upon my wounds, nor upon my cross and my death, but he will see the person that I am. Therefore, though I were in the midst of hell and in the jaws of the devil, I must again come forth, for the Father will not desert me. And thus I know my sheep and am known of them. They know that I am the good shepherd and know me; and therefore they come to me and abide with me, and they are not afraid because they are weak and sick, for they know that I will receive such sheep. He now concludes and says: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also must I bring, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock, one shepherd.

[34] Some have explained this passage in such a way as to make it appear that it will be fulfilled shortly before the last day, when the Antichrist appears, and Elias and Enoch. That is not true, and it is the devil himself who is responsible for this belief of some, that the whole world will become Christian. The devil did this that the true doctrine might be so obscured so that it might not be understood. Therefore be on your guard; for this passage was verified and fulfilled shortly after Christ ascended into heaven, and is still in process of fulfillment. When the Gospel was first proclaimed, it was preached to the Jews; that nation was the sheepfold. And now he says here: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also must I bring." Here he declares that the Gospel is to be preached to the gentiles also, so that they also might believe in Christ, that there might be one Christian communion, composed of Jews and gentiles. This was afterwards brought about through the apostles, who preached to the gentiles and converted them to the faith. Accordingly there is now but one church or communion, one faith, one hope, one love, one baptism, etc. And this continues to be so at the present day, and will continue until the day of judgment. Hence, you must not understand this to mean that the whole

world, and all men, will believe in Christ; for this holy cross will always be with us. They are in the majority who persecute Christ, and therefore the Gospel must ever be preached, that some may be won for Christ. The kingdom of Christ is in process of growing and is not something that is completed. This is, in brief, the explanation of this Gospel.

Misericordias Domini. Second Sunday after Easter. Second Sermon. Preachers, Civil Authorities, and the Knowledge of Christ.

Text: John 10:11-16

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

15 As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

16 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. John 10:11-16

[1] This Gospel offers us instruction on the authority called spiritual or church authority, about which some severe things have been taught and preached, especially in our times, in order that the church authorities might never be despised; and they wish to be equal to Christ in authority, and exalt themselves too highly. Of this we will speak in brief.

[2] First of all we should observe that as Christ in this Gospel speaks of one shepherd, so there shall and must be only one shepherd; and as he speaks of one fold, so there shall and must be only one fold. Therefore, whoever advocates many shepherds and many folds does wrong. As Christ is, and calls himself a Shepherd, so should he who holds his office be and be called a shepherd. Just as Christ is a King, so are all his Christians kings; for all Christ is and has is ours, and we possess all too, if we believe in him.

[3] To be a shepherd, however, is not to exercise great pomp and glory; but it is a service one is wont to render another, as a servant in a household, who does all in his power to please his master, freely, without any restraint, and is in all other respects faithful. Thus Christ did all in harmony with his office and his name. When he was here on earth he carefully tended his sheep and provided them with every thing needful for body and soul, with good and honest teaching and deeds of mercy, as the Evangelists record.

[4] Thus also ought those do who boast of filling the office of Christ. To this St. Peter, who faithfully followed Christ the Lord in his office, as the Lord had commanded him in John 21:15, diligently exhorts them, when in his First Epistle, 1 John 5:1-4, he says: “The elders, therefore, among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to the will of God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

[5] There are three kinds of shepherds: good or true shepherds, hirelings and wolves. Good shepherds are like the good Shepherd Christ, who tends the sheep, goes before them, cares for those that are sick, scabby or have the snuffles; who does not flee when the wolves come, but “who giveth his life for the sheep,” as Christ here in this Gospel describes. It is not enough that

we preach correctly, which the hireling can also do; but we must watch over the sheep, that the wolves, false teachers, may not break in, and we must contend for the sheep against the wolves, with the Word of God, even to the sacrifice of our lives. Such are good shepherds, of whom few are found. And they are now the righteous apostles and preachers, who are but the mouthpieces of Christ, through whom Christ preaches.

[6] This the hirelings do not; they care not for the sheep, they receive temporal wages, riches and honor, and feed themselves; yet they are good to a certain extent and Christ also preaches through them; but they are not true to the sheep. This may be seen in our shepherds today who almost entirely subvert their office. In times past the princes gave the bishops and priests great treasures, besides land and people, so that pious bishops did not want to accept the office, they even fled from it; but that is entirely changed at present and there is a running and racing after the best bishoprics. The greatest rush is for the offices, which afford the best livings. They all seek their own, not the things of Christ. Philippians 2:21. This is clearly seen, when trouble comes, when the wolves break in there is no one who remains faithful to the sheep. Then that occurs of which Christ here speaks: “He that is a hireling, and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, beholdeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep and fleeth, and the wolf snatcheth them, and scattereth them; he fleeth because he is a hireling and careth not for the sheep.” This is a lamentable and a miserable state of things.

[7] In the third place, there are the wolves, which also give the sheep some attention. Who are these wolves? It is plain that they are the tyrants, both ecclesiastical and secular, that can tolerate neither shepherd nor hireling. The pope and the bishop, together with their officials, likewise the secular princes who cling to them, are now arising and taking captive, excommunicating, anathematizing, putting in the stocks, and on the block, garroting and murdering everywhere both shepherds and hirelings. These are the bold manifest wolves that may be recognized, that do not go about with cunning and flattery, against whom one may indeed still guard himself.

[8] There are other wolves, however, who come to us in sheep's clothing. They are the false prophets, who under the form of pious and religious instruction feed pure poison to the sheep of Christ. Against these Christ warns us, that we may be constantly on our guard, lest with sugar-coated words and flattering religious expressions they mislead us, deceive

us, by their cunning, and draw us to themselves, as he says in Matthew 7:15: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves.” In the same way Paul warns the elders at Ephesus, when he left them and he said in Acts 20:28-31, “Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord, which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them. Wherefore watch ye, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not to admonish everyone with tears.” That I think is an earnest warning. O, I would to God that we might take it to heart, for it is greatly needed in our day.

[9] Hence the wolves are none other than those who would outwardly in deed, and inwardly by false teaching, persecute and suppress the Gospel; as the secular tyrants, the pope and all heretics do.

II. Of Authority, Civil and Spiritual.

[10] We must understand that we have two kinds of authority: the secular that punishes with the sword, and the spiritual that exercises its office with the Word and by means of preaching. The secular power is ordained of God as Paul in many clear and beautiful words declares to the Romans, “Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God: and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgment. For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. And wouldest thou not fear the civil power, do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise from the same: for he is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience sake. For this cause we pay tribute also; for they are ministers of God’s service, attending continually upon this very thing.” Romans 13:1-6.

[11] Since there are few who heed the Gospel, the most people remain rogues and knaves, yea, they use the Gospel for their own licentious liberty and wantonness; hence it is necessary to have a civil government, which we would not need if all were Christian and evangelical. God has designed and ordained it, in order that the godly may live in peace; for he has established the secular sword to the end that the public peace may be preserved, the wicked punished and the just protected. On this account we must pay to the government rent and taxes and revenue by which it may support itself and administer its office.

[12] The spiritual power they have vested in the pope; but how he has abused the same, thank God, almost everyone sees at present. He has subverted it and has by means of his clerical power become a secular authority. And what is the worst of all he uses his clerical power as a cloak of shame; he has brought it about to have himself placed over all secular government, he has become and is called its head, and that by no divine command, but contrary to the Word of God and the command of Christ, whose vicar he boasts himself to be.

[13] In the Gospel we find an altogether different spiritual government, one that exists alone in the Word, by which sinners are convicted and the Gospel proclaimed to the terrified and alarmed consciences. In Matthew 18:15-17, Christ speaks thus of that power: “And if thy brother sin against thee, go show him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be to thee as the Gentile and as the publican.” Of this St. Paul also speaks to the Corinthians in his second Epistle, 2 Corinthians 13:10: “For this cause I write these things while absent, that I may not when present deal sharply, according to the authority which the Lord gave me for building up, and not for casting down.”

[14] From this it follows, that when the bishops and their officials want to put one under the ban, the transgression is published to the whole congregation, otherwise their ban would not be noticed, and the messenger would be shown the door. The secular government should see to it, whenever the clerical authority overreaches its sphere to the injury of the soul, that it be restrained, and bishops and their officials be not permitted to

excommunicate from the church anyone without his knowledge and will, whenever it pleases them. This the congregation also should unanimously oppose.

[15] It does not concern God very much as to how the secular government uses its power, for he is concerned only about the soul, and with this the secular authority has nothing to do. It has received power to rule over the body and over property. Whether we govern well or not does not determine our salvation. But it would be a matter of great concern, if the spiritual authority were to say, Do this, and thou shalt be saved: do that not, and thou shalt be eternally lost. This is what the pope does. At certain times we must not eat eggs and meat and butter, but oil and fish; we are to do this and do that, believe this and believe that; and if it is not done he excommunicates, and issues one bull after another. Again, even if the secular authority should command: This thou must believe, and that thou must believe, and it should be contrary to the Gospel, you should refuse obedience and say with Peter in Acts 4:19 and Acts 5:29: "We must obey God rather than men." This, however, must not be done with violence, nor so as to create a disturbance and an uproar of any kind.

[16] Accordingly, the spiritual authority has another power, or function called the teaching of the Word of God, and the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. Whenever the bishops and their officials proclaim to you the Word of God and preach the Gospel, you must hear them, for in this they are using their authority; but if they do not preach the Word, they have lost their power and their office is gone. Hence be on your guard when parties come with their spiritual claims and human ordinances of indulgences and satisfaction, and do not preach the Gospel of Christ in its purity. There is no preaching that reforms except the preaching of the Gospel. When they come to us without the Gospel, we will say to them: Dear bishops, you are not bishops, but painted images, and as Paul says in Acts 23:3, "whited walls."

[17] This they cannot bear, and hence they wish to prove their power by the Scriptures and say: Does not Christ declare in Luke 10:16: "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that rejecteth, you rejecteth me?" Hear, ye simple folks, they say, do you not see what Christ says of us? To this you should answer: Yes, dear bishop, beloved official, put on your spectacles, look at the text closely, and mark well what Christ said to his disciples before in verse 3: "Behold, I send you forth as lambs in the midst of

wolves;” and a little further on in verse 9: “The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you;” and in Mark 16:15-16, he sends them and says: “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.” Concerning such as preach the Gospel the Lord also says: “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that rejecteth you rejecteth me.” For whenever I hear the messenger of Christ, I hear Christ himself; but if I do not hear his messenger, I do not hear Christ.

[18] Again, they say that Christ declares unto Peter in Matthew 16:19, “Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Very true, but that power they abuse most valiantly and shamefully; for they bind what they will, make laws, burden the conscience with whatever they dream and whatever they please; and never ask whether or not it would be a burden and an unbearable load to others. No, beloved bishop and official, this passage does not apply to the burdening of the conscience with laws; but to the correction of the erring and to the reproof of sinners. There is no authority of Christ, except the one that is helpful in making the people better.

[19] Therefore whoever uses this power wickedly is not a messenger of Christ, but of the devil, a wolf, a disturber of the flocks of Christ. The true sheep understand this very well. Hence Christ says here in this Gospel: “I am the good shepherd; and I know mine own, and mine own know me.”

III. Of the Knowledge of Christ.

[20] The sheep of Christ know no other Shepherd but Christ. Those who do not preach that we must learn to know Christ, preach falsely and deceptively.

[21] What is it to know Christ, but to discern him as a gift and as an example? A gift given by God that is your own; so that when you see and hear him suffering or doing anything, you may not doubt that Christ himself in such suffering and works is yours; upon which you may depend as though you yourself had done them, and as though you yourself were Christ. Observe this is what it means to know Christ aright: that he, with all that he has, out of pure divine goodness has been given unto us, that he has

rendered satisfaction, obtained salvation and eternal life for us, and that all this is through him and for his sake, without our merit, bestowed upon us.

[22] If in this way you have Christ as the foundation and chief treasure of your salvation, then follows the other part of laying hold of him as your example, that you give yourself to the service of your neighbor as he has given himself for you. Notice, then faith and love will be exercised, God's commandment will be fulfilled, and man becomes happy and fearless to do and to suffer any and everything. Therefore, give heed and mark well; Christ as a gift nourishes your faith and makes you a Christian; but Christ as an example moves you to do good works; these do not make you a Christian, but they go forth from you who have already become a Christian.

[23] The pope, however, has changed this entirely; for he commands: Thou shalt do this, and thou shalt do that. If you would be saved, you must pray the rosary, fast, become a Carthusian, flee to St. James, to Rome, to Jerusalem, buy indulgences, build churches, endow masses and do innumerable other things; not one of which Christ ever commanded. And most terrible of all, when they have practiced such works for a time, that have neither benefited God nor the world, they will boast of them and say: I have fasted so many Fridays with bread and water, I have spent so many years in the cloister, I hope God will not leave me unrewarded for such service, but will on that account give me heaven. That certainly is denying Christ, and a terrible blasphemy of the great and unsurpassable grace of God manifested toward us in His son Christ Jesus, "Who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption," as Paul also teaches in 1 Corinthians 1:30.

[24] This is the true knowledge of Christ: to know why he came, and how we may appropriate him to ourselves. This knowledge St. Paul so often desires for the Christians in his Epistles: "Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death." Philippians 3:8-10. St. Peter speaks especially of this at the end of his second Epistle: "But grow in the grace and

knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 3:8. In such knowledge we should rejoice and shout, as also the prophets have exhorted us to do. For where such knowledge is, “The mountains melt like wax,” as Psalm 97:5 says, Such are the saints with their great works they have done; and these are the works that they now despise and count as refuse as Paul says in Philippians 3:8, and upon whom they may boldly depend. And this knowledge comes to us through the Gospel. Finally Christ speaks as follows in this Gospel: “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock, one shepherd.

[25] Many say that this has not yet come to pass; but I say it has. The Jews were the first sheep, to them alone Christ preached at first; for then the Jewish name was as sacred, as the Christian name is now. The Gentiles, to whom we belong, were the strange sheep. These Christ has gathered into one fold, that is into one Christian congregation, through his apostles and preachers over the whole world, whose office still continues and whose course is not yet ended.

[26] Let us conclude here, and call upon God to help us in these perilous times, while we are in the midst of wolves, that they may not lacerate and devour us and that we may remain in the knowledge of him and his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. forever, Amen.

Misericordias Domini. Second Sunday after Easter. Third Sermon. The Good Shepherd and His Sheep, or Christ’s Person, Office, and Rulership.

Text: John 10:11-16

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

15 As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

16 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. John 10:11-16

[1] Today's Gospel has been appointed, I think, for this Sunday because Christ announces in it that he will lay down his life for his sheep, that is, suffer and die; and yet he also shows, at the same time, that he will rise again, in that he says: "Other sheep I have; them also I must bring" etc. For if he is to be and remain a shepherd of his sheep, he must not remain in death, as he himself afterward explains and interprets, in plain words: "I have power to lay my life down, and I have power to take it again."

[2] The Jews indeed heard this parable and sermon of Christ, but did not understand it at all, as the context declares. It sounded altogether too strange in their ears that he alone should be the true shepherd, and yet he was in the act of laying down his life for his sheep. What kind of a shepherd, think they, was this to be, who would die and give his life for the sheep? Can that be called guarding and keeping the sheep?

[3] In like manner it was an intolerable doctrine to them that he said he had other sheep which were not of this fold, that is, did not belong to the nation which alone was called God's people. These also he would bring, and of these, although they were not of this fold, there should be one flock, under one shepherd, regardless of what became of their fold and their shepherding. They understood very well what he meant by shepherd and sheep (for it was a form of speech familiar and current among them,

especially from the Scriptures), namely, that he claimed to be a man who would teach and govern the people. But because, as they consider it, he puts forth his claim so unreasonably, wishing to be the shepherd alone and yet saying that he will lay down his life for the sheep and that he has still other sheep which he will gather and make one flock — notwithstanding that they, the Jews, refuse to be his sheep — they are offended in him and say that he is mad and that the devil speaks through him. They, nevertheless, understood this much, that his meaning was that their shepherding — that is, their entire government which they had from Moses, the Law, the priesthood, circumcision, the service of God, all appointed for them by God himself — should become void and henceforth count for nothing, and that he would institute something entirely new, in which he would be all in all and rule supreme and would gather a new flock of both Jews and gentiles, just as he should find those who would cling to him recognizing no one else, whether Judaism and its government, glory and existence should abide, stand or fall.

[4] He makes matters still worse by saying, “I am the good shepherd,” whereby he draws the people entirely to himself. He means to say, Dismiss the teachers and rulers you have, and take me for your shepherd. The very best of them, those who teach and profess Moses and the Law, he calls hirelings, who are to be forsaken and not listened to; without considering that other multitude, the thieves and murderers, that is, those who teach against God’s Word and are public persecutors. Hereby he well deserves that they should execute him without sentence and grace, as a publicly accursed blasphemer against God, God’s Law and God’s people.

[5] Without doubt, the great lords, high priests, Pharisees, scribes and all that belonged to their spiritual government, defiantly boasted and bragged against all this: We sit in the true office and priestly estate, ordained not by Moses, but by God himself through Moses. How dare you, rebellious scoundrel, open your mouth before all the people and boast against God’s ordinance and commandment, that you are the shepherd and you alone? You are not even of priestly lineage, of those to whom God, through Moses, committed this charge and whom he commanded the people to hear. And when did God, publicly before all the people, speak to you as he spoke to Moses? Who are you, or where do you come from, that you dare, of your own authority, to utter such things and to apply to yourself alone all that has

been said and commanded concerning the office of shepherd, thereby exalting yourself above and against Moses, the Law of God, the priesthood and all authority? Is not this both rebellious usurpation of the government and the crown by the whole people, and also blasphemy and sin against the divine Majesty?

[6] To say, "I am the good shepherd," what else is it but to say: To me alone they must hearken, the whole flock of sheep. That is, the entire nation belongs to me alone. I alone am its shepherd, and the only good shepherd, who saves the sheep. You, however, are but hirelings, that care not for the sheep, seeking only your own in them and letting them perish in time of danger. In one word, this is to make the people revolt from them and to tell the people that they have no good shepherd or preacher who is faithfully-minded towards them or is able to save them and to whom they ought to give ear. "For my sheep," says he, "hear not the voice of a stranger." But he tells them, if they cling to him, they shall be saved.

[7] Moreover, he not only says that he alone is the shepherd of these sheep, but that he also has another flock and people, who are not under the government of Moses but are altogether outside of this fold. These, also, are to cling to him, and all shall be alike to him, gentiles as Jews, and Jews as gentiles. This is now the most offensive thing of all, that he makes nothing of God's people and puts them, with their Law, priesthood and everything else, on a level with the gentiles, and the gentiles on a level with them, so that neither is better, of more importance or has more than the other. In short, it is equivalent to saying that all Moses instituted and ordained in the priesthood, temple and service of God is to come to an end and to pass away; that now there is a new priesthood and government, and a new shepherd has arisen, whose alone the flock is to be and who is to do all. This surely is knocking the bottom out of the barrel and taking the head off from all Judaism, depriving it of all its glory. Hereby he simply bids them to yield up their shepherdhood, to hear him alone and to suffer him to be all in all.

[8] This was to them necessarily an odious, blasphemous injunction. For in their minds nothing was more certain than this: We have been appointed by God, through Moses, to the priesthood, to the office of teaching and ruling the whole nation. Now, whatever God has commanded and ordained must stand and not be changed by any creature. Therefore, our priesthood

and Moses' government must continue forever. And if the gentiles are to be added and to become God's people, this must not and cannot take place through this carpenter of Nazareth (as they regarded and called Jesus), but through Moses, in that they suffer themselves to be circumcised and accept his Law, and visit the temple at Jerusalem. Even the apostles at that time still believed that this must remain, above all things, as the ordinance and commandment of God, given and instituted from heaven. In opposition to this, Jesus of Nazareth dares to arise and publicly declare the contrary. If you would come to God and be saved, you must, after all, surrender Moses, the Law, the temple and the priesthood. All these will in nowise help you. You must come hither to me, whether you be Jew, gentile, priest, layman or what you will, even if you should be Moses himself. So the Jews were offended at this discourse, and are offended at it to this day. This stumbling block of opposition to Moses and their Law so lies in their way that they cannot get over it.

II. How this Sermon Serves to Overthrow the False Teachings of the Papists Concerning the Church.

[9] In like manner it is also not less offensive to our opponents, the pope and his following, so to preach. For this Gospel makes it necessary to preach against their government, which has been called the only government of the Christian church in the world, and which, it is claimed, possesses constituted authority and all that belongs to the church, namely, baptism, the sacrament, the keys etc., by inheritance from the apostles and by the prescription of so many years. Wherefore, like the Jews, they claim to be the people of God and the church alone. It is intolerable to them, when, in spite of all their pretensions, it is urged against them that they are not the church and that God cares nothing about their boasting, their government and all that. And it is likewise intolerable to them when we separate ourselves from them and renounce obedience to them and also teach others so to do; because, in the name of the church, of Christ and of faith, they have quite obscured the shepherd Christ, and in the name of the church and Christian government have filled the church with their own idle talk, and are not as good as hirelings, but are wolves and murderers. They, themselves, now prove this by their public persecution and execution of Christians on account of this doctrine and confession concerning Christ,

that he is the only shepherd, through whom we have forgiveness of sins and eternal life, who alone laid down his life for us.

[10] And I declare that if the case of the pope were as good as that of the Jews, who without contradiction had the Scriptures and God's Word in their favor, no man could get along with his adherents. For the Jews had the great advantage that their government was instituted by God's command through Moses, and moreover was confirmed by miraculous signs and was so strict in its provisions that whoever would not hear Moses was to be stoned and excluded from God's people. Such glorying and testimony, that their government of the church was commanded and confirmed by God, our opponents, God be praised, cannot produce. Nevertheless, they do as the Jews did. Let anyone preach concerning Christ and the Gospel whatever he will, they at once cry out against it: The church must be obeyed, the fathers be heard, the canons and decrees of the councils be kept. How else, say they, shall it be known what and where Christians or the church are? There must surely be some organization proceeding in proper order, such as the fathers and councils nicely arranged, and as has existed for so long a time, namely, that the church has a common head, the pope, and a regular government of bishops, and, under these, the ordinary priesthood, and, over all, a general council, whose decision, conclusion and judgment must be followed in all things. And if anyone does not observe this order and institution, or opposes it and gives occasion to division, he must be of the devil, a perfidious, rebellious, accursed heretic.

[11] In opposition to this, we must open our mouths and, in accord with this teaching of Christ, tell everybody, even as he commanded us to preach these things to all creatures: Dear friend, you may indeed observe, glorify and exalt such a human institution; but that does not make you a Christian. This is not yet the true shepherd and master, whose name is Christ. You must be led another way to know and hear him aright, else all this will not help you in the least to your salvation. For being a Christian is something different from the pope's government, and also something different from and higher than what the fathers have taught or the councils have decreed. Even though they did well, as Moses also did well and truly somewhat better — for example, the Jews circumcised, they sacrificed, and they observed their divine service — and even though among us a fine order of offices and ranks be maintained, and external discipline and a beautiful

service of God, together with fasting, praying, singing etc. — all this is not yet what is meant by Christ's Word: "I am the good shepherd."

[12] For this shepherd and his office must be carefully distinguished (wherefore he also teaches this) from all other preachers, teachers and everything else that claims to have the rule over souls. Let all these do as well as they can, still none of them is a good shepherd. For Moses, forsooth, did not do badly; he instituted a fine order of a spiritual and temporal government, both in external discipline and in the service of God. Nevertheless, his Jews are here compelled to hear that it can in no way help them before God, and that now, after it has endured and been maintained for so long a time, another is to come, who will glory exceedingly and boast: You have not yet the true shepherd that you ought to have. I alone am he, whose voice you must hear if you would be saved. And I have still other sheep, people who neither know nor observe anything at all of Moses and your entire government. Nevertheless, all shall be one flock. How so? Both shall learn to know me as their true shepherd and shall hear my voice. Therefore, I allow to preach whoever will preach, and let it pass; but the shepherd who can heal the injury, none will find until he comes hither and clings to me.

[13] Therefore, we are also to conclude from this that there is nothing in the loud pretensions of those of the present day who would like to maintain the papacy with its counterfeit bishops, and who sputter much about the church government which they affect, where they sit together in established inherited power, as the heirs of the sees of the first bishops, ordained by the apostles etc.; by which the whole government of the church is to be bound to them, so that without them there can be no church. They alone are to have power to ordain, consecrate and confirm bishops. They would persuade us to hear them alone in whatever they jointly decide, and of necessity receive from them all that pertains to the church, its office and government, the sacraments, the office of preaching, priestly orders etc. They would have us believe that they are no true bishops or priests, nor can they administer the sacraments, who have not received unction and chrism from them. Therefore, they also clamor and fume about us, saying that we are disobedient and rebellious and have set ourselves against the constituted power of the church and have seceded from them etc.

[14] In opposition to this, Christ teaches us in this Gospel to look to him alone as the true shepherd, who only is the founder, lord and head of the church, and says his sheep hear his voice, and not a stranger's. Hereby he indicates that these are the true church, without regard to their being under the pope and his bishops, or even under Moses. For he and his kingdom and church are bound neither to Moses' Law nor to Judaism, although they were instituted by God, much less to the government of pope and bishops, established by themselves. Neither has he taken or received anything from them, but he is the Lord of Moses and of all creatures, to whom all men should be subject.

[15] Therefore, when the Jews in the name of Moses, or our opponents in the name of the church and its power, undertake to draw people away from Christ, that is, from his Word and the pure teaching of the Gospel, he opposes them and says: "My sheep hear my voice; and a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers." Here he gives us not only the right and power, but even a distinct command not to hear nor to be allied with them.

[16] Since now we see and apprehend that the whole papal party not only keep, believe and teach nothing concerning Christ, but are public persecutors of the Gospel, that is, wolves and murderers of Christ's sheep and church, and that they conduct and exercise a real anti-Christian government, we should and must, by Christ's command, break away from their imagined power and possessions, from which they already are deposed by Christ himself. We are commanded to have nothing to do with them, but are to avoid and flee from them as the devil's church, as St. Paul also utters this sentence (Galatians 1:8): "Though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach any other gospel, let him be anathema." This is certainly a strong enough deposition from all power in the church, a command to respect the deposition and condemnation of God.

III. What Is the Summary of this Sermon?

[17] This then is the main thought and sum of this Gospel, that Christ alone is the good shepherd. It teaches us the power and fruit of the preaching of the Gospel and its ministry and distinguishes it from the office of Moses and the preaching of the Law. Christ names only two who keep and feed the

sheep, the true shepherd and the hireling. For the wolf is but a murderer, who works only injury and havoc; to resist him shepherds are necessary. But if the shepherd and the hireling are compared, it becomes manifest that Christ alone is the shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep. Neither Moses nor any other preacher of the Law does this.

[18] For this reason, he justly calls himself alone the good, that is, the comforting and helpful, shepherd. For, although Moses, the prophets and all other preachers of the Law preach and teach, they are not able to lay down their lives for the sheep and to save them. They all had to die for themselves, and were not able thereby to save either themselves or others. But Christ says: It is I alone who lay down my life for the sheep. Only death brings salvation to the sheep. And because I am such a one, I found this new doctrine and a new flock and people.

[19] In this way he refers the true shepherd's office, that is, the authority to help consciences and souls, to his own person alone, as the only one who has effected and completed the work of our redemption, given his body and life for his sheep, and instituted and perpetuated the office through which he gathers, governs and preserves them. This office, therefore, comprises the whole preaching of the Gospel, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever it is done. These preachers are also named, after Christ shepherds; not for themselves, for that honor belongs to Christ alone, but because they are in the office which is Christ's and which he exercises through them.

IV. How Christ Explains in this Sermon His Person and Office by a Reverse Picture.

[20] This then is the first section, treating of Christ's person and the office which he exercises in his church. Afterwards, when he speaks of his sheep, he elucidates it further. But first he pictures the hireling in contrast and says: "He that is a hireling, and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, beholdeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth, and the wolf snatcheth them, and scattereth them; he fleeth because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep."

[21] He names three kinds of persons or three offices which have to do with the sheep: The true shepherd, which, as has been said, he is himself; the hireling, including all besides him who preach the Law and teach how

we ought to live and do good, but do not point to Christ, like the scribes and Pharisees among the Jews of old; and finally the wolf, who wishes to be among the sheep and to rule over them but only works injury and ruin. The wolf is the devil, who also has his messengers and preachers. However, they have not the Word of God, neither the ten commandments nor the Gospel, but they mislead souls by false doctrine and heresies, which St. Paul, 1 Timothy 4:1-2, calls “doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy.” Such are now the pope’s anti-Christian doctrines, the Koran of the Turks, and doctrines of other sects. These three kinds of teachers have always been in the world from the beginning. We should keep the first, reform the second, and shun the third. None do this, however, except the true sheep, that is, the little flock which knows Christ.

[22] He also manifests here the condition of the sheep, and why he alone must be known and believed as the true shepherd. The condition of the sheep is such that, if the shepherd is absent, they are in the certain danger and distress of being seized, torn and killed by the wolf, for by their own strength they can neither guard nor defend themselves against him. A sheep is naturally a poor, weak, defenseless animal above all others and is quite dependent upon the protection, care and help of someone. The true shepherd must devote himself to the sheep, ever be with them, watch over them, rescue and defend them, whenever it is necessary, so that they may not perish. A stranger or a paid hireling, whose own the sheep are not, says Christ, will not do that; although for a time he leads and feeds them, he will not hold out to the end. When the wolf comes, he flees in order to save himself, and meanwhile lets the poor sheep face the danger and perish.

[23] So, also, it is with consciences in a spiritual way. If Christ himself, by his shepherd’s office, does not guard, lead and guide, all other preaching is vain, even if in other respects it is good and right. It cannot serve in distress, when the devil opens the jaws of hell by the terrors of sin and everlasting death. When this comes to pass, the poor sheep stands there alone and forsaken, dependent upon itself and its own efforts, according to the doctrine of the Law and of works, with nobody to help or assist, from whom to obtain comfort or find salvation.

[24] No better example of this can be adduced than what we, ourselves, experienced under the papacy in times past. The sweetest preaching possible was given, which, among others, I gave diligence to teach both

myself and the people. We were told: You ought to keep the ten commandments, love God with your whole heart and your neighbor as yourself. This teaching was not wrong, for the Law should be taught. But in order to impress this on the people, they added: Man can well do this, for he has the natural light of reason, given by God, by which he understands what he ought to do and what leave undone. Moreover, he has a will, by which he can resolve and begin to do this. And if with all diligence he exercises himself in such works and does what is in his power, God will regard and accept this, and undoubtedly bestow grace upon him.

[25] To this comforting assurance they added many good counsels. For they, themselves, felt that what they taught concerning the decalogue was not sufficient. The purpose of their counsels was to escape from death and to obtain salvation. They prescribed extraordinary, severe orders and modes of life, mortification of the body, fasting, watching, pilgrimages etc. All this they considered good and valuable, and performed it with the good intention that it was to be acceptable to God and to be received as a fulfillment of his commandments. But when all this had been tried, and when finally the devil came, in the hour of death or in other grievous trials, then all such teaching and works were found wanting, and poor consciences were miserably led into the devil's sweatbox, in which they worried and tormented themselves with thoughts of despair, with words and groanings, crying: O Lord God, if I could live longer, I would do penance for all my sins! etc.

[26] Such was the use and fruit of the hireling doctrine, which referred poor souls to their own doing and suffering, while nothing was said of Christ and of faith. This kind of teaching can only comfort and sustain so long as the devil is not present; for he is not concerned about our works, satisfactions and life. Where he does not find Christ, he has won the game. He advances, tears and devours souls without restraint or hindrance, according to his pleasure. Indeed, these teachers and masters are powerless to help themselves. They are frightened and scattered as well as the sheep, so that they know not where to abide and finally, unless they learn of other help, they become the prey of the enemy. An example of this is the case of a hermit who once came to a sick man on his deathbed and endeavored to comfort him so that he might die peaceably. He exhorted him, as is the custom of such comforters, work-saints and monks, to die willingly, and to

suffer patiently; this would secure for him forgiveness of all sins, with God. He was willing to pledge his soul for it. Gracious God! Here lies a poor sheep in its dying moments; it accepts what it cannot avoid, and on the strength of such comfort dies. But what happens? Soon after the death of this poor wretch the old hermit's last hour comes and fills him with such anxiety and terror that he becomes despondent of the very comfort which he gave to others. No attempt at consolation will avail him, and he finally sinks into despair.

[27] This is what must come to pass when only our own words are preached, or even only the ten commandments are taught, notwithstanding the preaching of these things is necessary, especially for the rude multitude. But where there is no Christ, it only serves to confuse and scatter the poor sheep and to drive them into terror and despair, so that they must perish, unless they are restored again by the true shepherd.

[28] When human nature and reason hear the preaching of the Law, even in the case of those who teach the Law in the very best manner without however knowing Christ, they foolishly err and imagine, when they have heard this doctrine, that they can easily fulfil it. For they say they have both the understanding and the will to do it. They think no further than that it is accomplished with their self-devised thoughts and outward works. Accordingly they proceed, and imagine that they must do whatever is told and held up to them in the way of good works, as commanded by God. They seek thereby to atone for sin and to blot it out, whereas God by no means demands that we do good works to this end, or that sin can be blotted out by works. Hence, they go on in this erroneous delusion and gather and accumulate all the works they can think or hear of, which God certainly has not commanded. They are simply caught by this conclusion: Good works are to be done; this is a good work, therefore I am under obligation to do it. In this manner they proceed and are ever doing, but never arrive at fulfillment. Hence, they are not able to resist the wolf. The more they do, the less they are satisfied and the more they find to do. And as soon as the devil comes and pretends: Behold, this is a good work, which you have done — they cannot get around it and must allow themselves to be carried away.

[29] Yea, though they had done all that man can do, nevertheless, if the wolf appears before their eyes with his gaping jaws of hell, they realize that

it will not stand before God's wrath and judgment. With a single breath the devil blows it all away and says: You have done much, it is true; but when have you fulfilled God's commandment, to love him with the whole heart above all things, to have no evil thought, desire or lust in the heart, to speak no idle, vain words? Then both the doctrine which the hireling gave you, and all your works and deeds which cost you so much labor and toil, drop and fall. You have no comfort or refuge against the devil, for he always has the advantage of driving you back on your own conscience and the testimony of your own efforts, as the hireling instructed you, who taught you only what to do, but imparted no strength to do it, and so left you in the lurch. In short, you are overcome by yourself and are convicted by the sentence: The good must be done.

[30] In this way the devil introduced the mire and filth of all human doctrines into the church through the pope, and there was no one to resist him, for all proceeded on the principle that what is good must be done. Therefore, whatever they called good and a service of God, had to be done. And even now they have not ceased to spew venom upon us, contending that our doctrine of faith and love is a bad doctrine; that we know nothing better to preach than the childish lesson of the ten commandments; that we must rise much higher and do much more, and teach not only what is contained in the Scriptures, but also hear what the church and the councils say etc.

[31] Hence, everything that any shabby, impudent mendicant monk dared to hold forth was violently confirmed and swept in like a deluge. Indeed, we simpletons, doctors of the Holy Scriptures as we were, could not prevent the pernicious barefoot (Carmelite) sect from persuading the people that if a dead man was buried in their monk's cowl, he would be saved and the devil could not get him, or else he would have taken him before. For we were all dazzled and taken captive by the sentence: We must do good works, and whoever does them is saved.

[32] Verily, even to this day we could not stand before the papacy or overthrow its least error if we had not more than this doctrine of our works and deeds. Even as the pious martyr, John Hus, was cried down and condemned by the devil in the diabolical council at Constance, when he rebuked the pope and his followers on account of the wicked, shameless life by which they often violated their own canonical laws. For this was their

defense against him, that although the life was not right, the doctrine, that these things were to be kept and done, was right. Hence, the papacy has hitherto resisted overthrow so long as its doctrine has been considered true and remained unchallenged.

[33] Therefore, these two, the hireling and the wolf, are always together. The devil likes such teachers, for, in the absence of the true shepherd, they serve him in enabling him to rend and kill the sheep without trouble, when and as he wills. And there is no defense save Christ and his doctrine and protection. As the only true shepherd, he does not allow the sheep to struggle with the wolf (for if it once comes to that, they are already in his jaws), but flings himself against the latter and gathers us around himself, and so protects us that the devil is compelled to flee. This takes place when from the Scriptures it is taught that no human work or endeavor, however good it may appear, even if done in accordance with the ten commandments, and no possible teaching, will avail to free from sin or stand before the wrath of God and the terrors of death and hell etc. This alone avails, that Christ laid down his life for you and took it again, and thereby overcame the devil and death and made them subject to himself, in order that by his power and strength you might be saved.

[34] But where the voice of this shepherd remains, the sheep can guard themselves against both hireling and wolf, and say: You, indeed, say truly that I ought to keep the ten commandments; but you do not tell me where I am to take refuge, seeing I have not fulfilled them. Here I will rather hear my dear shepherd, who died for me, and died not without reason nor in vain, but for this very purpose that I, who was such a poor lost sheep without a shepherd and in the power of the wolf, might be rescued. So, also, when the devil shows his teeth in your heart and threatens to kill and devour you, and tells you that you ought to have done or left undone this or that which you have not done or left undone, and that therefore you belong to him, you can take refuge with Christ as a sheep that knows its shepherd; and you can tell the devil to attack him who died and rose for you, and to try what he can win from him.

[35] Still more can you repulse others who are not as good as hirelings, but are the wolf's servants. They come and preach, as geese gabble, about our own fancied works. Say to them: I will hear and know nothing of these, for I have a much greater thing to do in learning the ten commandments. I

am not able to keep them. Why should I worry myself with such useless works, which only harm and hinder me from properly considering the ten commandments? It indeed happened that the world was so filled with commandments and doctrines of men that no bishop and no doctor knew or taught the ten commandments properly.

[36] For this reason we have reproved and attacked the papacy, not on the ground of their wicked and shameful life, which they themselves also acknowledge, but we say to them that, even if they led holy angelic lives, which they never have done and never will do, and if they kept not only their own law, but also the law of Moses, both of which are impossible, we nevertheless should regard them not only as hirelings, but also as wolves, because they teach only what destroys the souls. For nothing can feed or give life to the soul, which is not the doctrine of Christ. Although the hireling does not himself slay and destroy, he does not restrain the wolf. Therefore, because you neither point out nor teach this shepherd, you shall not and ought not to be heard, but you shall be shunned as a wolf.

[37] With this argument, the papacy and all that leads away from this doctrine are overthrown. Otherwise it is impossible, as has been said, to correct the least error which is given out under the pretense of a holy life. And no doctrine is so foolish or disgraceful but that it finds hearers and disciples, as is proven by the experience of the church with so many heresies and divisions. The heathen were reasonable and highly intelligent people, yet we read of them that they worshiped not only cats and storks, but also cabbages and onions, and even a member of the human body. All this comes from the name and delusion that such things are good works and render a service to God. The preacher of such works comes with the reputation and pretense of a shepherd who desires to counsel and direct souls on the way to God.

[38] Alas! we have hitherto not been able to correct or prevent the shameful lies and fables of the monks concerning the rosary of Mary. This consisted of fifty Ave Marias and five Pater-Nosters addressed to Mary the Virgin. The popes granted many indulgences to it, and the preaching friars (Dominicans) scribbled great books full of fanciful and disgusting lies concerning the power and wonderful efficacy of this prayer, which they themselves invented. Besides there was the frippery of innumerable similar lies invented by others, like the barefooted friars' (Carmelite) crown and

Psalter of Mary, concerning which they themselves are now silent and ashamed. Indeed, at the present day nobody in the papacy could refute or resist the faith of the Turks or of the Jews, for they of the papacy have not the true master nor the true solid doctrine of this shepherd. Therefore, the devil has power and authority over them, even by the decalogue. He always has the advantage of convicting you by your own conscience of not having kept the commandments; so much the more if you have spent your life in works based on human teaching.

[39] If, however, you know this shepherd, you can defend yourself against devil and death, and say: Alas! I have not kept God's commandments, but I creep under the wings of this good hen, my Lord Jesus Christ, and believe that he is my shepherd, bishop and mediator with God, who covers me with his innocence and bestows his righteousness upon me. What I have not kept he has kept, and the sin I have done, he has atoned for with his blood etc; for he died and rose, not for himself but for me. Even as he says here, that he lays down his life, not for himself, but for his sheep; that is, as St. Peter says (1 Peter 3:18): "Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous." Thus you are secure and the devil and hell must leave you in peace. The devil certainly will not be able to do harm to Christ, who has overcome him, and who, if you only believe in him as his sheep, will, as a faithful shepherd, not forsake you, but will stand by you, protect and preserve you.

[40] If now under this shepherd you are secure against the wolf, it is right that the hireling should also come as a good teacher, showing how you ought to live according to God's commandments and to do good works, and go before you where now you can walk yourself (as far as lies outside of the conflict of the conscience with sin and death), provided, however, that you are first in the protection and pasture of this shepherd and do not stray away from him.

[41] Behold, these are the three forms of preaching which always exist in the world: First, that of the great multitude, who set forth not God's Word, but human doctrine. These are the wolves, such as the pope with his decretals, the Turk with his Koran, the Jews with their Talmud, and other sects against the pure teaching of the Scriptures. Second, the hirelings, who preach only the decalogue. They are few, and without the Gospel cannot long remain pure. Third, those who sincerely and truly point and lead to

Christ. These are the fewest of all, but they will necessarily be found somewhere until the last day, as we say in the creed: "I believe in the holy Christian church etc."

[42] These are, and are called, true shepherds, because they preach not themselves, but Christ, and hence are the mouth of Christ, as he himself says in Matthew 10:20: "It is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you;" and again in Luke 21:15: "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or gainsay," that is, it shall not be your mouth, but I will prepare your mouth that it shall be full of wisdom given by me, and shall speak by me. For this is the clap of thunder by which everything that is not of this doctrine and quality is laid low, so that it serves and avails nothing for the life to come. It may in other respects be good to keep people under restraint or to bring them to a knowledge of their faults. For what is it that a man, pope or Turk can do in the face of eternal death and hell!

[43] Hereby the pope's government and all doctrines of men are stormed and overthrown. However, we do not antagonize them because they do not keep their own commandments and doctrine; for against this they always have the defense that, although their life is censurable, their doctrine is good and right. Hence they maintain their government by force, arguing from the words of Christ in Matthew 23:2-3: "The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat: all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe: but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not" etc. Therefore, before we had the Gospel, we were able to accomplish nothing against them. But now that we know Christ, we are able to condemn their doctrine together with all their works.

[44] Here now you have the distinction which Christ draws between his preaching and government and that of all others who desire to rule consciences and hearts without or independent of him. With so many words about the hireling, he pictures the danger, nay more, the injury and destruction, which must follow if he is not heard and known as the only shepherd, namely, that the wolf cannot be warded off, however numerous the hirelings. For with their doctrine they cannot help or give counsel how to escape from sin and death, nor can they resist the devil: and the poor sheep must soon be eternally lost and destroyed, unless it comes to this shepherd. Therefore, he again repeats what he said at the beginning, in

order to impress it upon us, that we must hold fast to his protection and pasture, that is, to his Word and ministry, and says: “I am the good shepherd; and I know mine own, and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

V. How Christ Sets Forth His Office and Government in the Most Charming Manner.

[45] Many, alas! too many, are called shepherds and undertake this government, which consists in feeding and leading souls; but I alone, says he again, am called and truly am the good shepherd. This means in plain words: All others besides me are not good, but are unmerciful, cruel shepherds, because they leave the sheep in the jaws of the wolf. But me you must learn to know as your dear, faithful, good, kind, sweet and comforting shepherd, towards whom your heart must be filled with laughter in the assurance that by him you are redeemed from every burden, fear, trouble and danger, and that he will not and cannot let you perish. I prove this, says he, by laying down my life for the sheep. Therefore, joyfully abide with me and let none other rule in your consciences. Listen only to me, who speak and by deeds prove this comforting word, that I will not drive, trouble or burden you like Moses and others, but will most lovingly lead and guide, protect and help you.

[46] In this manner he ever insists on this one doctrine as the chief point of our salvation, that there is no deliverance or help apart from this shepherd, Christ, apprehended in the faith that he alone rescues us by his death from the power of death and the devil. Therefore, this is the most necessary doctrine to be taught in the church. The devil is hostile to it and cannot endure that we remain with this good shepherd and in the pure sense and significance of his teaching. Therefore, he is always raging against it through his agents, with cunning and deceit, with persecution and blasphemy, with a view of tearing people away from it, just as he also opposed this teaching through the Jews. But we on the other hand, as his pious sheep, must listen to the shepherd’s voice and know that, when all things fail and the counsel and help of all men come to naught, we are safe and are preserved by faith in this shepherd, who laid down his life for us. He also concludes concerning his sheep, that is, the whole church, that he

knows them and they know him: "I know mine own, and mine own know me."

[47] This is, indeed, strange language, and naturally was singular and ridiculous to the Jews, just as when he had said that he alone was the shepherd. Without doubt they scornfully curled their lips at it and said: You talk much about your shepherd's office and your sheep. Man, where have you your sheep and where are they to be found? We have a nation and a flock, who adhere to the temple and the service instituted by God, and keep the Law of Moses. By this they are organized into a fold; so that they can be known and named. But where are yours? How are they known? What are they like? Give them a name and sign. No, says he, you shall not know them in the way that you conceive. Your sheep have their marks, by which they are known and distinguished: they are circumcised, they come to the temple at Jerusalem etc. But my sheep have another mark, not made or painted with colors and red ochre, so as to be visible on the forehead or on the wool. The pope, also, imitating the Jews, makes and marks such a church and Christians that everybody may know them by their outward conduct and life. No, it will not do, he means to say, to indicate them with the mark and seal which you put upon them or Moses puts upon them; but they are so marked and distinguished that nobody knows them except me alone.

[48] Although Christians also have external marks, given by Christ, to wit, baptism, the sacrament and the preaching of the Gospel, these may fail when we have to judge any individual minutely. For many a one has been baptized, hears the Gospel, and goes to the sacrament with others, and yet is a rogue and no Christian. But the distinguishing mark is this alone, that the faith that looks upon Christ as the shepherd dwells within the heart. But who knows this? You cannot see it in me, nor I in you; for nobody can look into the heart of another. So, then, it remains true that nobody knows or is able to describe these sheep and this flock, except this shepherd, Christ, alone. Again, my sheep alone know me, says he, and so know me that they do not allow themselves to be turned or torn from me, but abide in the faith, confession and doctrine that I am the shepherd and give my life for them against the devil, the world, death and hell.

[49] Now, here again he overturns Judaism with its law and priesthood, and still more our papacy with all that belongs to it, and deprives them of

the power of ruling and of judging his flock. He simply will not have himself and his church ruled by them, and therefore rejects and condemns all such judgment as they, according to Moses or any other external order and government, wish to pronounce in regard to who are Christians or not Christians and God's people. On the contrary, he tells them that they neither shall nor can know his sheep, yet he will have and preserve his church, although they know and receive neither shepherd nor sheep, but reject and condemn both, as cut off from the people of God.

[50] Moreover, he gives us the criterion by which we are to distinguish the true church or people of God from that which has the name and reputation, but in truth is not the church. He teaches us that the church neither is nor ought to be a society which must be organized with an external government and order, like the Jewish people under the Law of Moses. Nor does it exist, nor is it governed and preserved, by outward human power; much less is it bound to a regular succession or government of bishops or their successors, as the papacy claims. It is a spiritual assembly, which hears this shepherd and believes in him, and is governed by him through the Holy Spirit. It is outwardly recognized by this alone, that it has his Word, that is, the preaching of the Gospel, and his sacraments. Inwardly it is known to him alone, as in turn it also knows him by faith and clings to him when it hears his Word, regardless of the fact that it may neither maintain nor even know anything of that outward Jewish or papistical government and order, and may be scattered here and there in the world without any organized external government; as in fact it was in the time of Christ and the apostles, who, apart from and in opposition to the regular power of the whole priesthood, believed in Christ and confessed him.

[51] Therefore, if you wish really to know what a Christian is or why a man is called a Christian, and to give a true definition of the same, you must not look to the Law of Moses, the government of the pope, nor the life and sanctity of any man, however holy. But you must look alone to this Word of Christ, where he says: "My sheep know me, and my sheep hear my voice." Then you will say: A Christian is not one who leads a strict, severe, earnest Carthusian or hermit life; for Jews and Turks can also do that, some of whom do live even more strictly. In short, nothing that is in us or can be done by us, makes a Christian. What then? This alone, that one knows this

man, and regards him and trusts him as he wishes to be considered, namely, as the good shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep and knows them.

[52] This knowledge is nothing else than faith, which arises from the ministry of the Word. The Word consists not of our own thoughts nor does it come from men; but it was brought from heaven and was revealed by Christ himself, as he said to Peter in Matthew 16:17: “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee” etc. These two must always come together and agree: his Word and our faith. For if he were not to reveal himself by his Word nor let his voice be heard, we would know nothing of the shepherd. I say, in this way and in no other does a man become a Christian, when he hears this voice alone, and knows no other shepherd and allows no other to be fashioned for him, whatever his fame and luster, but grasps this image alone in his heart. And all the sheep of Christ without distinction have this one color and form, whereby they are to be identified, and are like each other in this, that they believe on this shepherd and confess his Word, although externally they differ in many respects, and are scattered here and there in the world without order and are spread abroad among different peoples.

[53] Hence we derive this comfort, that if anyone knows Christ in this way, he is certainly one of his sheep, and is already known by him and elected to be a sheep. He ought and needs not to seek and to look further how he may become a sheep, nor to worry and torment himself with the vain thought of whether or not he is elected and how he may become certain of salvation. But he ought joyfully to comfort himself and be secure in this, that if he hears the voice of Christ, he has in him a dear shepherd who knows him, that is, cares for him as his sheep, provides for him, protects and saves him, so that he need have no fear of the devil, hell and death. This knowledge of his sheep and its power he further explains with comforting words and says: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.”

[54] And for still greater comfort he adds: “Even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father.” It is a glorious, comforting knowledge with which the Father knows his dear Son in inexpressible, unfathomable, eternal love, as he publicly testified by the voice from heaven and said: “This is my beloved Son,” Matthew 3:17. So that for his sake, he took pity

and had mercy on the human race, when it had fallen into eternal wrath and condemnation and was in danger of being eternally lost; as St. Paul says in Ephesians 1:6: “Which (grace) he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” etc. In the same manner Christ also knows us with a like inexpressible love, as from the beginning he loved the human race, and therefore most deeply humbled himself beneath all men and even beneath sin and death, and endured the wrath of God for us, that God might not permit the devil to keep us in his bonds and in everlasting condemnation.

[55] Since now, the Father knows Christ in this way, and Christ in the same manner also knows us, his sheep, the knowledge which comes to us from the Father through Christ and that whereby we should know the Father’s heart toward us through Christ, become one and the same. That is to say, as he loves Christ his Son, so he cherishes toward us, who know Christ as sheep know their shepherd, true paternal love, in order that we may know that it is not his will that we should be lost or condemned, if only we believe in his Son whom he has given for us. For he cannot hate his Son; and he sent him from heaven that through his blood and death he might deliver us from sin.

[56] This is truly a high and glorious consolation. But it is also a very spiritual, that is, hidden and secret, knowledge in our eyes and thoughts, to believe that both Christ and the Father know us in this way. For to all human eyes it is deeply buried under manifold scorn, weakness and hostile opinions of the world and of our flesh and blood. In the world, they take offense at this kingdom of Christ and his church, because it does not accord with their wisdom and is not organized and regulated as in their opinion it should be regulated if it is to be God’s government and work. Indeed, because its course is contrary to reason, sense and thought, the world regards the doctrine as pure folly and delusion, and condemns and persecutes all who adhere to it and are unwilling to follow the world’s own opinion. Not only is Christ hidden from the world, but a still harder thing is it that in such trials Christ conceals himself even from his church, and acts as if he had forgotten, aye, had entirely forsaken and rejected it, since he permits it to be oppressed under the cross and subjected to all the cruelty of the world, while its enemies boast, glory and rejoice over it, as we shall hear in the next Gospel. Moreover, Christians must suffer themselves to be especially tormented by the devil inwardly, in their hearts, with the terrors

of their sin and God's wrath, and so must endure every misfortune and the tortures of hell; not to mention what they are otherwise compelled to feel and see in themselves and among their own brethren in the way of weaknesses and faults in both faith and life, and whatever scandal the devil can cause.

[57] Under these circumstances, who knows the sheep, or regards them as such, seeing they are so deeply buried and overwhelmed with suffering, shame, disgrace, death, scandal etc., that they are concealed even from each other? Certainly nobody but Christ alone. He tells them, and comforts them by it, that notwithstanding all that excites the displeasure of the world and our own flesh and blood, he nevertheless knows his sheep, and neither forgets nor forsakes them, although so it seems.

[58] And in order to impress this more deeply upon us, he adds a comparison and says: "Even as the Father knoweth me." This is truly also a deep, hidden knowledge, that God the Father knew his only begotten and beloved Son, when like the child of the poorest beggar, he had to lie in the manger, not only unknown by his entire people, but cast out and rejected; or when he hung in the air most disgracefully and ignominiously, naked and bare, between two murderers, as the most wicked blasphemer of God, and a rebel, cursed by God and all the world, so that he was compelled to cry out to him in great agony: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46. Nevertheless, he says here: My Father knoweth me, precisely in this suffering, disgrace and offensive form, as his only Son, sent by him to be the sacrifice and to offer up my soul for the salvation and redemption of the sheep. Likewise I know him, and am aware that he has not forgotten and forsaken me, but that he will lead me through and out of disgrace, the cross and death to eternal honor, life and glory. In the same way my sheep shall also learn to know me in their misery, shame, suffering and death, as their dear, faithful Savior, who has suffered in like manner and given his life for them. They shall trust me with assurance that in their distresses they are not forsaken or forgotten by me, as reason and the world imagine; but that in all this I will wonderfully preserve them and thereby bring them to eternal victory and glory.

[59] Behold, this is the true knowledge of Christ, with which he knows us and we are known by him. High and glorious wisdom! But for the reason and thought of the world, it is far too deeply buried and hidden. It is

comprehended by faith alone, which must here undergo a great conflict in order to keep this knowledge and to increase in it, lest by the great occasion for stumbling which appears here it be drawn away from Christ; as he himself admonishes in Matthew 11:6: “Blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me.”

[60] Here we are also to learn, as I have often said, that we must not judge of the kingdom of Christ and his church by the outward appearance and with the judgment of reason and human wisdom. For here you are told that this knowledge of the sheep belongs to Christ alone, and that it is as much hidden to reason under the greatest offense as he himself was when hanging on the cross.

[61] Therefore, the presumption of the mad, proud, sanctimonious and unreasonable wiseacres is to be rebuked, who with their arrogant judgment are already to secure and condemn Christians who possess the teaching of the Gospel and faith in purity, when they detect in these any weakness or fault. In their minds they picture a church which has only perfect, heavenly saints, without any fault, defect or offense — a manifestly impossible thing in this life. For even if the devil be not always busy sowing his seed in the true church through his sects and false saints, there are many Christians who are still weak in faith and show many infirmities in life; yea, even the greatest saints, who are pure in faith and irreproachable in life, find and feel in themselves many a weakness and remaining sinful inclination, and find cause enough for grief and conflict in overcoming this offense in themselves.

[62] Particularly they who fill the office of the church as preachers and pastors, are to learn here how they ought to conduct themselves toward the weak and erring, so that they may learn to know them as Christ knows us. That is to say, they ought not to be harsh and rude towards them, forcing and scolding them, or condemning them if everything is not always just right; but they ought to deal gently and tenderly with them and bear their weaknesses until they grow stronger. Wherefore, the prophet Ezekiel also rebukes the priests and those to whom God committed the office of shepherd, because they ruled over the sheep harshly and rigorously, and did not nurture the weak, nor heal the sick, nor bind up the wounded: nor restore the erring, nor seek the lost, and says (Ezekiel 34:15-16): “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep. I will seek that which was lost, and will

bring back that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick” etc. Hereby he shows that God also has in his flock the weak, the wounded, the erring, aye, even the lost. Still he recognizes these as his sheep, and will not have them rejected, but nurtured, bound up, healed and restored. And because they, wishing to rule strictly and rigorously, according to the government of Moses and by enforcement of the Law, failed to do this, he gives the promise of the kingdom of Christ, in which he will himself rule and feed his sheep, by the Gospel, through the true shepherd, Christ: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock, one shepherd.”

[63] Concerning these words we said in the beginning that with them Christ bids farewell to the Jews with their synagogue, the people and priesthood, who adhere to Moses, and declares that, although they do not receive him and regard him as their shepherd, which he was ordained of God to be, even by the testimony of Moses, he would still find sheep, both among them and, because they are not willing, among others who are not called God’s people nor know ought of Moses, that is, the gentiles. As he had also announced before through the prophets (Hosea 2:23): “I will say to them that were not my people, Thou art my people.” And “I will move them to jealousy with those that are not a people.” Deuteronomy 32:21. These, says he, will I bring, not to hear Moses and you, but to hear my voice and so through my Word to become my sheep, even though they do not come hither nor receive circumcision and the government of Moses, nor even have me visibly and bodily present with them. In this way all shall be, in one word, faith and Spirit, one flock under Christ, the only shepherd, and shall be subject to nobody else. This work began at his ascension, and will be in course of fulfillment daily until the end of time.

Jubilate. The Third Sunday after Easter. How Christ Comforted His Disciples in View of His Departure.

Text: John 16:16-23.

16 A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.

17 Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father?

18 They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith.

19 Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me?

20 Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

21 A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

22 And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.

23 And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. John 16:16-23

[1] Here in this Gospel we see how the Lord comforts and imparts courage to his children whom he is about to leave behind him, when they would come in fear and distress on account of his death or of their backsliding. We also notice what induced the evangelist John to use so many words that he indeed repeats one expression four times, which according to our thinking he might have expressed in fewer words. There is first of all presented to us here the nature of the true Christian in the example of the dear apostles. In the second place, how the suffering and the resurrection of Christ are to become effective in us.

[2] We also see that Christ announces to his disciples, how sorrowful they should be because he would leave them, but they are still so simpleminded and ignorant, and also so sorrowful on account of his recent conversation at the Last Supper, that they did not understand at all what he said unto them; yea, the nature of that which Christ presents to them is too great and incomprehensible for them. And it was also necessary that they should first become sorrowful before they could rejoice, even as Christ himself was an example to us that without the cross we could not enter into glory. Hence he says in Luke 24:26 to the two, with whom he journeyed to Emmaus: “Behooved it not the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?” If therefore the dear disciples were to have joy, they must first of all pass through great sorrow. But this joy came to them through the Lord Jesus; for it is decreed in the Gospel, that without Christ there is no joy; and on the other hand, where Christ is, there is no sorrow, as is plainly stated in the text. Hence when Christ was taken from them, they were in great sorrow.

[3] And these words here in this Gospel Christ the Lord spoke unto his disciples after the Last Supper, before he was apprehended. Let us look at them: “A little while and ye behold me no more, and again a little while and ye shall see me, for I go to the Father.”

II. The Sermon of Comfort Itself.

[4] “A little while,” he says, “and ye behold me no more,” for I shall be taken prisoner and they shall deliver me to death. But it will not last long, and during this short time ye shall be sorrowful, but only remain steadfast in me and follow me. It will soon have an end. Three days I will be in the

grave; then the world will rejoice as though it had gained a victory, but ye shall be sorrowful and shall weep and lament. “And again a little while, and ye shall see me; and, Because I go to the Father.” That is, on the third day I will rise again; then ye shall rejoice and your joy no man shall take from you, and this will not be a joy of only three days, like the joy of the world, but an eternal joy. Thus the Evangelist John most beautifully expresses the death and resurrection of Christ in these words, when Christ says, “A little while, and ye behold me not; and again a little while, and ye shall see me; and, Because I go to the Father.”

[5] An example is here given us, which we should diligently lay hold of and take to heart; if it went with us as it did in the time of the apostles, that we should be in suffering, anxiety and distress, we should also remember to be strong and to rejoice because Christ will arise again. We know that this has come to pass; but the disciples did not know how he should be raised, or what he meant by the resurrection, hence they were so sorrowful and so sad. They heard indeed that they should see him, but they did not understand what it was or how it should come to pass. Therefore they said among themselves, “What is this that he saith to us, A little while? We know not what he saith.” To such an extent had sadness and sorrow overcome them, that they quite despaired, and knew not what these words meant and how they would see him again.

[6] Therefore we must also feel within us this “a little while” as the dear disciples felt it, for this is written for our example and instruction, so that we may thereby be comforted and be made better. And we should use this as a familiar adage among ourselves; yea, we should feel and experience it, so that we might at all times say, God is at times near and at times he has vanished out of sight. At times I remember how the Word seems neither to move me nor to apply to me. It passes by; I give no heed to it. But to this “a little while” we must give heed and pay attention, so that we may remain strong and steadfast. We will experience the same as the disciples. We cannot do otherwise than is written here; even as the disciples were not able to do otherwise.

[7] The first “a little while” in that he says, “A little while, and ye shall behold me no more,” they could soon afterwards understand, when they saw that he was taken prisoner and put to death, but the second “a little while” in that he says: “And again a little while, and ye shall see me,” that

they could not understand, and we also cannot understand it. Yea and when he says: "Because I go to the Father," that they understand still less. Thus it also goes with us: although we know and hear that trials, misfortune and sorrow endure but a little while, yet we see that it constantly appears different than we believe. Then we despair and waver, and cannot be reconciled to it. We hear and we know very well that it shall not last very long, but how that result shall be accomplished we can never understand, as the disciples here cannot understand it.

[8] But since they are unable to understand it why does Christ relate it to them or why is it written? In order that we should not despair but hold fast to the Word, assured that it is indeed thus and not otherwise, even though it seems to be different. And although we do at times depart from the Word, we should not therefore remain altogether away from it, but return again, for he makes good his Word. Even though man cannot believe it, God will nevertheless help him to believe it, and this he does without man's reason or free will and without man adding anything thereto. Yea, the Evangelist tells us that the disciples could not understand the words the Lord spoke to them; how much less could they understand his works which followed afterwards. So very little does the free will and understanding of man know of the things pertaining to the salvation of the soul. These temporal things the free will can perceive and know, such as the cock crowing, which he can hear and his reason can also understand it; but when it is a question of understanding the work and Word of God, then human reason must give it up; it cannot make head or tail of it, although it pretends to understand a great deal about it. The glory thereof is too bright, the longer he beholds it the blinder he becomes.

[9] This is presented very plainly to our minds in the disciples who, though they had been so long with the Lord, yet they did not understand what he said to them. Well, neither will we be able to learn nor to understand this until we experience it; as when we say, Such and such a thing happened to me; this I felt and thus it went with me, then I was in anxiety; but it did not last long. Then I was encompassed by this temptation and by that adversity, but God delivered me soon out of them etc.

[10] We should take to heart and firmly hold fast to these words and keep them in mind when in sorrow and distress, that it will not last long, then we would also have more constant joy, for as Christ and his elect had

their “a little while,” so you and I and everyone will have his “a little while.” Pilate and Herod will not crucify you, but in the same manner as the devil used them, so he will also use your persecutors. Therefore when your trials come, you must not immediately think how you are to be delivered out of them. God will help you in due time. Only wait. It is only for a little while, he will not delay long.

[11] But you must not lay the cross and sorrow upon yourself as some have indeed done, who chose for themselves death and imprisonment, and said, Christ willingly entered into death; he willingly permitted himself to be apprehended and delivered. I will also do the same. No, you dare not do this. Your cross and suffering will not long delay coming. These good people did not understand it. The dear disciples also said in Matthew 26:35 that they would remain with Christ and die with him. Peter said in John 13:37 he would not deny Christ, or would give his life for him; but how was it in the end? Christ went into the garden, trembled and quaked, was apprehended, put to death; Peter however forsook him. Where was now this great confidence, this boldness and courage of Peter? He thought Christ would die with joyful courage, and he would also follow him, but alas he was badly mistaken.

[12] Here you easily see that the sorrow and sufferings, in which we expected to remain permanently, were of our own choosing, but when the hour finally comes, of which you never thought before, you will hardly be able to stand, unless you become a new man. The old Adam despairs, he does not abide, he cannot abide, for it goes against his nature, against his purpose and against his designs. Hence you must have your own time, then you must suffer a little. For Christ withdraws himself from you and permits you to remain in the power of sin, of death and of hell. There the heart cannot accomplish very much to calm the conscience, do whatever it will, for Christ departs and dies. Then you will have the refrain, “A little while, and ye shall not behold me.” Where will you go? There is no comfort. There is no help. You are in the midst of sin; in the midst of death; in the midst of hell. If Christ would not come now independent of any merit of your own, then you would be compelled to remain in this tribulation and terror eternally, for thus it would have happened also to the disciples, if Christ had not risen from the dead and become alive. Therefore it was necessary for him again to arise from the dead.

[13] Now this everyone must experience and suffer, either now or upon his deathbed when he dies, but how much better it is to experience it now, for when at some future time we shall be cast into the fire for the sake of the Gospel and be counted as heretics, then we shall see of what profit this is; for if the heart is not strong at such a time, what shall become of us, for there our eyes shall see the torture and the terror of death. Whither shall we go? Therefore if Christ is not present, and if he should then withdraw his hand we are already lost; but if he is with us to help, the flesh may indeed die, but all is well with the soul, for Christ has taken it to himself. There it is safe, no one shall pluck it out of his hand. John 10:28.

[14] But this we cannot accomplish with words, an experience is here needed for that. Well it is for him who experience this now, then surely it will not be hard for him to die. It is very perilous indeed if we must learn this upon our deathbed, namely, how to wrestle with and conquer death. Therefore it was indeed a great favor and mercy of God, which he showed to the holy martyrs and apostles in whom he had first conquered death, then afterwards they were prepared without fear to suffer everything that could be laid upon them. B. This Sermon of Comfort Explained.

[15] All this is presented to us in our Gospel, but since the disciples could not understand what he meant in that he said "A little while" and he noticed that they were desirous to ask him, he continues and explains it to them in these simple words and says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy."

[16] This is spoken to all Christians, for every Christian must have temptations, trials, anxieties, adversities, sorrows, come what may. Therefore he mentions here no sorrow nor trial, he simply says they shall weep, lament, and be sorrowful, for the Christian has many persecutions. Some are suffering loss of goods; others there are whose character is suffering ignominy and scorn; some are drowned, others are burned; some are beheaded; one perishes in this manner, and another in that; it is therefore the lot of the Christian constantly to suffer misfortune, persecution, trials, and adversity. This is the rod or fox tail with which they are punished. They dare not look for anything better as long as they are here. This is the court color by which the Christian is recognized, and if anyone wants to be a Christian, he dare not be ashamed of his court color or livery.

[17] Why does God do this and permit his own to be persecuted and hounded? In order to suppress and subdue the free will, so that it may not seek an expedient in their works; but rather become a fool in God's works and learn thereby to trust and depend upon God alone.

[18] Therefore when this now comes to pass, we shall not be able to accommodate ourselves to it, and shall not understand it, unless Christ himself awakens us and makes us cheerful, so that his resurrection becomes effective in us, and all our works fall to pieces and be as nothing. Therefore the text here concludes powerfully, that man is absolutely nothing in his own strength. Here everything is condemned and thrust down that has been and may still be preached about good works; for this is the conclusion; where Christ is not, there is nothing. Ask St. Peter how he was disposed when Christ was not with him. What good works did he do? He denied Christ. He renounced him with an oath. Like good works we do, when we have not Christ with us.

[19] Thus all serves to the end that we should accustom ourselves to build alone upon Christ, and to depend upon no other work, upon no other creature, whether in heaven or upon earth. In this name alone are we preserved and blessed, and in none other. Acts 4:12 and Acts 10:43. But on this account we must suffer much. The worst of all is, that we must not only suffer shame, persecution and death; but that the world rejoices because of our great loss and misfortunes. This is indeed very hard and bitter. Surely it shall thus come to pass, for the world will rejoice when it goes ill with us; but this comfort we have that their joy shall not last long, and our sorrow shall be turned into eternal joy. Of this the Lord gives us a beautiful parable of the woman in travail, when he says: "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come, but when she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish for joy that a man is born into the world." C. This Sermon of Comfort Is Illustrated by a Parable.

[20] With this parable he also shows that our own works are nothing, for here we see that if all women came to the help of this woman in travail, they would accomplish nothing. Here free will is at its end and is unable to accomplish anything, or to give any advice. It is not in the power of the woman to be delivered of the child, but she feels that it is wholly in the hand and power of God. When he helps and works, then something is accomplished, but where he does not help, all is lost, even if the whole

world were present. In this God shows to the woman her power, her ability and her strength. Before this, she could dance and leap; she rejoiced and was happy, but now she sees how God must do all. Hereby we perceive that God is our Father, who also must deliver us from the womb and bring us forth to life.

[21] Christ says here to his disciples, So it will also go with you. The woman is here in such a state of mind that she is fearful of great danger, and yet she knows that the whole work lies in the hands of God; in him she trusts; upon him it is she depends; he also helps her and accomplishes the work, which the whole world could not do, and she thinks of nothing but the time that shall follow, when she shall again rejoice; and her heart feels and says, A dangerous hour is at hand, but afterwards it will be well. Courage and' the heart press through all obstacles. Thus it will also be with you, when you are in sorrow and adversity, and when you become new creatures. Only quietly wait and permit God to work. He will accomplish everything without your assistance.

[22] This parable of the woman is a strong and stubborn argument against free will, that it is entirely powerless and without strength in the things pertaining to the salvation of our souls. The Gospel shows very plainly that divine strength and grace are needed. Man's free will is entirely too weak and insignificant to accomplish anything here. But we have established our own orders and regulations instead of the Gospel and through these we want to free ourselves from sin, from death, from hell, and from all misfortune and finally be saved thereby. A great mistake.

[23] Here you see in this example, that if a man is to be born the mother must become first as though she were dead; that is, she must be in a condition as though she were already dead, she thinks it is now all over with her. Thus it shall be also with us. If we want to become godly, we must be as dead, and despair of all our works, yea, never think that we shall be able to accomplish anything. Here no monastic life, no priestcraft and no works will be able to help; but wait thou patiently and permit God to do with you according to his will. He shall accomplish it; permit him to work. We shall accomplish nothing ourselves, but at times we shall feel death and hell. This the ungodly shall also feel, but they do not believe that God is present in it and wants to help them. Just as the woman here accomplishes nothing, she

only feels pain, distress and misery; but she cannot help herself out of this state.

[24] But when delivered of the child she remembers no more her sorrow and pain, but is as though she had become alive again. She could not before even think that her sorrow and pain should have an end so soon. Thus it is also with us in the trials of sin, of death, and of hell; then we are as though we were dead; yea, we are in the midst of death, and Christ has forsaken us. He has gone a little while from us. Then we are in great pain and cannot help ourselves; but when Christ returns, and makes himself known to us, our hearts are full of joy, even though the whole world be to the contrary.

[25] This no one can realize unless he has once been encompassed by death. He who has once been delivered from death must then rejoice; not that such a person cannot again fall and be sorrowful at times, but since this joy is at hand he worries about nothing. He also fears nothing, no matter by what dangers he may be surrounded. This joy can indeed be interrupted, for when I fall again into sin, then I fear even a driven leaf. Leviticus 26:36. Why? Because Christ has departed a little while from me and has forsaken me; but I will not despair, for this joy will return again. I must not then continue and cling to the pope, nor endeavor to help myself by works; but I must quietly wait until Christ comes again, he remains but a little while without. When he then looks again upon the heart and appears and shines into it, the joy returns. Then shall I be able to meet every misfortune and terror.

[26] All this is said and written that we may be conscious of our weakness and inability, and that as far as our works are concerned all is nothing, all is utterly lost. But this joy is almighty and eternal when we are dead; but now in this life it is mixed. Now I fall and then I rise again, and it cannot be eternal, because flesh and blood are still with me. Therefore Christ says to his disciples: "And ye now have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

[27] All this David has described in a psalm in a most masterly and beautiful manner, when he says in Psalm 30:1-8: "I will extol thee, O Jehovah, for thou hast raised me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me. O Jehovah, my God: I cried unto thee and thou hast healed me. O Jehovah, thou hast brought up my soul from Sheol, thou hast kept me alive,

that I should not go down to the pit. Sing praise unto Jehovah, O ye saints of his, and give thanks to his holy memorial name for his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime; weeping may tarry for the night, but joy cometh in the morning. As for me, I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved. Thou, Jehovah, of thy favor hadst made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face; I was troubled. I cried to Thee, O Jehovah; and unto Jehovah I made supplication.” Where is now the man who just said: “I shall never be moved?” Well, he replies, when thou, Jehovah, of thy favor didst make my mountains to stand strong, then I spoke thus. “But when thou didst hide thy face, I was troubled,” I fell. If Christ were continually with us, I really believe we would never be afraid; but since he occasionally departs from us we must therefore at times be afraid.

[28] In this Psalm is beautifully portrayed to us how to recognize and experience a good conscience, for here David considers the whole world as a drop, and is not the least afraid of it, even though it should storm and rage against him, for he has the Lord with him. He has made his mountain to stand strong, but when he fell and the Lord hid his face from him, then he was afraid. Then were heart, courage, and mountain gone. Then was he afraid of a driven leaf, who before was not afraid of the whole world, as he also says in another psalm unto the Lord: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” Psalm 23:4. Likewise in Psalm 3:6 he says: “I will not be afraid of ten thousands of the people that have set themselves against me round about.” Passages like these can be multiplied in the Psalms, all of which show how an upright good conscience stands, namely; when God is with it, it is courageous and brave, but when God has departed, it is fearful and terrified.

[29] Here we rightly understand now what the words of Christ signify, “I go to the Father.” Before this no one understood them, not even the disciples. But this is the road: I must die, he saith, and ye must also die. Peter vowed boastfully; for according to the old Adam he wanted to die with the Lord, and we all think we want to die with Christ, as all the other disciples said that they would enter into death with Christ. Matthew 26:35. But all this must perish in us. You must come to the moment of trial, when Christ does not stand by you and does not die with you, when you cannot help yourself, just like the woman in travail. When this takes place, then

you come to the Father. That is, you are filled with his power, and he makes a new man of you, who thereafter is not afraid, whose character is already here a heavenly character, as St. Paul calls it in Philippians 3:20; and this has its beginning here, by faith. Then you become courageous and brave, and can say as the prophet in the Psalm, “I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people,” and “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil.” Why all this? Because you have come to the Father. Who can now overthrow God’s omnipotence? No one. Aye, then no one can do anything to you or cause you any harm.

[30] This no one will understand until it has come to pass. Have you been encompassed by death and been delivered from it, then you will say, I was in death, and if the Lord had not delivered me, I would have remained in death’s grasp forever. The entire thirtieth Psalm refers to this, which you will do well to examine thoroughly and consider faithfully.

[31] Here you have now the fruit and the example of the death and the resurrection of Christ, and how free will is nothing, and everything reason concludes regarding these things, which pertain to our salvation. May God give grace that we may lay hold of it and regulate our lives accordingly, Amen.

Appendix to the Foregoing Sermon. Christ.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice” etc. John 16:20.

[1] No one should lay his cross upon himself, as some foolish persons have done and are still doing. They even court the prison and death, and say: Since Christ of his own free will entered death, I will follow him in his example as he commanded us to do. There is no need whatever to do this, for your martyrdom and cross will not be wanting. Such people, however, do not understand divine things, they think they will suddenly enter death with Christ, whom they have never learned to know except in words. Thus was Peter also disposed, but he stood before Christ like a rabbit before one beating a drum. Notice, how the old Adam lacks courage when under the cross! The new man, however, can indeed persevere through grace. In sufferpious persons have no aim of their own, but if it be God’s will they

bear good fruit like the tree planted by the streams of water; and that is pleasing to God, and besides all presumption is condemned, all show and every excuse however good they may be. But he who battles heroically will receive for his suffering here joy, the eternal in place of the temporal. Of this Christ says: "Your joy shall be turned into sorrow."

[2] This saying of Christ is addressed to all Christians in general. For things may go well or ill, still a Christian must contend with persecution, need, distress and opposition. Moreover Christ does not specify here any special punishment, cross or martyrdom; hence he says simply: You will weep, lament and be sorrowful; for Christians suffer many kinds of persecutions. Some have their property damaged, others have their name dishonored, some are drowned, others burned or beheaded. Thus Christians die, being put to death by many different hands, each with greater contempt than the other, so that misfortune, persecution and adversity are constantly weighing upon the neck of Christians, by which they are stricken, and there is nothing more certain for them to hope for as long as they crawl here upon the earth. And this is the court dress by which Christians are identified. Now, whoever wishes to be a Christian dare not be ashamed of his colors.

[3] But why has God appointed his own children to be driven here and there by persecution? On account of free will, that it may be humbled to the ground and become a perfect fool in the works of God, and learn to trust in God alone; as a result give to God good works, things, and at last give ourselves and thus rightly trust in God and cling to Christ. It may, however, well grieve one that the world rejoices over our misfortunes. It is a common thing, the jaybird can never stop jumping. But the comfort of the Christian is, that the world's joy will not last long. and that his own distress shall be changed into joy eternal. Amen.

Jubilate, the Third Sunday after Easter. Second Sermon. Christ's Death and Resurrection. Christ Comforts His Disciples, and the Joy of the World.

Text: John 16:16-23.

16 A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.

17 Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father?

18 They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith.

19 Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me?

20 Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

21 A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

22 And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.

23 And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. John 16:16-23

[1] First, we will consider this narrative in the simplest manner, as it occurred after the Last Supper, while the Lord was in the garden on the way with his disciples to his last sufferings and death. In this historical narrative of today's Gospel the Lord preaches his death and resurrection to his disciples, the words of which narrative the disciples at the time failed to understand, these words being to them dark sayings and totally hidden from them — an experience that may easily be ours, those of us who are not yet firmly established in the faith. What, however, hindered the beloved disciples from understanding the narrative? This, namely, that they thought Christ was about to establish a temporal kingdom which would make an impression upon the world, and move along in pure, perpetual life, not in death, of which he here speaks when he says: "A little while, and ye behold me no more." As if he wished to say: I will be with you yet a little while longer, perhaps to midnight; after that I will die and be buried, and be taken out of your sight, so that you will see me no more. But again a little while and ye shall see me; that is, on the third day I will arise again and see you again, and ye shall see me again.

[2] This is the sense according to the history, and they are very cold words if not understood in a spiritual way. Yet the Lord also comforts his disciples and says that they will be sorrowful because of his departure, but their sorrow will soon have an end. It will be with them as with a woman who lies in the pangs of childbirth; as soon as she is delivered of the child, she forgets her pain. And although this is plain and easy to understand, yet the disciples did not understand how they should fare, what the Lord meant to teach them by these words and by this parable; for such words they had never before heard. But these sayings seem simple to us now, since we often preach and apply them. Were not this the case they would be as dark to us as they were to the beloved disciples. Therefore, let us carefully examine these words and first consider what it means to go to the Father

[3] To go to the Father means nothing but to enter upon a new life. As if Christ were to say: I will leave this life of time, of the senses, of nature and of death, and will enter upon the immortal life, where the Father will make all things subject to me, where there is no sleep, no eating, no drinking, as while I lived in the body, and yet the flesh and blood, which I took from the virgin Mary, will continue. That is, I will take to myself a spiritual

government to rule the hearts of believers in spirit and faith, and not found, as you imagine, a temporal kingdom. To this spiritual rulership I cannot come except by the way of death. But, as I said, the disciples did not understand it; they thought they would lose the Lord entirely when he died. Hence they fell into grief and sorrow.

[4] Now, here we must take heed, and also learn something from this, lest we read this narrative in vain. To the beloved disciples the greatest pain and sorrow were not that they should never again see the Lord in the body, but the fact that their hearts had lost the Lord was a greater distress and calamity. They were happy to behold the Lord in the body, but they clung much more to him with their hearts. Hence they also thought: If he disappears from our eyes, he will also disappear from our hearts. Just so was it with their joy. To see him again in the body was not the true joy; that they could hardly expect. But that they received him again spiritually and by faith into their hearts, as Savior and Comforter, was their true comfort and joy. For when he is believed in as the Savior, the heart rejoices, and aside from this belief there is no help, no counsel, nor any comfort at hand.

[5] This we see in the case of the beloved disciples when they fled and forsook and denied the Lord, and shockingly fell into the sin of unbelief. Then there was no longer a Savior before their eyes. Comfort had departed, Christ had fallen out of their sight, counsel and help were no longer present, and they would have had to remain in this grief and doubt forever had Christ not again caused them to rejoice; for besides this Savior there is none other. Hence, when he is removed there is no other comfort to be had, and nothing but anxiety, need, despair and hell itself must be there. This was the real anxiety, grief and sorrow of the disciples.

[6] What agony and grief, think you, they must have had when they recalled the kindness and friendship of the Lord, and the good deeds he did them, and that they were all so unfaithful to him! Then their hearts confessed: Aye, how friendly and lovingly he associated with us and showed us all exceptional love and friendship! And we have acted thus toward him, have forsaken him and are forsaken by him. Like unfaithful villains, we have denied him, have misused his teachings and grace. What will become of us? We dare not appear before God, neither can we stand before man, much less before Satan. There is now no consolation. The Savior has departed. We are in a hopeless, condemned and lost state.

Observe, the beloved disciples stood in such anxiety, need and grief that no fasting, no praying, no chastisement, could have helped them. All was lost.

[7] In like manner God deals with his children today. Whenever he wants to comfort them, he first plunges them into similar anxiety and temptation. It is agony unbearable when the conscience passes sentence against one. The heart and every refuge fail and anxiety penetrates every nook of the conscience. Anguish and fear consume the marrow and bone, flesh and blood, as the prophet David often laments in his Psalms.

[8] But Christ does not let his disciples be long in such anguish and need. He had said, "And again a little while, and ye shall see me." This happened on Easter, when he appeared to them and offered them his peace, by which he comforted them and they forgot all the distress, fear and need which they had endured for the little while, until the third day. Narratives like this we should remember when we are in anguish and need, and have lost all hope of comfort. When man is troubled by an evil conscience because of his sins, the heart thinks it is eternal pain; and so it is, also, as man calculates, for he sees no end of it. He thinks God is against him and will not help him, and he himself will not allow God to help him. He looks about and finds no succor from any creature. Yea, he thinks all creatures are his enemies. Therefore, the heart soon concludes and says: Here is eternal anguish, here there will be no change, here there is no help, no comfort. God and everything are against me. In truth it is not so, but it is only a transition. It will not last long. If we can only keep quiet for a little time, he will surely not remain away long with his comfort. This is the Lord's meaning when he here says to the disciples: "A little while and ye behold me no more," namely, when ye are steeped in anguish and trouble. "And again a little while, and ye shall see me," namely, when I shall visit you with my consolation and cause you to rejoice."

[9] Since the holy disciples experienced what it was to be overwhelmed by anguish and want, we must not think that it will be better with us. God will not make an exception in our case. But let us remember that Christ foretells to his disciples their fall, fear and sorrow, and also comforts them in order that they may not despair. Thus we should likewise comfort ourselves and allow the same to be spoken to us, so that when we are taken captive by sin and feel our consciences troubled and burdened, we do not despair; but rather remember it will not continue long. Therefore this is a

very comforting Gospel to all troubled and terrified consciences. First, because Christ promises here he will not let them be captives to their misery very long; then, because he shows such kindly friendship to them — casts them not quickly from his presence, although they do not at once learn and understand his discourse; but bears with them, instructs them and deals with them most tenderly.

[10] Therefore, should a person come into like fear and misery of conscience, he ought to call to mind these words, and say: Well, a change is taking place. Christ says, A little while and ye shall see me again. It will not last long. Keep calm. It is a matter of only a short time and then Christ will permit us to see him again. But where the conscience is so terrified, one cannot grasp nor understand these words of comfort, even if he hears them. Such was the case with the disciples here. While they were in trouble they could not understand these words. It requires an effort if one is to comfort such terrified and troubled consciences. Hence the Lord uses a parable to explain his former words, in order to establish the disciples firmly in them. He takes an example of a woman in the labor of childbirth, and in such labor that she does not die from it, but brings a happy sight to the world. This is also very comforting and is spoken in order that the disciples may not despair when overtaken by temptation or fear, but may remember that, like a woman lying in travail, it will soon have an end; it is pain for only an hour or so. Christ thus, by means of this parable, makes their sorrow and trouble sweet and beautiful to his disciples.

[11] Now we must carefully consider this example. As it is here, so is it in temptation, and especially in the perils of death. Notice how God deals with a woman suffering in childbirth. There she is left alone in her pain by everybody, and no one can help her. Yea, nothing whatever is able to rescue her from her agony; that rests in the power of God alone. The midwife and others around her may indeed comfort her, but they cannot avoid the agony. She must go through it, and venture and freely hazard her life in it, not knowing whether she shall die or recover, because of the child. There she is truly in the perils of death and completely encompassed by death. This parable St. Paul also uses in 1 Thessalonians 5:3, when he tells the Thessalonians how the day of judgment will suddenly fall upon them, just like the pangs of a woman in travail, and they will not be able to escape.

[12] Just so it is also when the conscience is in agony or when one lies in the perils of death. Then neither reason nor anything else can help. No work, whether this or that. There is no comfort. You think you are forsaken by God and everybody; yea, you imagine how God and everything are against you. Then you must restrain yourself to quiet and cling only to God, who must deliver you. Besides him nothing else, neither in heaven nor upon the earth, can deliver. The same God gives his help when he thinks it is time, as he does to the woman in travail. He gives her cheer when she no longer thinks of her pain; then joy and life are where death and all distress reigned before. In like manner God makes us happy, and gives us peace and joy where before there were misery and all kinds of sorrow. Therefore, Christ here presents to us all this example, and comforts us with it, in order that we may not despair in the time of death and temptation. It is as if he wanted to say to us: Dear man, when fear, sorrow, temptation and tribulation come, doubt not, despair not. It is only for a little time. When these are over, then follow their fruits, peace and joy.

[13] In such sorrow and distress the beloved disciples were when the Lord departed from them. They were forsaken by everybody. They had no place of refuge. They stood in the gate of hell, expecting every hour to meet death; and they heard the judgment of God, thinking they had sinned and must now be given over to Satan. But immediately after his resurrection Christ comes and causes them to forget all their affliction and heart-sorrow. Then they become happy and go and bring forth fruit, and bestir themselves to help all mankind to the same joy. It is a beautiful example and a comforting passage of Scripture for all who experience temptation and trouble. Such should remember that Christ says: "A little while and ye behold me no more and again a little while, and ye shall see me," and never forget the Gospel of the woman in travail, who gladly goes through all and soon reaches the goal.

[14] This Gospel thus arms us for temptation and tribulation, and the sum of it is, that Christ the Lord reveals himself to his own as pure love and friendship, so that they are comforted. This may ever be the case with us, since we know, and from this Gospel learn, that Christ will not forsake those overwhelmed by the perils of death and the temptations of conscience, but will come and comfort them just as he does here his disciples, not leaving them long in their distress. There is truly still hope for

one who is terrified in conscience and is troubled because of his sins. But when one doubts and falls into such presumption that he feels in his heart: “There is no hope for me. It cannot be otherwise. I must be condemned. There is no help nor comfort left, do as I will” — when man is brought to this and hazards everything, it is a terrible fall. May almighty God ever protect us against such a fall! Though the sin be ever so great, if only one does not doubt he will be in no trouble. God will surely rescue him in his own good time.

[15] Thus, you have heard here of two kinds of sorrow: The first, that of the disciple when deprived of the bodily presence of Christ; the other, our own, when his spiritual presence departs from our hearts. The first sorrow Christ removed by his resurrection; the other he removes when he causes the conscience again to rejoice. Of this he here speaks further, and says: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: ye shall be sorrowful but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.” And immediately following the parable he adds: “And ye therefore now have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one taketh away from you.”

[16] Here the Lord means the joy with which the conscience is again comforted and made to rejoice when Christ becomes known as a Savior. For then sorrow, sin, death, hell and all misfortune vanish. And this is not a worldly joy, as the world rejoices, sings and dances over success, but it is a heavenly and eternal true joy before God, and truly well pleasing to God. Of this joy the prophet says in Psalm 68:3: “But let the righteous be glad; yea, let them rejoice with gladness.” And Christ says here to his disciples: “And your joy no one taketh away from you.” How does this come about? Thus: When Christ stands again before your eyes, and the conscience finds that it possesses the Lord, from whom it expects everything good, then nothing more can be done for him; for who will harm the heart that is thus established upon Christ? Of what should one be afraid as long as he can say: My Lord Jesus Christ is Lord over all things; over death, hell, Satan, and over everything in heaven and upon earth? As St. Paul also defiantly boasts in Romans 8:31-39. “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that

justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. (Psalm 44:23). Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

[17] These were the words of St. Paul. In the same spirit David also speaks in Psalm 27:1-3, and says: “Jehovah is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? Jehovah is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers came upon me to eat up my flesh, even mine adversaries and my foes, they stumbled and fell. Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, even then will I be confident.” And in Psalm 23:1-4 he says: “Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside still waters, he restoreth my soul: he guideth me into the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though! walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”

[18] Behold, how courageous and defiant is this man! Who gave him such a valiant and defiant courage? or whence did it come to him? From the Savior alone. And the more we are driven from him, the more we cling to him. The more injury, misfortune and sorrow people cause us, the more we rejoice, for this joy is eternal; and the more they tear us from it, the greater it becomes.

[19] Now the question may be asked, can one fall from this joy? Yes. And as soon as we fall, eternal pain is at hand, out of which, although it is in its nature eternal, yet God rescues his own. Thus the joy continues forever, but as long as the person is upon the earth he may fall from it. You should understand it thus: Christ is my Savior, if so, believe and confess. This joy is to me an eternal joy so far as I remain in it. But when Christ departs out of the heart, then the joy also departs. The grace continues, but

the conscience can easily fall. I tell you this to the end that you may not be offended in the future, when many of you shall fall from the Gospel and deny Christ. For wherever Christ shall be with his joy and comfort, there the cross and persecution are also soon at hand. But I fear we have neither the joy nor the persecution, since we so little appropriate the Gospel. We continue ever in our old nature and despise the dear and precious treasure of the Gospel; therefore God will visit us with greater punishment than he did the Jews, namely, with blindness and error. As Paul says to the Thessalonians: “And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. For God cannot allow his Gospel to be disgraced. That one should stumble he will indeed allow, but for one thus to despise his mercy he will not permit, and it is not right that he should. Therefore, it is to be feared that heresy and working of error will come, so that no one will know what is the trouble, as is already evident and will become still more so. May God restrain Satan and save us from such a visitation! Amen.

Jubilate. The Third Sunday after Easter. Third Sermon. Christ’s Death and Resurrection. The Comfort Christ Ministers to His Disciples, and the World’s Joy.

Text: John 16:16-23.

16 A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.

17 Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he

saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father?

18 They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith.

19 Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me?

20 Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

21 A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

22 And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.

23 And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. John 16:16-23

[1] This Gospel contains, and likewise pictures before us, the high and excellent work God accomplished when Christ, his only Son, died and rose again from the dead for us. Much has been said on this theme and there is much more to say. As for myself, I find that the more I study it, the less I master it. But since it is God's will that we think of him, praise his work and grace, and thank him for the same, it is proper that we speak and hear all we can about them.

[2] The Lord addresses his disciples here in dark and veiled words, which they do not understand; chiefly, no doubt, because he wishes thus to admonish them and thoroughly impress these words, so seldom heard, upon them, that they may not forget. A deeper impression is made upon one by words that are seldom used than by the forms of speech in general use.

[3] The result was that the disciples even repeated the words twice and asked one another what they must mean. Christ likewise repeated them, and no less than four times. Still they remained dark and unintelligible words to them until later he revealed their meaning, when he rose from the dead and

bestowed upon the disciples the Holy Spirit. Then they clearly understood his words. So we now understand them, to the extent that we hear and read them; but that they should be understood to their depth, that will not be in this life. But as I said, the longer and the more one learns from them, the less one can, and the more one must, learn.

[4] For the Word of God is a different government, and the Holy Scriptures a different book, from the discourses and writings of man. St. Gregory spoke truly when he uttered the fine proverb: The Scriptures are a river in which a large elephant must swim and across which a little lamb can wade on foot. For the Scriptures speak clearly and plainly enough to the common people, but to the wise and very learned they are unattainable. As St. Paul confesses concerning himself in Philippians 3:15.

[5] And St. Peter says in 1 Peter 1:12 that such things were announced and written in the Scriptures that even the angels have their satisfaction and enough to occupy them, in the great work that Christ, God's Son, became man, suffered death on the cross, but rose again and sits now at the right hand of the Father, Lord over all, even according to his human nature, and governs and preserves his church against Satan's wrath and all the power of the world. We have, it is true, the words treating of this, but the angels see and understand it and therein have their eternal joy. And as they in eternity cannot behold it enough, much less can we understand it, for it is a work that is eternal, inexpressible, unmeasurable and inexhaustible.

[6] This is said *de cognitione objectiva*; that is, as one sees it at a glance, as the angels view it, and as we will see it in the life beyond. But in this life we must have a different understanding of it, a practical knowledge (*cognitio practica*), that we may learn to confess what the power of this work is and what it can do. This is done by faith, which must cease in the next life, where we also shall know it by a full vision of it.

II. The Comfort Christ Ministers to His Disciples in their Sorrow, and the Joy to the World.

[7] We must learn here now what it is that the Lord says: "A little while, and ye behold me not; and again a little while and ye shall see me," etc. This passage is fraught with as much meaning as that other: "Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice," etc. "But your sorrow shall be

turned into joy.” A rare saying: A little while not see and be sorrowful, and yet a little while again see and be joyful.

[8] According to the letter and history, it is indeed easy to understand what these words mean, especially in our day. In the confession of our faith even the children say: “I believe in Jesus Christ,” etc; “was crucified, dead and buried; the third day he rose again from the dead.” These are the two “little whiles,” of which Christ here speaks. But since there is deception where we also seek, and taste it, and we should try to bring it into life or experience, the words have a wonderful depth of meaning — that we should lose Christ, whom we believe to be God’s Son, who died and rose for us, etc; that he should die in us, as the apostles experienced until the third day. A terrible crucifixion and death begin when Christ dies in us and we also in him. As he here says: Ye shall not see me, for I am to depart from you. That is, I die, hence ye also will die, in that ye will not see me; and thus I will be dead to you and you will be dead to me. This is a special, deep and severe sorrow.

[9] As there are many kinds of joy, so there are many kinds of sorrow. As, for example, when one is robbed of his money and property, or is reviled and disgraced when innocent, or loses father and mother, child and dear friends, etc; likewise, when Satan afflicts and martyrs one’s soul with sad thoughts, as Satan so easily can, though one knows not why or whence. But the really great sorrow above all sorrow is for the heart to lose Christ, so that he is no longer in view and there is no hope of further comfort from him. There are few who are so sorely tried. Surely not all eleven of his disciples experienced this. Perhaps not St. Thomas, St. Andrew, St. Bartholomew, and others, who were such good, common and plain people. But the other tender hearts, St. Peter, St. John, St. Philip and others, to whom these words applied, as they all had heard that they would lose Christ and never see him again.

[10] Christ here also addresses, more than others, persons who truly believe and experience that Christ died and afterwards rose again; and it is to them a little while, in a common, small and childish sense, and only a bodily sorrow. But the disciples had to keenly feel and experience what it is to lose Christ out of view, not only to have him taken away bodily, but also spiritually, leaving them in a twofold misery and sorrow. For they had had not only the joy of his bodily presence, in that he was so long with them,

cared for them, ate and drank with them, and passed through loving, sweet customs and fellowship, but he had associated so affectionately with them and had borne their weaknesses, yea, companioned with them more intimately and lovingly than a father does with his children. He often gave them remarkable liberties and even animated them by innocent trivialities. Therefore, they were pained to lose such a companionable Lord.

[11] But the chief cause of their sorrow lay in the fact that they had set their hearts on his becoming a mighty lord and king and founding a government by which he would make them, along with himself, lords. They thought he would never suffer them to die. Such was hitherto their hearts' joy and confidence in this Savior.

[12] Now, however, they lose both utterly and at one time, not only the friendly companionship of the Lord, but also this beautiful, glorious confidence, and they suddenly fall into the abyss of hell and eternal sorrow, Their Lord is most shamefully put to death, and they must now expect every moment, because of him, to be seized in like manner. They must now sing this song of mourning: Alas, how our confidence is now totally lost! We hoped to become great lords through this man and possess every joy we desired. Now he lies in the grave and we are fallen into the hands of Caiaphas and Judas, and there are no more miserable and unhappy people on the earth than we.

[13] Notice, this is the true sorrow and heart agony, of which Christ here is really speaking, into which God does not lead everyone, nor anyone so readily; for here he offers comfort against it, as he shows in this Gospel. Other bodily suffering and need may be considered sorrow, as, when one suffers persecution, imprisonment and misery for Christ's sake, and loses his property, honor and even his life. But the greatest of all sorrows is to lose Christ. Then all comfort is gone and all joy is at an end and neither heaven nor sun and moon, neither angel nor any other creature, can help you; nay not even God himself. For besides this Savior, Christ, there is none in heaven nor on earth. Now, when he has departed, all salvation and comfort are gone, and Satan has gained an opportunity to plague and terrify the troubled soul. This he desires to do in the name and person of God, as he can then play the part of a lord.

[14] On the other hand, the highest of all joy is that which the heart has in Christ, our Savior. That is, indeed, also called joy, when one rejoices over the possession of great fortune, money and property, power, honor, etc.; but all this is but the joy of a child or of a maniac. There is also the infamous joy of Satan which even rejoices over the injury and misfortune of others, of which Christ here also says: The world will rejoice, and laugh in its sleeve over your crying and weeping when they put me to death and cause you every misfortune. There are also many like these in worldly affairs, who can never be happy unless they have brought misfortune to their neighbor or have seen him meet it. They are like the poisonous reptile, the Salamander, which (as the fable runs) is so cold that it can live in fire or can exist out of fire. So these people live and grow fat on the misfortunes of other people. The nice, envious person who is sad when another prospers, and would gladly have one eye less if thereby his neighbor had none, is the product of Satan.

[15] But all this is still nothing compared with the joy the world, ruled by Satan, has in opposing Christ and his followers. It rejoices the most over the great misfortune of his followers in that Christ is crucified, all the apostles are banished, the church is completely destroyed, God's Word is silenced and his name totally blotted out. This is spiritual joy just as truly as the severe sorrow is spiritual. However, it is not from the Holy Spirit, but from those who belong, body and soul, to Satan, and still are called the wisest, the most learned and the holiest persons upon the earth. They are like the high priests, Pharisees and scribes, who have no peace and know no joy so long as they hear the name of Christ mentioned and know that his Word is preached, or see one of his disciples still alive. As they say, in the Wisdom of Solomon 2:15: "He is grievous unto us even to hear or to behold," and while Christ hangs on the cross, they blaspheme and revile in great joy thus: "If thou art the Son of God, and the King of Israel, come down from the cross; he trusteth on God, let him deliver him now," etc. Matthew 27:40-43. See how their hearts leap with joy, what a paradise and kingdom of heaven they have in seeing the dear Lord reviled on the cross and put to death; and that they themselves did it, is to them nothing but sugar and sweet grapes.

[16] Observe, Christ here gives such joy to the world, and on the other hand severe sorrow to his disciples in that they must see, hear and suffer

this. It must penetrate through their hearts, through their bodies and lives. And he truly pictures the world here to be as terrible and horrible as a child of Satan that has no greater joy than to see Christ defeated and his followers shamefully condemned and lost.

[17] We see almost this condition now in our clever noblemen, the pope, the bishops and their rabble; how they maliciously rejoice and shout when they discover it goes a little ill with us, and how anxious they are that it under no circumstances remains concealed. It must be trumpeted forth until it reaches the abyss of hell. Dear God, what have we done to them? They still have their property and money, power and luxury, while we have hardly our daily bread. It is not enough that they are superior to us in everything they crave, while we are in other ways harassed and afflicted, but they must besides be such bitter enemies to us that they do not wish us God's grace but would have us burned in the lowest fires of perdition!

[18] It is always a horrible sight, and the true fruit of the infernal spirit, that people cannot rejoice so highly over the good nor over worldly or human joy. Yea, no gold nor silver they love so intensely, no stringed instrument sounds so sweet to them, no drink tastes so good as to yield them the joy they feel when they see the fall and grief of pious Christians. They are so inflamed by hatred and a desire of revenge that they enjoy no really happy moment until they are able to sing: Praise be to God, the villains are at last out of the way! We have now rooted the Gospel out of the country. They have no rest and taste no joy before they have brought this about. Heretofore they have sought and partly accomplished this by many prompt intrigues, tricks and ill offices, and God allowed some to have for a short time a little joy, which individuals contrived and arranged. But they by no means cooled their anger in this way, as they had desired to do.

[19] Hence, Christ wishes to say here: You have now heard both what kind of joy the world will have, and what kind of sorrow will be yours. Therefore, learn it and cleave to it when you meet and experience it, so that you may have patience and lay hold of true comfort in the midst of such suffering. I must try you thus and let you taste what it means to lose me and for me to die in your hearts, in order that you may learn to understand this mystery and secret; for you will otherwise not study me. It will be too great for you to serve your time of apprenticeship in this exalted work, that God's Son returns to the Father, that is, that he dies and rises again for you, to

bring you to heaven. And if I do not allow you to be tried for a time, you will remain too imprudent and finally be incapable of doing right.

[20] Therefore, he says, you must adapt and resign yourself to this, so as to experience what this “little while” means, and yet not despair and be wrecked therein. And therefore I tell you before, that it must be so. You have to pass through such sorrow inwardly and outwardly, that is, both in body and soul; but when it takes place and the hour comes that you have nothing to comfort you, and you have lost both me and God, then hold fast still to my Word that I now speak to you. It is only a matter of a little while. Now, if you can learn this saying, and retain these small words, “a little while,” and “again a little while,” there will be no trouble.

[21] True, the first “little while” that you now see me and still have me with you, until I depart from you — that you can suffer and pass through. But the other “little while,” until you shall see me again — that will be an especially long and hard time for you. For it is the hour of true sorrow, when I will be to you dead, with all the joy, comfort and assurance you had from me, and you yourselves will be totally lost. However, my dear little children, only think of these words and forget not entirely what I now say to you. It shall not be so forever. A little while I shall be lost and not be seen. This you must now learn by experience. But only retain this much, that I called it “a little while,” and in my eyes it is only a little, short hour, although in your hearts and feelings it is not a little but a long while; yea, an eternally long while and a long eternal while. According to your feelings you will not be able to think differently, for when I am taken from you, you have lost all, since I am the eternal good and the eternal consolation. When that is gone, there is no longer a little while, nothing but the eternal; namely, eternal sorrow and death.

[22] Notice, Christ preaches here for the comfort of his disciples and of all Christians when tempted thus by God, whether it takes place inwardly or outwardly, bodily or spiritually, especially in the highest form, which is called losing Christ out of the heart; that they may learn this passage, and retain this drop of the lavender water, by which to refresh and strengthen their hearts. Christ, my Lord, has surely said it shall be only a little while. Although I now lose him and know of no joy whatever, but lie prostrate and languish in pure sorrow, yet I will use that drop and cling to the cordial that he shall not continue to be lost to me. He says that it shall be only a little,

short season, although it appears to me indeed to be great, long, and eternal. He will come again, as he here and in John 14:18 says: "I will not leave you orphans: I come unto you," etc. And thus we shall possess in him eternal comfort and joy instead of this little season of sorrow.

[23] On the other hand, Christ says further that you must endure it that the world rejoices over your suffering and sorrow, for which it has no reason except that of pure satanic jealousy, by which it is so completely blinded, embittered and exasperated that no joy relieves it until its jealousy sees you stumble and become ruined. This is its heart's delight and pleasure and it esteems it a heavenly, eternal joy. Then it says: Let us now see whether God will save him; is he the Son of God, then let him come down from the cross, etc. Mark 15:31-32. As if they should say: He is now out of the way, and we are done with him forever.

[24] But notice what further follows. Just as you, he says, shall not be robbed of a view of me forever, nor remain in your sorrow, so they shall not rejoice over your misfortune forever; but it shall be for them also only a short season, and be, as they say, a dance at high mass. For I will soon come to you again and make it worse and more bitter for them than it has ever been before. This was fulfilled in them after Christ's resurrection, so that the Jews have no severer suffering than that they must hear and see Christ, our Lord. Although it pleases them a little that they slander Christ and his mother Mary and us Christians in the most ignominious manner, yet true joy they can never possess as they desire. And they continually hope that their Messiah will come and uproot all Christians.

[25] Thus, also, our Caiaphas and Judas, the pope, with all his factions, who continually console themselves with the hope that we shall yet be uprooted, cannot be happy while we live and the Gospel spreads. Nothing that causes man to rejoice has any effect upon them. Some are so angry that they cannot cease their raging and roaring until we all are dead. When that takes place they will be once happy, but the joy for which they long shall never be theirs. For, although we are dead, the Gospel will still remain and others will take our places, and that will be to them a new heart agony.

[26] The Turk likewise imagines he will exterminate Christ and enthrone his Mohammed in all the world, and he rejoices whenever there is any hope of doing so; but this joy he craves he shall never experience. Our Lord,

whom the Turk himself highly exalts and must esteem as a great prophet, shall restrain him; yea, finally season his joy and make it bitter enough through the exalted work of his death and resurrection, by which he tramples under foot sin, death and Satan. The victory which God accomplished through Christ was long before announced in the Scriptures, whereupon the beloved prophets and fathers died in this joy, as Christ says of Abraham in John 8:56.

[27] Since Abraham received such joy before it had yet transpired, but was only in word and promise, how much more can and will he receive it in the future after it has transpired and is proclaimed in the earth and even in heaven by the angels! Neither pope nor Turk can smother and extinguish it. They may indeed try to smother it, and fancy they have a bite of sugar when they do Christendom a little harm; but they shall never obtain the joy they hope for and for which they thirst.

[28] They may rejoice for a season, Christ says, but not longer than while you are in sorrow. That joy is particularly short, as your sorrow is short and lasts only a little while, and shall soon be turned into joy that no one will take from you. Without doubt that joy will, on the other hand, be also turned into sorrow that will never end.

[29] Here upon the earth, however, you will not be able to have enough joy, nor will it be of the true, perfect quality that will quench your thirst. Only a foretaste, an appetizing morsel or a refreshing sip. It is too great ever to be exhausted as also the work that develops this joy is far too great to be fathomed by our learning. God mingles and tempers things thus upon the earth so that those who should by right rejoice must experience great suffering and sorrow; and, on the other hand, those who should be sorrowful here are happy and have a good time, but still in a way that this outward joy works their ruin. For they cannot acquire the true inner joy they long for, therefore their outer joy will also be their destruction. Their wealth, power, honor, pleasure and high living by no means make them happy, and they cannot lay their heads down to rest until they see that Christ is dead and his disciples are banished from the earth. These are always poor, miserable people whom one may truly pity. They fare the worst in that they cannot have their temporal joy pure, as they desire, because of their jealousy and hatred; and we even are altogether too ready to take vengeance by doing them harm. What more misfortune can they have and what greater

injury can they do themselves than that they themselves should spoil and annihilate their own joy?

[30] We also have true sorrow, both outwardly and inwardly, when Christ conceals himself from us; not like them, moved by jealousy and hatred, but because we do not possess Christ, the chief good. For this, however, there is already mingled with the sorrow the sugar that Christ speaks. Beloved, only persevere a little. It shall not be eternal, but short-lived sorrow, and soon it will be better. It is only a matter of a little while.

[31] These words I hear, but when sorrow comes, it is stamped so deeply in the heart that I do not feel this comfort, and I fancy that it is impossible for the sorrow to have an end. However, this comfort keeps me, so that I do not fall from Christ to the other party. Though I experience grief and need, still they keep me, so that the sorrow must not be thoroughly bitter. As in the case of the others, their joy is sweetened and sugared through and through, yet it is always spoiled by wormwood and gall, so in our case sorrow has within itself its sugar and honey.

[32] Therefore, let us continue to hear Christ and learn to understand his language, that we judge not according to our feelings, as if comfort were lost forever and sorrow had no end. That you feel and think thus, he says, I know very well; but still listen to what I say to you and learn only this word modicum, a little while. Sorrow must also be felt, but it shall not harm you, besides it shall not last long. Even by this the sorrow is already sugar coated and tempered. Later, when the “little while” has passed and triumphed, then one feels what Christ says: “Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.” Then the true joy of the heart commences and the soul sings an eternal Hallelujah, and Christ is Risen — a joy which will in the life beyond be perfect, without a defect and without an end.

[33] Notice that the articles of our faith, both on the death and the resurrection of Christ, are thus set before us in this Gospel, and how the same must be put to practice by us. learned, and exercised in our deeds and our experiences, and not only heard with the ears and spoken with the mouth. Also, that we thus feel it, and such power works in us that both body and soul thereby become changed; that is, Christ dies in us and we also die in him. That is a great change, from life to death. However, then I must cleave firmly by faith to the words Christ says, “A little while,” and not

only hear, but also take to heart the truth that trial will not last forever, but there will be a change from death to life when Christ again rises and lives in me and I become alive in him. Then the words shall come true, “I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one taketh away from you,” etc. For this meeting every Christian should be prepared whenever he is called for it; for he must experience something of it either in life or at the hour of death; so that he will then be reminded of this saying of Christ and let nothing tear this comfort out of his heart. Amen.

[34] Whatever is to be said further on this Gospel in a textual exposition of it you can read in the explanation of the three chapters of John, the discourses Christ spoke at the Last Supper to his disciples, where this and the Gospel for the following Sunday are treated at length.

Cantate – The Fourth Sunday after Easter. How the Holy Spirit Convicts the World of Sin, Righteousness, Judgment.

Text: John 16:5-15.

5 But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me,
Whither goest thou?

6 But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your
heart.

7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for
if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I
will send him unto you.

8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of
righteousness, and of judgment:

9 Of sin, because they believe not on me;

10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;

11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all
truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that
shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto
you.

15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall
take of mine, and shall shew it unto you. John 16:5-15

[1] The meaning of this Gospel lesson we have also often heard elsewhere; the only trouble is, the words have not generally been understood to have the meaning of things with which we are familiar. Therefore we will explain it a little, in order that one may see that the same teaching is contained in these words, that is found in all the other Gospel lessons. It is a fine Gospel, but it also requires fine students. We will omit the first part and consider what the Lord says, that the Holy Spirit is to convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment, and will see what the meaning of all this is.

[2] In the first place, we see here that the world is accused of blindness and ignorance. All those who are without the Holy Spirit, however wise they may be in matters pertaining to the things of this world, are, before God, fools and blind. They do not like to hear this; and when they are told that their doings are of no account before God, it displeases them and makes them angry, because they insist that they are in possession of reason and the natural light, which God created in them. But what does this matter to us? There are the Scriptures and the Word of God plain and clear, that the Holy Spirit is to come to ‘convict the world, because it does not know what sin, righteousness and judgment are. Thus it is determined, there it stands; let be angry who will, Christ does not care.

[3] It is much to be deplored that the world is convicted, not only because of its sin and want of righteousness, not being able to judge rightly, but that it does not acknowledge nor see this, to say nothing of its endeavor to alter the matter. Oh, how completely the praise of all comes to naught, who, while they endeavor to make other people pious, know not themselves what sin is! Let us take, for example, at the present day, all the schools of learning and the learned men and see whether they can tell us what that one little word “sin” is? For who has ever heard that not to believe in Christ is sin? They say, it is sin if one speaks, desires or does something against God’s will and commandment. But how does that correspond with this saying of Christ: It is sin because they do not believe on me? Therefore, they are easily convicted of the fact that they know not what sin is; and if they be ever so learned, they will not be able to explain this text.

[4] In like manner, they are not able to know what “righteousness” is. For who has ever heard that a man should become pious and just because Christ ascended to heaven or goes to the Father and we see him no more?

There we must say, a fool has thus spoken and not a wise man. For they say, righteousness is a virtue, which teaches man what he owes others. This is true, but the trouble is, they do not understand their own words, such blind fools they are. Therefore, one needs not be surprised that they rage so much against the Gospel and persecute the Christians. How could they do otherwise? They know no better.

[5] Neither do they know what “judgment” or right is, that is, a right judgment, a correct good opinion and sense, or whatever you may call it. For they say: Right is that which is written in books, how one is to know and distinguish things, to quiet and end quarrels. But how does Christ define it? He says: “It is right, that the world is to be judged.” Who understands such speech, and where will it go in or out, and how does it correspond with reason? Let us see whether we can explain it so that it may be understood.

[6] In the first place one must know that the Word of God does not speak only of the outward existence and appearances, but it takes hold of the heart and the depths of the soul. Accordingly it does not judge man as to his outward appearance and action, but according to the depths of his conscience. Now, everyone will experience in himself, if he wishes to acknowledge it, however pious he may be (even though he were a Carthusian or as holy as anyone on earth), that in his heart he would rather do the contrary, and otherwise than what he is outwardly compelled to do. Thus, if I were left to myself, a monk, who walks about in poverty and chastity, as they pride themselves, but were made to confess how I feel in my heart, I must say: That which I do, I would rather not do. If there were no hell and I would not feel the disgrace, I would leave my office have the misfortune, and run off. For I have no desire from the heart to do it, but am compelled thereto, and must do it in spite of hell, punishment or disgrace. It is not possible that I should do it from choice and gladly. Such everyone who is without grace finds in his own heart. The same you will find continually in other matters. I am never from my heart kind and friendly to my enemy, for this is impossible to nature; and though I act otherwise, in my heart I think thus: If it were not for the punishment, I would have my way and not remain without revenge. Thus, I still go about before the world, and do not as I would like and feel inclined to do, for fear of punishment or disgrace. Likewise if you go through all the commandments,

from the first to the last, you will find that there is no one who keeps God's commandments from the bottom of his heart.

[7] Now, against this evil God found a remedy and determined to send Christ, his Son, into this world, that he should shed his blood and die, in order to make satisfaction for sin and take it away, and that the Holy Spirit then should enter the hearts of such people, who go about with the works of the Law, being unwilling and forced to it, and make them willing, in order that without force and with joyous heart they keep God's commandments. Otherwise there might be no means of removing the misery; for neither human reason and power, nor even an angel could rescue us from it. Thus, God has done away with the sins of all men who believe on the Christ, so that henceforth it is impossible for one to remain in sin who has this Savior, who has taken all sins upon himself and blotted them out.

[8] Inasmuch as Christ has now come and commanded to preach that everything we may do, however great and beautiful it may appear, is sin, because we do nothing that is good with pleasure and willingly, and that for this reason he has stepped forward and has taken away all sin, in order that we may receive the Holy Spirit, through whom we obtain love and pleasure to do what God wants us to do, in order that we do not attempt to come before God through our own works, but through Christ and his merits, therefore it cannot be called any longer sin committed against the Law, for the Law did nothing to assist us in becoming pious, since we are not able to do anything good.

[9] What sort of sin then remains upon earth? No other than that one does not receive this Savior and refuses to accept him who has taken away sin. For if he were present, there would be no sin, since he, as I have said, brings the Holy Spirit with him, who kindles the heart and makes it willing to do good. Therefore, the world is no longer punished and condemned on account of other sins, because Christ blots them all out; only this remains sin in the New Testament, that one will not acknowledge nor receive him. Therefore he likewise says in this 1 Gospel: "When the Holy Spirit is come, he will convict the world in respect of sin, because they believe not on me."

[10] As if he wished to say: Had they believed on me, everything would already have been forgiven them, whatever sin they might have committed,

for I know that they by nature cannot do otherwise. But because they will not receive me, neither believe that I can help them, this it is that will condemn them. Therefore, God will at the final judgment pass a sentence like this on them: Behold, thou wast in sin and couldst not free thyself from it, still I did not on this account wish to condemn thee, for I sent my only begotten Son to thee and intended to give thee a Savior, in order that he might take the sin from thee. Him thou didst not receive. Therefore, on this account alone, thou wilt be condemned, because thou hast not Christ.

[11] This sentence, then, is given for the honor and glory of the high grace, which God has given us in Christ the Lord. What reason would have ever been so wise as to discover that this was done for man's sake? Reason is not able to rise higher in its thoughts than to say: I have sinned in deeds done. I must make good by doing other deeds. I must blot out and pay for the sin, in order that I may thus obtain a gracious God. If reason comes so far, it has reached its climax. Still it is nothing but foolishness and blindness.

[12] But God speaks thus: If thou wilt be rid of sin, thou must do other works wherewith to pay the price. But with all the works which thou dost, thou canst do nothing but sin, even with the works wherewith thou thinkest to reconcile me and to do penance for thy sins. How wilt thou then, thou fool, blot out sin with sin? For even in the works which thou considerest the best and which thou canst do, thou sinnest if thou dost not do them willingly and from the heart. For if thou didst not fear punishment, thou wouldst rather not do them at all. Thus thou dost no more than that thou seekest to blot out little sins by doing greater ones; or else to commit such great ones that thou mayest lay aside others.

[13] Wherefore, it is ever great blindness that a man does not see what sin is, nor know what good works are, but accepts sin for good works. When the Holy Spirit comes, he convicts the people and says: The works which thou hast done, as well as those which thou art still doing, are nothing but sin; therefore, it is all in vain that thou dost attempt to make satisfaction for thy sin according to thy ability. Then they feel compelled to say: Behold, this I did not know. Then says he: For this purpose I am here, in order to tell thee this. If thou hadst known it, it would not have been necessary for me to come and make it known. What wilt thou do now in order to be helped? This thou must do: Believe on the Savior, the Lord

Christ, that he has taken away thy sin. If thou believest this, he is thine and thy sins will disappear; if not, then thou wilt never get rid of sin, but wilt always fall into it deeper and deeper.

[14] Thus, with this passage everything has been completely overthrown that has hitherto been preached about penance and satisfaction for sin, and all else that has been practiced and urged. For this reason there have been founded many orders and masses, and on this account we have become priests and monks and have run to and fro in order to be best in the world, which the world considers pious and holy, to get rid of sin. Therefore, it also follows: Whatever is that is nothing but mere sin and a damnable thing. Thus we have considered one part of this Gospel.

[15] The second thought then follows: “The Holy Spirit will convict the world in respect to righteousness, because I go to the Father,” says Christ, “and ye behold me no more.” Righteousness means piety and a good and honorable life before God. What is this now? It is, says Christ, “because I go to the Father.” We have often said about the resurrection of Christ that it came to pass not for his sake, but for our sakes, in order that we may apply it to ourselves as a blessing which is our own. For this reason he is risen from the dead and has ascended to heaven, that he might begin a spiritual kingdom, in which he reigns in us through righteousness and truth. Therefore, he sits above; he does not rest and sleep, does not play with himself, but, as Paul says, Ephesians 1:22, has his work here upon the earth, governing the consciences and the souls of men with the Gospel.

[16] Wherever Christ is now preached and acknowledged, there he reigns in us, from the right hand of his Father, and is himself here below in the hearts of men. There he reigns with might, power and dominion over you and all your enemies, and guards you from sin, death, devil and hell. Thus is his resurrection and ascension our comfort, life, blessing, righteousness and everything in one. This is what the Lord means when he speaks of righteousness, that the people thereby should become pious and righteous, that he ascends to heaven to the Father and we see him no more. This the world does not know, therefore the Holy Spirit must come and convict the world of it.

[17] How does this come to pass? Just as we have heard. Am I to become pious, it will not be enough for me to perform outwardly good

works, but I must do them from the bottom of my heart, gladly and willingly, so that I may be free from the fear of sin, death and the devil; be joyous, and with a good conscience, and all confidence stand before him and know how I stand with him. This no work, no creature can give unto me, but Christ alone, who has ascended into heaven — there, where one cannot see him, but must believe that he sits yonder and wishes to help one. Such a faith makes me acceptable unto God; Christ gives me the Holy Spirit into my heart, who makes me willing and happy in the doing of every good work. In this manner I become righteous, and in no other; for the works themselves make me more and more unwilling, the longer I occupy myself with them.

[18] But the longer one is engaged in this work, the more willing it makes one's heart; for wherever there is such knowledge, there the Holy Spirit cannot be wanting. When he comes, he makes the heart willing, joyful and happy, so that one may be free and willingly do what is pleasing to God, with joyous courage, and suffer whatever there is to suffer, yea, and even die willingly. And in proportion as this knowledge is clear and great, in that proportion the willingness and joy will also be great. Thus the commandment of God is fulfilled and everything done that one is to do, and thus thou art righteous. Who would ever have thought that this would be righteousness and that thus it should be. This question we have hitherto often heard about and considered, and although the words here be different, yet the sense and meaning are the same.

[19] In the third place, the Holy Spirit is to convict the world in respect of judgment that is that the world does not know what right is. For who has ever heard the definition of this right to be, because the prince of this world hath been judged? The prince of the world, to be sure is the devil, which one may readily see in his government.

[20] If now I have learned to know what sin is and am free from it, and have obtained righteousness, so that now I stand in a new character and life and have become another man — have now the Lord Christ and know that something else than our works is required to get rid of sin — if these have come to pass in me, it then follows that I may have a correct judgment, having learned to judge differently before God. For, according to such understanding, I know how to discuss, conclude and judge of all things in

heaven and upon earth, and to pass correct judgment; and when I have passed such a judgment, I can live accordingly. This no one else can do.

[21] The world, in its holiness, maintains that righteousness means to perform good works wherewith to do penance for sin and reconcile God. This has been taught in all the schools of learning. Such teachers think it is right and well done if only they can accomplish good works. But now comes the Holy Spirit and says: Not so. You err and are mistaken. Your judgment is wrong. Therefore there must be another judgment. You should judge thus: Everything that your reason concludes, is erroneous and false, and you are a fool and a simpleton.

[22] Reason may do other things; for instance, know how to judge in worldly and human matters and affairs, how to build cities and houses, how to govern well, and the like. In such matters one may easily be able to judge and decide more wisely than another. Of this, however, we do not speak here, but of judgment in the significance of what is right or wrong before God. Here the Holy Spirit concludes thus: Every judgment of reason is false and worth nothing. Everything that is born of man and is not born from above, must be rooted out and crucified, so that no one may boast of it and depend upon it. Again, whatever the world considers as wisdom, that which it votes as wisely and intelligently devised and accomplished, is foolishness before God. In short, whatever the world does, is useless and cursed, unless it proceeds from Christ, the Lord, and is of his Word and Spirit, as he teaches us. If it does not proceed from him, it is surely mere blindness and there is no good in it.

[23] Therefore everything that the world considers good is debased. Everything is evil because it does not proceed from the Word and the Spirit, but from the old Adam, who is nothing more than a blind fool and sinner. And why? Should not your wisdom and reason be foolishness and count for nothing, since the most exalted one, who has all the power and wisdom of this world in the highest degree, is condemned? For, without doubt, there is no one in the world so wise, shrewd and rational as the devil, and no one is able to make a more pious appearance. And all wisdom and holiness that do not proceed from God, as well as the most beautiful things in the world, are found in their highest degree in the devil. Since he is a prince and the ruler of the world, the wisdom and righteousness of the world must proceed from him; here he reigns with all his power. Therefore, Christ says: Since the

same prince of the world is condemned, with all that he has and can do, the world is ever blind because it considers that to be good which has been condemned already, namely his wisdom and piety.

[24] We must, therefore, pass a correct judgment, such as Christ passes, if we are to guard against everything that the world considers and declares precious in order that it may appear before God prudent, wise and pious. If people who have not the Word and Spirit of Christ, desire to teach and govern, everything is already condemned; for in this way one accomplishes no more than to make the old Adam stronger and to establish him in his opinion that his works, his piety and prudence are to avail before God. Thereby one must work himself deeper and deeper into the devil's kingdom.

[25] But now, since the prince of this world and the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the devil, are directly opposed to one another, and the Holy Spirit is not willing that anyone should parade his own deeds and praise himself on account of them, the holy cross must soon follow. The world will not consent to be reprimanded for its blindness. Therefore one must willingly submit and suffer persecution. If we have the right kind of faith in our hearts, we must also open our mouths and confess righteousness and make known sin. Likewise we must condemn and punish the doings of this world and make it known that everything it undertakes, is damned. For this we must be considered heretics, and must pass through the fire. They say: This is against the holy councils and the canon of the holy father, the pope. Then you are to answer: How can I help it? Here it stands — the text does not say the Holy Spirit is to convict them and say their doctrine is error, blindness and the government of the devil. This, of course, they will not endure, but would have us call them gracious noblemen. Therefore, one must here risk his neck.

[26] These are the three parts we have in this Gospel lesson: Sin is unbelief; righteousness is faith; the judgment is the holy cross. Therefore give heed and learn to consider everything that is without the Spirit as nothing and as condemned, and afterwards be prepared for the holy cross that thou must suffer on account of it. Now follows in the Gospel further: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth."

[27] These words ought to be understood in all their simplicity, as if the Lord were to say: “These three parts which I have now related, you cannot yet fully understand, even though I were to explain them unto you. I would have to say much about them in order to explain them more fully, to make plain how things shall be, and you still stick too deep in your coarse, carnal reason to be able to comprehend it. Therefore, I will forbear now. When the Holy Spirit comes, he will enlighten your hearts, so that you will understand it, and will call to your remembrance all things, I tell you of it now, in order that you may think about it. Thus, we give these words in their simple meaning. It is as if I conversed with some one and said: I would yet have many things to say, but they are too difficult for you. You cannot yet comprehend and grasp them.

[28] But our doctors and highly learned men have made use of these words in a frivolous way and said that it was necessary to have something more than the Gospel and the Scriptures; therefore one ought also to hear what the councils and the popes decree. They endeavor to prove in this way that Christ says here: “I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now;” therefore, because he has not told them all things, it must follow that he told them to the councils, popes and bishops, who are now to teach them.

[29] Now look at these fools, what they say. Christ says: “I have yet many things to say unto you.” What does “you” mean? To whom does he speak? Without doubt, to the apostles. To these he says: “I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all truth.” Therefore, if Christ is not to lie, his Word must have been fulfilled at the time that the Holy Spirit came. The Holy Spirit must have said everything to them and accomplished everything that the Lord here refers to, and, of course, he led them into all the truth. How, then, do we get the idea that Christ should not have said everything, but should have kept much back, which the councils were to teach and to determine? With this idea his words do not at all harmonize. Christ gives to understand that soon the Holy Spirit would tell and explain to them all things, and that afterwards the apostles should carry out everything, and through them should be made known to the world what they have learned from the Holy Spirit. But, according to the councils and

popes,' it depends on what they say, teach and command, even to the end of the world.

[30] Moreover, Christ says further: "He shall guide you into all the truth." Here we conclude: If what the councils teach be the truth, that one is to wear the tonsure and the cap and live a life of celibacy, then the apostles never came to the truth, since none of them ever entered a cloister, nor kept any of those foolish laws. Thus, Christ must indeed have betrayed us in this, that he said the Holy Spirit should guide us into all the truth, when in reality he wished to teach how we were to become priests and monks and not to eat meat on certain days, and like foolish things.

[31] Without doubt it is "truth" before God when one lives an upright and sincere life. But if we now look at our ecclesiasts, pope, bishops, priests and monks, we see nothing but carnival masks, who give themselves the outward appearance of being pious, but in their hearts they are villains. What popes, bishops, and orders have ever led us into this truth, which should spring from within — out of the heart? In everything they are concerned about the outward appearance of things, in order that they may make a display before the eyes of the people.

[32] Thus they have perverted this text masterfully in order to strengthen their lies; and yet we are to call them gracious lords! To hear such things is exasperating and it should grieve our hearts that we are to suffer such great outrage — should see how shamefully the people act against the precious Word of God and that they make the Holy Spirit a liar. Should not this single passage be powerful enough against the pope and the councils, even if we had no other in the Scriptures?

[33] Thirdly, Christ says: "You cannot bear them now." Here we ask: My dear, should it have been too hard for the apostles to understand or to obey such laws as abstaining from meat, and the like? They had been accustomed in the law of Moses to observe many such outward ceremonies, and had been educated therein all their life, so that it would have been child's play for them. Moreover, they understood this better than we do. Is it such a difficult matter — that a monk must wear a black or gray cap, the pope three crowns, a bishop a pointed hat, or the manner of dedicating churches and altars and baptizing bells — are these so difficult as to make it necessary that the Holy Spirit should come from heaven to teach such

things? If it is not acting the fool enough that one jests with these noble words, then I do not know how one may be a worse fool.

[34] Therefore, beware of these liars and understand the words rightly, thus: Christ wishes to speak of the inward, actual character, not of outward jugglery. He wishes to make the heart, before the eyes of God, pious and righteous in order that it, in the first place, acknowledge its sin, and in the second place, that it acknowledge him to be the one who forgives sin and suffers himself to be sacrificed upon the cross. This is that “truth” which the apostles were not yet able to hear and understand. But those outward things make no one righteous, lead no one to the truth. They make only hypocrites and a show, by which the people are deceived.

[35] Thus, we have the true meaning of this passage, from which we see how fools who seek from it to bolster up their jugglery, place themselves in opposition to it and build upon the sand. There is scarcely a passage that is more strongly opposed to them than this one. We have briefly explained this Gospel lesson in order that we may see how it teaches just that which we have always preached.

Cantate, the Fourth Sunday after Easter. Second Sermon. Sin, Righteousness, and the Cross.

Text: John 16:5-15.

5 But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me,
Whither goest thou?

6 But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your
heart.

7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

9 Of sin, because they believe not on me;

10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;

11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you. John 16:5-15

[1] Christ pictures to us in this Gospel what his kingdom is and what takes place in it, how it is governed and what it accomplishes. Here you learn that there is a kingdom upon the earth and that it is invisible, and that it cleaves to and rests upon the Word of God alone. Christ does not say that he wishes his disciples to follow him up into heaven at once; but that he will send them the Holy Spirit and that he departs from them for the very purpose of sending them the Holy Spirit, in order that thereby his kingdom may be further developed. Therefore, he says: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." They could not understand that kingdom, how it should exist and be administered. Their reason and senses were still too carnal, they had never seen a spiritual kingdom, nor heard of one; therefore they continually thought of a temporal, outward kingdom. And here as in other Gospels, faith and trust in Christ are preached. We wish now to consider the leading thoughts in this Gospel and to explain them as far as God gives us his grace to do so. The Lord addresses his disciples thus: "When the Comforter is come, he will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they believe not on me."

[2] Here we must let that be “sin” which is ascribed to, and included in, sin by the high majesty of heaven. In the text only unbelief is mentioned as sin, “because,” says the Lord, “they believe not on me.”

[3] But what is it to believe on Christ? It is not simply to believe that he is God, or that he reigns in heaven in equal power with God the Father; many others believe that: But I believe on Christ when I believe that he is a gracious God to me and has taken my sins upon himself and reconciled me with God the Father, that my sins are his and his righteousness mine, that there is an intermingling and an exchange, that Christ is a mediator between me and the Father. For the sins of the whole world were laid upon Christ, and the righteousness of the Father, that is in Christ, will swallow up all our sins. No sins dare and can remain upon Christ. Such faith makes me pure and acceptable to the Father. Of this faith the pope and our highly educated leaders know nothing to speak, much less to believe. They teach that man should do many good works if he is to be acceptable to God and be free from sin, and that then God imparts to him his grace.

[4] However, here the Lord speaks quite differently, and says: “The Holy Spirit will convict the world in respect of sin, because they believe not on me.” Unbelief only is mentioned here as sin, and faith is praised as suppressing and extinguishing the other sins, even the sins in the saints. Faith is so strong and overpowering that no sin dare put it under any obligation. Although sins are present in pious and believing persons, they are not imputed to them, nor shall their sins condemn them. This is Paul’s meaning when he says in Romans 8:1: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Their hearts are cleansed by faith, as Peter writes in Acts 15:9. Therefore, whatever they do in this faith, in this assurance is all good, pure and pleasing to God. On the contrary, without this faith all their doings are sin and destruction, though their good works may shine and glitter as beautifully as they will, and ever though they raise the dead. For Paul says: “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin,” Romans 14:23.

[5] What will now become of all the priests, nuns and monks who, wishing to escape sin, run into cloisters and undertake to do many good works without this faith? Unbelief is called sin, as I said, but to believe on Christ — that he takes my sins upon himself, reconciles me to the Father and at the same time makes me his heir of all that is in heaven and earth —

this is good works. In John 6:28-29, the Jews asked Christ: “What must we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered: “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” Yea, and should we preach thus, who will then enter the cloisters or contribute anything for them? The purses of the monks would then surely become flat, their kitchens scanty, their cellars empty and neglected. For this reason they will not allow faith to be preached; nay, they condemn this doctrine and banish its preachers. Indeed they have already set about it in good earnest. Christ further says: “Of righteousness, because I go to the Father.”

II. The Holy Spirit Convicts the World of Righteousness.

[6] Here all the learned come armed, yea, the whole world besides, and tell us what kind of righteousness this is. Yes, and they shall err. For the world has never known this righteousness; it does not yet know it, and it does not wish to know it. Hence, the Lord says here that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of this righteousness.

[7] But what are we to understand here by “the world?” We dare not understand by it the coarse, outward sins, as adultery, murder, stealing and theft. There are instituted for such characters the wheels and gallows, with which the worldly powers, the kings, emperors and princes, have to do. But we will interpret “the world” as the subtle and secret sins, of which the Holy Spirit convicts, which the world does not know as sin. Yea, it pronounces them divine works; it applauds them and will not permit them to be called sins. How else can unbelief and other secret sins live in the heart while the heart itself is not conscious of them and knows not that they are sins? But those who convict the world must, on that account, be reviled as heretics and be banished from the country, as we see at present. Therefore, the Holy Spirit must convict the world.

[8] The rod, however, by which the world is convicted and punished, is the divine Word and the holy Gospel, proclaimed by the apostles and preachers, as God the Father says to his Son in Psalm 2:9: “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” That is, you shall humble them with the holy Gospel. But the world resents such conviction and punishment; yet it punishes severely, and even more severely than the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit takes rods, but the

world uses swords and fire. Isaiah also speaks in like terms of Christ our Lord in Isaiah 11:4: “He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth; and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.”

[9] What is now the righteousness the Lord means here? Some say righteousness is a virtue that gives to every person his own. Although this is a fine definition, yet it is misleading, in that we do not know how we are indebted to everyone, to God and to man. This God desires and demands of us. Therefore, his righteousness is nothing more than the faith and grace of God, by which God makes us pious and righteous. Such righteousness we must have and thus be righteous, if we are to be found righteous and unblamable before God, and not only before man. For the smallest letter or tittle of the Law shall not fail, but all will be fulfilled.

[10] Noah was found to be such a righteous man. It is written of him in Genesis 6:8-9: “Noah was a righteous man, and blameless in his generation; he walked with 1 God. Therefore he found favor in the eyes of Jehovah.” It is also written of Job, in Job 1:1, that he was a perfect and upright man, one that feared God and turned away from evil. But that is done only by faith, when one believes that God has strangled and swallowed up one’s sins in his righteousness. For this righteousness is nothing but to believe that Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father; that he is equal with God, possessing equal power; that he has become Lord by virtue of his passion, by which he has ascended to the Father, reconciled us with God and is there as our mediator. This is what the prophet means in Psalm 110:1. “Jehovah saith unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” Therefore, St. Paul calls Christ now a mediator, 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6; then a throne of grace, Romans 3:25; a propitiation, 1 John 2:2, and other like names. God requires this honor from us and faith demands it, that we possess him as our Lord and Savior; and this glory he will not concede to anyone else, as he says through the prophet: “My glory will I not give to another,” Isaiah 42:8.

[11] His way to the Father is his glory. For “to go” means to die, and to pass through death to the Father and enter upon another existence. He glories in his future course when he says: “I go unto the Father.” Therefore, here righteousness is nothing more than traveling by faith the road through death unto the Father. This faith makes us righteous before God, this faith by which we believe that he delivered us from sin, death, Satan and hell,

through his passion, and that thereby God, the Father, is reconciled and our sins are blotted out by his blood. This is also the reason that he mentions his going, when he says, in respect of righteousness, not that he is with the Father, but that he goes to the Father. In this going, sin is swallowed up in righteousness and Christ passes cheerfully through death, so that no one is even aware of it. Therefore it follows: “And ye behold me no more.”

[12] The nature and art of faith are here set forth: Faith neither feels nor gropes, nor do the things connected with it require a science; but it bestirs itself cheerfully to believe the things it neither feels nor can measure with all its powers inwardly or outwardly. Paul says in Romans 8:24: “Who hopeth for that which he seeth?” Therefore, the Lord aptly says: “And ye behold me no more.” As if he would say that this way of good works which he is traveling, will not be seen nor grasped by the senses, but it must be believed. Now follows the third and last part of our Gospel.

III. The Holy Spirit Convicts the World of Judgment, Or the Cross. “Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.”

[13] The prince of this world is Satan, and his members include all unbelieving and godless persons. All flesh with all its powers is condemned by these words, and what the world praises is condemned by God, including both the godly and the ungodly, believers and unbelievers, friends and enemies, as St. Peter cites in his first Epistle (1 Peter 4:17), when he says: “For the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God,” that is, with the elect, in whom God dwells. The righteous, while they live here, have flesh and blood, in which sin is rooted. To suppress this sin, God will lead them into great misery and anxiety, poverty, persecution and all kinds of danger (as Paul writes to the Romans 7:18ff; 8:4; and to the Corinthians) until the flesh becomes completely subject to the Spirit.

[14] That, however, does not take place until death, when the flesh is completely turned to ashes. We must be in all points like Christ. Since he was here despised, mocked and tried, so that, as the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 53:3) says, he was esteemed and held as one stricken and smitten of God, the most despised and unworthy, full of grief and sorrow. His disciples must also go through the same experiences. Everyone should carefully consider

this. It is so decreed, as Christ himself before declared to his disciples, saying: “Remember the word that I said unto you, A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me they will also persecute you.” John 15:20. Hence Paul says in very plain words in 2 Timothy 3:12: “All that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

[15] Therefore, St. Peter carefully discriminates and says: “If judgment begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the Gospel of God? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?” 1 Peter 4:17-18. This discrimination is between the sufferings of the godly and of the wicked. Godly and believing persons know their sins; they bear all their punishment patiently, and are resigned to God’s judgment without the least murmur; therefore, they are punished only bodily, and here in time, and their pain and suffering have an end. Unbelievers, however, since they are not conscious of their sins and transgressions, cannot bear God’s punishment patiently, but they resent it and wish their life and works to go unpunished, yea, uncensored. Hence, their punishment and suffering are in body and soul, here in time, and last forever beyond this life. The Lord says here, “The prince of this world is already judged.” As if he were to say, All that the world and humanity in the world discover, praise and condemn, amounts to nothing; and whatever God judges the world cannot suffer nor bear, but rejects, repudiates and condemns.

[16] Thus, three thoughts have been presented to us in this Gospel: Sin, righteousness and, finally, the cross and persecution. We shall be freed from sin through faith. If we believe that Christ made satisfaction for our sins and that his satisfaction is ours, that is then the righteousness. When we are free from sin, and are just and pious, then the world, Satan and the flesh will arise and contend and battle against us. Then come persecution and the cross. This we wish to have set forth in brief at present from this Gospel. May God grant his grace that we learn it thus, and know how to govern ourselves by it when we need it.

Cantate, the Fourth Sunday after Easter. Third Sermon. Christ's Kingdom and the Convicting and Teaching Office of the Holy Spirit.

Text: John 16:5-15.

5 But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me,
Whither goest thou?

6 But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your
heart.

7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for
if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I
will send him unto you.

8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of
righteousness, and of judgment:

9 Of sin, because they believe not on me;

10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;

11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all
truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that
shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto
you.

15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall
take of mine, and shall shew it unto you. John 16:5-15

[1] The meaning of this Gospel we have often heard elsewhere, the only trouble is, its language is not altogether understood as having the meaning of things, with which we are familiar. Therefore we will expound it a little, in order that it may be seen that the same truth lies in these words as is contained in almost all the Gospels.

[2] It is a part of that beautiful discourse Christ the Lord delivered after the last supper he had with the disciples. His special object is to console his beloved disciples in view of his departure, because he is now about to die and to leave them alone in danger and distress, in the hostility of the world, in persecution and death for his sake. And so with many words he announces to them that they would be put under the ban, and they who killed them would boast that they had offered unto God a service. It was a grievous and terrible thing for them to hear this, and on account of it they became very sorrowful, both because they were to lose their dear Lord and because they were to be left in such misery and distress. Therefore it was needful to console them against all this, as indeed Christ does throughout these three Chapters of his last discourse with all diligence and faithfulness. And the sum of it is this: in view of the loss caused by his departure, he promises to send the Holy Spirit, who shall comfort and strengthen their hearts, and then first establish the kingdom of Christ and extend it throughout the world; and he tells them plainly what is to be the nature of his kingdom, wherein it is to consist, and what the Holy Spirit shall accomplish in the world through them.

[3] Therefore he says to them first: I know and plainly see, beloved disciples, that you are in great fear and sorrow on account of what I have told you, that I am about to go away from you. But this shall be your comfort: I tell you the truth, it is much better for you that I go away. My departure shall bring you abundant joy, for you shall have instead the comforting of the Holy Spirit, and in addition the power, that he will accomplish through you what I, now present with you, am not able to do. For I am required by this mission in the flesh to suffer and die, and so to make my journey to the Father, and afterwards to send the Holy Spirit, who will do through you much greater things than can be done now through me, and who will bestow upon you a great and excellent office and work, by which my kingdom shall be extended in the world.

[4] So then he first shows them what is to be the nature of his kingdom on earth, in order to take away from them their old deeply-rooted delusion of an external worldly dominion and government over the Jewish people and the world generally in this life. For against this he says plainly enough and in many words, that he would go away, leave the world, and not be seen any more. But if he dies and leaves the world, he cannot rule and govern after the manner of the world, externally and visibly, like a king and emperor on earth. He indicates this still more clearly by announcing to them in so many words both before and after this text, how they shall fare after his departure, namely, that they shall be hated, persecuted, put under the ban and even killed by their own people; moreover, that they shall weep and lament and have tribulation in the world, which on the contrary shall be merry and joyful. All this by no means agrees with the thought that they should have a worldly kingdom on earth, for which to hope; they must expect the very contrary. Nevertheless they are to know that he will have and preserve his kingdom in the world; wherefore he promises the Holy Spirit.

[5] What kind of a kingdom is it, and how is it governed? This he indicates in the words: “The Holy Spirit will convict the world.” It is not to be a government constituted and organized in worldly fashion by human wisdom, power and might, but a government of the Holy Spirit, or a spiritual kingdom, in which Christ rules invisibly and not with external, bodily power, through the Word alone, which the Holy Spirit will preach and thereby work in the hearts of men. For the Holy Spirit, he says, will convict the world. That does not mean to coerce with armor and weapons and worldly power, but to use an oral word or an office of preaching, called the Word of God, or of the Holy Spirit, sent by Christ. This Word is to pass through the world and to attack it, so that it can be called a convicting of the world, not only of a few, of one or two races and countries, but of both Jews and Gentiles, the learned, the wise and saints, who in their own government have the most beautiful and laudable organization.

[6] For by “world” he does not mean the humble common folk, the populace, but that which in the world is best and most excellent, and in external government blameless; especially those who claim to be holy above all others, like the Jews, who were called God’s people and had the

law of Moses, of whom Christ said before, that they hate him and his own without cause, as is written in their law.

[7] Herewith Christ bestows upon his apostles power and authority, nay more, even command over the whole world. It is to be subject to their preaching and to hear the apostles. Although their office shall be despised in the world and have no reputation, because they are plain, ordinary people, and even apart from this they must be hated and oppressed and must suffer in the world, when with their convictions they run counter to it, till he strengthens and comforts them with the assurance that their office shall nevertheless have power, force and efficacy. Those in the world will be compelled to hear it and to allow it to have course, unsubverted and unforbidden, regardless of their raging and storming against it with persecution, ban and death, and all power and force not only of the world, but also of the whole kingdom of hell.

[8] Therefore, says he, you have good reason not to be terrified and cast down, because I am going away from you bodily. For thereby I will give you something better than you have had while you were with me, and you shall accomplish much greater and more glorious things than can now be done; namely, the Holy Spirit shall affect through you far more gloriously and mightily what pertains to my kingdom than you now think. Then you will no longer, as now, seek and aspire to become lords upon earth and to have great kingdoms under you. For these are transitory things, which God does not care for, and which have always produced more rogues than good men. But he will set you in a government, where you shall judge all men's consciences; and what is highest in the world, namely its wisdom and holiness, shall be subject to you. You shall pronounce judgment upon it, convict and condemn, and nobody will be able to escape sin, death and hell, nor get to heaven, who does not hear and obey your word.

[9] He shall also give you such comfort and courage, that you shall no longer be filled with terror and deadly fear, as now, at the world's threatening, fury and raging against your preaching; but you shall boldly go forward and convict regardless of what the world and the devil can do to prevent it by persecution, murder and all the violence of hell.

[10] This is the province of the work, which the Holy Spirit is to begin in the kingdom of Christ. It is the teaching office of the apostles, which is to

be of such a character that it must convict the world, as it finds it outside of Christ, and nobody is to be excepted, great, small, learned, wise, holy, of high or low condition, etc. This means in short, to bear the world's anger and to begin strife, and to be struck in the mouth for it. For the world, which rules on earth, will not and cannot endure its course to be disapproved; therefore persecution must arise, and one party must yield to the other, the weakest to the stronger. But, as the office of the apostles is to be only a teaching office, it cannot use worldly power and the world retains its external kingdom and power against the apostles. But, on the other hand, the apostles' office of conviction of the world shall likewise not be suppressed, because it is the office and work of the Holy Spirit, but shall overcome all and triumph; as Christ promised to them: "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand." Luke 21:15.

[11] The Holy Spirit indeed convicted the world by preaching before from the beginning (for Christ ever rules, and is the same Christ "yesterday and today, and forever," Hebrews 13:8) through the holy fathers, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and John the Baptist, and this conviction was upheld by divine power. But now the true beginning is to be made, and Christ will institute a public conviction, which is to be extended not only over the Jewish people, but over the whole world until the last day. This is to be much more efficacious and shall prevail, and hearts shall be pierced and wounded by it, even as is said in Acts 2: of the first sermon of St. Peter on the day of Pentecost, that they were pricked in their heart by the preaching of the apostles, and so were enlightened and converted from their blindness. But if they will not accept this preaching, it shall be efficacious to their condemnation, and they shall stumble, fall and plunge into eternal ruin. So it shall prove a power unto life and salvation to believers, and a preaching and power unto death to others, as St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:16.

[12] However, in respect of what shall the Holy Spirit convict, and concerning what shall he teach? This he tells us plainly in the words: "And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."

[13] This certainly means biting off a good deal and assuming a big load: the poor beggars, the apostles, are to interfere in the world in this way and

to reprove and convict everything it does. They must needs have strong backs and a good reserved force. For he shows here that this convicting is to be no farce, nor is it to be in respect of small, trifling matters, nor even of sovereignty, countries and property, but in respect of the highest thing, by which the world's government exists, namely, the reputation of wisdom, righteousness, and its judgment or convicting, especially in the high matters, which concern the service of God and what is good in the sight of God.

[14] For as to the earthly government of property and wealth, this does not concern the Holy Spirit and Christ. In regard to that, he allows the world's wisdom, law and order to stand as they are; for in this sphere it is commanded to the world to rule and to judge what is praiseworthy and what is punishable. Likewise he does not convict the offices and different classes in the world, which are God's creation and order. But for this he convicts the world, that is, the people, who in their own government rule excellently, because with their reason and wisdom they also seek to interfere in God's affairs and government, and presume to decide and judge, how God shall be served, and imagine that whatever they assert, must also be right and acceptable in the sight of God.

[15] This is what the conviction of the Holy Spirit is directed against. It breaks in not piecemeal on certain works and actions, but reduces to nothing and condemns everything that reason and worldly wisdom propose. In short, he convicts and censures them in and for the very things they do not wish to be convicted in, but rather praised and lauded, as teaching and doing well and right. He puts them to sin and shame with all their glory and openly charges them with knowing nothing of these things nor being able to teach how sin is to be known and gotten rid of, righteousness is to be attained and wrong is to be permitted. How much good is left now, when all this is laid low completely as by a thunderbolt? He himself explains the three particulars, and shows what each means and how each is to be preached. First he says: "Of Sin, because they believe not on me."

[16] The world itself must confess that it understands none of the things, which Christ here says of these three thoughts. For whoever heard this before among the wise and learned of the earth, or by what understanding was it produced, and in what books is it written that sin is not to believe on this Jesus of Nazareth? Does not Moses himself and all the world call that

sin, which is done contrary to the law, by commission or omission, by word or deed or even by thought? Well, the child is named, and the article concluded and fixed by the Holy Spirit, that this is the sin of the world that it does not believe on Christ. Not that there is no sin against the law besides this; but that this is the real chief sin, which condemns the whole world even if it could be charged with no other sin.

[17] Thus this preaching of conviction is now to begin, if people are to be brought to right knowledge and to salvation. And the first thing shall be this: it makes all men, learned, high and wise, sinners; and sinners for this reason, because they do not believe on Christ. Hence God's wrath is declared, and the judgment of condemnation and eternal death (for this is what convicting in respect of sin means) is pronounced upon those who in the sight of the world are irreproachable, who even strive with earnestness to live according to the law and the ten commandments. Such were Paul before his conversion, and Nicodemus at first, and many others of like character among the Jews, to whom St. Paul also bears witness that they had a zeal for God, and followed after righteousness, but did not attain to righteousness (Romans 9:31). So then this word "sin" briefly comprehends all life and conduct without and apart from faith in Christ.

[18] Here you will say: How is this? Is it sin to live according to the ten commandments obediently, honorably and chastely, not to kill, not to break the marriage tie, not to steal, not to lie and deceive? Answer: Surely not. But that is not enough, and the ten commandments are not kept, if only they are not violated externally by works. For God's law demands not merely outward form and appearance, but goes to the heart and demands its perfect obedience. Therefore it also judges man not only by his outward walk and conduct, but by the depths of his heart. But the world does not understand and regard this; for it recognizes only public external sins, such as murder, adultery, robbery and what the jurists call and punish as sin. But it neither knows nor sees the true offenses and their root, such as contempt of God, inborn inward impurity of the heart, and disobedience to God's will: which things nevertheless are and remain in all men, who are not sanctified by Christ. For everybody, however pious he may be, if he will only confess it, finds in himself, what true saints earnestly lament, that even if he would gladly keep God's law, his flesh and blood, that is, his whole nature, including his heart and all his members, resist it; as St. Paul says in Romans

7:23: "I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members." Much more is this true of those, who are without grace and the Holy Spirit, who live irreproachably outwardly, solely from the fear of punishment or on account of reputation and vain honor; but still would prefer to do the contrary, if they did not fear hell or disgrace and punishment. For the heart is ever hostile to the law and resists it with inward disobedience.

[19] Now because this is the case, that no man fulfils the commandments of God and can be without sin before God, and therefore all men are under the wrath of God and sentenced to eternal condemnation by the law: God has found a remedy for this evil, and he resolved to send his Son into the world, in order that he might become a sacrifice for us and make satisfaction for our sins by the shedding of his blood and his death, and take away from us the wrath of God, which no creature could reconcile, and bring forgiveness of sins and moreover bestow upon us the Holy Spirit, so that we might obtain and receive all this, begin to become new men, and come out of sin and death to righteousness and eternal life.

[20] This he has now done and has commanded to preach it through the Gospel, and he demands of all men (as we heard in the Easter sermons) repentance, that is, true knowledge of sin and earnest dread of God's wrath, and faith, that in such repentance God will, for the sake of his Son, forgive their sins. He that believes this preaching, has by this faith forgiveness of sins and is in the grace of God: and although he has not satisfied the law, still the remaining sin is not imputed to him, but is included in the forgiveness. Together with this faith the Holy Spirit is also given, so that he acquires love and delight to do the good and to resist sin. Therefore he is no longer condemned by the laws as a sinner, although he has not fulfilled it in every respect; but he is accepted by God through grace and forgiveness, and regarded as if he had no sins.

[21] But on the other hand, he who has not faith, cannot be rid of sin nor escape the wrath of God. For he has no forgiveness and abides under condemnation, even if he is very zealous to live according to the law; for he cannot fulfill it. Besides, he does not accept Christ, who brings forgiveness and bestows upon believers his own fulfillment, and also gives power to begin to keep the law from the heart.

[22] Therefore, whereinsoever this preaching is not accepted, there sin and condemnation must remain. Indeed, this unbelief then becomes the chief sin. For if faith in Christ were present, all sins would be forgiven; but now since they will not accept this Savior by faith, they are justly condemned in their sins. And it avails them nothing, that they do many works of the law and outward divine services, and judge according to reason, that, as they sinned by works, they will pay by works, that is to say, put away sin and merit God's favor. For in so doing they simply undertake to blot out sin by sin, indeed, to atone for great sins by little ones, or to do great sins in order to lay aside others. For in addition to the fact that they continue in disobedience and sins against God's commandments, and are so blind that they neither see nor regard it, but without repentance and fear of God's wrath have the presumption and pride to expect to please God by their own works and merits: above all this they proceed not only to despise this preaching of Christ, which admonishes to repentance and faith, but even to persecute it. This alone would be enough to bring eternal wrath and condemnation upon them, even if they had no other sins and fulfilled the whole law.

[23] Therefore the Holy Spirit rightly and justly convicts, as sinful and condemned, all who have not faith in Christ. For where this is wanting, other sins in abundance must follow: God is despised and hated, and the entire first table is treated with disobedience. For if one does not know God in Christ, he cannot trust him for any good thing, nor call upon him from the heart, nor know his word; but he is entangled in the devil's lies, persecutes and blasphemes true doctrines, and continues in obstinacy and hardening, even to the degree of slandering the Holy Spirit. In consequence of this he also disobeys the other commandments in his life and station, so that he does to nobody what he ought to do, and has in his heart no true love, kindness, gentleness, patience, no delight in chastity, righteousness, faithfulness and truth; but practices the contrary, except where he has reason to fear disgrace or punishment.

[24] Lo, how the dragon's tail of the devil and all hell must follow unbelief! The reason is, that he who does not believe in Christ, has already turned away from God and quite separated himself from him. Therefore he cannot have the Holy Spirit, nor originate good thoughts, nor have a true, hearty pleasure in living according to God's will; notwithstanding he may

outwardly assume a different appearance, like a hypocrite, and act so as not to be rebuked or chastised. Just like a bad, ill-behaved servant, who is inimical to his master, and does what he hates to do, only because he is compelled, and as opportunity arises, does evil. Such are the beautiful, precious fruits, produced by this fountain and stem, if Christ is not accepted and heard as the Savior, presented to us by God in order to blot out our sin and to take from us God's wrath.

[25] Hence you see pictured here what the world is, nothing but a great company of wicked, stubborn people, who will not believe Christ, but despise God's Word, praise and accept the seduction of the devil, and defiantly run counter to all of God's commandments. They receive all the favors and benefits of God only to repay him with ingratitude and blasphemy. And yet in all this they are unwilling to be convicted or reproved, but wish to be called excellent, pious and saintly people. Such were the Jews, who crucified Christ and persecuted his apostles, and yet wished to claim the glory of having done God great service. Therefore the Holy Spirit must resist this and strive with the world and ever exercise his office of conviction with divine power and might until the last day.

[26] For he has not begun to convict with the intention of ceasing and allowing his mouth to be closed. On the contrary he must continue his work of conviction in the devil's kingdom, because there is nothing good in it, and he must drive it altogether under God's wrath and condemnation, in spite of the rage and fury of the devil, if perhaps by this conviction some be brought to repentance and faith, which indeed is the object of this preaching. But the others, who will not be convicted, must at least be convinced and condemned by this preaching. For all flesh and blood must be convicted, either for salvation or for condemnation, and the sentence, which Christ commanded to be preached to all creatures, must stand: "He that believeth shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." Let this be enough of the first point in the preaching of the Holy Spirit. The second is this: "Of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more."

[27] Not only is the world convicted because it has sin, but also because it does not know how to become pious and what righteousness or piety is. But he is not speaking here of the righteousness, which philosophers and jurists discuss, which consists in observing civil or imperial laws and in

doing what reason teaches; but of the righteousness, which is valid before God or which he regards as righteousness. Now what kind of righteousness is this, or wherein does it consist? This is it, says he, that “I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more.” This is strange and to the world ridiculous language. If the first particular was unusual and obscure, that this is the world’s sin, that it does not believe on him; then this is far more strange and incomprehensible, that this alone is righteousness, that he goes to the Father and is seen no more.

[28] What shall the whole world say to this? They are all striving after righteousness and claiming to be pious before God, Jewish, Turkish and papistic saints, who stumble at this as an offensive, nay, foolish doctrine, just as if all good works, devotions, pious intentions, fine obedience, severe and strict life on the part of so many men are to be nothing before God? And why does he give such an odd and absurd definition, that being pious before God consists in this that he goes to the Father and yet is not seen? How does it fit together, being righteous by what one cannot see nor feel?

[29] Well, you learn here, that he concludes emphatically and vigorously, that alone is righteousness which he calls righteousness, and the world is convicted by it, because it does not possess it. It is as if he said: Of what use is it, for you to dispute much about good works, holy living and what you think is the way to righteousness? If you do not have this, that I go to the Father, it is all nothing and worth nothing before God. Even if you should seek and strive, think and study to death, and pursue after righteousness with all your powers, you will never think it out or attain to it. Another righteousness is necessary, different from what you understand and propose, where one is to take up the law, and be obedient to it and live according to it. Something far and high above all that is necessary, where there is no law, or commandment, or human work and life, but only what I do, namely, that “I go to the Father” etc.

[30] How now does it come to pass? Answer: In the first part of this discourse we heard that all men are convicted in respect of sin. From this it follows, as has been explained, that nobody fulfils the law or the ten commandments. For if anybody fulfilled them, he would certainly not be convicted as a sinner, but by this obedience and fulfillment of the law he would be righteous, as St. Paul says in Galatians 3:21-22: “If there had been a law given which could make alive, verily righteousness would have been

by the law. But the scripture shut up all things under sin.” Since no man can fulfill the law, we have no righteousness from the law of and in ourselves, with which we can stand before God against his wrath and judgment. But, if we are to come to God, we must have the righteousness of another, which God regards and accepts.

[31] For the conviction in respect of sin extends over all human life on earth. Even saints and Christians must still suffer this conviction to pass upon their best life and work, and confess that they have sin, which would be wrong and worthy of condemnation, if it should be judged according to God’s commandment and before his tribunal; as also the prophet David, saintly and full of good works as he was, prays and confesses: “Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight no man living is righteous, Psalm 143:2; and St. Paul (1 Corinthians 4:4): “I know nothing against myself; yet I am not hereby justified.” But that they are not condemned like the others, is due alone to this difference: they accept this conviction, confess and lament that they have sin, and believe on Christ and seek forgiveness of sins through him. In this way they have the righteousness of another, which is entirely the work, power and merit of Christ the Lord. He calls it: “Going to the Father.”

[32] For these words: “because I go to the Father,” embraces the whole work of our redemption and salvation, for which God’s Son was sent from heaven, and which he performed for us and still performs until the end; namely, his passion, death and resurrection, and his whole reign in the church. For this going to the Father signifies nothing else than that he offers himself as a sacrifice by the shedding of his blood and his death in order to pay for sin; that afterwards he triumphs in his resurrection and brings into subjection to himself sin, death and hell, and seats himself alive at the right hand of the Father, where he reigns invisibly over all things in heaven and earth, and gathers and extends his church by the preaching of the Gospel; and that he intercedes for those, who believe, with the Father as an eternal mediator and high priest, because they still have weaknesses and sins remaining in them, and gives the power, and strength of the Holy Spirit to overcome sin, the devil and death.

[33] Lo, this now is the righteousness of Christians before God, that Christ goes to the Father, that is, suffers, and rises for us, and thereby reconciles us to the Father, so that for his sake we have forgiveness of sin

and grace. It is not at all by our work or merit, but solely by his going, which he does for our sake. This is the righteousness of another, for which we have done nothing and have merited nothing, and are unable to merit anything, freely given and appropriated to us to be our righteousness, whereby we please God and are his dear children and heirs.

[34] But that this freely bestowed righteousness is in us, and that we can comfort ourselves with it as our treasure and chief possession, comes by faith alone. For it must be received and accepted by us. Now it cannot be apprehended otherwise than with the heart, which clings to the departure of Christ and firmly believes that for his sake it has forgiveness and redemption from sin and death. For this righteousness is not an external thing, which can be effected by human works, ordinances or exercises; but a lofty, hidden treasure, not to be seen with eyes nor comprehended by our senses: as he himself says: “Ye behold me no more.” It must simply be believed.

[35] Here now is abolished and cut off at one stroke all that the world is seeking, disputing and inquiring about without end, namely, how a man may become pious before God. Everybody says something different; one teaches this, another that; and yet none has ever arrived at it, although they may have heard, learned and practiced every doctrine of the law and good works. One ought justly to ask this master Christ also and to be glad to hear what he says; as indeed everybody would wish to do, if this preaching were not at hand, and would gladly run to the ends of the earth for it. But, of course, everybody hopes that he will say something to the point, what should be done and something higher and better than all others have taught.

[36] But what does he say? Not a word about our doing and living: on the contrary he says, that all this is not the righteousness, which is valid before God. But if you wish to become pious and righteous before God, something else is necessary, something that neither you nor any man is and can do, namely this: “I go to the 1 Father.” In other words, nobody will become righteous before God except by and on account of this, that I die and rise again. My departure alone is the cause, why God graciously accepts a man and counts him righteous, if he clings to Christ in faith.

[37] Therefore these words are to be carefully noted, in which Christ proves himself such an adventurous man in speaking against the

understanding and ideas of all men, especially, of the wise and saintly, who all, if the discussion be concerning what it is to be pious and righteous, know nothing else to speak of than what they call justitiam formaleto, that is, such virtue as is in us or as we ourselves do, that is to say, our work and obedience.

[38] Again you say: What about the doctrine of good works? Shall this amount to nothing, or is it not a beautiful, praiseworthy thing, when a man endeavors to keep the commandments, and is obedient, chaste, honorable and truthful? Answer: Yes, surely; all this is to be done; it is also a good doctrine and life, provided it is left in the place where it belongs, and the two doctrines are kept distinct, how a man becomes pious and righteous before God, and how and to what end he is to do good works. For although it is necessary to teach the doctrine of good works, at the same time, nay, even before this also must be carefully taught (so that the doctrine of the Gospel and of faith be kept pure and unadulterated), that all our works, however good and holy they may be, are not the treasure and merit, by which we become acceptable to God and attain everlasting life. But it is this alone, that Christ goes to the Father and by his departure merits this for us, and gives and communicates to us his righteousness, innocence and merits; and so begins in us a kingdom that we, who believe in him, are redeemed by his power and Spirit from sin and death, and shall live with him forever. It must not be a righteousness that continues only here upon earth and then ceases; but a new righteousness, which endures forever in the life beyond with God, just as Christ lives and reigns above forever.

[39] For this reason I have often said, that in order to speak and judge correctly of these matters, a careful distinction must be made between a good man (what the philosophers call bonum virum) and a Christian. We also commend being a good man. There is nothing more praiseworthy on earth, and it is a gift of God just as well as sun and moon, corn and wine, and all creatures. But things must not be mixed and confused. Let a good man have his praise before the world, and let it be said: A good man is doubtless an excellent, precious man on earth, but for that reason he is not yet a Christian; for he may be a Turk or a heathen, as in ages past some were very famous. Indeed it cannot be otherwise than, that among so many wicked people, occasionally a good man should be found. But however

good he may be, with such goodness he is and remains a child of Adam, that is, an earthly man under sin and death.

[40] But when you inquire about a Christian, you must go much higher; for he is another kind of a man. He is not a child of Adam, and has not father and mother upon earth; but he is a child of God, an heir and nobleman in the kingdom of heaven. He is called a Christian because he clings with his heart to this Savior, who has ascended to the Father, and he believes that for his sake and through him he has God's grace, and everlasting salvation and life. This is neither achieved nor apprehended, attained nor learned by our life, virtue and work, from which we are called good men on earth; nor by righteousness according to the law and ten commandments. These, as has been said, are also necessary, and are found in every Christian; but they do not attain by far to this chief thing and this righteousness, of which Christ is speaking here and which he calls righteousness.

[41] For, although a man has exercised himself in this during his whole life much and long, and has done everything that he was able to do; nevertheless he cannot thereby attain to certainty that God is pleased with it and is truly gracious to him. Hence in every such life the heart always remains uncertain and in doubt. All experienced consciences give evidence of this, and even the monks bear testimony to it in their books, in which they teach openly, that one must doubt, for no man can know whether he is in a state of grace, and it would be presumptuous in a high degree to make this boast with reference to one's self.

[42] From this it must follow: because a man is in such doubt, he can have no true confidence in God, nor turn to him and call upon him from his heart; but he is timid and flees from God, and must at last fall into hatred of God and despair. For when the real struggle comes and he is to stand before the judgment, then he feels and sees, that with his life and works he cannot abide the wrath of God, but with it all must sink into the abyss.

[43] If now in such distress we are to be saved from despair and to prevail, we must have another foundation than our righteousness or that of the law, namely, this eternal righteousness of Christ, which stands there, where the devil cannot overthrow it and the judgment of God can bring no charge against it, that is, at the right hand of the Father. The devil can

overthrow me, whenever he wills, with all my life and works by presenting God's judgment and wrath. All this can blow away as the wind blows a little feather. But when I direct him from myself and my works to the right hand of the Father, where Christ, my Lord, is seated, who bestows upon me his righteousness, for which he has gone to the Father, he will not overthrow him, nay, he will not even dare to attack him.

[44] Therefore Christ acts like a faithful, good Savior, when he draws all this from us and all men to himself alone, and grounds and builds our righteousness entirely on his departure to the Father. So we can know, where we are safe against every onset and assault of the devil and the gates of hell. For if it depended upon us and upon our worthiness, that we had made sufficient satisfaction and had done enough good works, our heart never would have rest and finally could not exist.

[45] From all this it is manifest what a shameful, cursed doctrine the monks and the whole papacy have hitherto taught, whereby they have misled the world. They not only taught no word of Christ and faith, but they even claimed with impudence, that their monkery is a much higher, nobler and more perfect life than that of ordinary Christians, which ought to be an abomination to all Christians to hear. For one may exalt and extol the life and piety of all men, the chastity of virgins, the discipline and asceticism of hermits, the laudable deeds and virtues of great, excellent and pious lords and rulers, and whatever may be described to pious people, as high as one pleases; it never can equal a Christian, that is, one who has this Lord, sitting at the right hand of God, and his righteousness. We will gladly let that also stand for what it is worth and praise it as a precious gift; but a Christian is to be extolled as a lord far and high above all that, as one that has this eternal possession and inheritance in the kingdom of heaven at the right hand of God with Christ, his brother.

[46] He that understands and knows how to distinguish this, can also teach and judge correctly of all life, and go safely in all matters and guard himself from error. For he judges and measures everything by this rule and standard, which Christ teaches here, that the righteousness of a Christian is not the righteousness that has grown in us, like the other called the righteousness of the law and of man, but it is a heavenly and divine righteousness without and above us.

[47] Therefore, if anybody comes and tries to make a fool of you, makes much ado and tells you wonders about great exceptional holiness, and directs you to live after the example of this or that great saint, in order thereby to please God and become a Christian, you can say to him: Dear sir, I grant all that is good and I also would like to be pious, do according to God's commandments, and keep myself from sin; but you shall never persuade me, that in this way I become a Christian or attain to greater and higher things. They also, who fasted, labored and suffered so much, did not become Christians by that. For this were to encroach upon my dear Lord Christ, so that he would have gone away in vain and human work would be placed on equality with his. But I wish to be called a Christian, as he taught me and all saints have had to do, if they wished to stand before God, because I cling to this Savior and, as St. Paul says in Philippians 3:9: "Be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law," but his, which he gained for me by this departure, by which he overcame my sin and death, and which he announces and grants to me through the preaching of the Gospel. When you once have this, then go and do as many good works as you can; however, do it according to the commandment of God, for without this and before him you will be able to do nothing good, because you are still in unbelief, and have and know not Christ, and therefore are under sin with all that you do; as we have heard in the first part of this discourse.

[48] Behold, this is speaking according to the manner of Christ and with his words of righteousness, which he esteems righteousness. It is not an external human thing upon earth, but something incomprehensible and invisible in this life. It is not found in us men on earth, nor attained through men, but a new heavenly righteousness, which he alone has created and founded by his death and resurrection, and which we must apprehend in faith, because we do not see it, and which has for its goal an everlasting, unending life and being, where he rules in a new, heavenly state.

[49] For this life will not reach up to it, because it is altogether corrupted by sin and death, and finally shall be destroyed. Therefore the Son of God from heaven has founded this kingdom, which is not concerned with external, worldly affairs and government, as the Jews and the apostles imagined, nor with the poor, beggarly righteousness of this life. Its purpose is, on the contrary, to create a new, everlasting righteousness, by which all

nature shall be transformed and renewed, and in it shall be no sin or death any more, but a purely perfect, divine work and life. This is the work, which he has begun by going to the Father and in his own person has already fully accomplished. This kingdom he is evermore promoting in this life by the preaching of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers until the last day. But in the life to come it shall be lived and found completely and perfectly in us.

[50] This is the meaning, he intends to say, of the words: “I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more.” I am not speaking of this temporal life and existence upon earth, which in this corrupt nature cannot be without sin and death. Therefore there can be no perfect righteousness and life in it. Nor shall my kingdom consist of this transitory nature. Things must become different and arrive at the pass, that you behold me no more, because I reign eternally outside of this bodily, visible existence, and I shall bring you thither, where purely new and perfect righteousness and eternal life exist. This kingdom I now begin in Christendom by the preaching and work of the Holy Spirit. “Of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged.”

[51] In the first two thoughts Christ spoke of doctrine and included the whole sum of the Gospel. First, that all human nature, power, doing and life are sin and under God’s wraths, because they do not believe in Christ. Secondly, that we become righteous, that is, we are redeemed from sin and death, and we please God and have eternal life, solely because Christ goes to the Father. Now follows the third, including both how the world conducts itself towards this preaching, and how contrariwise the Holy Spirit shall press forward with his preaching.

[52] Of this he says, he will convict the world further in respect of judgment. This is also somewhat strange and obscure language in the ears of us, who are not accustomed to the Hebrew speech. The word “judgment” means nothing else than (as we also speak of it) the action and decision between two parties at variance, which is right or wrong; and it embraces at once both elements, which must always enter into a proceeding of judgment, favor and anger, or aid and punishment, on the one hand, that the innocent party be acquitted and helped to his rights; on the other, that the guilty be condemned and punished. However, the word is generally used for

the latter element of judgment or the legal sentence, namely, for condemnation and its consequence or execution.

[53] In this sense Christ also uses it here, and he intends to indicate that when the Holy Spirit shall pursue the two themes of his preaching in the world and shall convict it in respect of sin and righteousness, the world will not receive it, nor be willing to be convicted of being in sin and without righteousness, nor be moved to allow the righteousness of Christ to be offered to it. But it will set itself against this teaching and convicting of the Holy Spirit, and condemn and persecute it. It will claim to be right in doing so and to be obliged not to suffer its wisdom and righteousness, which it considers divine gifts and service of God, to be reduced to nothing. Contrariwise the Holy Spirit must continue to convict in respect of this judgment and also press the sentence of condemnation, and tell the world that it with its judgment is condemned, together with its prince and head, the devil.

[54] Then arises the conflict and one judgment runs contrary to the other. For the world also sets up this teaching, not only because it does not proceed from its wisdom nor from the great, distinguished men of the world, but also because it is preached by poor, lowly people. It opens its mouth wide against it, and says: Why, what more is it than that some vagabond beggar's wish to oppose established authority and by everybody, aye, was instituted by God himself? So it condemns, interdicts and curses both the doctrine and the preachers. Moreover it proceeds to shut up their mouths by threats of its power, resorts to severity and the sword, and will absolutely have its error and idolatry unassisted and unreprieved, nay, preserved and defended against God and Christ as wisdom and holiness, and the preaching of the Gospel uprooted and exterminated.

[55] But Christ says on the contrary, that the Holy Spirit shall retain the superior judgment and prevail with his convicting of this sentence of the world until the last day. But in consequence of this, Christians get into straits between door and hinge, and the cross and persecution begins. For, because the kingdom of Christ, as we have heard, is not of this world, but spiritual and at present invisible on earth, the power and might, which the world has upon earth, are directed against the church with condemning, persecuting, harassing, torturing, killing and murdering by sword, fire, water and every means. The world is also incited and strengthened by the

bitter, fierce anger and hatred of the devil against Christ, who desires and seeks to blot out and exterminate the church. And so to the eyes of the world and also of Christians it looks as if, in consequence of this persecution, cruelty and murder, practiced on the Christians who confess and maintain this preaching of the Holy Spirit, the church would altogether perish.

[56] In this part of discourse then Christ first prophesies, how this preaching shall be received by the world and what would happen to the apostles on account of it; namely, in the first place the world shall despise them, because they come along without any public authority and command from it and introduce a new doctrine in opposition to the regular government, priesthood and teaching office, instituted by God, and convict and reprove all it maintains as of no validity before God; in the next place, because they wish to continue and not to cease their preaching, the world will proceed and issue judgment against them and also execute it, as against people, who are neither sent by God nor preach God's word, but are the emissaries of the devil, and who, having been proved and declared to be blasphemers of God, disobedient and rebellious to God's law, God's people and God's service, are guilty of death and not worthy to live. So the Jews cried out against St. Paul (Acts 22:22): "It is not fit that he should live," and they assign the reason (Acts 21:28): "This is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place."

[57] Secondly, Christ gives comfort against this hatred of judgment and persecution of the world. They are to know that he will nevertheless maintain his preaching and preserve his church against the anger and rage of the world by his divine power and strength. The devil and his kingdom shall be subdued by him and compelled to yield and not be able to execute against his church what in his fierce, mad wrath and hate he would like to do. Therefore, although Christians on account of this preaching must be exposed to the devil and the world, this word shall nevertheless remain undestroyed and finally triumph and hold the field, and make manifest to all the world its unjust judgment against the Gospel. In the end they shall be made to feel ashamed of themselves and to acknowledge of themselves, that they condemned and persecuted the Gospel unfairly and with injustice; just as the judges of Christ, aye, even his betrayer, in his passion had to bear witness to his innocence. The reason, he says, is this: this king Christ by

going to the Father has overcome both the world and the devil; and now he causes this to be proclaimed that he is the Lord of all and has power and might to condemn and to punish, with everlasting hell fire, everything that opposes him, including the devil and his angels.

[58] This is what he says, that this conviction shall continue against the world that persecutes the Gospel, and finally prevail over it, so that its judgment and condemnation shall be overpowered, and in turn be condemned and put to shame; and not only the world, but also its god, the devil, who incites the world against Christ. For he is, says he, already judged, and the sentence of condemnation has already been pronounced upon him, and the only thing still wanting is its execution, that the punishment be inflicted upon him in eternal hell fire: just like a thief or murderer, sentenced by the judge, upon whom the wrath and judgment of blood has already passed and who has been given over to death, so that he only flees to be led away and to receive his due.

[59] So here this judgment proceeds by power and might of the Lord Christ, sitting at the right hand of the Father; and this judgment is publicly proclaimed by the office of preaching, that the prince of the world with all his adherents is already finally under condemnation, and shall accomplish nothing against Christ. He must let him remain the Lord, under whose feet he shall eternally lie and suffer his head to be trodden down. And Christ causes this to be preached in all the world, that whoever will not believe on the Lord, shall be condemned with the devil, however high, mighty, learned or holy he may be, regardless of how he dares to condemn this doctrine or to suppress and extirpate it, be his name Roman or Turkish emperor, king and lord over all.

[60] If now meanwhile the world goes its way and despises this judgment, which is already pronounced upon the devil and all his members, and makes a jest of it, because it does not see it come to pass visibly, just as it also condemns the first and second part of this preaching. Christ nevertheless ever proceeds and cheerfully allows himself to be despised. But at the same time he also shows the devil and the world that he is the Lord, who can break and restrain the wrath and raging of the devil, and hurl down his enemies, as Psalm 110:I says of him, until he makes his enemies his footstool. For the ax is already laid at the tree, and already chains and bonds are thrown upon him, as 2 Peter 2:4, says, with which the devil is

bound unto everlasting darkness in the fire of hell. Nobody shall believe this except the Christians, who take their Lord's Word for truth and know his power and kingdom; the others shall have no other reward than what they seek with their lord, the devil. Plunged into the abyss of hell in everlasting darkness, they must be overthrown and perish on account of their raging against Christ. This is the first division of this Gospel of the kingdom of Christ and the preaching of the Holy Spirit in the world. Now follows:

II. Sermon on the Teaching Office of the Holy Spirit.

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth.”

[61] This part: also belongs to the promise of the Holy Spirit and his office in the church. But he breaks off here, what he had begun to say of the doctrine and had summarily comprehended in few words concerning what the Holy Spirit shall preach; and he directs them to the truth, that the Holy Spirit himself shall come and teach them these things, so that they shall well understand them and experience them in their work. For it is not yet time, he will say, to speak much of the doctrine, because he is about to pronounce his farewell and to comfort them in view of his departure. Moreover, even if he should speak of it at great length, they are not yet prepared to comprehend and understand rightly, how it shall be in his future kingdom. For they are yet too deeply immersed in the thought and hope of an external, temporal kingdom and worldly glory, so that they cannot adapt themselves and take into their hearts, what he says to them of his spiritual kingdom and office, which he shall fulfill through the Holy Spirit. For they are able to think only in this way: If he is to be a king, he must be present himself, and win the world to himself either with his preaching and miracles, so that it will voluntarily render him obedience and accept him as lord, or if it is not willing of its own accord, compel it by external force and punishment. But if this, which he now says shall happen, and he goes away from them and is not seen any more, that is, dies, it is no longer to be hoped that he will be a king and execute such great things. Therefore they are, and until after his resurrection they remain, quite bewildered, so that they do not understand what he told them beforehand, and besides they already feel the

misery, sorrow and persecution of the world, which he here announces to them.

[62] This is what he says: “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” It is too heavy for you to bear, what has been said and still is to be said of this; for it is all quite contrary to your thoughts and hopes. For if you understood it, you would thereby take comfort and be of a joyful heart; as he also said before: “If ye loved me, ye would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father.” But now what I tell you for your comfort about my glorification, ascent to heaven, and the glorious kingdom, which I will begin through you, only fills you with fear and sorrow. It is indeed true: “Ye cannot bear them now.” Therefore I must reserve it, until the time comes, when what I tell you now beforehand, shall come. He must teach it to you himself, and lead and guide you out of your present erroneous thoughts and misunderstandings into the truth and right knowledge.

[63] For, he says, his office shall be to glorify me, that is, to declare of me the revelation and testimony that I, raised out of suffering and death to glory, seated at the right hand of the Father, am Lord over all, and announce to all the world, that this was the counsel of the Father. Therefore the Holy Spirit shall be sent in order that the world may know this and so be brought to my kingdom. When now this takes place, and I am taken from you and the Holy Spirit comes, he himself shall doubtless teach much better than you now think and understand; and in your own experience shall be found what I have now spoken to you and, if I were to explain and elucidate it further, would have to speak much more fully. In this sense he also afterwards concludes this chapter, as we shall hear in the Gospel for next Sunday, and says: “These things have I spoken unto you in dark sayings,” that is, what I have hitherto told you of my passion, resurrection, and your sufferings and how in the midst of them you shall ask the Father in my name, all these are now strange, dark and hidden sayings, which you do not understand. But the time shall come, “when I shall speak no more to you in dark sayings, but shall tell you plainly of the Father,” namely, when I have ascended to heaven and shall send to you the Holy Spirit. Then you shall experience, what now is nothing but dark sayings to you, as I tell it to you. This is the true, simple meaning of the text: “I have yet many things to say unto you.”

[64] But these words have had to serve our papists and still must serve them, and allow themselves to be twisted and interpreted, in order to strengthen their frippery, and to be laid as foundation of what they pretend and expectorate, that much more must be believed and kept than what the Gospel and the Scriptures teach, namely, what the fathers and the councils have said and ordained. For Christ has promised here that the Holy Spirit shall tell them much more than he has said, and guide them into all the truth. Just as if the apostles had very well understood, what Christ says to them here, whereas they themselves prove the contrary by the work of their unbelief in regard to his passion and resurrection. Or as if this were ever so easy to understand, that the Holy Spirit was not necessary, whereas until this day no pope understands anything of it, as I know from experience. For their art I have also learned; and by their books they give evidence enough, that they understand nothing of this. Therefore it is necessary to reply to these fools, in order to break down their tissue of lies.

[65] First you hear now that Christ says: “I have yet many things to say unto you.” Who are these “you”? Or to whom is he speaking? Without doubt the apostles, to whom he also says: “Ye cannot bear them now;” and “The Holy Spirit shall guide you into all the truth.” Therefore, unless Christ lied, this word must have been fulfilled at the time that the Holy Spirit came. He must have accomplished in them and through them all that the Lord here says, and have guided them into all the truth. How now will it be inferred from this that Christ did not tell all to the apostles, nor did the Holy Spirit, but left much untold, which the councils should teach and determine? Whereas, according to their claims, the contrary should follow, that the Holy Spirit has told all to the apostles; and Christ is pressing towards this conclusion, that he will explain all to the apostles and will introduce into the world through them, what they have learned from the Holy Spirit. How then does their juggling agree, that what is to be known, believed and done in the church, is only to be told, taught, decided and ordained after the apostles at the end of the world.

[66] Furthermore, if what the councils have taught and decided after the apostles is to be taken as truth, revealed anew by the Holy Spirit, the apostles themselves did not come into all the truth, much less they to whom they preached. And together with them the church would be deceived by

Christ, when he promises them: The Holy Spirit shall guide you into all the truth.

[67] Secondly, Christ says plainly: “I have yet many things to say unto you.” He does not say: I have many other things to say unto you, and the Holy Spirit shall teach and explain to you other things than I have told you. This is their own addition, which they daub on the words of Christ, and so pervert them, that teaching many things (multa) is to mean teaching other things (alia). We would wish them well to the word “many,” if only they had the grace of the Holy Spirit to teach many things; but it is not to be endured, that under the guise of the word “many” they also wish to introduce and to have power to teach other things. For they impudently claim that the church by inspiration of the Holy Spirit appointed and ordained many things after the apostles, which must be observed; among others the article of one form in the Sacrament, celibacy of priests, and the like. This is not teaching more or further, but altogether different things, aye, contrary things against the clear ordinance and command of Christ, which they themselves must acknowledge is right. Nevertheless it is to be heresy and wrong to act contrary to their law according to the command of Christ; for the church, they say, has ordained differently. If you ask, on what ground, they answer: “Christ says: “I have yet many things to say unto you;” indeed, even that which is contrary to his own Word and command.

[68] Truly, that would be a fine church, which could arrogate to itself the power, as the Antichristian church of the pope does, to teach contrary to Christ whatever it wished, and to change his ordinances, and then would prove and confirm it with this saying: “I have yet many things to say unto you.” Whereas he says distinctly of the Holy Spirit, and so puts limit and measure upon him, that the Holy Spirit shall glorify Christ and not speak from himself, but take and proclaim of his own, that is, of that which is the Word and command of Christ. Therefore the company that teaches otherwise, cannot be from the Holy Spirit, nor the church of Christ, but must be the sect of the hateful devil.

[69] For the Christian church and the Holy Spirit himself abide by that which Christ said and commanded. They may make more of it, that is, elucidate it in length and in breadth, but they do not make something different of it. For this saying “many things” consists in discussing one point in manifold ways and yet always saying one thing. For instance John

the Evangelist wrote many more things than Christ said here; but yet always holds to the one thing, discussing thoroughly the article of faith on the person, office and kingdom of Christ, of which also Christ speaks, and his scope or main point always looks to this Lamb of God. Likewise St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans and almost throughout that to the Galatians treats of and enforces the righteousness of faith.

[70] Doubtless this is to preach much and to say more than Christ said in these few words but yet always one thing and not something different. For it is the quality of a good preacher, that he is able to take a subject and briefly comprehend it and sum it up in two or three words, and afterwards, if there is need, also to elucidate and explain it with sayings and examples and make out of a flower a whole meadow: just as a goldsmith is able to bend one piece of silver together solidly into a lump, and again beat it broad, crooked and curly, and into thin foil; and so it becomes a long or a short sermon, but always the same and not contradictory. For God's Word is to dwell in us richly, says St. Paul (Colossians 3:16), so that we may be powerful in the Scriptures and able to prove the right doctrine by them. The Epistle to the Hebrews does this which for the most part speaks of the priesthood of Christ, and spins a long sermon out of the saying in the 110th Psalm 5:4: "Thou art a priest forever," adducing many more sayings, texts and examples; and yet, viewed as a whole, it amounts to nothing more than this one point, that Christ is the only eternal priest. This indeed means that much more is said than David says in the psalm mentioned, but still nothing different. So since the beginning of Christianity much more has been taught and preached, through the Holy Spirit, than Christ did, and more may be taught still every day and expounded most abundantly and in every manner, as more is revealed to one than another, or as it falls and is given to one to speak more copiously than another; but still in such a way, that when it is all finally brought together, it all refers to one Christ. And how many things can be adduced as illustrations from the whole Bible, aye, from all creatures, which all agree with the teaching of the Gospel, none of which Christ has taught or said, and yet it is the same doctrine!

[71] St. Paul also speaks of this when he refers to the gift of prophecy or the interpretation of the Scriptures, and lays down a measure and rule by which it is to be governed: "Whether prophecy, let us prophecy", says he in Romans 12:6, 1 "according to the proportion of our faith," that is, in

harmony and agreement with the doctrine of faith. For instance, if one wished to adduce the example of Abraham, who took his son Isaac upon the mountain to sacrifice him there, but left his servants and the ass below at the foot of the mountain; this example can be interpreted for and according to the faith, or against the faith. The Jewish preachers and teachers did the latter, when they set forth that whoever would allow himself to be sacrificed and killed in the same manner, he would do the loftiest work and would immediately ascend to heaven; wherefore kings, who desired to be distinguished saints, sacrificed and burned to God their own children alive. Similarly our monkish saints interpret it. If one wishes to come to God, he must leave servants and beasts below at the foot of the mountain, that is, put away the five senses and have nothing to do with outward, worldly affairs, but separated from all this, live in spiritual contemplation. This can be called interpreting and teaching not in proportion to and according to the faith, but against it. But you may interpret it in this way: Whoever wishes to come to God, must rise above human understanding and thoughts, so that he may have God's Word, to learn to know and apprehend God from it, and there offers before him by faith (if the conscience is to stand before God) the sacrifice, given for us as a sacrifice by God, Christ, the Son of God, and meanwhile lets the ass with the servants remain below, that is, what is of our own work and doing. In this way I have adduced this example. This is the same teaching that the Gospel contains everywhere, and is not against, but for the faith; although this also is not the real, sure interpretation of this history.

[72] Our papistic asses, swine and simpletons will not regard this, but wish to persuade us to accept everything that is put forth and taught in the name of the church or the councils, as if the Holy Spirit taught it, irrespective of how it agrees and corresponds with the teaching of the Gospel; and all is to be confirmed by the saying: "I have yet many things to say unto you." No, dear fellow, that will not pass, although he has more to say; you cannot for this reason say whatever you please, or what every monk has dreamed, or what every bold papist wishes to be observed. This I willingly grant you, that you may spread these words of Christ and be a copious preacher, and out of one word make a thousand, in order that it may become clear, bright and lucid, and everybody may understand it; but only in such a way that the one pure, uncorrupted doctrine remains. But if, contrary to this, you bring up and put forth a new doctrine, for instance, if

anybody becomes a monk, he has a new baptism and becomes as pure as a young child, just baptized then not the Holy Spirit, but the devil teaches you to speak, and it is not teaching more, but something quite different from and contradictory to what Christ says. Therefore a Christian must be prudent in this matter and, as St. John teaches, be able to prove the spirits according to the Word of God, and be on his guard, lest he allows himself to be told another teaching, be it much or little, and led and guided upon another way.

[73] Thirdly, he says: “Ye cannot bear them now.” You observe here, that he is speaking of excellent, great things, which are too difficult for them, and for this reason alone he is unwilling to say more about them now, because they are too imperfect and weak. He refers, of course, to the same things and none other, than he began to speak of, namely, his kingdom, how it should progress in the world; how he must die the most shameful death and become a curse, and yet be believed on as the Savior, the Son of God and the Lord over all. Furthermore, that they should be persecuted and killed by the world, and nevertheless the Gospel should prosper, and by it the whole Jewish people, their priesthood, temple, service of God and all their glory, should fall to the ground. At that time they were able to understand none of these things, even if he had preached to them for many years, until they were taught by the Holy Spirit through experience in their office of preaching.

[74] But tell me, in comparison with these things what is all that has been ordained and appointed later, after the apostles, by councils and popes? Is that such a difficult thing, that it cannot be understood or endured without special revelation and power of the Holy Spirit? How this or that order and monastic rule is to be kept; shall black or gray hoods be worn; on Friday no meat is to be eaten; only one form of the sacrament is to be used; should not the apostles have been able to understand and bear such things, which every unlearned, wicked rascal can well understand and do? Ah, they were much higher things, which the apostles could not bear, and a higher art than these good-for-nothing babblers dream of. I certainly think that what the apostles were not able to understand and bear, that you also will not be able to understand and bear with the enlightenment of the 1 Holy Spirit. For the doctrine of faith is difficult to grasp and is not so easily learned, as inexperienced spirits dream; namely, that a man must go out of himself, out of his own life and works, and with his whole mind fasten to that, which he

neither sees nor feels in himself, namely, that Christ goes to the Father. O, it is a difficult art, to despair thus of one's self, and to let go whatever one has of his good or bad life, and to cling to the Word of Christ alone and to give body and soul for it. What power of reason can search out or teach this, if the whole world be searched over? Only try it with earnestness and in the real conflict of conscience, and you will experience it. For the devil and our own nature, and so many sects and false doctrines fight against it too hard. Let this be said against the lies and asinine art of the papists, with which they defile and bedaub this beautiful text, in order to confirm their lies.

[75] But the meaning of this, that Christ calls the Holy Spirit "the Spirit of truth", belongs to the explanation of other Gospels, and is elsewhere fully expounded. But it is said here advisedly, "The Spirit of truth" and, "He shall guide you into all the truth," that is, into the true, pure doctrine, which preaches of me and, as he afterwards says, shall glorify me. For he sees far ahead here, that the spirit of lies, the devil, will stir and put himself forward even in the church, and set forth his own with great plausibility and approval; and he would fain say: O, how many sects shall arise, all of whom shall boast wonderfully of great mind, and yet they will only seduce people away from Christ and the truth into error and perdition.

[76] Therefore he describes the Holy Spirit, and gives to him the true token, by which he can be known and tested: "He shall glorify me; for he shall take of mine." It is he alone, who elucidates Christ, as he has made himself known through his word; so that it may be known, that whoever teaches anything different, and yet pretends to be a Christian and adorns himself with the name, is not of the Spirit of Christ. For he shall teach no other thing, but adhere to the same teaching of Christ, except that he spreads it more and makes it clearer and plainer; wherefore he says: "He shall glorify me."

[77] Furthermore, when he says: "He shall not speak from himself," he again distinguishes between the false and the true Spirit. For the others all come of themselves, and speak from themselves, what they have thought out. Now he says, this is not the quality of the Holy Spirit, but of the devil. "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof." John 8:44. Therefore he wishes to say: If a spirit is heard, who speaks from himself, he is certainly a liar. But the Holy Spirit shall not

speaking from himself; but what he receives from me and as he shall hear me and the Father speak with each other.

[78] This is truly an incisive text for the article of the three persons in the divine Being, that the Son of God is the Word of the Father in eternity, whom no one hears speak except the Holy Spirit; and he not only hears, but also testifies and proclaims it in the world. And in short, it all tends to this. that it is God's purpose that the Holy Spirit shall teach and pursue only the article of Christ, how we become righteous before God for his sake. Therefore he concludes: "He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine;" that is, he shall indeed say more than I, and speak and explain more clearly: but he shall take of mine, and speak of me and not of men and their holiness and works. This is to be his true office and work, by which he shall be known, and which he shall carry on until this Christ is well known. When you have learned this, you may seek for another Holy Spirit; but I hope we shall all remain the disciples of this Master and Teacher until the last day.

Rogate. The Fifth Sunday after Easter. Christ's Sermon on Prayer.

Text: John 16:23-30.

23 And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.

24 Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

25 These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.

26 At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you:

27 For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

28 I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.

29 His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb.

30 Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God.
John 16:23-30

[1] We are accustomed to read today's Gospel on this Sunday because it treats of prayer and this week is called Rogation (Supplication) week, in which we give ourselves to prayer and to processions with crosses. Those who first instituted it, no doubt, meant it well, but it has proven to work

harm. For, in the processions heretofore, many unchristian things have been practiced, and there has been no praying at all or very little; so that the processions were rightly abolished and discontinued. Often have I admonished that we should persevere in prayer, for there is great need of it. Since the outward prating and muttering of prayer is done away with, we no longer pray in any way. This is a good indication that we heretofore, notwithstanding our many prayers, never prayed.

[2] The Lord points out here five things necessary to constitute true prayer. The first is God's promise, which is the chief thing and is the foundation and power of all prayers. For he promises here that it shall be given us if we ask; and besides he swears: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name." He promises that we might be sure of being heard in prayer; yea, he censures the disciples for the reason that they are lazy and have not therefore been praying. As if he would say: God is ready to give more quickly, and to give more than you ask; yea, he offers his treasures if we only take them. It is truly a great shame and a severe chastisement for us Christians that God should still upbraid us for our slothfulness in prayer, and that we fail to let such a rich and excellent promise incite us to pray. We let this precious treasure lie there, and seek it not, nor exercise ourselves to receive the power in such a promise.

[3] So God himself now founds our prayer upon his promise and thereby encourages us to pray. If it were not for this promise, who would have the courage to pray? We have hitherto resorted to many ways of preparing ourselves to pray — ways with which the books are filled; but if you wish to be well prepared, take the promise and lay hold of God with it. Then your courage and desire to pray will soon grow, which courage you will never otherwise get. For "those who pray without God's promise, imagine in themselves how angry God is, whom they wish to propitiate by means of their prayers. Without faith in the promise, there is then, neither courage nor desire to pray, but mere uncertain delusion and a melancholy spirit; there is, therefore, no hearing of prayers, and both prayer and labor are lost.

[4] By these words Christ now chastises the unbelief of those who, by reason of their foolish worship, consider themselves unworthy to pray, and gauge the worthiness of their prayer according to themselves and their own ability, and not according to the promise of God. There is then, to be sure,

nothing but unworthiness. However, you should, by all means, be conscious of your own unworthiness, taking confidence not from your own doings, but from the promise of God, and be so completely conscious, that if you were all alone, and no one else in the world prayed, you would nevertheless pray, because of this promise. For you can point me to no true saint who prayed, depending upon his own worthiness, and who did not rely only upon God's promises, be he Peter, Paul, Mary, Elijah, or anyone else. All of them have been unworthy. I would not give a nickel for all the prayers of a saint if he prayed because of his own worthiness.

[5] The second requisite of true prayer, following that of God's promise, is faith — that we believe the promise is true, and do not doubt that God will give what he promises. For the words of the promise require faith. But faith is a firm, undoubting confidence in God's promise that it is true; as James says: "But if any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting: for he that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." James 1:5-7. Moreover, he who doubts and yet prays, tempts God; for he doubts in respect to God's will and grace. Therefore, his prayer is nothing and he gropes after God like the blind for the wall. John also speaks of this assurance of faith in 1 John 5:14-15: "And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth: and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him." John describes with these words how a truly believing heart is disposed in prayer, namely, that it is concerned about nothing else than that its prayer be heard, knowing that it has even then obtained its petition. That is also true. Such faith and definite assurance, however, the Holy Spirit must impart; therefore, without the Holy Spirit, surely no prayer will be offered.

[6] Try it, now, and pray thus. Then you will taste the sweetness of God's promise. What courage and consolation of heart it awakens to pray for all things! It matters not how great and high the petitions may be. Elijah was a man of like passions with ourselves; yet when he prayed, it did not rain for three years and six months, and when he again prayed it rained. 1 Kings, 17:1; 18:45. Notice, here you see a single man prays and by his

prayer he is lord of the clouds, of heaven and earth. So God lets us see what power and influence a true prayer has, namely, that nothing is impossible for it to do.

[7] Let everyone now ask his heart how often he has prayed during his whole life. Singing Psalms and saying the Lord's Prayer is not called praying. These are instituted for children and untutored people, as exercises, to make them athletes in the Scriptures. Your prayer, however, no one but yourself sees and feels in your heart, and you will truly know it, when it hits the mark.

[8] The third requisite of true prayer is, that one must name definitely something that he brings to God or for which he prays; as for strong faith, for love, for peace, and for the comfort of his neighbor. One must actually set forth the petitions; just as the Lord's Prayer presents seven petitions. This is what Christ means by the words: "If ye shall ask anything of the Father." "Anything," that is, whatever you are in need of. Besides, he himself interprets this "anything" and says: "That your joy may be made full." That is, pray for all things you need, until you have acquired even all and your joy is made full; and his prayer will first be fully answered on the day of judgment.

[9] The fourth element in true prayer is; that we must desire, or wish that the petition be granted, which is nothing but asking; as Christ says, "Ask." Others have called this "Ascensum mentis in Deum," when the soul ascends to God and desires something from him, and sighs from its depths, saying: Oh, that I had this or that! Such sighing St. Paul praises in Romans 2:26. It is an intercession of the Spirit that cannot be uttered. That is, the mouth wants to, but cannot speak as rapidly and strongly as the heart desires; the yearning is greater than any words and thoughts. Hence it is, also, that man himself does not feel how deep his sighing or desire is. When Zacchaeus sought to see the Lord, he himself did not feel how strongly his heart wished that Christ might speak with him and come into his house. However, when his desire was fulfilled, he was very happy, for he had succeeded according to all his wishes and prayers; he had received more than he had dared to ask by word of mouth, or desire. Luke 19:2ff. Moses, likewise, cried so that God spoke to him: "Wherefore criest thou unto me?" Exodus 14:15, and yet his mouth kept silence; but his heart, in its extremity, sighed deeply and that was called crying unto God. In like manner St. Paul writes to

the Ephesians: “God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Ephesians 3:20. Now, temptation, anxiety and trouble induce this sighing; they teach us what true sighing is.

[10] The fifth requisite of true prayer is, that we ask in the name of Christ. This is nothing more than that we come before God in the faith of Christ and comfort ourselves with the sure confidence that he is our Mediator, through whom all things are given to us, without whom we merit nothing but wrath and disgrace. As Paul says to the Romans: “Through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Romans 5:2. It is praying aright in Christ’s name, when we thus trust in him that we will be received and heard for his sake, and not for our own sake. Those, however, who pray in their own name, who presume that God will hear or regard them, because they say so many, such long, such devout, such godly prayers, will merit and obtain nothing but wrath and disgrace; for they wish to be people whom God should regard without a mediator. To them, Christ here is of no consideration, nor is he of any service.

[11] We observe that all five requisites of prayer may be complied with in the heart, without any utterance of the mouth. The oral part of prayer is really not to be despised, but it is necessary to kindle and encourage prayer inwardly, in the heart. The additional conditions, however, of which I have written enough elsewhere, should and must be omitted that we specify to God the time, person, place, and measure. We must leave all that to his own free will, and cling only to asking; we must not doubt that the prayer is heard, and that what we petitioned is already ordered — that it will be given — as certainly as if we already had it. This is pleasing to God and he will do as he here promises: “Ask, and ye shall receive.” Those, however, who set the time, place and measure, tempt God, and believe not that they are heard or that they have obtained what they asked; therefore, they also receive nothing. The Gospel lesson continues: “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name.”

[12] It may be that they knew as yet nothing of such prayer, and of this name; besides they felt no need that urged them to pray in this name. They imagined that so long as Christ was with them they needed nothing and had enough of everything. But, now that he is to separate from them and leave them, trouble immediately comes and they will have reason enough to

move them to pray. “These things have I spoken unto you in parables (dark sayings).”

[13] When he says, “these things,” he means that which he had just before spoken: “A little while, and ye behold me not; and again a little while, and ye shall see me;” and, “Because I go to the Father;” also, the parable of the woman in travail. For these were nothing but parables, that is, dark obscure sayings, which they did not understand. John calls these dark, hidden sayings “parables,” although the German language does not designate them so, but calls them enigmas or veiled sayings. We are accustomed to say of one who has uttered an enigmatical saying: “That is a covered dish or a covered meal,” when the words have a meaning not on the surface. In parables, the meaning to be conveyed is expressed in a way that not everyone understands. Of this nature were all the sayings of Christ, which he spoke to his disciples on the night of his farewell and his going to the Father; they could understand nothing of them. They thought his going would not be dying and coming into another existence; they thought of it as a pleasure walk and that Christ should return in the body, as one journeys to another country and returns. Therefore, although he spoke plainly and clearly, yet going and parting were a “covered meal” to them. Hence, he adds: “The hour cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in dark sayings (parables), but shall tell you plainly of the Father.”

[14] That is, what I now speak to you, while in the body, and my parables ye understand not, which I will thoroughly explain to you through the Holy Spirit. I will plainly speak of my Father, that you may then understand who the Father is and what my going to the Father means. You will clearly see how I ascend through suffering into the Father’s life and into his kingdom; that I sit at his right hand and represent you and am your mediator; that all this is done for your sake, that you may likewise come to the Father. “I shall tell you plainly of the Father” is not to be understood to mean that he will tell us much about God’s divine nature, as the sophists fancy; for that is unnecessary and the divine nature of God is incomprehensible. But Christ will tell us how he goes to the Father, how he takes upon himself the kingdom and government of the Father; as a king’s son returns to his father and assumes the government of the kingdom. Christ says further: “In that day ye shall ask in my name.”

[15] For then, in your many tribulations, you will have not only reason to pray, but will also know and perceive what my name is and how you should esteem me. Then will you be taught by praying itself what you now do not at all understand, and that hitherto you have never prayed. Therefore, he adds: “And I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father.”

[16] How, then? Will Christ not be our mediator? Shall we not pray in his name? How lovingly and sweetly the Lord can speak, and woo us to himself, and, through himself, to the Father! Here he, himself, explains how it will be when we pray in his name: “Ye,” he says, “have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father.” That is, ye love me and know me; have me and my name and are in me as I in you. For Christ dwells in us, not because we can think, speak, sing or write so much about him; but because we love him and believe in him. We know that he is come from the Father and returns to the Father; that is, how he emptied himself, in his passion, of all his divine glory and returned again to the Father in his kingdom, for our sake. This faith brings us to the Father, and thus all then is done in his name.

[17] So we are sure that Christ needs not to pray for us, for he has already prayed for us. We, ourselves, may now approach through Christ, and pray. We no longer need a Christ who prays for us. This one Christ is enough, he who has prayed for us and accomplished this work. Therefore, he says: “The Father himself loveth you.” It is not your merit, but his love. He loves you, but for my sake, because you believe on me and love me, that is, he has regard for my name in you. Hence, thereby have I fulfilled my office, and you are now brought, through me, to where you may yourselves, in my place, appear in his presence and pray. It is not necessary that I still pray for you. These are marvelous words, that we, through Christ, become like Christ and are his brethren, and may glory in being children of his Father, who loves us for Christ’s sake. He says in John 1:16, ‘Grace for Grace,’ that is, God is gracious unto us, because he is gracious to Christ, who is in us and we in him.

[18] And here we also see that to “believe in Christ” does not mean to believe that Christ is a person who is both God and man; that does not help anyone. But that this same person is the Christ; that is, that he went forth

from the Father and came into the world, and again leaves the world and goes to the Father. The words mean no less than that this is Christ, that he became man and died for us, rose again and ascended to heaven. Because of this office of his, he is called Jesus Christ, and to believe this concerning him, that: it is true, means to be and to abide in his name. There follows further in this Gospel: “His disciples say, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no dark sayings.”

[19] Here you see that to speak “plainly” (“frei heraus”), or to speak in clear terms, means to speak without parables, or without dark and covered words. And the good disciples think they understand very well what he tells them, that Christ Comes from the Father and goes to the Father; but they do this as good, pious children of Christ. They are easily able to understand it, and in love they tell him so. In ordinary conversation, people sometimes say to one another Yes or No, or give assent, saying, It is so, and in a sense one understands, even though he is still far from the meaning of another’s words. In such case the conversation is without hypocrisy and in true simplicity. The Evangelist hereby shows what a beautiful, plain, friendly and loving life Christ led with his disciples, since they were so very able to understand him. Then the disciples say further: “Now know we that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee.”

[20] That is, you anticipate and explain yourself and speak no more in parables, concerning which we must question you; for you know in advance where we are lacking in understanding. All this reverts to the fact that they wished to ask what the “little while” meant, and he noticed it and explains by saying that he must go to the Father; which they still did not understand, and yet it was clearer than his words: “A little while and ye will not see me.” Now, because he saw their thoughts — that they wished question him — they confessed that he comes from God and knows all things, so that we need not to ask him, for he himself sees very well where the trouble is.

Rogate, the Fifth Sunday after Easter. Second Sermon. Five Requisites of True Prayer.

Text: John 16:23-30.

23 And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.

24 Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

25 These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.

26 At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you:

27 For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

28 I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.

29 His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb.

30 Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God.

John 16:23-30

[1] First we note that in order for a prayer to be really right and to be heard five things are required. The first is, that we have from God his promise or his permission to speak to him, and that we remember the same before we pray and remind God of it, thereby encouraging ourselves to pray in a calm and confident frame of mind. Had God not told us to pray, and pledged himself to hear us, none of his creatures could ever, with all their prayers,

obtain so much as a grain of corn. From this, then, there follows that no one receives anything from God by virtue of his own merit or that of his prayer. His answer comes by virtue of the divine goodness alone, which precedes every prayer and desire, which moves us, through his gracious promise and call, to pray and to desire, in order that we may learn how much he cares for us, and how he is more ready to give than we are to receive. He would have us seek to become bold, to pray in a calm and confident spirit, since he offers all, and even more, than we are able to ask.

[2] In the second place, it is necessary that we never doubt the pledge and promise of the true and faithful God. For even to this end did God pledge himself to hear, yea, commanded us to pray, in order that we may always have a sure and firm faith that we will be heard; as Jesus says in Matthew 21:22: "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Christ says in Luke 11:9-13: "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. And of which of you that is a father shall his son ask a loaf, and he give him a stone? or a fish, and he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" With this and like promises and commands we must consolingly exercise ourselves and pray in true confidence.

[3] In the third place, if one prays doubting that God will hear him, and only offers his prayers as a venture, whether it be granted or not granted, he is guilty of two wicked deeds. The first is, that he, himself, makes his prayer unavailing and he labors in vain. For Jesus says: "Whoever will ask of God, let him ask in faith, nothing doubting: for he that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." James 1:6-7. He means that the heart of such a man does not continue stable, therefore God can give it nothing; but faith keeps the heart calm and stable and makes it receptive for the divine gifts.

[4] The other wicked deed is, that he regards his most true and faithful God as a liar and an unstable and doubtful being; as one who cannot or will not keep his promise; and thus through his doubt he robs God of his honor

and of his name of truth and faithfulness. In this, such a grievous sin is committed that by this sin a Christian becomes a heathen, denying and losing his own God, and thus he remains in his sin, and must be condemned forever, without comfort. Moreover, if he receives that for which he prays, it will be given, not for his salvation, but for his punishment in time and eternity and it is not for the sake of the prayers, but because of his wrath that God rewards the good words which were spoken in sin, unbelief and divine dishonor.

[5] In the fourth place, some say: Yes, I would gladly trust that my prayer would be heard, if I were only worthy and prayed aright. My answer is: If you do not pray until you know and experience that you are fit, then you will never need to pray. As I have said before, our prayers must not be founded nor rest upon ourselves or their own merits, but upon the unshakable truth of the divine promise. Where they are founded upon anything else, they are false, and deceive us, even though the heart break in the midst of its great devotions and we weep drops of blood. The very reason we do pray is because of our unworthiness; and just through the fact that we believe we are unworthy and confidently venture upon God's faithfulness to his Word do we become worthy to pray and to be heard. Be you as unworthy as you may, only look to it, and with all earnestness accept it as true, that a thousand-fold more depends upon this, that you know God's truth and not change his faithful promise into a lie by your doubting. Your worthiness does not help you, but your unworthiness is no barrier. Disbelief condemns you, and trust makes you worthy and sustains you.

[6] Therefore, be on your guard all through life that you may never think yourself worthy or fit to pray or to receive; unless it be that you discover yourself to be a freebold character risking all upon the faithful and sure promises of your gracious God, who thus wishes to reveal to you his mercy and goodness. Just as he, out of pure grace, has promised you, being so unworthy, an unmerited and unasked hearing, so will he also hear you, an unworthy beggar, out of pure grace, to the praise of his truth and promise. This he does in order that you may thank, not your worthiness, but his truth, by which he fulfils his promise, and that you thank his mercy that gave the promise, that the saying in Psalm 25:8-10 may stand: "Good and upright is Jehovah: Therefore will he instruct sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in justice; and the meek will he teach his way. All the paths of

Jehovah are loving kindness and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.” Loving-kindness or mercy in the promise; faithfulness and truth in the fulfilling or hearing of the promises. And in another Psalm he says: “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” Psalm 85:10. That is, they come together in every work and gift we receive from God through prayer.

[7] In the fifth place, one should so act in this confidence of prayer as not to limit God and specify the day or place, nor designate the way or measure of the prayer’s fulfillment; but leave all to his own will, wisdom and almighty power. Then confidently and cheerfully await the answer, not even wishing to know how and where, how soon, how long, and through whom. His divine wisdom will find far better ways and measures, time and place, than we can devise, even should we perform miracles. So, in the Old Testament, the children of Israel all trusted in God to deliver them while yet there was no possible way before their eyes, nor even in their thoughts; then the Red Sea parted and offered them a way through the waters, and suddenly drowned all their enemies. Exodus 14.

[8] Thus Judith, the holy woman, did when she heard that the citizens of Bethulia wished to deliver the city to their enemies within five days if God, in the meantime, did not help. She reproved them and said, Now who are ye, that have tempted God? They are not designs by which one acquires grace; but they awaken more disgrace. Do you wish to set a time for God to show you mercy, and specify a day according to your own pleasure? Judith 8:10-12. Then the Lord helped her in a wonderful manner, in that she cut off the head of the great Holofernes and dispersed the enemies.

[9] In like manner, St. Paul says that God’s ability is thus proved, in that he does exceeding abundantly above and better than we ask or think. Ephesians 3:20. Therefore, we should know that we are too finite to be able to name, picture or designate the time, place, way, measure and other circumstances for that which we ask of God. Let us leave that entirely to him, and immovably and steadfastly believe that he will hear us.

The Day of Christ's Ascension into Heaven. Christ Commissions His Disciples to Preach the Gospel.

Text: Mark 16:14-20.

14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

19 So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

20 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. Mark 16:14-20

[1] We are to consider today the article of faith in which we say: "I believe in Jesus Christ, who ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father." Our Gospel lesson briefly reviews the story of this ascension. But Luke treats the matter at greater length and writes, The Lord gathered all the disciples together, fully forty days after his resurrection, just as he had often shown himself to them, and spoke with them and gave them commandment what they should do, and as they were assembled together

and spoke with him out at Bethany, whither he had led them, some asked him, saying: “Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And he said unto them: “It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority. But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” And when he had said these things, he blessed them and bade them good night and departed from them and was taken up while they beheld him and a cloud received him out of their sight. And as they stood there, gazing after him, gaping at the heavens, behold, there came and stood hard by them two men in white apparel, who said: “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven.” Hereupon they returned from Bethany, from the Mount of Olives, to Jerusalem and assembled in the upper room of the house where they were abiding, and continued with one accord in prayer, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus. This is the story of our Lord Jesus Christ’s ascension. Now let us consider the Gospel.

[2] In the first place, there are in this Gospel two parts: one where the Lord commands the apostles to preach the Gospel in all the world; the other, treating of his ascension. We shall pass over the beginning of the text, where the Lord reproves their unbelief and hardness of heart, and take up the part where he says: “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation.” Here you have in English what the Gospel really is, to wit: “He that believeth and is baptized, is saved.” In these words all is comprehended; he that has them, has the Gospel.

[3] We have often said ‘heretofore that the Gospel, properly speaking, is not something written in books, but an oral proclamation, which shall be heard in all the world and shall be cried out freely before all creatures, so that all would have to hear it if they had ears; that is to say, it shall be preached so publicly that to preach it more publicly would be impossible. For the Law, which was of old, and what the prophets preached, was not cried out in all the world before all creatures, but it was preached by the Jews in their synagogues. But the Gospel shall not be thus confined; it shall be preached freely unto all the world.

[4] There is no need, therefore, of commenting on the text as some have done, and saying that *omnis creatura* (every creature) means a man. For there is no indication in these words that the Gospel shall be preached to men alone, but it shall be cried out before the whole creation, so that earth shall not have a nook or corner into which it shall not penetrate before the last day. Such is the counsel of God, wherein he has decreed that even they who cannot read and have not heard Moses and the prophets shall, nevertheless, hear the Gospel.

[5] What is the Gospel? It is these words which the Lord speaks: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” We have often said — and I think we ought to thoroughly understand it by this time — that the Gospel cannot suffer us to preach works, however good and great these may be; for it seeks to pluck us down from our presumption and to set and plant us solely upon God’s mercy, that his work and grace alone may be extolled. Therefore, it suffers us not to rely upon our works. For one of these two must perish: if I stand upon God’s grace and mercy, I do not stand upon my merit and works; and, vice versa, if I stand upon any works and merit, I do not stand upon God’s grace. For, “if it is by grace,” says St. Paul, Romans 11:6, “it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace.” I cannot say that God owes me a reward, but I must confess that he has given it to me entirely as a free gift.

[6] Hence, he that would preach the Gospel must cast aside all works that are calculated to make men just, and suffer nothing to remain but faith, or I must believe that God, without any merit of mine and regardless of all my works, has granted me his grace and eternal life, so that I am constrained to thank him and say: I rejoice, praise and thank God that he has freely and out of pure grace given me this most excellent boon. Likewise that the Gospel is, as Scripture says, nothing more nor less than a declaration of the honor, praise and glory of God. As we read in Psalm 19:1-2: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge.” Therefore, we must preach in a way that the glory and praise will be given to God and not to ourselves. Now, there is no greater praise and glory that we can give to God than this, that we confess that he, out of pure grace and mercy, takes away from us sin, death, and hell, and gives his

beloved Son for us, and all his treasures to us. Such a confession must give glory and honor and praise to him alone.

[7] And this is the trend of all those passages in the prophets where God boasts that he will establish a preaching that will show forth his praise; as when he says in Isaiah 43:21: “The people which I formed for myself, that they might set forth my praise.” As if to say: You hypocrites do no more than praise yourselves in your hearts and thus my praise must perish; for you make me a stern judge and an unfriendly God, so that secretly the people hate me and think within themselves: Ah, if we but had another God, one that would not require so much of us; such a one we would love. Therefore, I will form for myself another people, which shall know me and love me. When they see that I will not regard their works but will give them every good thing freely, their hearts will teem with joy and will never weary of my praise.

[8] Therefore, beware of glossing the text and seeking to improve upon the words of Christ. Our doctors and colleges have tried to better them and have said these words must be understood thus: “He that believeth” (understand: and doeth good works), “shall be saved.” Who authorized them to make that insertion? Do you think the Holy Spirit was too stupid to make it? Thus they have utterly obscured, yea, perverted, this precious statement with their insertion. Therefore, take heed and let no one make an insertion for you, but abide by the text as it reads and understand it thus: “He that believeth shall be saved” without his merit, without any works. Why? For this reason: because God has caused to be preached and proclaimed unto us that he had his Son Jesus Christ come and take away sin and all evil. For he saw that we were not able to do it, that it was an impossibility for us to blot out sin with our works and powers. Otherwise he could have saved himself the trouble and expense of delivering up his own Son to suffer and die; and he has this preached to us in the Gospel.

[9] Now what does such preaching call for? It calls for this, that I believe in it, for in no other way can I apprehend it. If you write it in a book, it will be of no use to any man, though you indulge in much thinking about it. Again, you may preach and speak about it, or hear it; it will be to no purpose. You must believe it and confidently rely upon it that the thing is as the Gospel says, that not your works but the Lord Jesus Christ’s death and

resurrection takes away your sin and death. This you cannot attain to except by faith.

[10] Again, Christ says: “He that disbelieveth,” even though he be baptized, “shall be damned.” These words, too, you must allow to remain just as they are. For he does not say thus: He that disbelieves and does evil works besides; but, without any varnish he says: If thou hadst the chastity of all virgins, the sufferings of all martyrs, and, to be concise, if thou hadst all the works that ever were done by all the saints — if thou hadst all these in a heap, yet, if faith were lacking, all would be lost.

[11] Therefore, this is the passage whereby all cloistery, priest-craft, monkery and nunnery is overthrown; for it is a lost case. Do what you will, the sentence is already passed and the decree is already gone forth: If thou disbelieve thou art condemned already. Thus heavily and mightily do these two sentences butt against all doctrine and doing that are founded upon the works and powers of man.

[12] Now, place the two side by side, and you can rightly conclude: Where there is faith, there cannot be so many sins, but they will surely be swallowed up and exterminated by faith; where there is unbelief, you will never be able to do good works enough to blot out the least sin. Little, therefore as sin can stand in the presence of faith, so little can good works abide with unbelief. Therefore, nothing is needed, in order to do good works, but faith; and nothing more is required, in order to do sin and evil works, than unbelief. Thus it follows that he who believes has no sin and does nothing but good works; on the other hand, he who does not believe, verily, does no good work, but all he does is sin.

[13] Therefore I say, however, you cannot have committed so many sins, neither is Satan such an invincible enemy of yours, but that all is taken away and forgiven as soon as you begin to believe. For through faith you have Christ as your own treasure, who was given to you for the very purpose of taking away sin; and who will be so bold as to condemn Christ? For this reason, no sins can remain, however great they may be, if you believe. Thus, you are then God’s dear child and all is well, and whatever you do is all right. If you do not believe, you are damned, all you may do to the contrary notwithstanding; for since you have not Christ, it is impossible for you to blot out a single sin.

[14] Now, since there is no other means for taking away sin than Christ, you might ask: How is it then, that we are nevertheless required to do good works; if as you say, all depends upon faith? I reply: Where faith is genuine, it cannot exist without good works. Just as, on the other hand, where there is unbelief, there can be no good work. Hence, if you believe, there must necessarily follow from your faith naught but good works. For, as faith brings you salvation and eternal life, so it also brings you good works; they cannot be restrained. Just as a living person cannot refrain from moving about, eating and drinking and laboring, it being impossible that such activities should cease while he lives, no one need command and drive him to do such works but — spare his life and he'll do them; just as all this is true in the physical life, so nothing more is required, in order that good works may be done, than faith. Only believe, and you will do all of your own accord.

[15] Thus, there is no need of your demanding good works of him who believes, for faith teaches him all that; and, being done in faith, all he does is well done and all are good and precious works, however insignificant they may seem. Faith is such a noble thing that it ennobles the whole man. Now, it is not possible for a man to live on earth and not have anything to do. Hence all such works as are done by faith are precious works. On the other hand, where there is unbelief a man cannot be without works, either; therefore, such works are likewise all sin. Christ is not there, therefore all is lost. Hence, the statement of St. Paul to the Romans 14:23: “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” As though he would say, on the contrary: Whatsoever is of faith is all grace and righteousness; that is a foregone conclusion. Hence, there is no need of asking whether good works shall be done, for they come of themselves, unbidden. Such is also the sense of the Psalmist, Psalm 25:10: “All the paths of Jehovah are lovingkindness and truth.” That is to say, when God works and creates faith in us, all that we do is lovingkindness, and all is truth; that is, all is done sincerely and not from hypocrisy. It follows, however, on the other hand, that all the ways of men are not lovingkindness but sheerest wrath, not truth but mere sham and hypocrisy, because they spring from unbelief.

[16] Beware, then, lest under any circumstances you gloss the text, and say: Faith alone is not sufficient; works, also, are necessary in order to justify. For it is sufficiently clear from what we have said that works

contribute nothing to this end. Nothing does any harm but unbelief. Works are not sufficient. If faith were present, all would be well. Therefore, as works contribute nothing toward the evil in unbelief, so in faith they contribute nothing toward the good; but unbelief alone corrupts all works and faith makes all works good.

[17] But there is still one more thing here, that Christ says: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Here you might say: I perceive, then, that baptism is also required. To be sure it is, but baptism is not a work that we do. It is to be coupled, however, with faith, because God would not have faith to be hidden in the heart, but would have it burst forth and manifest itself to the world. For this reason, he ordained such outward signs, by means of which everyone may show and confess his faith, to the end that we may come to the holy cross. For, if faith were to be kept as a secret, hidden in the heart, we would be pretty sure of not having to bear the cross or to follow Christ; if the world knew not that we believed, we would not be persecuted.

[18] In the second place, we would never be the means of leading a soul to repentance and faith if we did not openly confess the Gospel and observe an external sign whereby men might know who and where the Christians are. Now, God has so ordained that our faith should be manifested before the heathen; hence, whosoever is a Christian and has received baptism, is in danger of his life among the heathen and unbelievers. It is necessary that we receive baptism if we are Christians; or, if that is beyond our reach, that we say, at least: I sincerely desire to be baptized.

[19] Moreover, the sign of baptism is given us also to show that God himself will help us, and that we should be certain of his grace, and that everyone be able to say: Hereunto did God give me a sign, that I should be assured of my salvation, which he has promised me in the Gospel. For he has given us the Word, that is, the written document; and beside the Word, baptism, that is the seal. So faith, which apprehends the Word, may be strengthened by the sign and seal.

[20] But you see no work of man in this transaction; for baptism is not my work but God’s. He that baptized me stands in God’s stead and does not the work of a man, but rather it is God’s hand and work. God is the real worker. Therefore, I may and should say: God, my Lord, baptized me

himself, by the hand of a man. Of this I may boast, and on this I am to rely, and say: God, who will not and cannot lie, has given me this sign to assure me that he is gracious to me and willing to save me and has through his Son given me all that he has. Thus, on our side there is nothing but faith alone; and on his side, only the Word and the sign. But we have dwelt upon this matter often enough and there is no need of enlarging upon it now.

[21] The following portion of our text speaks of the signs that shall accompany them that believe. We will not discuss these either at present, but pass on to the other part that we have chosen to consider, and that treats of Christ's ascension.

[22] In passing, be it said, however: We must not suppose that the signs here mentioned by Christ are all the signs that believers will do, neither must we imagine that all the Christians will do them; but Jesus means: All Christians can and may do the signs. Or, if I believe, then am I able to do them; I have the power. Through faith I obtain so much that nothing is impossible to me. If it were necessary and conducive to the spreading of the Gospel, we could do easily the signs; but since it is not necessary, we do not do them. For Christ does not teach that Christians practice the spectacular, but he says they have the power and can do these things. And we have many such promises throughout the Scriptures; for example, in James 14:12, where Christ says: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do." Therefore, we must allow these words to remain and not gloss them away, as some have done who said that these signs were manifestations of the Spirit in the beginning of the Christian era and that now they have ceased That is not right; for the same power is in the church still. And though it is not exercised, that does not matter; we still have the power to do such signs.

II. Christ's Ascension into Heaven.

[23] Now we must consider the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the first place, it is easily said and understood that the Lord ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God. But they are dead words to the understanding if they are not grasped with the heart.

[24] We must, therefore, conceive of his ascension and Lordship as something active, energetic and continuous, and must not imagine that he

sits above while we hold the reins of government down here. Nay, he ascended up thither for the reason that there he can best do his work and exercise dominion. Had he remained upon earth in visible form, before the people, he could not have wrought so effectually, for all the people could not have been with him and heard him. Therefore, he inaugurated an expedient which made it possible for him to be in touch with all and reign in all, to preach to all and be heard by all, and to be with all. Therefore, beware lest you imagine within yourself that he has gone, and now is far away from us. The very opposite is true: While he was on earth, he was far away from us; now he is very near.

[25] Reason cannot comprehend how this can be. Therefore it is an article of faith. Here one must close his eyes and not follow his reason, but lay hold of all by faith. For how can reason grasp the thought that there should be a being like ourselves, who is all seeing and knows all hearts and gives all men faith and the Spirit; or that he sits above in heaven, and yet is present with us and in us and rules over us? Therefore, strive not to comprehend, but say: This is Scripture and this is God's Word, which is immeasurably higher than all understanding and reason. Cease your reasoning and lay hold of the Scriptures, which testify of this being — how he ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of God and exercises dominion. Let us examine some Scripture bearing upon this matter.

[26] In the first place, Psalm 8:4-6 says of Christ: "What is man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him but little lower than God, and crownest him with glory and honor. Thou makest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet." Here the prophet speaks to God concerning a man and marvels that God humbled, for a time, that man, when he suffered him to die, humbled him to the extent that it seemed as if God were not with him. But after a little while God exalted him, so that all things must obey him, both in heaven and on earth. To these words we must hold, to these words we must cling, in these words we must believe; for reason will not submit nor adapt itself to them, but says they are lies. Now, if all things are to be subject to this being and to fall at his feet, he must sit where he can look into the whole world, into heaven and hell and every heart; where he can see all sin and all righteousness, and cannot only see all things, but can rule accordingly.

[27] Hence, these are majestic and powerful words. They afford the heart great comfort, so that they who believe this are filled with joy and courage and defiantly say: My Lord Jesus Christ is Lord over death, Satan, sin, righteousness, body, life, foes and friends. What shall I fear? For while my enemies stand before my very door and plan to slay me, my faith reasons thus: Christ is ascended into heaven and become Lord over all creatures, hence my enemies, too, must be subject to him and thus it is not in their power to do me harm. I challenge them to raise a finger against me or to injure a hair of my head against the will of my Lord Jesus Christ. When faith grasps and stands upon this article, it stands firm and waxes bold and defiant, so as even to say: If my Lord so wills that they, mine enemies, slay me, blessed am I; I gladly depart. Thus you will see that he is ascended into heaven, not to remain in indifference, but to exercise dominion; and all for our good, to afford us comfort and joy. This is one passage.

[28] Furthermore, in the second Psalm, verses 7 and 8, we read that God says to Christ: “Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possessions.” Here you see again that Christ is appointed of God a Lord over all the earth. Now, if he is my friend and I am persuaded that he died for me and gave me all things and for my sake sits in heaven and watches over me, who then can do aught to me? Or if any man should do aught, what harm can come of it?

[29] Furthermore, David says again in the 110th Psalm, Psalm 110:1: “Jehovah saith unto my lord, sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” And further on, in Psalm 110:5,6,7: “The Lord at thy right hand will strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He will judge among the nations, he will fill the places with dead bodies; he will strike through the head in many countries. He will drink of the brook in the way; therefore will he lift up the head.”

[30] Again in still another Psalm, David says (Psalm 68:18): “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led away captives; thou hast received gifts among men, yea among the rebellious also, that Jehovah God might dwell with them.” And all the prophets took great pains to describe Christ’s ascension and his kingdom. For, as his sufferings and death are deeply founded in the Scriptures, so are also his kingdom, his resurrection and ascension. In this manner we must view the ascension of Christ. Otherwise

it will afford us neither pleasure nor profit. For what good will it do you if you merely preach that he ascended up to heaven and sits there with folded hands? This is what the prophet would say in the Psalm Christ is ascended on high and has led captivity captive. That is to say, not only does he sit up there but he is also down here. And for this purpose did he ascend up thither, that he might be down here, that he might fill all things and be everywhere present; which thing he could not do had he remained on earth, for here in the body he could not have been present with all. He ascended to heaven, where all hearts can see him, where he can deal with all men, that he might fill all creation. He is present everywhere and all things are filled with his fullness. Nothing is so great, be it in heaven or on earth, but he has power over it, and it must be in perfect obedience to him. He not only governs and fills all creation (that would not help my faith any nor take away my sins), but also has led captivity captive.

[31] This captivity some have interpreted to mean that he delivered the sainted patriarchs out of the stronghold of hell; but that interpretation does not benefit our faith any either, for it is not particularly edifying to faith. Therefore, we must simply understand the matter thus: that he means that captivity which captures us and holds us captive. I am Adam's child, full of sin and foully besmirched; therefore, the law has taken me captive, so that I am lettered in conscience and sentenced to death.

[32] From this captivity no one can free himself, save only that one man Christ. What did he do? He made sin, death, and Satan his debtors. Sin fell upon him as though it would vanquish him, but it lost the day; he devoured sin. And Satan, death, and hell fared the same way. But we are unable to do this unless he be present to aid us. Alone, we must needs perish, But he, since he had done no sin and was full of righteousness, trod under foot Satan, death and hell, and devoured them, and took everything captive that fain would capture us, so that sin and death no longer can do harm.

[33] This, then, is the power he causes to be preached, that all who believe in him are released from captivity. I believe in him by whom sin, death, and all things that afflict us, were led captive. It is a pleasing discourse, and full of comfort, when we are told that death is taken away and slain, so that it is no longer felt. However, it affords pleasure and comfort only to those who believe it. You will not find release from captivity in your works, fastings, prayers, castigations, tonsures, and gowns,

and whatever more things you may do; but only in the place where Christ sits, whither he ascended and whither he led captivity with him. Hence, he who would be freed from sin and delivered from Satan and death, must come thither where Christ is. Now, where is he? He is here with us, and for this purpose did he sit down in heaven, that he might be near unto us. Thus, we are with him up there, and he is with us down here. Through the word he comes down, and through faith we ascend up.

[34] So, we see everywhere in the Scriptures that faith is such an unspeakably great thing that we can never preach about it sufficiently nor reach it with words. It cannot be heard and seen, therefore it must be believed. Such is the nature of faith that it feels nothing at all, but merely follows the words which it hears, and clings to them. If you believe, you have; if you believe not, you have not. In this wise must we understand this article of faith, that Christ is ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God.

The Day of Christ's Ascension into Heaven. Second Sermon. Christ Upbraids His Disciples with Their Unbelief, And His Missionary Commission.

Text: Mark 16:14-20.

14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

19 So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

20 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. Mark 16:14-20

[1] In today's Gospel there is again presented to us the essence of a Christian life, namely faith and love; just what you constantly hear in all the Gospel lessons. Since the Gospel ever holds up before you this theme, we must continually preach and discuss it; for Jesus says to his disciples: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." We will consider the thoughts of this Gospel text in order.

[2] First, Christ upbraids his disciples with their unbelief and hardness of heart, and reproves them for it, and shows them their faults. He does not reject them, nor deal too severely with them, but reproves them; just as we would say to a person: Are you not ashamed that you dared to do such a thing? Meaning thereby to bring him to a knowledge of himself and make him blush with shame, that he may desist from his wicked intent or deed, though we do not reject him, nor turn our love from him.

[3] However, it is not an insignificant matter here that the Lord rebuked the disciples; for unbelief is the greatest sin that can be named. Christ tells them the cause of their unbelief when he says that their hearts are hardened, yet he deals mildly and gently with them.

[4] This is given to us all for our comfort, lest we despair when, lacking in faith, we doubt, stumble and fall; it is to help us to rise again, to strengthen our faith and lift up our hearts to God, that we may grasp and hold fast the confidence of God, who does not deal with us severely, but can indeed bear with us and overlook much. And whoever believes him to be

thus, shall find him so; if we hold him to be a merciful God, he allows himself to be found merciful, and shows himself thus to us; but a bad conscience and an unbelieving heart have no such trust in God, but flee from him, and deem him a harsh judge, which he, therefore, is found to be.

[5] So should we also deal with our neighbor. If we see him fall from the faith, or err and sin, we should not strengthen him in his wickedness, nor justify his cause, but admonish him, and in meekness reprove his faults, yet neither hold enmity, nor turn our love from him. Thus St. Paul speaks to the Galatians: Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Galatians 6:1. But our lord pope, the bishops, priests, monks and nuns allow no one to reprove them when they do evil; they are never willing to acknowledge that any fault is theirs, but always that of their subjects, and their policy toward subjects is one of strictness and severity.

[6] To sum up all: We should expose and reprove what is wrong, and exercise truth and love toward everybody; we should be plain-spoken, not letting ourselves be silenced, for none of us, since we are flesh and blood, will so live as to be found without blame in all things. I in this, you in that. We all see, that even the apostles were lacking in the chief things yet they were cornerstones, the foundations and the very best part of Christendom.

[7] But let no one think that the apostles were altogether unbelieving; they believed what was written in the Law and the prophets, although their faith was not yet perfect. There was a faith there and yet no faith; they did not yet believe all things, although they believed that God created heaven and earth, and was the Maker of every creature. So the apostles were not altogether without faith, for they had faith in part. Faith is a thing that always grows. It is with faith as with a man who is ill and begins to get well — is increasing in strength. Therefore the Lord shows where they did not believe, and what they lacked; it was that they did not believe the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Although they believed the other things, they were still lacking in this. I hold that they believed that they had a gracious God. Yet this was not enough; they must believe also the resurrection of Christ. The Lord upbraided them with their unbelief, reprovved them and said that in spite of all they had seen, they were not believing, they still lacked in a certain article of faith, namely the article on

the resurrection. Hence Christ's words to them at the Last Supper: "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." John 14:1.

[8] What does it mean, then, to believe the resurrection of Christ, this thing which is so important, and concerning which the disciples were called unbelieving and faithless, and without which nothing else that they believed would help them? To believe the resurrection of Christ, is nothing else than to believe that we have a Mediator before God, who is Christ, who makes us holy and acceptable to God the Father. For man's possessions, by birth and nature, are but sin and corruption, by which he brings down upon himself the wrath of God. But God is eternal righteousness and purity, and therefore, from his very nature, hates sin. Hence there is always enmity between God and the natural man, and they cannot be friends and in harmony with one another.

[9] For this cause, Christ became man and took upon himself our sins and also the wrath of the Father, and drowned them both in himself, thus reconciling us to God the Father. Without this faith, we are children of wrath, able to do no good work that is pleasing to God, nor can our prayers be acceptable before him. For thus it is written in Psalm 18:41: "They cried, but there was none to save; even unto Jehovah, but he answered them not." Yea, even our noblest deeds, by which we had thought to obtain from God mercy, help and comfort, are counted to us for sin; as the prophet says, Psalm 109:7: "Let his prayer be turned into sin"; seeing God could not be reconciled by all our strength, for there is truly no strength in us.

[10] Therefore Christ must come, that he might go before the Father's face, reconcile us to him, and obtain for us everything we lacked. Through this same Christ we must ask of God all we need. You have heard in last Sunday's Gospel that the Lord says: "If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name." Whatever we obtain from God, we must receive through this Christ, who has gained for us a merciful Father. For Christ is our support and refuge, where we may hide ourselves, like the young chickens hide under the wings of the mother hen. Through him alone is our prayer acceptable before God and through him is it answered, and we obtain the favor and mercy of the Father; for Christ has made atonement for our sins, and an angry judge he has changed into a gracious and merciful God. To believe in the resurrection of Christ means, then, to believe, as I said, that Christ has taken upon his head our sins and the sins of the whole

world, also the wrath of the Father, and thus drowned them both in himself, whereby we are become reconciled with God and altogether righteous.

[11] Now, observe for yourselves how few Christians there are who have this faith, by which alone man is freed from his sins and becomes entirely holy; for they believe not in the resurrection of Christ, that their sins are taken away through Christ, since they attempt to become holy through their own works. This one runs to a cloister, that one becomes a nun, one does this, another that, in order to be free from sin; and yet they always say they believe in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, notwithstanding that their works prove the contrary.

[12] The apostles have insisted upon and preached this article more than any other; thus St. Paul speaks to the Corinthians: “If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain.” 1 Corinthians 15:14. And shortly, after in verse 17 he says: “If Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.” What sort of a conclusion is this? What is its logical analysis? This: If Christ be not risen from the dead, then sin and death have devoured and slain him, and we cannot get rid of our sins ourselves. Jesus Christ took them upon himself, so that he might tread under foot sin, death and hell, and become their master. But if he be not risen, then he has not overcome sin, but has been overcome by sin. Also, if he has been overcome by sin, then he is not risen: if he be not risen, then he has not redeemed you; then you are yet in your sins. Likewise Paul speaks to the Romans: “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Romans 10:9. There to all the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments agree.

[13] Now, it is not enough that we believe the historic fact of the resurrection of Christ; for this all the wicked believe, yea, even the devil believes that Christ has suffered and is risen. But we must believe also the meaning — the spiritual significance of Christ’s resurrection, realizing its fruit and benefits, that which we have received through it, namely, forgiveness and redemption from all sins; we must believe that Christ has suffered death, and thereby has overcome and trodden under foot sin and death, yea, everything that can harm us, and is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven as Almighty Lord over sin and devil, death and hell,

and all that harms us, and that all this took place for our good. This the wicked do not believe.

[14] You see how much depends upon this article of faith on the resurrection. We can better dispense with all the other articles than with this one. What would it avail if we believed all the other articles, as that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, died and was buried, if we did not believe that he arose again? It is to this subject that God has reference in Habakkuk 1:5, when he says: “I am working a work in your days, which ye will not believe though it be told you.”

[15] The importance of this subject is also the reason that Paul has urged and preached it, and in all his epistles has treated of no work or miracle of Christ so frequently as of his resurrection. He is silent concerning the many works and wonders of Christ, and preaches and teaches emphatically the benefit and the import of the resurrection of Christ — what we have received from it. No other apostle has portrayed Christ to us in the light that Paul has. Christ did not without meaning say of him to Ananias: “He is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel; for I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name’s sake.” Acts 9:15-16.

[16] Now, no good work will help those who do not have this faith in the resurrection, let them play the hypocrite as they will. To virgins, their virginity or purity is no help; nor to monks, their long prayers. Here it avails nothing to preach of works, they are not even named; but everything must be obtained of God through Christ, as you have heard. So David prayed in Psalm 84:9: “Behold, O God, our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.” This is enough on the first part of this Gospel. Now follows in the text the words: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation.”

II. The Missionary Commission Christ Gives to His Disciples

A. The Contents of this Commission.

[17] What shall they preach? Nothing else, he says, than just that I am risen from the dead and have overcome and taken away sin and all misery. He that believes this, shall be saved; faith alone is sufficient for his salvation. Therefore, the Gospel is nothing else than preaching the resurrection of

Christ: "He that believeth shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." Here all works are abolished. Here you see, also, the nature and character of faith. Faith will compel no one to accept the Gospel, but leaves its acceptance free to everyone and makes it a personal matter. He that believes, believes; he that comes, comes; he that stays out, stays out.

[18] Thus you see that the pope errs and does the people injustice in that he ventures to drive them to faith by force; for the Lord commanded the disciples to do nothing more than to preach the Gospel. So the disciples also did; they preached the Gospel, and left its acceptance to those who would take it, and they did not say: Believe, or I will put you to death.

[19] A question arises about this passage, "Go ye into all the world," as to how it is to be understood, since the apostles certainly did not visit all the world. No apostle came hither to us; and many a heathen island has since been discovered, where the Gospel has never been preached. Yet the Scriptures say: "Their sound went out into all the earth." Romans 10:18. Answer: Their preaching went out into all the world, although it has not yet come into all the world. This going out has been begun and continues, although it is not yet completed; the Gospel, however, will be preached ever farther and wider, until the judgment day. When this preaching shall have reached all parts of the world, and shall have been everywhere heard, then will the message be complete and its mission accomplished; then will the last day also be at hand.

[20] The preaching of this message may be likened to a stone thrown into the water, producing ripples which circle outward from it, the waves rolling always on and on, one driving the other, till they come to the shore. Although the center becomes quiet, the waves do not rest, but move forward. So it is with the preaching of the Word. It was begun by the apostles, and it constantly goes forward, is pushed on farther and farther by the preachers, driven hither and thither into the world, yet always being made known to those who never heard it before, although it be arrested in the midst of its course and is condemned as heresy. As we say, when one sends a message, the message has gone forth, although it has not yet arrived at its destination, but is still on its way; or as we say that the emperor's message is sent to Nurenburg, or to the Turk, although it has not yet arrived so we are to understand the preaching of the apostles. B. The Promise Attached to this Commission.

[21] But there arises here another question from this passage of today's Gospel, "He that believeth, shall be saved:" whether faith is sufficient for salvation, and alone saves; or whether we must also do good works in order to be saved. Here our highly learned doctors have desired to control the Holy Spirit, to sharpen his tongue, and to place a little stick under his tongue, as if he could not speak plainly, and have forced and strained this passage, and so worn it out and rent it that no marrow nor vitality remains in it. They have said that good works are necessary to faith, and that faith is not sufficient for salvation. This is not true. Faith alone, of itself, without any works, as the Word of God here clearly says, brings us salvation, and works help nothing at all toward righteousness or salvation. We must let this passage stand pure and unadulterated, and without any addition. If the Holy Spirit had so desired, he could easily have said different words thus: "He that believeth and doeth works, shall be saved." But he did not do this, therefore we should and will leave it as it is.

[22] This I say to the end that you may fortify yourselves with such passages, holding to the true meaning of the words. Though there are many passages in Scripture teaching that faith alone saves, yet they have been so covered over and obscured, so shaken to pieces and stretched, by the sophists and scholars, that their right meaning has suffered. St. Paul says to the Galatians: "If righteousness is through the Law, then Christ died for naught." Galatians 2:21. That is to say: If we can be saved in any other way or work out our salvation, then Christ has died in vain; for to presume to be justified by the Law means to think that man can become righteous through his works.

[23] Therefore to conclude: The chief righteousness is faith; the chief wickedness is unbelief. There is also no sin so great that it is able to condemn man; unbelief alone condemns all who are condemned. And again, only faith saves everyone; for faith alone deals with God, no works can appear before him. For works have to do only with man, and man lets his works be made use of as he has made use of Christ's. They make no one holy; they are only the distinguishing marks of a man that has already become righteous through faith, which alone makes the heart pure.

[24] I can easily assent to the saying: Works do not make you pious, but show that you are pious; or when I hear it said: He that believes, serves his neighbor, I admit that it is so. But that the explanation of this text should be,

Faith is not sufficient for salvation, we must also do good — this is a liberty which the text can stand just as little as this church could stand that I should pull down its pillars. There follows further in the text: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

[25] God has always accompanied his Word with an outward sign to make it the more effective to us, that we might be strengthened in heart and never doubt his Word, nor waver. Thus he gave Noah the rainbow in the heavens as a sure sign that he would keep his promise and not destroy the world by another flood. The rainbow is, so to speak, a seal or sign to Noah and to us all, just as a seal upon a letter certifies the document. And just as a nobleman has his own coat-of-arms of a particular device or color, by which he is known, so has God evidenced his words for us with signs, as with a seal, that we should never doubt. To Abraham he gave the rite of circumcision, to show that Christ should come and bless the world. Thus has he done here, adding to this promise of his — “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” — an outward sign, namely baptism, and also the sacrament of the bread and the wine, which was especially instituted for use in times of temptation, and when death draws near, that by it we might strengthen our faith, and remind God of his promise, and hold him to it.

[26] A man can believe even though he be not baptized; for baptism is nothing more than an outward sign that is to remind us of the divine promise. If we can have it, it is well; let us receive it, for no one should despise it. If, however, we cannot receive it, or it is denied us, we will not be condemned if we only believe the Gospel. For where the Gospel is, there is also baptism and all that a Christian needs. Condemnation follows no sin except the sin of unbelief. Therefore, the Lord says: “He that disbelieveth shall be condemned”; he says not: He that is not baptized. He is silent concerning baptism; for baptism is worth nothing without faith, but is like seals affixed to a letter in which nothing is written. He that: has the signs that we call sacraments, and has no faith, has only seals upon a letter of blank paper.

[27] Here you see also what is the office of the apostles, to which all the bishops, and those that call themselves ministers, should conform, inasmuch as they boast that they are the successors of the apostles in preaching the Gospel. For the Lord says here, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel.” Therefore, we should not listen to those who do not

preach the Gospel. Now our papists come along and quote the passage in Luke 10:16: “He that heareth you, heareth me.” This verse has hitherto been the pope’s sword, by which he has swayed the whole world, and none has rightly understood this passage, which means that teachers are to be obeyed only when they preach the Gospel. So the Lord here inspires the apostles to speak the Gospel, which is his Word. Christ alone is to be heard, and the apostles are but messengers and instruments for this word of Christ. Therefore, here again are condemned pope, bishops, monks and priests, and all who preach something else than the Gospel.

[28] But what is meant when the Lord says: “Preach the Gospel to the whole creation”? Shall I preach also to trees and stones, mountains and waters? What would that profit? St. Gregory preached on this text and said that “all creation” means man; that man is one with all creatures — with the angels in understanding, with the animals in sensibilities, and with the trees in growth. We must, therefore, not misuse the text nor make its meaning too literal, for so we shall misconstrue it. The meaning is that the Gospel should be publicly and universally preached, given to all; it should hide in no corner, but be preached freely in all places, as is written in Psalm 19:3-4: “There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world,” The beginning and going forth has been fulfilled by the apostles, but the work is not yet finished; the Gospel has not yet reached its limit, for I know not whether Germany has ever heard the Word of God. The pope’s word we have surely heard.

[29] The Lord here says to the apostles: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation,” for the reason that this Gospel may be published to everyone, so that even trees and stones might hear if they had ears, and might bear witness that we have heard the Gospel; and that pillar there might say, I have heard the Gospel preached to you. Thus generally and publicly shall it be proclaimed, and preached in all the world, being withheld from no one, till it reaches the ends of the world, as the Psalm records. So it has now come to us, who are dwelling at the end of the world, for we live close to the sea. This Paul has in mind when he says to the Ephesians: “And he gave some to be apostles, and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of

Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” Ephesians 44:11-13. Next, the text speaks of the signs that shall follow faith, and names five signs, one after the other, thus: “And these signs shall accompany them that believe: in my name shall they cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.”

[30] How shall we proceed here that we may preserve the truth of the passage: he that believeth shall have power also, and be able to show these signs? For the Lord says all these signs shall accompany them. Now we know that the apostles did not present all the signs, for we read of no other that drank poison than John the Evangelist, and there are no other individual instances. If the passage shall stand literally, then few believers will be cleared and few saints be entitled to heaven; for these signs, one and all, have not accompanied them, though they have had power to work signs, and have exhibited some of them.

[31] Some rush on here and explain these signs as spiritual, so as to preserve the honor of the saints; but it will not do to strain the words. They do not carry such meaning; therefore, they will not bear such an explanation. It puts upon the Scriptures uncertain construction for us.

[32] Others, with equal heedlessness, say that though not every individual has the power and does the wonders mentioned, yet the church as a whole, the multitude of Christendom, has; one may drive out devils, another heal the sick, and so on. Therefore, they say, such signs are a manifestation of the Spirit; where the signs are, there is also the Christian Church, and so on.

[33] But these words do not refer to the Church as a whole, but to each person separately. The meaning is: If there is a Christian who has faith, he shall have power to do these accompanying miracles, and they shall follow him, as Christ says, in John 14:12: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do, shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do,” for a Christian has equal power with Christ, is a congregation, and sits with him in joint tenure. The Lord has given Christians power, as is written in Matthew 10:8, also against the unclean spirits, that they might cast them out and heal every disease. Thus it is

written in Psalm 91:13: “Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent shalt thou trample under foot.”

[34] We read also that this has been fulfilled. There was once a patriarch in the wilderness, who, when he met a serpent, took it in both hands and tore it in two, and thought no more about it, but said’ O what a fine thing it is to have a clear and guiltless conscience! So, where there is a Christian, there is still the power to work these signs if it is necessary. But no one should attempt to exercise this power if it is not necessary or if need does not compel. The apostles did not always exercise it, but only made use of it to prove the Word of God, to confirm it by the miracles; as is written here in the text’ “And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word by the signs that followed.”

[35] But since the Gospel has now been spread abroad, and made known to all the world, there is no need of working miracles as in the apostles’ times. If need should arise, and men were to denounce and antagonize the Gospel, then we verily should have to employ wonder-working rather than permit the Gospel to be derided and suppressed. But I hope such a course will not be necessary, and that such a contingency will never arise. For another example: That I should here speak in new languages is not at all necessary, since you all can well hear and understand me; but if God should send me where the people could not understand me, he could easily grant me their speech or language, that I might be understood.

[36] Then, let no one, without pressing need, undertake to work wonders, for we read of the patriarchs’ children that they once brought a large number of serpents in their cloaks, and shook them out at their parents’ feet; whereupon their parents reprovved them for tempting God unnecessarily. In like manner, we read of many signs that believers have done. It happened once upon a time that one of the fathers by chance got hold of a basilisk. He looked at it, and thereupon exclaimed: O Lord, I must die, or this reptile must! for the basilisk kills by its looks. At once it bursted and flew into pieces.

[37] I know not what I shall say about those who venture to do signs where they are not necessary. For example, some drive out demons. But I know that it is a dangerous undertaking. The devil, indeed, lets himself be driven out, but he does not intend to suffer for it; he allows it only that he

may strengthen the sign-worker in such error. I would not like to trust him. We have many such instances in our times. I know also of many that happened not long ago.

[38] There was a sexton who wished to learn alchemy from the devil, that is, the art of separating gold from sand, and of making gold from other metals. The devil agreed to come to him at the hour of eleven, but the sexton should have on a gown and chasuble. See with what fool's work the devil goes about! As though he cared much about the chasuble. The sexton went and reversed the hour-glass and noted the hour. At eleven he put on the chasuble. The devil came and knocked. The sexton was afraid and asked who was there. The devil said that the sexton should come at once to the parson and attend the Sacrament. The sexton threw off the chasuble and ran out in haste, but found no one. Then the devil the second time demanded of the sexton to come out. The third time the devil came and said that the parson was awaiting him impatiently; he should come without delay. The sexton then went out, but by this time the hour was past, and the sexton had not on the chasuble. Then the sexton saw for the first time that it was the devil, and wished to hurry back to the house and get the chasuble. The devil, however, would not allow this, but said: No, my dear fellow, the time is past. He seized the sexton, broke his neck and threw him to the ground. Such occasions the devil seeks, and acts. So much for this Gospel.

The Day of Christ's Ascension into Heaven. Third Sermon. The Hardness of the Disciples' Hearts. Christ's Missionary Commission, and the Signs Following.

Text: Mark 16:14-20.

14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

19 So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

20 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. Mark 16:14-20

[1] In few words, St. Mark sums up in this Gospel all that Christ did during the forty days after his resurrection, until he ascended into heaven. Not all the words of Christ, as here recorded, were spoken at the same time. Some persons have doubted the authenticity of this chapter because it does not seem to harmonize with the other Gospels. It relates the incident of the Lord's upbraiding the disciples for their unbelief, and that of his commanding them to preach the Gospel, as though the two utterances were spoken at the same time, while the other Evangelists inform us of many things occurring between these two incidents. They tell us that he appeared to all of his disciples, not only once, but often, and that, during these forty days, he ate and drank with them that they might no longer doubt his resurrection. The upbraiding of the disciples took place shortly after his resurrection, between Easter and the eighth day following. After they had all seen the risen Savior he took leave of them, ascending from the mountain where he had commanded them to meet him.

[2] In upbraiding the disciples with their unbelief and hardness of heart Christ charges them with no small measure of weakness. He tells them that they are not only unbelieving but also stubborn to the extent that they

obstinately doubt what they have heard from eyewitnesses, namely, that the Lord has risen. On the other hand, Christ shows great forbearance and kindness toward those who are not only disbelieving, but even obstinate. He does not reject or despise them for their hardness, but is patient with them. Eventually he makes them preachers of that which they, until then, did not believe themselves. He knows that, for this very reason, their testimony for him will be the stronger. They were themselves to have the experience of preaching not only to the ignorant and unbelieving, but also to the hardened, and even to their persecutors. Thus from their own experience they were to learn to bear with others, who might be likewise stubborn, though not with those who should willfully and maliciously rage against the acknowledged truth.

[3] The beloved disciples had, however, cause for their hardness of heart, which others could never have. They were Jews, and the Jewish teaching was that at Jerusalem alone should be founded that kingdom which is called the kingdom of God and of Christ. For this belief they thought they had proof and evidence from the prophets, wherein was stated, in many passages, that Christ should forever reign at Jerusalem, in the house and on the throne of David. The heathen had no promise whatever of such a kingdom.

[4] Therefore, it seemed ridiculous to the Jews and incredible, yea, even offensive, that Christ should disregard Jerusalem, the priesthood and everything pertaining to the Jewish nation, and, altogether unmindful of these, send a few poor disciples who had neither a name nor fame out into the world to preach, intending thus to fulfill the glorious prophecy of nearly all the prophets, that, as Psalm 68:11 says, from Jerusalem should go forth the great message and the great hosts of messengers of the Gospel into all the world. This must surely be fulfilled and become true. As Christ himself when he bade them farewell, charged his disciples not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, as St. Luke says in Acts 1:4-8, “until ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you.” And recently on Easter Christ said: “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” Luke 24:46-47. It was universally believed that when the time should come for Christ to proclaim his message to bring the

world into his kingdom, he would surely consult the great men, the high priests, the rulers and the council at Jerusalem, and would do nothing without them; for was it not by the Law of Moses that the nation had its very existence? But Christ ignores the representative heads of the nation in calm assurance, and calls to himself a handful of strangers and beggars, brings them to Jerusalem and commissions them to do these things. That was offensive enough to the Jews in general, and even to the disciples; it seemed incredible that Christ should use such lowly means for so exalted a purpose and with such in difference to the opinions, the knowledge and the assistance of Jewish officials.

[5] However, the disciples knew, or might have known from the Scriptures, that Christ should not come from the priesthood, but from the house of Judah; so that the religious leaders of Jerusalem need not have looked to the priestly ranks. Nor did the Scriptures mention a citizen either at Jerusalem or at Bethlehem of whom Christ should be the son. Therefore, the Jews should have given God the honor, and thought: we ought to look for him to come not from our own tribe or from any other tribe than the tribe of Judah, from the house of David. They knew the prophecy well enough and upon it had based their records and calculations. We read that the blind man by the wayside (Luke 18:39), and the Canaanitish woman (Matthew 15:22) cried out, saying: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David." How did this poor beggar and this alien woman know that Christ was the son of David, if it had not been well known among all the people that the Messiah should come from no other house than that of David?

[6] Though Christ did not belong to the house then ruling at Jerusalem, yet the Jews knew that he belonged to the house of David, and had been brought up in Nazareth, and for this reason they should have accepted him, especially since they heard his teachings and saw his miracles. For all had to confess, that no one else could preach with such power and do such mighty works as he did. They also knew that the time to which the prophets pointed was at hand. The prophet Zechariah had clearly stated that Christ should be lowly, that is, from the ranks of the common people, without great pomp and power, honor and wealth.

[7] But as they disregard all this, and will neither hear nor know him, he proceeds to fulfill the Scripture. He gathers a little flock and establishes his kingdom through them, while neither priests nor council in Jerusalem are

aware of it. They are left, as it were, gazing and thinking that when Christ should come and establish his kingdom, he would doubtless make them the chief instruments therein. This he does not do. He establishes his kingdom at Jerusalem and charges the disciples to tarry there until the sending of the Holy Spirit upon them, who should continue the same work among them, convincing and compelling them to believe that the predictions of the prophets have been fulfilled.

[8] But the apostles are weak and slow to believe this; they do not realize that Christ has appeared in just the manner in which they and all the Jews had hoped and expected. The disciples wondered why, if he really were the Christ — as they considered him — he did not so convince all the people at Jerusalem and organize, prepare, establish and confirm his kingdom so that the entire nation would flock to him, and the whole world sing and proclaim the great power and glory of this king through whom all humanity would be honored, and obtain wealth and salvation. Since he proceeds in a manner so contrary to their expectations, permits himself to be crucified, and dies on the cross, and after his resurrection shows himself to only a few persons, they can never believe that through him the marvelous things of the new kingdom should be accomplished those things which they had learned from the writings of the prophets.

[9] Christ has to bear with such hardness of heart in them, though he upbraids them and instructs their ignorance. As they are gathered together and he is about to depart from them, he tells them how his kingdom is to be entered upon, and how he will accomplish its beginning through them. It shall not be by the help and advice of the officials at Jerusalem, nor with their knowledge. It shall not be with temporal force nor power, but shall be felt solely through the message and commission of the ministry with which he charges them, saying: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.”

II. Christ’s Missionary Commission to His Disciples to Preach the Gospel to the Whole Creation.

[10] These are words of the sovereign Ruler, words that are becoming his majesty — commissioning these poor beggars to go forth and proclaim this

new message, not in one city or country only, but in all the world, in principalities and kingdoms and to proclaim it publicly and cheerfully; to speak before all creatures, so that all humanity might hear the message. That certainly means, to stretch forth the arms and gather unto Christ a great multitude. Indeed, it is such a mighty commission, that the like of it was never issued in the world.

[11] The command of a temporal ruler goes no farther than to the confines of his own kingdom; likewise that of a father to his own household: but this commission of Christ concerns all kings, princes, countries and people, great and small, young and old, simple and wise, sinners and saints. With this one message he claims all dominion and power, all wisdom, holiness, majesty and the right to rule on earth with unlimited authority. What else can the world think and say about it than this: What! this one man and his eleven poor beggars dare to assume authority over Moses and all the prophets, yes, even over all people? Even Moses was sent only to Pharaoh and his people in Egypt. Is this man, then, to have the whole world for his field? He is in relation to it no more than a common laborer!

[12] It must be a master of no mean authority who dares to exercise the right to send forth messengers not only to one or several crowned heads, but to all rulers throughout the world. Christ does all this as though he possessed full power and authority over them as his subjects, charging his disciples that they should fear no one, no matter how great and powerful he might be, but should cheerfully go forth, continuing to the remotest parts of the world, and preach the Gospel, with the assurance that they could not fail to be heard and that no one was able to hinder them.

[13] Thus was it fulfilled. "Beginning at Jerusalem," the kingdom touched the whole world. No other kingdom ever had such power. There never yet lived a ruler who achieved supremacy over even one-half of the world. How is it then, that from Jerusalem to the remotest corners of the earth all men know of this king who is called Christ? And all this was accomplished without a single sword thrust and without military power; simply through these poor beggars, whom Christ sent forth into so many kingdoms and principalities that resisted them with the sword, with fire and water and with their whole might. If the apostles had been dependent upon their own power, they would have miserably failed before crossing their

own thresholds. They had been afraid of their own people, the Jews, and had hidden themselves behind bolted doors. But later on, upon the strength of this commission, they boldly went forth, not only among their own people, but in all kingdoms, through all principalities, and in the face of all the powers and resistance of the world and the devil.

[14] Whence did they obtain such courage and strength? Surely not from any king of Persia nor emperor of Rome, Turkey or Tartary. No, it was from the Lord alone, who ascended into heaven and commanded them to go and preach to the whole creation. And as Christ began to set up his kingdom, so it will continue till the end of the world. Certainly he is not Lord in any temporal sense. He is the one to whom all authority in heaven and on earth is given, as he himself declares in Matthew 28:18. To him must be subjected both angels and men, and all creatures, as God also saith to him in Psalm 2:8: "Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." This is the reason why we know and believe in him. Only Christ could have brought the world everywhere to believe in one who was apparently a simple Jew.

[15] These words of his command are marvelously powerful. Therein he shows that he is greater than all emperors, kings and rulers on earth, by his own power subjecting unto himself all creatures. He does not commission his disciples to convey his greetings or to ask favors of certain rulers on earth, but in full authority he issues to all rulers a command that they shall accept his message and obey his orders. It is evident, too, that this commander is mightier than any angel. Angels are, indeed, mighty and powerful beings, sent by God to do his bidding with reference to certain of his servants; as, for instance, we see Moses leading his people out of Egypt by an angel. But Christ issues his own command, that shall reach all the world, yea, even all creatures, intimating that all belongs to him. Such authority is given to none else but this son born of the Virgin. He must, therefore, be the one Lord over all things, over angels and men, the only God and Maker of all creatures.

III. The Preaching of the Gospel Enjoined in this Commission.

A. The Preaching of the Gospel in Itself.

[16] Now this is the commission: “Go ye and preach the Gospel to the whole creation.” Christ looks far into the future. He does not want his message hidden in a corner. He does not wish them to have any fear concerning it, neither to go about it secretly nor deceitfully. He wants it proclaimed so publicly that even the sun in the heavens, yea forests and stones might hear it if they had ears. And so it has been proclaimed, though the world has opposed it for so many centuries. It has steadily advanced. There never has been in the world a like force and power; nothing of equal sway and authority. This message, then, must be of divine power. It pertains not to insignificant, vain, or sinful things of the world, such as robbing, stealing, lying, deceiving, murdering, violence, oppression and tyranny, but to pure, heavenly and divine things. Thus it cannot be of human origin but is God’s own message. Both word and work, then, harmonize and openly testify to Christ’s authority before all creatures under heaven, on land and sea.

[17] Christ thus sends forth, not a decree to stir up rebellion in the world, or to overthrow the legal power of kings, princes or other temporal authority, but he simply puts his word and command into the mouths of the disciples that they may carry into effect his own power by their speech and ministry. They shall speak not of worldly institutions, worldly authority or earthly riches, nor of the glory of the Jewish people, their laws, religious rites and priesthood — though it was the expectation of all Jews that these should be world honored but the import of the message shall be to teach nobler things, namely how we may be reconciled to God, be redeemed from sin, death and all evil, and be saved; to obtain everlasting righteousness, life and glory.

[18] This, indeed, was a new message, of which the world knew nothing. It differs greatly from all other preaching and teaching. Yes, heaven raises it above all that can be taught on earth. All other teaching must give way to it, for it alone ministers the power to be saved. When Christ says, “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation,” he desires none to be excluded; but he shows that the whole world knows naught of his doctrine: In spite of all its wisdom, it is blind concerning these things, no matter how learned and holy it pretends to be. His own people, the Jews, though they have not the light and knowledge of salvation to which the prophet Zecharias refers in his Benediction, Luke 1:77: “To give knowledge

of salvation unto his people in the remission of sins.” If the Jews had known this before, or could have discovered it for themselves, it would not have been necessary to preach it to them. Christ would not have had to descend from heaven and send forth his servants into the whole world with the message.

[19] All the world is here sent to school, to hear and learn of Christ’s kingdom and confess that it did not know anything about it. Men may know well how to build, how to care for their property, to rule, to be outwardly pious, and how to lead a decent, honest life, and they may be able to teach others what they know; but of things pertaining to God’s kingdom, and how to escape sin and death, they know nothing. Christ sets aside all teachings, even that of Moses, and of the ten commandments. The order is given to the disciples to go forth and tell all men what they do not know — that all must hear and accept, by God’s command, this message, if they would be saved.

[20] The meaning of this message Christ plainly shows. In the first place, he gives it a worthy name, calling it Gospel-preaching. No doubt he gives it this peculiar new name for a special reason, to distinguish it from all other teaching and preaching. It is something different from the Law of Moses and the teachings of men. A new name would impress itself upon the minds of the disciples. For the word “Gospel” means a new message — a good message bearing joyful tidings, proclaiming something, that one gladly and eagerly hears. Not a law or a commandment, forcing or demanding from us and threatening punishment and condemnation if we do not obey it. Such a message none like to hear. Even if we, to our utmost ability, both teach and obey the law, yet no consolation and joy will result from it; because we can never so perfectly comply with its demands that it will cease to smite and accuse us. Therefore, if we were to be rescued, God had to send us, through his Son, a different message than the Law from which to derive consolation and peace.

[21] As to what the Gospel is, and the difference between the Law and the Gospel, enough has already been said. However, we here observe how Christ himself gives the definition, and shows what the Gospel teaches, saying: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.”

[22] This indeed is a kind, friendly and consoling message, and is rightly called a Gospel; here, in one word, you hear *salvus erit*, i.e., he shall be saved — the gates of heaven opened, hell closed, the Law and judgment set aside, sin and death destroyed, and life and salvation granted to all the world if they only believe the message. Oh, if one could thoroughly learn these words: Believe and be saved! They are spelled in few letters yet they are a sermon of such power that the world cannot grasp the glorious grace and unspeakable treasure given us through this message. And all this without any merit on our part since we have done absolutely nothing to earn it, we have not known anything about it. If the world had really believed it, they would, I am convinced, out of pure love have overwhelmed the preachers of the Gospel, particularly the apostles, and come in great multitudes and joyfully kissed their feet and borne them on their hands, praising and thanking God for their having lived to hear a Christian Gospel preacher.

[23] The Gospel is faithfully taught and practiced in our day, yet it will continue to be necessary, as here, for Christ to upbraid his disciples with their unbelief and hardness of heart. Unbelief is still too strong in us, and our hearts are too narrow and too weak to grasp these wonderful words. We are controlled too much by our own desires and feelings when sin troubles us and God's wrath startles and terrifies us, though we desire to be saved. We seek and strive to discover how we may save ourselves by our own works; we try to find within ourselves that, by which we may justify ourselves before God.

[24] We must, therefore, constantly learn, preach and exhort about this message of salvation, though it cannot at once enter the hearts of men — that is impossible. But day after day, year after year, the Gospel may the more and more be grasped, to the limit of our comprehension here on earth. The promise is dependent upon the condition. We cannot separate these two things; they must remain together just as Christ joins them and says: "He that believeth shall be saved." As to one part, namely, shall be saved, there is indeed nothing wanting, nor is it uncertain; this is surely a promise in the Word, which is God's unchangeable truth. But as to the other part, our believing, there is indeed much lacking. We do not firmly believe; we do not accept and adhere to God's word of promise. As I have said, the grace and the spiritual treasures offered are so great that the human heart is

astonished and overwhelmed when it realizes that the high and eternal majesty opens the gates of heaven so wide, and that he causes his grace and mercy to shine over all the sins and misery of the whole world, and that this great store of grace and spiritual riches is given us through the Word alone.

[25] However, this passage stands here and declares both what the Gospel is, — a message concerning faith in Christ, — and what power it has, namely to save him that believeth. The Jews have waited until this day for the coming of their Messiah to restore the city of Jerusalem and its temple, and so exalt the Law of Moses that it may be accepted by all the world. But what happens? At the very place and at the very time when their temple services are most glorious, and their best, noblest and wisest men most strenuously observe the Law, the Son of God himself pronounces judgment upon them, commanding his disciples to go and preach throughout all Jewry and all the world that not the temple service nor the Levitical priesthood, not circumcision nor the Law and its observance, which God indeed had given them, will save, but he that believeth shall be saved, be he Jew or gentile. There is no distinction (Romans 3:23), nor one possessing any special privileges. This Gospel shall be preached to the whole creation.

[26] This, surely, was tearing a dreadful hole in the Jewish expectations and ideas — proclaiming himself as alone having authority and that to him all must submit — for neither Moses nor any of the prophets would have dared to do so. They all had to be circumcised and to observe the Law under penalty of loss of body and soul. And now this man Jesus with full authority interferes, and even indifferently sets aside the Law, as though he would know nothing about it. He commands, in few simple words, his disciples thus: You shall not tell the world, in whatever part of it you may be, that the people must go to Jerusalem, or must keep the Law of Moses etc., but you shall tell them all that if they would be saved, which everybody desires (especially the Jews at that time), then they must believe this message of mine, and thereupon be baptized etc. Commence this kind of preaching among my people who desire to be saved by their Law and its temple service, and go forth through the entire Roman empire, and to all the corners of the world. Those that trust in their idols, reprove and condemn, one and all, and tell them that this is the command that I, the Lord of heaven and earth, give them, that they shall believe in me. This is my

message; it shall go through all the world unhindered and unmolested. No matter if the Jews disbelieve and are offended by it, and put you under the ban, consigning you to the devil, and fret not if the heathen endeavor to suppress it by force.

[27] This is also a consoling message to us, because we, too, are included in these words of Christ when he says: Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. Herein are enclosed all who hear this message, wherever they may live, be they few or many. "All the world" does not mean one or two parts of it, but everywhere within it wherever people may dwell. Therefore, the Gospel had to be proclaimed according to the command, as it is yet being proclaimed today. Although it is not steadily triumphant in every place, yet it is destined to reach to the ends of the earth and to resound in all places and corners of the world. As it is a general command to preach the Gospel everywhere, to all men, so it is also a general injunction and the Lord's command that all shall believe this message.

[28] It was essential for Christ, in his command, to emphasize "all the world." The Jews, who wanted thus to silence the rest of mankind, boasted that they alone were God's people, to whom the fathers and the prophets were given, and that Christ was promised to come from their seed. This boasting Christ had to kill, otherwise they would have overcome us gentiles and compelled us to become Jews and accept circumcision. Directly opposed to their claim is the fact that Christ commanded that the Gospel be preached to all creatures. Christ says, He that believes, belongs to God's people and is saved, be he Jew or gentile, Greek or barbarian, priest or layman, male or female etc. True, God did not give any other nation than his chosen people, the Jews, those special honors and blessings that were theirs in their God-given and mighty leaders and in the miracles he wrought for them, and in the fact that to them first were given the divine promises and the Scriptures.

[29] But now we are made one people in the sight of God. None have any preference or privilege to boast of. Christ would have none despised nor rejected. The injunction reads, To all creatures, the disciples shall preach and proclaim it. The greatest, the most powerful, the noblest born, the most learned and the holiest person is not a whit better than the humblest, simplest, most despised on earth. All are brought into one

company and fellowship. No one is preferred above another. No partiality is shown. No one is pictured or separated to special honor or advantage; but everything hinges entirely on “He that believeth.” It matters not what people, nation or rank or what station in the world they may occupy. There must, of course, be a difference in the physical life of the various inhabitants of the earth, as the creatures are and are called each according to its nature and each is different from the other; sun from moon, man from woman, master from servant.

[30] Therefore, as in the world every country and people have their own special laws, rights and customs, so, like in outward temporal appointments, there must also be a difference in the preaching. Every station and office must be responsible and taught in its appointed sphere. But though duty be beautifully and faithfully performed, all Jews perfect in temple service, all temporal government faultlessly administered, all discipline and obedience observed and rendered in the matter of laws and customs — yet all of this is not sufficient to insure salvation to the doer. In this kingdom of Christ all humanity is brought to the same place — all are made into one bread (Kuchen) — all must meet the one condition. Not this or that person, who lives in a certain manner, and is doing a certain thing, shall be saved, but: “He that believeth shall be saved.” Here you have it all. No matter if you are Jew or gentile, master or servant, virgin or husband, monk or layman, if you believe, says Christ, then you are in my kingdom, saved and redeemed from sin and death.

[31] By this message, Christ’s kingdom is clearly distinguished from all other kingdoms of the world. In earthly kingdoms, he who obeys the laws and precepts, does not rob, steal and kill, shall not be punished, but shall be commended, honored and protected as an obedient citizen of the kingdom. It will not do to say: He that believes shall have honor and riches in this temporal kingdom. Such honor and riches would mean temporal, visible requisition. He who is pious and good in the eyes of the world and leads a perfect life, is not, because of that, in the kingdom of God. Something higher and better is necessary. He must believe in Christ, who ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God. A temporal kingdom knows nothing of the spiritual matters of faith. It does not deal in nor control these things. And yet the blind world dares to attempt that which it is not able to understand nor rightly to judge.

[32] On the other hand, Christ's kingdom has nothing to do with the kingdoms of men. He permits them to continue in their own observances. Christ commands that the disciples should preach the Gospel to all creatures. The creatures existed before the Gospel came to them. Governments are instituted, and laws formed, by men, through God-given reason and wisdom. St. Peter calls them human ordinances in 1 Peter 2:13. They are also called ordinances of God in Romans 13:2. In such things, Christ would establish no change; he permits them to remain as they are, in fact and in name. But he instructs the world concerning his own eternal kingdom; how it is possible for one to be freed from sin and eternal death, how all, without difference, shall be subject unto him, and acknowledge him, through faith, as their Lord.

[33] We must examine and rightly understand the words, "He that believeth," in order not to pervert or mar them by additions and glosses. With such the papists becloud and nullify this sublime and powerful passage, attaching to it their sermons, and, saying that here must be understood "good works" with the word "faith," so that it must read: He that believeth, and also does good works, shall be saved. These are the highly learned masters that take Christ to school, correct his language and teach him how to speak, babbling in their blindness whatever they please, though they know not what and whereof they speak concerning these sublime things. But we shall do Christ the honor to keep his Word pure and undefiled. He well knew how to express these things and what he would have the disciples speak when he commanded them to preach his message to all the world.

[34] Christ intentionally made the statement thus plain: "He that believeth, and is baptized" etc., in order to set right the delusions and pretensions of the Jews and of all the world regarding salvation by man's own works. On faith and baptism, not on our own but on his works, he bases all. In opposition, the Jews, and the world in general, wish to consider their own pride and glory. They boast of their own holiness, unwilling to be censured and condemned in respect of it. The Jews, because they observe circumcision, the Law and many temple services, these, in their own estimation, sufficient to secure them salvation, will, therefore, not consent that the heathen, who observe none of these, should be considered their equals, be called God's people and be saved, until they also conform to

these practices and become Jews. Just so the false apostles, and many of those who became Christians, with great pretense fought over these things and argued against the teachings of the apostles.

[35] What have the heathen, who had not the Word of God nor the true knowledge of him, ever done of themselves, yet they would neither hear nor accept the Gospel for the very reason that they did not wish to forsake their idolatry. They claimed that they also served the true God with their offerings and religious rites. They would not listen to condemnation of these things.

[36] All who depend on good works, and teach the people salvation through the same, are alike in error. They cannot endure disregard of their works in the matter of salvation. They cannot endorse such a doctrine as Christ here states to be true: “He that believeth shall be saved” etc. Although they receive the Gospel and wish to be Christians, as do our papists, they will not accept this doctrine in its purity but must defile the same with their additions and glosses, claiming that it must be understood thus: He that believes, and does also good works, shall be saved. Their interpretation means that one obtains salvation, not by faith alone, but also by good works. Just so the false apostles and disciples from among the Jews also made additions to this doctrine, pretending that not faith alone secures salvation, but the law of Moses must be kept also. They said: “Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” Acts 15:1. Thus they confused the true 2 disciples and Christians, and the apostles at Jerusalem had to reject this statement publicly.

[37] But you may say: Indeed, you yourself teach that a Christian must do good works; God himself commanded to do them, enjoining the keeping of the Law, and Christ also says: “If thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments,” Matthew 19:17. Now, faith alone does not justify and save. This message must be understood as not excluding good works; but Christ here, in addition and beyond good works, also demands faith, which the Jews and heathen did not exercise. Our papists also hold that good works are not sufficient unto salvation for those who have no faith, but that faith and good works must go together. Nor do they mean by “works” the observance of the law of Moses, of circumcision and the Jewish temple service, which are now obsolete; but they mean the works demanded by the ten commandments, which teach the obedience all men owe to God. And in

order to prove that these words must be thus understood, the papists refer to Matthew 28:19-20: “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them,” etc. and “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you.” These last words, they say, also belong to the command Christ here gave to the disciples; therefore, this text must be interpreted to mean that it demands not faith alone, but also good works.

[38] We answer: All this, as I have said before, is mere babbling, false and perverted comment of blind sophists who understand nothing of this text and of the glorious doctrine of the Gospel. They know not what they say, concerning either faith or good works, nor do they know how properly to distinguish between the two. We also confess, and have always, better and more forcibly than the papists, taught that good works must be done; that they must follow faith, and that faith is dead if good works be absent. Therefore, this doctrine of faith does not denounce good works; it does not teach that they should not be performed. Nor is it the question here, whether or no good works are requisite. But faith and good works differ, and it must be taught with discrimination what is the value of each for and by itself. Each must be considered in its proper relations that we may understand both what faith accomplishes and receives, and why good works are necessary. This distinction is everywhere taught in the Gospel and was preached by the apostles. It is, therefore, but blindness, if not intentional malice, that these papal sophists, without here making any distinction, in a swine-like manner misconstrue and pervert these passages so that neither of them can be clearly understood.

[39] We, therefore, insist that these two passages — this one and that written in Matthew — be properly interpreted in the light of their actual wording and arrangement. In our teachings it is right that we instruct men to observe all that Christ commanded. But we cannot disregard that which Christ here says concerning faith. We must always observe the place and order which Christ gives his words. Now, we find in this text, Matthew 28:19-20, that Christ first commands the eleven to go and make disciples of all nations, and to baptize them into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is, they are to preach to them the teaching of the Gospel, how they must be saved — which, as yet, neither the Jews nor the heathen knew — and in this knowledge to baptize them, making the people disciples or Christians. These are the first essentials and thereto the words agree: “He

that believeth and is baptized” etc. Then comes the other part, which must follow the teachings of the Gospel, namely, what those who believe and are baptized shall do. These, Christ says, ye shall teach to observe all things that I commanded you, so that all things shall be according to my Word, and not according to the Jewish law and ceremonies, or any man-made laws pertaining to self-chosen works or religious services.

[40] Therefore these two, faith and good works, must not be confused. They must be clearly distinguished from each other. Faith and baptism, as the chief part and foundation of our salvation, must stand first. The other part follows. Both must be taught, but each in its proper relation. As I have often stated, and as is also clearly self-evident, there is a vast difference between the efficacy of our own works and of that which Christ has accomplished for us. In our teaching, the latter must be exalted and made infinitely superior to the former. Now, in these words of Christ: “Teach all nations and baptize them” etc.; and “He that believeth and is baptized” — it is evident that he holds before us not our unworthy works and the demands of the Law, but his own merits and his gift; these we can accept in no other way than by faith. These are the treasures by which we are saved, which were neither earned nor procured by us, but were graciously presented to us by him. For we may never dare to boast that we merit the gift of Christ in whom we believe, or 2 that the baptism which we receive in his name is of our own doing or has been instituted by any human being.

[41] To prove my statements, consider this: Christ says plainly and clearly; “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;” as though he would say: If you would know how you can be saved, then this shall be considered the chief and essential condition — to believe and be baptized. The question is not whether or not we must do good works. There is no dispute about that. But there is something more important. The point is not what we are doing ourselves, but where shall we seek with the certainty we shall find that by which we can be saved from sin and death, and can obtain life and salvation? Here Christ clearly explains what shall be the chief doctrine of the Gospel. He bases it entirely on faith and baptism, concluding that we shall be saved for the sole reason that we have Christ by faith and baptism.

[42] Believing means: To hold to be true, and with all the heart to depend on, that which the Gospel and all the articles of faith say about

Christ; that he has been sent to us by God the Father, that he suffered, died and rose again and ascended into heaven for the sole reason that we may obtain from God the Father forgiveness of sin and life eternal in his name. That our faith may grasp and hold this the more firmly, he gives us holy baptism, by this visible sign to prove that God the Father will accept us and unfailingly give us that which is offered to us in the Gospel.

[43] Now, if I am to believe this, then I must not adulterate my faith with belief in my own works. I must not depend upon my own merits, daring to offer them to God, as do the monks and self-righteous Jews. There are two doctrines that will not agree and can never hold combined, namely, the belief that we, for Christ's sake and without our merits, obtain God's grace; and the belief that we obtain God's grace by our own works. For if we could obtain this grace by our own merits, then we should not need Christ in addition. Such confusion and detestable patchwork of the sophists cannot be tolerated — the claiming that Christ, indeed, atoned for original sins and for sins done aforesaid and that he opens the door of heaven, but that we ourselves, by our own good works, must now also atone for sins and merit grace in order to fully obtain salvation. This is to rob Christ of his honor; yea, to set him, his death, resurrection and ascension aside, as if his merit were not sufficient for us, and as if his sufferings and blood are not able to atone for sins. But St. John says he is the only propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. John 2:2.

[44] And that the passage we are considering and similar ones must be thus understood, St. Paul teaches in his epistles, especially in that to the Romans, where he proves that we are freely justified by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood Romans 3:24-25. Here he plainly mentions the word gratis, i.e., freely, without our merits, and not for the sake of our works. Thus, we may have a sure consolation, and not doubt God's grace and salvation though we are truly unworthy and still have remnants of sin in us. If the people be taught thus: If you desire forgiveness of sins and a merciful God, you must do enough good works and possess sufficient merits to overcome and remove your sins — then faith is already nullified. Christ is then of no efficacy, conscience is robbed of all consolation, and man is driven to despair, because he seeks help by and in himself and dares to attempt to accomplish himself that for which Christ

was sent and which only he could do for us. Christ came to fulfill the Law, and to earn for us, by his obedience, grace and life eternal.

[45] So, our passage on faith, and others like it, must be understood in this light; not perverted and marred by misleading comments and additions, for the purpose of belittling faith and contradicting Christ's meaning. Such error will surely result if the teaching of good works is confused with that of faith; if distinction is not made between the chief doctrine of Christ's Gospel, appropriation by faith alone, and the teaching of the Law concerning good works. As I said above, these two doctrines cannot stand side by side; they are directly contradictory. To believe that for Christ's sake alone grace and eternal life are granted, and yet at the same time to seek and claim to obtain them by our own merits, is absurd.

[46] I repeat, Christ would, with these words, condemn the pretensions of the Jews and of all the world, their boasting of their law and works, and would declare that no one will be saved by works, but alone by faith in the Lord. It is written that Christ alone has conquered sin and death, and is now sitting at the right hand of God, etc.

[47] From all this explanation you are now enabled to clearly distinguish between these two passages from Matthew and Mark — which the papists, by reason of their ignorance, confound with each other — so that both are vindicated. By the text: "He that believeth and is baptized" etc., our own works and doings, in so far as they are considered as a merit, are not considered with faith but are excluded when we speak of man's justification and salvation before God. Not that good works have no place in a believer's creed, but he must be conscious that by his own worthiness he cannot be saved, that his own works and deeds do not merit for him grace and life eternal; that this has been merited for him through Christ alone, granted him for Christ's sake, and must be apprehended by faith. Then this text, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," is rightly understood.

[48] When one understands and believes this text, then the teaching of the other text should follow, namely, that we should also do good works. Yet good works must accompany faith and depend upon faith, which always clings to Christ and pleads before God that he will graciously and for Christ's sake accept and be pleased with the supplicant's life and works, and not impute to him that which might be imperfect and sinful in him.

Hereupon follows properly the text, Matthew 28:20: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you." Fail not to observe the first and essential condition; for if faith is absent, all our good works and upright life count for naught before God. Indeed, it is not possible to do truly good works without faith. Christ says in John 15:5: "For apart from me ye can do nothing" etc.

[49] Observe, by making this distinction you can rightly understand this passage. Learn how to apply it and to derive from it consolation in the struggle with a conscience, terrified by sin and death. Only in the experience of such agony can one know the power of faith. This truth is apparent even among the papists and all sectarians, for they also preach these words, although in a superficial and indifferent manner as if they were of no importance. They thus show, by their besmirching additions, that they understand nothing about the subject. Alas, exclaim the papists, that you preach nothing but faith, notwithstanding we are neither unbelievers nor Turks. Well, my good man, if it is so easy, then try it once and see how you will fare in the hour when death overtakes you, or when Satan terrifies and disheartens you, and when your reason and all your senses feel nothing but God's wrath and the anguish of hell.

[50] If you are a Christian, as you claim, then you must, indeed, believe and never doubt the statement that Christ died for you, and through his resurrection and ascension conquered for you sin, death and hell; yes, destroyed and swallowed them up. Why is it, then, that you still fear death, flee from God and dread his judgment? This surely is an unmistakable sign that you lack faith, inasmuch as he that has faith cannot be troubled nor terrified by death or hell. Where faith is, there it strengthens and delivers the heart from fear, so that we can cheerfully say: What do I care for sin, death and the terrors of Satan, for I have a Lord and Savior who sits in heaven at the right hand of God the Father, and rules over all in heaven and upon earth, and who gives me his righteousness and life? Can you thoroughly learn the art to do this? Then I will say, you are a doctor of all the doctors. However, you will certainly experience, like all others, even the greatest saints, that you are woefully deficient when it comes to a real test and trial.

[51] The reason the world cares naught about the preaching of faith is that it lives in false security and in carelessness, having neither knowledge

nor experience of the terrors of sin and a troubled conscience. But when death and its horrors overtake it, then it knows of no help and plunges suddenly into despair. Then it will, indeed, having waited too long, realize what it is to have faith, of which it hitherto knew nothing. It will learn that faith is not a dead letter, not mere words of the tongue, a vague idea or a mere imagination, which the papists call faith, but a fearless and strong courage that, with all boldness of heart, relies on Christ, in defiance of sin, death and hell.

[52] In such times, even the best of holy men deplore their weakness, and must confess that their faith is still insufficient, because they are sad and troubled by fear and anguish. As to these words, “He that believeth shall be saved” etc., there is, indeed, no doubt whatever that by them hell is closed, heaven opened, and eternal life and joy granted. But here the chief thing is lacking, namely, that you are not yet the person *qui credit*, i.e., who believes, or that you are still weak in faith. However, though you are not strong, if you only cling to Christ you will obtain the consolation, power and strength that overcomes all terror of death and hell, which all human power, works and merit cannot accomplish.

[53] Here your conscience, burdened by the demands of the Law, will say: You still have sin, and have not kept God’s commandments, which under threat of eternal condemnation, you are bound to keep. Answer: All this I know, alas, only too well, and you must not speak to me of it. Wait with your demands of the Law as to what I must do, till I first possess this chief part of my salvation, namely, Christ and his righteousness, Christ who conquers sin and death for me. This, alone, I want to hear now, and it shall transcend the other in importance as much as the heavens are higher than the earth. For at present the question is not, how I must live and what I must do, but how I may overcome sin and death, or, as Christ here says, be saved. But, after having attained all this, and being, in spite of all that is called sin, death, hell, God’s wrath, Law and works, in Christ justified and saved, and made heir of life eternal, then I want to know also how I must live here on the earth. Then you may come and teach and admonish me, like a faithful schoolmaster, as much as you can, but never going further with your Moses than is right and necessary; not teaching me that thereby I can be saved, or can conquer sin and death.

[54] Now, this is the message that Christ commands to be preached to all creatures. But that we may know that in his kingdom he would have this message supreme, so that we should never doubt it, nor expect something else, but should altogether depend upon it and know that it shall stand as an irrevocable declaration of this Lord of all creation, Christ repeats the message once more, making it still stronger in the negative form, saying: “But he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.”

[55] Here you have the final judgment against the boasting pride and self-praise of the Jews and of all the world. As the first part of the text with one word opens heaven, closes hell and sets aside Moses and the threats of the Law for those who believe, so Christ here with one word, closes heaven, leaves open the jaws of hell, permits death to reign and Moses to be an intolerable tyrant for all that disbelieve. For this there is and shall be no help, though you, like the Jews, torment yourself to death in keeping the Law, even torturing and burdening yourselves, saying: Did I not do many good works and even suffer much? Alas, here you have the decision: “He that disbelieveth shall be condemned.”

[56] Even though man accomplishes all that he possibly can, yet without Christ, everything has already been concluded under sin and God’s wrath; as we heard in the Gospel of St. John, that the Holy Spirit will convict the world in respect of sin, because they believe not etc. John 16:8. Here, in the text we are considering, the judgment of condemnation is already pronounced on the world, together with all its righteousness of the Law and religious service. No one on earth can escape this judgment, nor be rescued from condemnation, except by hearing and believing this message, which says that those who believe in this Lord and Savior shall not be condemned because of their sins, but shall, because of him, have forgiveness of sins and life eternal. Christ says, in John 3:16, that “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish” etc. “For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him.” John 3:17. Therefore, “He that believeth on him is not judged,” but “he that believeth not,” says he, “hath been judged already.” John 3:18. This judgment of condemnation remains upon him because of his disbelieving, imputing all sins to him, which cannot be forgiven. Thus he increases his sin and makes his condemnation the stronger; in addition to all other sins, he also despises Christ by not

believing in him. B. The Signs Christ Appointed to Accompany This Preaching.

[57] When Christ adds baptism to the first part, “He that believeth,” he has in view the established rite among the Christian people. We read in Matthew 28:19, where he puts both parts together, “Make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them” etc. He thus shows, first, that faith, which the Gospel preaches, must not remain concealed; it is not sufficient for each one to go his own way’ and believe for himself, after he has heard this Gospel message, deeming it not necessary to confess his faith before others. On the contrary, in order that it may become evident, not only where this Gospel is preached, but also where it is accepted and believed, that is, where the church and kingdom of Christ may be in this world, Christ wants to unite and hold us together by virtue of this divine sign, baptism. If Christians were without such an ordinance, if they had no common bond in the way of seal or sign, the organization would neither be expanded nor preserved. Christ wishes to bind us together by a divine communion, to further the spread of the Gospel; that others through our confession, may be brought into the fold. Therefore, baptism is a public testimony to the Gospel teaching, and to our faith, by which the world may know where and within whom the Lord rules.

[58] In the second place, Christ has especially ordained this sign to the end that, through the office of the Word and of baptism, we may be conscious of God’s work and mighty power in his church; that the Christian, in accepting baptism, might know that, Christ himself being witness, he is accepted by God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is what it means to be baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, in obedience to Christ’s command. Thus, baptism is a sign and seal, in addition to the Word or promise, that we have been called and brought into the kingdom of Christ, have become God’s children and heirs of eternal life, if, by faith we cling to Christ. This we have often taught elsewhere with reference to baptism.

[59] It is, indeed, wisely ordained by Christ, that in his kingdom, which shall expand into all the world and among all nations, he instituted not many ceremonies, as was the custom among the Jews, nor a diversity of forms among the various countries and nations, peoples and languages; but he ordained only the simplest and most ordinary sign; it is everywhere

observed in the same way — just as the preaching of the Gospel is alike in all places, making all, adults and children, rich and poor, great and humble, one and all, in the world, equal before God. Hence, if a Christian from the uttermost parts of the world should come to us and observe our forms, he would have to say, They are the very same Word and sign that I have learned and received.

[60] Among the various inhabitants that people our earth, each individual and each nation has its own characteristics. But Christians everywhere may be distinguished by their one doctrine, one language, one sign, even as they have one faith and one confession. Indeed, the kingdom of Christ everywhere is a kingdom of love, unity and peace. But it would be impossible for it to always withstand, steadfastly and in unity, the devils and their wiles, if Christ, by his divine power, did not preserve and protect it. However, we see that although Satan causes many sects and factions to rise up, soon they war among themselves and disappear again. What countless cliques and fanatical tyrants Satan has produced to oppose the Gospel during these fifteen hundred years, endeavoring to rend and destroy the kingdom of Christ! And yet there remains to this day one and the same Gospel message, one faith, one baptism and all; even the world, if not willfully blind and hardened, might see and feel the strength and power of this Lord.

[61] Christ deems it sufficient to say, in the first part of our text: “He that believeth and is baptized,” and in the other part: “But he that disbelieveth” etc., not further mentioning baptism. The reason, of course, is that the first part sufficiently enjoins the ordinance and that baptism is commanded elsewhere, namely, in Matthew 28:19: “Make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father” etc. Hence, we have no authority in these for omitting baptism; no reason to hold that because one has faith he needs no baptism. If one becomes a Christian and truly believes, he will surely also gladly accept this sign. He will wish to have this divine testimony and confirmation of his salvation, for strength and consolation throughout life, and also to confess his faith publicly before the world. St. Paul makes plain the Christian’s duty when he says: “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Romans 10:10. True, it is possible that one may

believe though he is not baptized; and again, that some may receive baptism though they do not believe.

[62] This text, however, must be understood as commanding and confirming baptism: no one shall despise the ordinance but, as has been said, it is the duty of all to accept it. Yet the lines must not be drawn so closely that one should be condemned and lost for the failure to receive baptism if he could not obtain it.

[63] As a summary, we derive from this text the following propositions:

1. Some believe, and are baptized, which is in accordance with the general command of Christ, the rule that is to be taught and observed.
2. Some believe, but are not baptized.
3. Some do not believe, and yet they are baptized.
4. Some do not believe, and are also not baptized.

[64] This distinction is made by the text itself. (To the first two points belongs, as we have said, that part of this passage affirming and promising salvation, namely, "Shall be saved." Ed. 1546). It has always unanimously been believed that a person dying a believer is not lost, though he be not baptized; for it may happen that a true believer is suddenly overtaken by death before he can receive the desired baptism. (It also occurs that infants sometimes die before, during or immediately after their birth. These, having already been commended to the Lord by the faith and prayers of the parents or other Christians, without doubt Christ will accept, according to his words: "Suffer the little children to come unto me." But as to the other two points, namely, those who do not believe, whether God grant they be baptized or not, judgment of condemnation is pronounced over them. Ed. 1546). Concerning this it is not necessary to speak further.

[65] But the troublesome Anabaptist sects speak contemptuously of holy baptism, claiming that no one should be baptized who does not first believe. Their intent is to abolish infant baptism. But since enough has been written against this error of the Anabaptists in former postils and elsewhere. we will not now dwell on this matter. It is enough to know that Christ and the apostles make a distinction between these two points, namely, teaching and baptizing. Baptism is administered but once. We would need many to

perform the ceremony if baptism had to be administered as often as we preach and teach. The teaching and preaching are of the most important and must be done constantly.

[66] It is not stated here whether baptism should be administered before or after the teaching, but may God grant that the office of preaching should be exercised above everything else; then baptisms will follow. It is evident that he who receives baptism once, does not need this sign again. But the teaching of the Word, by which faith is kindled, strengthened and preserved, we need continually. For this reason, we observe, the office of baptizing was committed to people of much humbler station than was the office of preaching. Christ, himself, baptized no one, as we read in John 4:2, but commanded his disciples to do so. St. Paul says that he was sent, not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel, 1 Corinthians 1:17, and that he himself baptized but few people, though he preached the Gospel among all the heathen.

[67] The sum and substance of the lesson, therefore, is, for us to give heed to the Word and teaching, and not to judge whether one truly believes or not. Where the Word is, there we shall also administer baptism, be the people young or old. For we are not commanded to accomplish the impossibility of looking into a man's heart to judge whether he believes or not. This must be left to Christ alone. Neither is it commanded us, in our office of preaching, to seek to know how each one may believe, or who accepts the Word and who does not. It will not do for you to say that you would preach only to those whom you could first know to be ready to believe and accept the Word. In that case you would never dare to preach at all. The same holds in baptism. You must not wait until you are sure as to who believes and who does not, but give heed to this: Wherever the Word is preached and heard, and baptism is desired, there you are commanded to administer baptism, both to young and old. Where the Word, the all-important thing, is rightly preached, the other will naturally follow. And, again, where the teaching of the Word is in error, all else is in vain; because there is neither faith nor Christ. It is the Word that brings us everything, the sacraments with their power, peace of conscience and even Christ himself; for it is his power and strength, or, as David calls it: "The rod of his strength out of Zion," Psalm 110:2; or, as St. Paul says, "The power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth," Romans 1:16.

[68] Preaching is, then, the chief work that Christ and all the apostles performed and commanded us to do. Christ gives the commission: “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” etc. The other work, being inferior in importance, can, indeed, be performed by those who are not charged with the greater responsibility of preaching. It will be recalled that both Christ and the apostles sent many to lay hands on the sick. We may safely assume that, in the instance when, by the preaching of the apostles on Pentecost and afterwards, the number of believers who received the Word and were baptized increased to five thousand, not all of this multitude were baptized by the apostles alone. The apostles had to attend to their office of preaching, as commanded. Baptisms were accomplished by the assistance of others who accompanied the apostles. St. Paul, having already been called to the apostleship, was baptized by the disciple Ananias. Acts 9:18.

[69] Therefore, it depends not on the person, whoever it may be, that administers baptism or that receives it; who it is that preaches the Word or hears it. They may be saints or sinners, believers or unbelievers; if only the Word is preached and taught in its purity, then the ministry is also right, no matter who the minister may be. The office of preaching being first observed, then Christ speaks to you and me who hear the Word and desire to be Christians, admonishing us with this passage: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

[70] The Christians filling this office and possessing the talent that must bear interest, are commanded to preach wherever possible, and, together with the preaching, administer also baptism. But as to who may believe or disbelieve, this you must commit to Christ himself, for it is not in the preacher’s power to save or condemn, but in the power of Christ alone. He is Lord over life and death, and may, therefore, grant it or withhold it from whomsoever he will.

[71] However, Christ is not silent upon the point, to whom will he grant salvation. He says: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” And again: “He that disbelieveth shall be condemned.” Naught else can help or hinder; no difference of person or station avails; one being is as dear to him as another. Only that one believes and desires baptism, will avail to save. All who are disciples or hearers of this message must so learn.

[72] Preachers and teachers must see to it that they preach and teach faithfully, and, as St. Paul says, shrink not from declaring the whole counsel of God, Acts 20:27, that the hearers may know what God demands and has decreed concerning them. All the world has always desired, searched and sought to know this, but no one ever attained such knowledge, till it was revealed from heaven through Christ. It is embodied in this message. We should no longer seek nor expect any other revelation. Here it may be clearly perceived that the Gospel itself is witness that the Word of preaching and the sacraments are the means by which you may know God's decree concerning yourself. If you believe the message, you shall be saved. But if you do not believe, then it is also decreed that you shall come under the judgment of condemnation, no matter how earnestly you may have sought, by your works and deeds, to obtain salvation. Though you had accomplished all the works and wonders of angels and men, it would be unavailing. The whole world is hereby divided into two classes, entirely separated from each other, the one for heaven and the other for hell. On the last day no other judgment shall be pronounced than that in accordance with this message, namely, the reward of belief or disbelief.

[73] Therefore, we ought to thank God that we belong to those who shall be saved. For we are among those called God's creatures, to whom he commands this message to be preached. And we are, also, thanks to God, baptized into Christ, and have preached and confessed him 'before the world as the Lord that is sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and is ruling over all the world. Our preaching, faith and confession is, indeed, pure and true; God grant that our lives be according to our faith and confession. All this is said concerning the preaching of the Gospel, which Gospel Christ commanded to be proclaimed in the whole world 2 after his ascension into heaven. Now follows the last part, namely: "And these signs shall accompany them that believe."

[74] Here the sectarians have brooded over the question of signs, vainly asking why they do not accompany our preaching and whether they no longer can be expected. It is enough to know, that these signs followed as a testimony to, and public confirmation of, this Gospel message. They were especially necessary in the beginning, to further the spread of the Gospel. But with the preaching of the Word in all lands and tongues accomplished, their prevalence became less frequent, and their testimony less necessary.

[75] Yet it is true that the same power and efficacy of Christ remains in Christendom. If it were necessary, such signs could even now be performed. It often took place, and still does, that devils were cast out in Christ's name; likewise the sick are healed by prayer in his name, and many receive help in great distress of both body and soul. The Gospel is now being preached in new tongues, where it was unknown before. Signs are given to all Christendom, as Christ says — to those who believe. True, we do not always observe this gift in every Christian believer, and even the apostles did not do these wonders with equal power.

[76] These signs are inferior and very insignificant in comparison with the really great wonders that Christ unceasingly works in the world through his divine omnipotence. He makes frequent allusions to them. These are truly great wonders: That Christendom is defended and preserved on earth; that God's Word and faith, or even a single Christian believer, remains on earth in spite of the devil and his angels; that he protects us against so many tyrants and sects, so many false and unthankful people among the Christians, yea, even against our own flesh and blood — all of them raging against Christ's kingdom. Yet the devil, with all his power and the help of all his servants, will never be able — though he has attempted to do so in his great wrath and still attempts it through the pope, the Turk and all his hosts — to remove the baptismal font from the church, the Gospel from the pulpit, to extirpate Christ's name or destroy from out his kingdom in the world the little flock that clings to him. This great wonder, the power of Christ, is prophesied of and to it praise is given, in Psalm 110:2: "Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies," who are indeed so wroth and bitter that, if they could, in one moment, they would pervert and overthrow all that lives and moves in Christendom. And yet, one single Christian believer, by his preaching and prayer, can be the means of salvation to uncounted multitudes. In spite of Satan's hatred and desire to hinder, many people hear the Gospel, receive baptism and become teachers of the faith; and through the influence of the Gospel, the sacredness of home and country are preserved.

[77] This good work may well be called by believing Christians, casting out devils, taking up serpents and speaking with new tongues. Those visible wonders were only signs to the ignorant unbelievers, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:22, and for the purpose of bringing them to Christ. But why

should we, who know this and believe the Gospel, need such signs? And if they were necessary, we can easily believe they were done. We see that through Christ greater wonders are done among us; the power of Satan and the terrors of sin and death are overcome in our hearts, and many Christians, both young and old, cheerfully die in Christ and by their faith, tread Satan under foot. The marvelous power of Christ's kingdom is constantly the theme of St. Paul and the other apostles, and Christ himself lauds it above all other signs and wonders in Luke 10:19-20, saying: "Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall in any wise hurt you," etc. "Nevertheless in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" etc.

[78] Thus, even in our day, are great signs and wonders upon wonders. Here is an example: In a great city a little flock of Christians is kept in the knowledge of God and in true faith, notwithstanding that more than a hundred thousand devils are turned loose upon them and the world is filled with sects, with scoundrels and tyrants. In spite of the opposition of all these, the Gospel, baptism, Lord's Supper and confession of Christ are still preserved. We can see that, for the heathen, outward, tangible signs were necessary. Christians, however, behold spiritual signs, in comparison with which the former ones are but earthly. We need, therefore, not wonder that they are no longer in evidence now that the Gospel reigns throughout the world and among those who aforesaid could not comprehend God until he had brought them into the fold by visible signs, as little children are persuaded with apples and pears.

[79] Moreover, we should marvel at and extol the great and glorious miracles that Christ is daily accomplishing in his Christendom, wherein Christians conquer the power of the devil and snatch so many souls from the jaws of death and hell. Against their work the devil daily battles in the world and fumes in his awful wrath and rancor. Yet he must flee from the Christian. What though he be cast out of one poor heart, in which he has raged? The whole world still remains helpless in his power unless it is brought to the knowledge of Christ. But wherever a Christian, in spite of the terrors of sin, death and hell, with cheerful heart dies in Christ, there Satan has been truly cast out from his dwelling place, and deprived of his power and kingdom.

[80] The wicked world shall not see nor heed such signs and wonders, but with open eyes and hardened hearts shall pass by and blaspheme them, just as it always despises God's works, blaspheming even the public and indisputable miracles of Christ and the apostles. The world would but the more despise such signs, were they done by us. God must withhold them, since the Gospel is now revealed everywhere, giving the world only those other signs, by which it is offended and therefore is overthrown and destroyed by the power of God. The Jews so fared when they despised the signs by which Christ manifested his proffered help and blessings. They looked for and demanded other signs. Then he refrained and would give them no other sign than the sign of Jonah, lying, after his crucifixion, for three days in the grave in weakness and death. Afterward he came forth from death and the grave, demonstrating his power by his resurrection and ascension. Now he mightily rules over all the world, and will overthrow and destroy it, together with all its power and glory.

Exaudi, The Sunday after Christ's Ascension. A Sermon of Comfort and Admonition.

Text: John 15:26-16:4.

26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

27 And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

1 These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.

2 They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.

3 And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.

4 But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. John 15:26-16:4

[1] Beloved, you have heretofore heard much about faith. Today you hear also of the witness of faith and of the cross that follows. Paul says to the Romans, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." Romans 10:10. If one be pious, he must begin in his heart and believe. That serves only unto godliness; it is not enough for salvation. Therefore, one must also do what the Christian life requires, and continually abide in that life. Hence, Paul adds: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, thou shalt be saved," It is these two things that constitute our salvation, faith and the confession of faith. Faith rescues from sin, hell, Satan, death and all

misfortunes. Now, when we have this we have enough. We then let God live here that we may reach a hand to our neighbor and help him. Besides, God desires to have his name praised and his kingdom developed and extended. Therefore, we must praise his name, confess our faith and win others to do the same, so that God's kingdom may be extended and his name praised.

[2] Thus, faith must be exercised, worked and polished; be purified by fire, like gold. Faith, the great gift and treasure from God, must express itself and triumph in the certainty that it is right before God and man, and before angels, devils and the whole world. Just as a jewel is not to be concealed, but to be worn in sight, so also, will and must faith be worn and exhibited, as it is written in 1 Peter 1:7: "That the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire," etc.

[3] Now, by confession I must take upon myself the load of Satan, hell, death and the whole world — kings and princes, pope and bishops, priests and monks. By faith, everything falls that reason can or ever has devised for the salvation of the soul. It must chastise the apish tricks of the whole world, and its jewel alone must be praised. The world cannot endure this, therefore it rushes in, destroys, kills, and says: "It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not," as Caiaphas says in John 11:50. Thus, the confession must break forth, that God alone is the Savior; and the same confession brings us into danger of losing our lives. As the Lord says later to the disciples: "They shall put you out of the synagogues."

[4] One cannot paint the cross differently than it is here painted; that is its true color. But the cross of illness — to lie in bed at home ill — is nothing compared with the cross of persecution. The first is indeed suffering: but the suffering is golden when we are persecuted and put to death with ignominy; when our persecutors have the praise; when right and honor apparently are on their side, while shame, disgrace and injustice are on our side, compared with the world that wishes them thereby to have God's honor defended, so that all the world says we are served right and that God, the Scriptures and all the angels witness against us. There can be no right in our cause, and without trial we must be banished and isolated in shame and disgrace. So it also was the lot of Christ — they put him to death in the most scornful and disgraceful way, and crucified him between two thieves or murderers; he was regarded as chief of sinners, and they said,

with blasphemous words: Aye, he called himself God's Son; let God help him now, if he wills it differently. Since he does not, God and all the angels must be against him. So Christ says in our Gospel, "They will kill you," and not in an ordinary way, but in an infamous manner, and all the world will say that they thereby offer God a service. It is, indeed, hard to hold and confess that God is gracious to us and that we have a Savior who opposes all the world, all its glitter and shine. But, let the struggle be as hard and sharp as it will, faith must express itself, even though we would like to have it otherwise.

[5] Faith must expect all this, and nothing follows its confession more surely than the cross. For it is certain to come to us, either in life or at death, that all our doings will appear to be opposed to God and the Scriptures. It is better that it be learned during life, from the people, than from the devil at death; for the people cannot force it further than into the ears, but Satan has a pointed tongue that pierces the heart and makes the heart tremble. Satan torments you until you conclude that you are lost and ruined, that heaven and earth, God and all the angels, are your enemies. This is what the prophet means in Psalm 6:7-8, when he says: "I am weary with my groaning; every night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears. Mine eye wasteth away because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine adversaries." It is hard to endure this. Now you see how weak you are who are 2 permitted to bear witness of this faith. One fears his wife, another his children and riches, and a third fears himself.

[6] Faith is in vain where it does not continue steadfast to the end. Christ says in Matthew 10:22, and 24:13: "But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. Hence it is better to experience persecution here than punishment at the end. If one flees persecution, there is no faith in his heart — only a dead knowledge or erroneous belief, without sap and strength, marrow and bone; but where there is a true, living faith, it presses forward through sword and fire. Let us now notice how the Lord comforts his disciples. He says: "But when the Comforter is come."

I. Christ's Sermon of Comfort.

[7] That we may, under no circumstances, despair, Christ says, I will send you a Comforter, even one who is almighty. And he calls the Holy Spirit

here a Comforter; for although both my sins and the fear of death make me weak and timid, he comes and stirs up the courage in my heart, and says: He, cheer up! Thus he trumpets courage into us; he encourages us in a friendly and comforting manner not to despair before death but' to cheerfully go forward, even though we had ten necks for the executioner, and says: Aye, although I have sinned, yet I am rid of my sins; and if I had still more, so that they overwhelmed me, I would hope, that they should do me no harm. Not that one should not feel his sins, for the flesh must experience them; but the Spirit overcomes and suppresses diffidence and timidity, and conducts us through them. He is powerful enough to do that. Therefore. Christ says further: "Whom I will send unto you from the Father."

[8] For he, the Father, is the person that takes the initiative: I am the Son; and from us the Holy Spirit proceeds. And the three persons are one, and one essence, with equal power and authority, as he better expresses it when he says: "The Spirit of truth, who proceedeth from the Father."

[9] That is as much as to say: He who will comfort you is almighty and Lord over all things. How can the creatures now harm us, if the Creator stands by us? Notice how great the comfort of the Holy Spirit is. Now let all the Turks attack us. As long as he is our guard and rearguard, there is no danger. John also says in his first Epistle,¹ John 3:19-20: "Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall 2 assure our heart before him; because if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Likewise, in the following chapter, verse 4, he says: "Ye are of God, my little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." So the Lord now says, Him will I send unto you, so that nothing can harm you. Is not that liberal comfort? Who would not be fearless and cheerful in view of this? And Christ calls him "The Spirit of truth;" that is, where he is and comes there is a rock foundation through and through, the real truth. Neither falsehood nor hypocrisy is there, for the Spirit is not hypocritical. But wherever he is not, there is nothing but hypocrisy and falsehood. Therefore, we fall when the test comes, because the Spirit of truth is not present. Christ now further says: "He shall bear witness of me."

[10] That is, if he is in the heart he speaks through you, and assures and confirms you in the belief that the Gospel is true. Then, as a result, the

confession of the Gospel springs forth. What, then, is the Gospel? It is a witness concerning Christ, that he is God's Son, the Savior, and beside him there is none other. This is what Peter means when he says: "Ye are a royal priesthood, that we are elected thereto, that we preach and show forth the excellencies of Christ." 1 Peter 2:9: Hence, there must always be witnessing. Witnessing loads upon itself the wrath of the whole world. Then the cross follows, then rebellions rise, then the lords and princes and all who are great become angry; for the world cannot hear, nor will it tolerate, this kind of preaching. Therefore, the Gospel is hated and spoken against.

[11] Reason thinks: Aye, one can, nevertheless, easily preach the Gospel in a beautifully simple and plain way, without a revolution in the world, and then it will be heartily welcomed. This is the utterance of Satan; for if I believe and say that faith in Christ alone does and accomplishes all, I overthrow the monkey play of the whole world; and that they cannot allow. Therefore, Christ's teachings and man's teachings cannot stand together; one must fall. Priests and monks, as they are at present, are dependent in name, character and works upon human institutions, which the Gospel thrusts to the ground. Hence, they dare not accept the Gospel, and they continue as they are.

[12] Thus, I say that the Christian faith is founded upon Christ alone, without anything additional. The priests will not permit their affairs and institutions to fall; in consequence, seditions and rebellions follow. Therefore, there must be dissension where the Gospel and the confession of Christ are; for the Gospel opposes everything that is not of its own spirit. If the teachings of Christ and the priests were not antagonistic, they could easily stand together. They are now pitted against one another. As impossible as it is for Christ not to be Christ, so impossible is it for a monk or priest to be a Christian. Therefore, a fire must be kindled. The Lord himself, in Matthew 10:34 and Luke 12:51 says: "I came not to send peace, but a sword." Then follows in our text: "And ye also bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning."

[13] Yes; then, first, when you become certain of your faith through the Holy Spirit, who is your witness, you must also bear witness of me, for to that end I chose you to be apostles. You have heard my words and teachings and have seen my works and life and all things that you are to preach. But the Holy Spirit must first be present; otherwise you can do nothing, for the

conscience is too weak. Yes, there is no sin so small that the conscience could vanquish it, even if it were so trifling a one as laughing in church, Again, in the presence of death the conscience is far too weak to offer resistance. Therefore another must come and give to the timid, despairing conscience, courage to go through everything, although all sins be upon it. And it must, at the same time, be an almighty courage, like he alone can give who ministers strength in such a way that the courage, which before a rustling leaf could cause to fear, is now not afraid of all the devils, and the conscience that before could not restrain laughing, now restrains all sins.

[14] The benefit and fruit of the Holy Spirit is, that sin will be changed to the highest and best use. Thus Paul boasts to Timothy, when he was converted, that whereas he had lived such a wicked life before, he now held his sin to be so contemptible that he composed a hymn and sang about it thus, in 1 Timothy 1:12-17: “I thank him that enabled me, even Christ Jesus our Lord, for that he counted me faithful, appointing me to his service; though I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: howbeit I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord abounded exceedingly with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief: howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me as chief might Jesus Christ show forth all his longsuffering, for an example of them that should thereafter believe on him unto 2 eternal life. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

II. Christ’s Sermon of Warning.

“These things have I spoken unto you that ye should not be caused to stumble.”

[15] Now that Christ had comforted and strengthened his disciples, he warns them of their future sufferings, in order that they might be able to bear them valiantly. He is an especially good friend who warns one; and the evil visitation is much easier borne when one is prepared beforehand for it. Christ says: “They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the hour cometh that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service unto God.”

[16] You will certainly experience this; therefore, arm yourself and be prepared. The most of all will be that, when they have treated you in the most shameless manner, they will think they did a good work in doing so, and it will appear to them as if your God had taken stand against you, and they will sing over it a *Te Deum laudamus* (Lord God, we praise thee), as if they had done God's will and offered unto him a service. Hence, he arms them here, that they may be of good courage when it comes to pass; and he concludes with the thought that they shall have God's favor, although at the time there shall be no signs of it; for God does stand on the side of his disciples. He adds: "And these things will they do, because they have not known the Father, nor me."

[17] Therefore, be patient, be prepared, be firm. See to it that ye, by no means, take offense at me. Remember that I told you before that they have known neither the Father nor me; and therefore they will heap upon you dishonor, shame and persecution. You should never forget this, for it will give you great comfort and make you bold, cheerful and undismayed. Therefore, Christ concludes the admonition by saying: "But these things have I spoken unto you, that when their hour is come, ye may remember them, how that I told you. And these things I said not unto you from the beginning, because I was with you."

[18] Who, now, has been considered to be worse than he who told the pope that he knew not the Father? The pope would, of course, declare the contrary and say: Aye, Satan has commissioned you to speak that. Now, they all say that they know the Father. The Turk also says that he does. In like manner, they declare they believe God and the Scriptures. But there are two kinds of knowledge. The first for example, such knowledge as one might have of the Turk from his noise and reputation; the other the knowledge one would have of the Turk through his deeds were he to capture and occupy Rome. In this latter sense we do not know the Turk.

[19] It is this first kind of knowledge that some people have of God. They know very well how to say of him: I believe in God the Father, and in his only begotten Son. But it is only upon the tongue, like the foam on the water; it does not enter the heart. Figuratively a big tumor still remains there in the heart; that is, they cling somewhat to their own deeds and think they must do works in order to be saved — that Christ's person and merit are not sufficient. Thy work is nothing, thy wisdom is foolishness, thy

counsel is nothing, thy truth also amounts to nothing, neither does the mass avail anything before God. Then they reply: Aye, the devil has prompted you to speak thus. They say, Christ has truly died for us, but in a way that we, also, must accomplish something by our deeds. Notice how deeply wickedness and unbelief are rooted in the heart. The puffed-up pride of the heart is the reason why man can know neither Christ nor the Father.

[20] But to know Christ in the other and true sense is to know that he died for me and transferred the load of my sin upon himself; to so know this that I realize that all my doings amount to nothing. To let go all that is mine, and value only this, that Christ is given to me as a present; his sufferings, his righteousness and all his virtues are at once mine. When I become conscious of this, I must in return love him; my affections must go out to such a being. After this I climb upon the Son higher, to the Father, and see that Christ is God, and that he placed himself in my death, in my sin, in my misery, and bestows upon me his grace. Then I know also his gracious will and the highest love of the Father, which no heart of itself can discover or experience. Thus I lay hold of God at the point where he is the tenderest, and think: Aye, that is God; that is God's will and pleasure, that Christ did this for me. And with this experience I perceive the high, inexpressible mercy and the love in him because of which he offered his beloved child for me in 2 ignominy, shame and death. That friendly look and lovely sight then sustain me. Thus must God become known, only in Christ. Therefore, Christ himself says to his disciples: "No one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him." Matthew 11:27.

[21] On the other hand, those who parade their own works, do not know Christ. Neither do they know what the Father has done through Christ. Nor do they know that God is not interested in their good works, but in his Son alone. Thus, they do not know the Father, neither do they know what they have received from the Father, through Christ. Therefore, they must fall and perish, and behold God in his severest aspect — as a judge. They try to silence the judgment with their good works, but they find no good work that is sufficient to do this, and then they must finally despair. When people see that they, themselves, are nothing, and establish the foundation of their hearts upon Christ, esteem him as the highest good, and know God as a Father in death and life — this is to "know God." Enough has been said on

this Gospel. We will pray to God, to give us grace to know him and his Christ aright. Amen.

Exaudi. The Sunday after Christ's Ascension. Second Sunday. The Holy Spirit and his Witness of Christ, and the Persecution of Christians Because of it.

Text: John 15:26-16:4.

26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

27 And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

1 These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.

2 They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.

3 And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.

4 But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. John 15:26-16-4

[1] The first part of this Gospel, referring to the Holy Spirit, we will reserve for consideration on Pentecost, at which time it is appropriate to state why Christ calls the Holy Spirit the Comforter and the Spirit of truth; also, how he distinguishes him from the Father and the Son, namely: He is the person who proceeds from, or is sent by, the Father and the Son; therefore, the Holy Spirit is called, at the same time, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, that is, of Christ, as St. Paul and St. Peter respectively call him in Galatians 4:6, and 1 Peter 1:11. It is here also testified that Christ is truly eternal God with the Father when he states that he and the Father send forth the Holy Spirit and bestow the same upon the Christian Church. This is stated more fully in the explanation of chapters 15 to 17 of the Gospel of St. John.

[2] But the Lord Jesus Christ speaks these words, and all of the discourse of these three chapters, before his departure and ascension, in order to comfort his beloved disciples, and not only the disciples but all Christians to the end of time, concerning all that shall happen to them in the world after he shall have left the world and gone to the Father; to comfort them when he is no longer visibly present with them, and when he rules, not temporally but spiritually. He says these things that we may be strengthened and comforted through faith in his Word, to withstand the great and serious trials which confront Christians on earth, as we shall further hear.

[3] He often announced to them how the world would array itself against them because of their office. He plainly told them, in order to forewarn them, that the world would not agree with them nor accept their doctrines. They had hitherto hoped that all the world, and more especially his own people, would gladly accept him. Now he tells them that the world will not only despise their teaching and regard their words as vain assertions of foolish men who preach about simply a crucified man, but will, for the sake of himself, hate and persecute them. In a word, he told them that they should not expect friendship and kindness of the world; he wished them to learn that his kingdom is in no respect a temporal one.

[4] But Christ would not have them be dismayed by his words and think: What shall be the outcome of this? Shall we preach if no one will hear us — if even our own people are to become our enemies if we open our mouths to speak, not to think of what others will do? Let us be silent and let the world go its own way; let it believe and live as it chooses, rather than that we

should speak only to be compelled, with shame and amid mockery, to remain silent. We should not be able to accomplish anything, for what are we and what can we poor, despised few do against so many, against the wisdom, power and might of the world? He would not discourage them; therefore he comforts and strengthens them beforehand with these words: “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness of me.”

[5] Be it so, he says, even though they hate and persecute you for my name’s sake, and though the devil, who is responsible for such hatred, aims thereby to prevent you from speaking; nevertheless they shall not be able to stifle and nullify your preaching, for after my departure, when they think that I am forever dead, another shall come whose mouth they shall not be able to shut. He will publicly testify of me and will speak before all the world, whether the world smile or be angry. This one, he says, shall be the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and is sent by me. If I now go to the Father, through suffering and death, and begin to reign in divine power and majesty, then I shall speak through him; not, as now, personally and with my weak human will, in this small corner of the world, but publicly and before all the world. For I will send him in such form that he shall be in you, and he shall be your Comforter, since you will obtain no comfort from the world. He shall give you courage and strength to withstand the enmity of the world and the fear of the devil, enabling you to confidently and publicly testify of me. This testimony of yours shall be called and be the testimony of the Holy Spirit, given by you in your official capacity. He shall be sent to you by the Father and by me, and you may know, and the world will be compelled to see, that what the Holy Spirit shall say through you is by my power and authority, and according to the will and command of the Father.

[6] This is the consolation which Christ gives the disciples to strengthen their faith. They would have need of it in their coming work for him. This promise is a promise to his whole Church that, after his resurrection and ascension, the word and teaching of the Holy Spirit shall at all times, so long as Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, testify through the apostles and their successors, and that this testimony shall remain in the world, no matter who hears it or hears it not. For the 2 disciples were not to

be concerned as to who did or did not hear and receive their testimony, but they should know, because it is the testimony of the Holy Spirit, that he would be present and working with them, to the end that some might believe. Nor should the world be able to hinder or prevent this, though it should rage against it with its hatred and persecution. Yea, even if no person on earth received their teaching, nevertheless the world should be reprov'd through the preaching of his Word. He says: The Holy Spirit will reprove the world, which will thus receive the judgment of its condemnation because it heard the preaching but nevertheless would not believe it and therefore has no excuse; as he said afterwards: "If I had not come and spoken unto them," and "had not done among them the works which none other did, they had not had sin."

[7] Now, when he says: "Ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning," he thus presents the apostles as special examples for all preachers and confirms their preaching so that all the world is bound to their word, to believe the same without contradiction, and is assured that everything the apostles teach and preach is the true doctrine and the preaching of the Holy Spirit, heard and received from himself; as 1 John 1:1-2 testifies, saying, "That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we have beheld and our hands have handled concerning the Word of life...declare we unto you." No other preachers on earth have testimony like that of the apostles; all others are commanded to follow in the footsteps of the apostles, to remain in the same doctrine, and to teach none other.

[8] In addition, the true criterion is given by which the preaching of the Holy Spirit may be tested, when he says, "The Holy Spirit shall testify of me;" that is, he will preach nothing except concerning this Christ, not concerning Moses, Mohammed, or our own works. St. Peter says, in Acts 4:12, "and in none other is there salvation, for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved," except through this crucified Christ. "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues, yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service unto God."

II. The Prophecy of the World's Hatred and Persecution of Believers. A. Hatred and Persecution Analyzed.

[9] He pointed out clearly enough what should happen to them in the world as a result of their preaching. He mentions two sources of opposition to the Gospel, than which none could be stronger: One, that the preachers should be excommunicated and put to death; the other, that the persecutors would regard this as rendering a service to God. Who can withstand such persecution? or who will or can preach if those who testify of Christ shall be thus abusively treated and slain? Nevertheless, he has said that the Holy Spirit should testify of him and that they also should bear witness; and he assures them that their testimony shall not be effaced by this rage and persecution of the world. He gives them this assurance beforehand for the very purpose that they may know and be prepared against these same abuses.

[10] Now, it is a strange and almost incredible thing to hear that not only the world shall oppose, with its bitter hatred and rage, Christ, the Son of God and its Savior, but that also the apostles themselves must be offended at such judgment of the world, Who could ever conceive that Christ and his Gospel should be received in this manner among his own people, to whom he had been promised by God, and from whom they were to expect nothing but that which is good, as indeed they have received from him? But here you are told that the Gospel is a teaching which, according to human judgment, gives nothing but offense; that is, men regard it, not only as a great error or folly and justly mocked and despised of the world, but as a thing unworthy to be heard or tolerated — to be condemned as if it were the very devil's most dangerous gift from hell.

[11] The kingdom of Christ on earth shall so come that it must be apparent to all that it is not an earthly kingdom, after the manner of men. But the world shall refuse to recognize its nature. It shall not be called the kingdom of Christ or of God, but a destruction and subversion of all good government, both spiritual and temporal. It is well-nigh inconceivable that the Son of God should be so received by those who are called the people of God and who are regarded as the most 2 irreproachable in the world; for he speaks here not of open, malicious, wicked knaves and godless men, but of

those who are regarded as the most eminent, the wisest, the most holy, and, as he here says, the servants of God.

[12] Hitherto no one has understood these words, nor can anyone among the papists interpret the expression, “They shall excommunicate you” etc. They can say nothing else of this passage than that it is now an old and, in fact, a dead thing, referring to the Jews, who were a wicked and hardened people, that would not endure Christ and his apostles. It is hard to believe that even now there can be such wicked people on earth among Christians or in the Church as those who would excommunicate their brethren. But it cannot be Jews nor Turks who are meant; they have nothing to do with the Church. Nor has it ever been known that among the papists anyone of them was excommunicated or persecuted or killed for the sake of the Gospel or the knowledge of Christ. Then, of course, this sermon does not concern them, and gives them neither instruction nor comfort.

[13] But we, thank God, have been compelled, by our experience as preachers of the Gospel, to learn something of Christ’s meaning here and why he has spoken these things. We discover, in connection with the controversy concerning doctrine which we carry on with our adversary, that the papacy with its numerous adherents has been and still is composed of the tender, pious, holy people of whom Christ here speaks, who excommunicate his Christians for the Gospel’s sake and think that thereby they are rendering service to God. They certainly did this when by force they suppressed the Gospel and compelled submission, the Church accepting and obeying their mandates, and when, if anyone dared a single opposing word, he was promptly burned at the stake.

[14] To exterminate the accursed heretics and enemies of God was called doing a holy work for God. In our time, also, they have shown this spirit in many examples and still show it in their treatment of numerous pious people whom they foully put to death, solely on account of their confession of faith in Christ and God, and will not consent to spare their lives even were they willing to recant. Therefore this passage does not need many annotations other than that we learn from it the difference between the true and the false Church, and thereby receive strength and comfort in our hour of a similar persecution. In view of this, let us briefly examine the words of the Gospel.

[15] The words, “they shall excommunicate you,” are to be understood, as the Greek text clearly sets forth, in the sense of banishment and exclusion from the synagogue or the assembly of God’s people and virtual separation from all fellowship of the Church, the offender being committed to the devil, to be cast into the abyss of hell, never to have any part in the kingdom of God, of grace and of everlasting salvation. This is, indeed, a severe and terrible word, at which every pious heart must be greatly affrighted.

[16] It is an incontrovertible truth that God has given such authority and power to the Church that whoever is excommunicated by it is truly excommunicated by God; that is, is placed under the wrath and curse of God and deprived of all fellowship with the saints, as Christ says in Matthew 18:17-18: “What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,” and again, “If he refuse to hear the church let him be unto thee as the gentile and the publican.” What fate more terrible could happen to a man than to have the curse and imprecation of God and of all men pronounced upon him, and to be forever deprived of all comfort and salvation?

[17] When, therefore, this ban and curse are pronounced, these other words of Christ must follow: “Whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service to God.” This is the punishment and execution which the world thinks it must carry into effect upon those who are publicly excommunicated — -that they should, without any mercy, be exterminated from the earth. This penalty is to apply especially to such as oppose God’s people with a new teaching and faith; just as the apostles were accused of preaching against the Law, the temple, and the people of God. Indeed, God specifically commanded in the Law that those who are guilty in these matters should not be permitted to live, but should be condemned without mercy, and that no one should favor his nearest friend nor brother, his son nor daughter, if an offender. Deuteronomy 13:8. This, Christ says, shall also happen to you — you will be not only excommunicated by your own people and be put under the curse of God, but they will also carry out the sentence of punishment upon you as the enemies of God, and think that they can render no service more praiseworthy than to exterminate such accursed people, to the praise and glory of God. Thus, the disciples of Christ shall fare even as their Head and Lord himself fared; they shall be regarded as

such evil, dangerous, corrupting, accursed people 2 that everyone is in duty bound to assist in exterminating them from the earth; he who does this has performed a good work, one acceptable to God in heaven, and can render him no better obedience. B. What Moved Christ to Prophecy of this Hatred and Persecution.

[18] Behold, should not this persecution prove too heavy to be borne by the disciples? Christ tells them later that it shall be their lot to personally see and suffer such treatment, not only with reference to their Lord, in whom they believe, but also for themselves; that they, for Christ's sake, must be shamefully cursed and put to death by those who are called the people of God, and who possess the authority of the Church and command the honor and respect of men for not only doing right, but for serving God most zealously, as pious and holy people, ardently promoting the honor of God. What great tribulation must be in store for the rest of the little flock of Christ's Church, if these things happened in its beginning and first planting, when the Holy Spirit so powerfully manifested himself in miracles before the whole world! What better things could they later expect from idolatrous heathen, if they are to suffer these at the hands of their own brethren and friends, the Jewish people?

[19] Christ's words, then, mean that the Church is to be established in a most wonderful manner, beyond and inconsistent with all human understanding. Who has ever heard that this is to be the way in which God will introduce Christ's kingdom upon earth, establish his Word in all places, and gather his Church, if it is to begin in such an inconsistent manner and to meet with such opposition that the dear apostles must, in shame and disgrace, yield up their lives and not they, with their few followers, but their adversaries, bear the name of God's people and God's Church? This ought to be sufficient to drive out of the hearts of the disciples the erroneous delusion they had held concerning the temporal kingdom of Christ, and to teach them not to expect from it worldly and temporal good and honor and power and peace, but to perceive that he meant to give them something else, since he permitted them to suffer shame and death.

[20] With this word of consolation, Christ prepares his disciples, and future Christians, assuring them that the Holy Spirit will testify of him in the face of so much discouragement, as was greatly needed. That the disciples could understand 2 his words, must be due to the revelation of the

Holy Spirit. How otherwise could they believe that this crucified, accursed and condemned Jesus, represented by his disciples and pupils, could be the true Son of God, the Lord of life and of eternal glory?

[21] There is presented to us in this text a picture of the reception accorded this kingdom of Christ in the perverse, opposing kingdom of the world, concerning which prophesied in the earliest promise of his Word — the promise in which the Church had its first beginnings — where God said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; he shall bruise (crush) thy head, but thou shalt bruise his heel.” Genesis 3:15. This enmity, then, must continue in the world, an unending enmity and contest; as soon as Christ comes, teaching the Word, he meets the serpent, which immediately becomes venomous and at every opportunity attacks and bites with its poisonous fangs, for it fears the loss of its head. But in spite of all efforts, it has not yet gained anything and is still under the feet of the Seed of the woman, who tramples on its head, until its venom and wrath against him shall have been spent in vain and its power utterly destroyed.

[22] We have the comfort of this victory of Christ — that he maintains his Church against the wrath and power of the devil; but in the meantime we must endure such stabs and cruel wounds from the devil as are necessarily painful to our flesh and blood. The hardest part is that we must see and suffer all these things from those who call themselves the people of God and the Christian Church. We must learn to accept these things calmly, for neither Christ nor the saints have fared better.

[23] It was also a bitter and hard thing for our first parent, Adam, to learn to understand the fulfillment in his own children of this same truth, “I will put enmity between thee” etc., when his first born and God-given son murdered his own brother because of his offering to God and his obedience to him. The patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and others who, for the time being, were the true Church, had to pass through the same experience when brothers who had learned from the same father one and the same faith, Word and worship of God, became enemies and one received persecution at the hands of the other. We ought not to be surprised, then, if a similar experience must be ours, not alone at the hands of the papists, from whom we have already received condemnation and whose disposition toward us is plainly apparent; but also at the hands of those who are still among us as

evangelical Christians, and who yet are not upright. C. The Cause of This Hatred and Persecution.

[24] This is the first part of this Gospel and prophecy of Christ. The second part now follows, explaining how it is that such worthy people, the best, the wisest and most holy among God's children, who earnestly seek to serve and honor God, should so bitterly and mercilessly persecute Christ and his people. "These things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor me."

[25] There you have the reason. Christ tells what moves them to such hatred and persecution of Christians. It is, he says, because you preach concerning me, whom they do not know; for they jealously regard their own office of teaching and preaching in the capacity of chief-priest and scribe (and in this day of pope, bishop, etc.) repudiating all doctrine that differs from that of Moses and the Law. They rigidly follow the command of Moses in Deuteronomy 13:6ff. How, then, shall the apostles be permitted to promulgate this utterly new doctrine concerning an unknown Messiah, one, too, whom they reject as a false prophet, yea, whom they have crucified as a deceiver and blasphemer? Who, in opposition to all recognized authority and intelligence, would acknowledge as Christ this executed victim? These so-called people of God boast to the apostles of their authority, saying, in Acts 5:28: "Did we not straitly charge you not to teach in this name?"

[26] That they do not know this Christ is true without a doubt. Their own confession and deeds prove it. It is plainly evident in what high esteem they hold themselves as being the people of God, who possess the Law, and the promise, the priesthood and worship of God (even as our people possess the Scriptures, baptism, the sacrament and the name of Christ); yet they are blind and without the true knowledge of God and of Christ, and consequently have become hardened, opposing God and his Son with their acts of ban and murder, under the very appearance and with the boast of thereby serving God. But Christ strengthens and comforts his own people that they may not fear harsh judgment, nor be intimidated by jealous authority from preaching and confession, but may say to 2 their adversaries as the apostles answered the chief-priests and the council at Jerusalem, in Acts 5:29: "We must obey God rather than men."

[27] In this connection Christ fixes the standard of judgment and points out the difference between the true and the false Church. The Church is not to be judged by name and external appearance; but insight must be had and the identifying mark be forthcoming, by which the holy Church and the true people and servants of God may be recognized. Reason and human wisdom cannot furnish the necessary qualifications for the true Church. The actual test is in ascertaining who have the real knowledge of Christ and who have it not. Judgment cannot be passed in this case according to mere external appearance and name, according to the office and authority and power of the Church; in all these externals the Jews excelled the apostles and the papacy excels us by far.

[28] Accordingly, we concede to the papacy that they sit in the true Church, possessing the office instituted by Christ and inherited from the apostles, to teach, baptize, administer the sacrament, absolve, ordain, etc., just as the Jews sat in their synagogues or assemblies and were the regularly established priesthood and authority of the Church. We admit all this and do not attack the office, although they are not willing to admit as much for us; yea, we confess that we have received these things from them, even as Christ by birth descended from the Jews and the apostles obtained the Scriptures from them.

[29] In view of these prerogatives, they make their perverse boast against us and censure and curse us as obstinate and recreant apostates and enemies of the Church. It is unpleasant to suffer such reproach, and for this reason the devil easily terrifies the hearts of some of the ignorant and overwhelms men with the thought: Alas! the Church has pronounced the ban and it really possesses the office; this is certainly a thing not to be made light of, for Christ says in Matthew 18:18: "What things soever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven." Therefore whom the Church excommunicates is undoubtedly also condemned by God. Most assuredly they do not excommunicate in the name of the devil, nor of the pope, but in the name of God the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, by the authority of Christ etc., embellishing the ceremony with appropriate and high-sounding and solemn words.

[30] It is necessary to a thorough understanding of the matter that we understand what Christ here says concerning the two Churches: One is the Church which is not recognized by the world, but is robbed of its name and

exiled; the other, the Church that has the name and honor but persecutes the small flock of believers. Thus we have the opposing situations: The Church which is denied the name is the true Church, whilst the other is not the reality, though it may occupy the seat of authority and power, and possess and perform all the offices conceded to be offices and marks of the holy Church and yet we are obliged to suffer its ban and judgment.

[31] The reason for the difference in the two Churches is contained in Christ's saying: "Because they have not known the Father nor me;" that is, the false Church regards itself as superior to the teachings of Christ, when a knowledge of Christ is the very basis of distinction between the true and false Church. It is not enough merely to have the name and the office of the Church since these could be unlawfully assumed and abused; the second commandment and the second petition of the Lord's Prayer indicate that the name of God is often abused, not hallowed but blasphemed and dishonored. Hence, we must not be too ready to endorse the declaration: I say or do this in the name of God or of Christ, and at the command and by the authority of the Church. But we should reply thus: I accept the name of God and of the Church as they are dear and precious to me; but I do not concede to you that in this name you should prescribe and sell whatever you please.

[32] Thus we say to the papists: We grant you, indeed, the name and office, and regard these as holy and precious, for the office is not yours, but has been established by Christ and given to the Church without regard for and distinction of the persons who occupy it. Therefore, whatever is exercised through this office as the institution of Christ, and in his name and that of the Church, is at all times right and proper, even though ungodly and unbelieving men may participate. We must distinguish between the office and the person exercising it, between rightful use and abuse. The name of God and of Christ is always holy in itself; but it may be abused and blasphemed. So also, the office of the Church is holy and precious, but the person occupying it may be accursed and belong to the devil. Therefore, 2 we cannot decide according to the office who are true or false Christians, and which is the true or false Church.

[33] But the basis of distinction shall be: to know Christ or not to know Christ; that is, to know the doctrine and faith of Christ and to confess him. It is evident, as supported by Christ's own statement, that some know neither him nor the Father; it is determined by him that they are not the

Church of Christ, rather that those constitute the Church who bear the name of Christ and have his truth, yet are persecuted by the others. Under authority of this conclusion, Christians are to be undaunted; they are not to be concerned even though they may be denounced as heretics and be cursed, but are to regard it as a comforting sign that they are the few who belong to Christ, when they are excommunicated by the majority in power. For excommunication certainly is not exercised among members of the false Church for the sake of the knowledge of Christ and of faith; their policy is to stand approved and unchastized, yea, they dare even to denounce crowned authority to the extent of curse and ban, protected as they are by the name and sanctity of the Church.

[34] Now, what does it mean to know Christ and the Father? The papists, forsooth, boast of such a knowledge, even as the Jews boasted of being able to recognize the Messiah when he should come, Indeed, who should so well know the Messiah as the same Jews who possessed his Law and promises, his temple, priesthood etc., and who worshiped the true God, creator of heaven and earth and promisor of the Messiah? But here you learn that an intellectual knowledge of God is not sufficient — the Law and temple service cannot avail; he who wishes to know God truly, must know him in this Christ, that is, in the Word, in the promises which the Scriptures and the prophets have spoken concerning him. The teaching and preaching of the Gospel is nothing else than that Christ is the Son of God, sent by the Father as a sacrifice and ransom for the sin of the world, by his own blood, that he might appease the wrath of God and effect reconciliation for us, redeeming us from sin and death and securing for us righteousness and everlasting life. It must follow, then, that no one, by his own work and holiness can atone for his sins or appease the wrath of God, and that there is no other way to attain the grace of God and eternal life than by the faith which thus apprehends Christ.

[35] This teaching points out the true Christ and the real knowledge of him. He who thus knows Christ, knows the Father also; for the knowledge of Christ teaches him that, for the sake of his Son, God will be gracious to us and will save us, that no one shall come to God except through him. who is the bearer of our sins and is our mercy-seat, and that all this and nothing else is the eternal counsel, desire and will of God the Father.

[36] This knowledge is the article of faith by which we become Christians, and it is the foundation of our salvation. Whenever, therefore, we have the knowledge of Christ, we must cease trusting and boasting in selfrighteousness, in works and in worship of the God of the Jews merely performed according to the Law, and we must place no confidence in all the trumpery of the papal self-ordained juggling and baubles; for if Christ alone shall bear my sins, I cannot at the same time atone for them by my own works and my own pretended worthiness.

[37] The former Jewish saints would not, nor will our present papists, accept nor believe this preaching of Christ; they testify, then, by their own deeds that they do not know Christ nor the Father who sent him. The Jews meanwhile set up their own God, who has regard for their holiness — a holiness consisting in the Law, the priesthood and temple-service — and they set up a Christ who, when he comes, will be highly pleased with such holiness and, because of it, promote them to positions of great honor and glory before the whole world. If they hear the apostles preach that no one can be justified before God by the works of the Law, and that no other name is given whereby we can be saved than that of this crucified Christ, they will not suffer the doctrine, but must bitterly persecute its advocates, pronouncing the ban and condemning and slaying the apostles and the Christians.

[38] Even so do the papists; they will not endure the teaching that we, for Christ's sake and not by our own works, may be accounted righteous before God and be saved. Even though they retain the name of Christ and of faith, yet they rob Christ of his work and power, justify the erroneous doctrine of human merit, and admit only that faith and Christ are indeed of some help if love and good works be present. This means simply that Christ does not count so much as our own works; but whatever merit he confers is because of our works, as they teach in the schools: 2 Propter unum quodque tale etc., and as they publicly say: Faith, which must always believe in Christ, is useless, void, yea, dead, does not avail, if it is not clothed and made alive by love, which is the soul and life of faith. They say that therefore Christ and faith may be found even in a person who is impenitent and lives openly in mortal sin. This is nothing else than to make Christ a mere empty husk or container and to make out of works the grain and the gold; to regard Christ as a dead body but our works as the soul. When

works are added to faith, they say, faith becomes a living body, a full container. This is a shameful and blasphemous interpretation of Christ, that his merit and power must be dependent upon our works, that he must receive his ability from them, and become a beggar of us for that which he should give us.

[39] From these two convictions — that they do not know him and that they persecute and slay his advocates — Christ now passes the judgment that the so-called Church is not the Church. He then concludes that with their false doctrines and persecutions they are both liars and murderers of God and of Christ and of all his saints.

[40] From the analysis given, you may decide for yourself in which group you are to be found; for you must be on one side or the other, and it is useless to wait for human council in this matter. It has already been unalterably determined that the two divisions can never agree. The larger body, which has the recognized authority, will always persecute the minority, even to the extent of excommunication and murder, as practiced from the beginning. Those who know Christ — the true Christians — will accept Christ's classification and be numbered with the minority, who have the Word and the knowledge of Christ, and they will suffer persecution for the faith rather than, for the sake of the friendship and honor of this world, to belong to those who, condemned by Christ, are the bitterest foes of God and of the Church, and who cannot see the kingdom of God, nor be saved.

[41] In this article of faith, distinction must be made between the true Church and the false; for it is the command of God and of Christ that one shall not be confused 1 “A thing has a quality in a higher degree than other things if in virtue of it the similar quality belongs to the other things as well” (Meta. 993b 24). with the other. Therefore, we must separate ourselves from the papal Church, regardless of the fact that they trust in their Church authority and condemn us as apostates.

[42] If they excommunicate and persecute us because of our evangelical preaching and our knowledge of Christ, we already have the decision of Christ that they are not the true Church, and their office and all the authority of which they boast cannot avail against us; that rather our teaching and judgments against them shall avail before God in heaven. We are certain, by reason of the test which Christ here applies, that the true Church is with the

few who know Christ and are united in doctrine, faith and confession of him. And where the true Church is and abides, there remain, also, the offices of the Church, the sacraments, the keys and all things given to it by Christ; it needs neither to ask nor to receive them from pope or council. In the true Church, not only is the office pure in itself, but those who exercise it use it lawfully.

[43] We admit that the papists also exercise the appointed offices of the Church, baptize, administer the sacrament etc., when they observe these things as the institution of Christ, in the name of Christ and by virtue of his command (just as in the Church we must regard as right and efficacious the offices of the Church and baptism administered by heretics), yet if they attempt to pervert the right use of these offices by exercising them against us, we may, by virtue of the judgment of Christ, declare their action void and regard themselves as apostates of the Church of Christ.

The Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit to Teach and Remind the Disciples of all Christ Taught.

Text: John 14:23-31

23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

25 These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world

giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

28 Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.

29 And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.

30 Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.

31 But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence. John 14:23-31

[1] Before we explain this Gospel lesson we must first say a few words about the festival of Pentecost and its history, or the event we celebrate on this day. St. Luke records it in the Acts of the Apostles, second chapter, verses 1-41, in the following words: “And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

[2] “Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound was heard, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speaking in his own language. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying, Behold, are not all these that speak Galilaeans? And how hear we, every man in our own language wherein we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judaea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, in Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God. And they were all amazed, and were perplexed, saying one to another, What meaneth this? But others mocking said, They

are filled with new wine. “But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and spoke forth unto them, saying:

[3] “Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and give ear unto my words. For these are not drunken, as ye suppose; seeing it is but the third hour of the day; but this is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel: And it shall be in the last days, saith God I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh: And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams: Yea and on my servants and on my handmaidens in those days Will I pour forth of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heaven above, And signs on the earth beneath; Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the day of the Lord come, That great and notable day: And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

[4] “Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know; him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay: whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David saith concerning him, I beheld the Lord always before my face; For he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; Moreover my flesh also shall dwell in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul unto Hades, Neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption. Thou madest known unto me the ways of life; Thou shalt make me full of gladness with thy countenance.

[5] “Brethren, I may say unto you freely of the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us unto this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne; he foreseeing this spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left unto Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses.

[6] “Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear. For David ascended not into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet. Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified.

[7] “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him. And with many other words he testified, and exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation. They then that received his Word were baptized: and there were added unto them in 2 that day about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

[8] This is the history of the day. The festival we call Pentecost originated thus: When God led the children of Israel out of Egypt, he had them to celebrate the Easter festival the same night, and commanded them to celebrate it annually, as a memorial of their exodus out of Egypt. Counting from that day, they journeyed in the desert for fifty days, to Mount Sinai, where the Law was given to them by God, through Moses. Hence they celebrated the festival we call Pentecost. For the little word “Pentecost” is derived from the Greek Pentecostes, signifying the fiftieth day; the Saxons say Pingsten. It is to this festival that Luke has reference. When the fifty days after Easter were past and the disciples had celebrated the event of God’s having given the people the Law on Mount Sinai, then the Holy Spirit came and gave them a different law. We celebrate the festival, not because of the old, but because of the new, event, because of the sending of the Holy Spirit. Therefore we must offer a little explanation and show the difference between our Pentecost and the Jews’ Pentecost.

[9] In the first place, the Jews celebrated the festival because the Law had been given them in writing; but we ought to celebrate it because God’s Law is given to us spiritually. St. Paul aims to make this plain. In the

second Epistle to the Corinthians, chapters 3 and 4, he speaks of two kinds of preaching. And just as there are two kinds of preaching, so also there are two kinds of people.

[10] First, the written Law is that which God has commanded and embodied in writing. It is called “written” because it proceeds no further and does not enter the heart, nor do any works follow, except mere hypocritical works; the Law has only an outward significance. The people also, in this sense, remain altogether written. Since the Law has existed only in writing, in letters, it has been dead, and its influence has been deadening. It has ruled a dead people, for the hearts were dead which did not willingly do God’s commandment. If every man were allowed his own free will, to do as he pleased without fear of punishment, none would be found who would not rejoice in exemption from the Law.

[11] Man’s nature is to follow his desire, but he is compelled to do otherwise. He thinks: God will punish me and cast me into hell if I do not keep his 2 commandment. Since it is his nature to obey reluctantly and with displeasure when his will is opposed, man becomes hostile to God because of the penalty; he knows that he is a sinner and not in harmony with God, that he does not love God, yea, rather he would there were no God. Such hatred of God is hidden in the heart, no matter how finely nature adorns herself outwardly. Hence we see that the Law, as long as it is merely written, a Law in letters, makes no one righteous, for it enters not the heart. On this theme we have preached and written a great deal.

[12] The other Law is spiritual. It is not written with pen and ink, nor spoken by word of mouth like the Law on the stone tablets handled by Moses, but, as we see in Luke’s narrative, the Holy Spirit falls from heaven and fills all the company assembled together, manifesting itself upon them in cloven and fiery tongues, causing them to preach boldly and with a power they had not before, so that all the people were pricked in their hearts and marveled. The Holy Spirit streams into the heart and makes a new man, one who now loves God and gladly does his will. Such is the Holy Spirit himself, or rather the work he does in the heart. He writes in fiery flame on the heart and makes it alive, causing it to find expression in fiery tongue and active hand; a new man is made, who is conscious of a reason, heart and mind unlike he formerly had. Everything is now alive: He has a live reason; he has light and courage and a heart which burns with love and

delights in whatever pleases God. This is the real difference between the written and the spiritual laws of God; and such is the work of the Holy Spirit.

[13] Therefore, the great art is to preach aright concerning the Holy Spirit. Hitherto it has been preached concerning him that he alone produced and inspired what the councils decreed and what the pope commanded in ecclesiastical law, whereas the whole papistical law is only outward in effect, commands only outward observances and rules in material things. Their claim is simply nonsensical, the reverse of their claim being true. For they turn the work of the Holy Spirit into a written, dead law, whereas it is essentially a spiritual and living law, and they make of him a Moses and a human weakling. The reason is, they do not know what the Holy Spirit is, why he is given, and what his office is. Therefore let us learn and understand well what he is, in order that we may define his office.

[14] Here you learn that he comes down and fills the disciples, who before sat in sorrow and fear, and renders their tongues fiery and cloven; he so kindles them that they grow bold and preach freely to the multitude, and fear nothing. You see very clearly that the Holy Spirit's office is not to write books nor to make laws, but freely to abrogate them; and that he is a God who writes only in the heart, who makes it burn, and creates new courage, so that man grows happy before God, filled with love toward him, and with a happy heart serves the people. When the office of the Holy Spirit is thus represented, it is rightly preached. Do not believe those who picture it otherwise. Now, you perceive that when he comes in this manner he abolishes the letter of the Law and desires to liberate the people from their sins and from the Law; the latter is no more needed, for he, himself, rules inwardly in the heart. They who oppose this doctrine, however, criticize him for compelling the people, like Moses, and above all for making new laws.

[15] What means does he use and what skill does he employ thus to change the heart and make it new? He employs the proclamation and preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ; this Christ declares in John 15:26: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness of me." Now, we have often heard that the substance of the Gospel is this: God has proclaimed to everyone that no man can become just by

means of the Law,-but rather is thereby condemned. That therefore he has sent down his dear Son to shed his blood and die, since men could not, by their own power and works, cancel their sins and get rid of them.

[16] But in addition to what is thus preached, something else is needed; for even though I hear the preaching, I do not at once believe Therefore, God adds his Holy Spirit, who impresses this preaching upon the heart, so that it abides there and lives, It is a faithful saying that Christ has accomplished everything, has removed sin and overcome every enemy, so that through him we are lords over all things. But the treasure lies yet in one pile; it is not yet distributed nor Invested. Consequently, if we are to possess it, the Holy Spirit must come and teach our hearts to believe and say: I, too, am one of those who are to have this treasure. When we feel that God has thus helped us and given the treasure to us, everything goes well, and it cannot be otherwise than that man's heart rejoices in God and lifts itself up, saying Dear Father, if it is thy will to show toward me such great love and faithfulness, which I cannot fully fathom, then will I also love thee with all my heart and be joyful, and cheerfully do what pleases thee. Thus, the heart 2 does not now look at God with evil eyes, does not imagine he will cast us into hell, as it did before the Holy Spirit came, when it felt none of the goodness, love, or faithfulness of God, but only his wrath and disfavor. Since the Holy Spirit has impressed upon the heart that God is kind and gracious toward it, it believes that God can no more be angry, and grows so happy and so bold that, for God's sake, it performs and suffers everything possible to perform and to suffer.

[17] In this way you are to become acquainted with the Holy Spirit. You may know to what purpose he is given and what his office is, namely, to invest the treasure — Christ and all he has, who is given to us and proclaimed by the Gospel; the Holy Spirit will give him into your heart so that he may be your own. When he has accomplished this, and when you feel Christ in your heart, you will be constrained to cry: Is this the idea, that my works are of no avail but the Holy Spirit must perform all? Why then do I punish myself with works and the Law? Thus all human works and laws vanish, yea, even the law of Moses; for such a being is superior to all law. The Holy Spirit teaches man better than all the books; he teaches him to understand the Scriptures better than he can understand from the teaching of

any other; and of his own accord he does everything God wills he should, so the Law dare make no demands upon him.

[18] Therefore, we need books only for the purpose of demonstrating that it is written even as the Holy Spirit teaches. We must not confine faith to ourselves, but must let it break forth into action; and to confirm and establish it, we must have the Scriptures. Therefore, be very careful to consider the Holy Spirit in no way a law-maker, but as one who abrogates the Law and frees man, so that no written letter remains, or that it remains only for the sake of preaching.

[19] In all this, however, we ought to exercise sense and wisdom, understanding that a man receiving the Holy Spirit is not at once perfect, insensible to the Law and to sin, pure in all respects. For we do not preach, concerning the Holy Spirit and his office, that he has completed and finished his work, but that he has only begun it and is now constantly engaged in it, and that he is ceaselessly progressing; consequently, you will not find a man who is without sin and without sorrow, full of righteousness and full of joy, and so perfect that he is never needlessly concerned about anything, and who serves everybody freely. The Scriptures 2 indeed tell us that the office of the Holy Spirit is to redeem from sin and fear; but that does not say that this is altogether accomplished.

[20] Therefore, a Christian must at times feel his sin and the fear of death, and be concerned about all else that troubles a sinner. Unbelievers may be sunk so deeply in their sins that they do not feel them; but believers do feel them, yet they possess a helper, the Holy Spirit, who comforts and strengthens them. However, if he had finished and made an end of his office, they would experience none of these fears.

[21] Therefore, I say that we must be wise and take care that we do not boast of the Holy Spirit too confidently and joyously, that we may not become too secure and imagine that we are perfect in all respects. For a pious Christian still is flesh and blood like other people, but he fights against sin and evil lust and feels what he would rather not feel — Romans 7:15ff. The unbelievers are indifferent and make no such fight.

[22] It makes no difference that we feel evil lusts if we only battle against them. Therefore, the Christian must not judge according to his feelings, believing because of them that he is lost, but he must labor all his

life with the remaining sin of which he is conscious and must permit the Holy Spirit to work, groaning without ceasing, to be rid of sin. Such groaning never ceases in believers, but is more profound than can be uttered, as St. Paul declares to the Romans 8:26. But there is a precious listener, the Holy Spirit himself, who deeply feels our longing and also comforts our consciences.

[23] The two must always be mingled, in our feelings — the Holy Spirit and our sin and imperfection. Our case must be like that of a sick man who is in the hands of the physician; presently he will be better. Therefore let no one think: Such a one possesses the Holy Spirit, consequently he must be altogether strong, without infirmities, and do only precious works. No, not yet. The Gospel is not a proclamation for everybody. It is a proclamation exceedingly gracious, but a coarse, hard heart may hear it without receiving any good; rather are such made more audacious and careless, imagining they need not war against the flesh, because they do not feel their sin and misery. The Holy Spirit is given to none except to those who are in sorrow and fear; in them it produces good fruit. This gift is so precious and worthy that God does not cast it before dogs. Though the 2 unrepentant discover it themselves, hearing it preached, they devour it and know not what they devour. The hearts which receive it with profit are such as feel their evil lust but are unable to escape from it. There must be struggling if the Holy Spirit is to abide in the heart, and let no one dare think it will be otherwise.

[24] This is what we find in the narrative before us. The dear disciples sat in fear and terror, and still uncomforted and without courage. They were filled with unbelief and ready to despair, and it was with much effort and labor that Christ cheered and established them again. Their only difficulty was, they were afraid the heavens would fall upon them, and the Lord himself could scarcely comfort them until he said to them 'The Holy Spirit shall come upon you from heaven' he will imprint me upon your hearts so that you will know me, and through me the Father; then will your heart rejoice. And so it happened. When the Holy Spirit came they were comforted and strengthened and full of joy.

[25] Thus I have described to you the Holy Spirit. Now let us see in this Gospel lesson what we have discussed so far. Christ declares: "If a man love me, he will keep my Word: and my Father will love him."

[26] This text raises a question' Why does Christ speak as though we must be first to love, when it is certain that the opposite is true, that God must first love us? This question I have before solved and in the following manner' Several passages read as if we begin the work and others as if God begins it. Now, God must always lay the first stone. He makes the start, and receives me into his grace, so that I stand in his favor. But it does not follow that I at once feel his work of grace, although it is already there.

[27] We saw that when the Holy Spirit came, he came with a rushing sound, even frightening the disciples until they knew not whither to go. But when he comes in this manner he is very near, and then he kindles the heart so that it feels love; when it feels love, it also begins to love. This is what Christ means. He is speaking not of our beginning the work, but of what we afterwards feel, and of the love that follows feeling. The import of his words is' If a man love me, he will keep my Word, and my Father will love him; that is, when I have caused a man to feel my love, he will begin to love me in return etc. Therefore, the words refer to the realization of love, not to the beginning of love. Now, if a man love me, says Christ, 2 he will keep my Word, and my Father will love him, that is, he will feel that he loves me and will do everything that pleases me, and he will perceive how I and the Father come to him and dwell with him. And, furthermore, Christ declares: "He that loveth me not keepeth not my Words."

[28] Here we see it is plainly declared that they who have not the Holy Spirit do not keep one letter of the Law. Therefore I say, if all the preachers arise and preach the Law, attempting thereby to make people godly, what do they accomplish? They accomplish nothing. For, briefly, there must first be love in the heart, otherwise nothing is accomplished in keeping the Law. Do you accordingly teach first of all how to obtain love, then men will be able to keep the Law. The Holy Spirit is given, as we have stated, for the purpose of abrogating the Law. Hence, Christians are not to be governed by laws. Those, however, who are not Christians must be controlled by laws, and be subjected to executioners and governed by the sword, in order that they be compelled not to do evil with the hand, although they are thereby not made better in heart. Now, Christ does not want us to keep his Word with outward observance, like a finite law, but with the heart, with joy and love. But who will give us this joy and love? The Holy Spirit gives it and no one else, Now, the next words read: "These things have I spoken unto you,

while yet abiding with you. But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you.”

[29] Here Christ calls the Holy Spirit a Comforter. If the Holy Spirit is to retain this name he must exercise his office only where there is no comfort and where comfort is needed and desired. Consequently, he cannot comfort the hard heads and audacious hearts, for these have not tasted of struggle and despair, and have never been in distress; he can accomplish nothing except with sorrowful, comfortless and discouraged hearts.

[30] What, however, is he to do? He is to teach and bring to remembrance. Here our learned men have come and declared: All that we are to believe, to do and omit to do is not in the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit is to teach us many things which Christ did not teach. Such declaration is altogether contrary to the Holy Spirit, and even contradictory. For Christ says: “He shall teach you and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you;” that is, he will beautifully explain (glorify) what I now say to you, better than I am able to teach with words, so that you will need no further words. You are to know it now beforehand and have a sign, so that when it comes to pass you may believe it the more fully. Now the learned men declare, He shall not say what Christ says. How can we suffer the pope and the bishop to proceed with their declaration that the Holy Spirit teaches what they determine? We here see that Christ wants to establish his Word with the Holy Spirit, who is with us, for the purpose of bearing witness to Christ and of reviving in our hearts what he has taught, that we may understand and believe it. Therefore, wherever anyone teaches otherwise than the things Christ taught, or wants to direct you to another comfort than he speaks of, do not believe that it is the Holy Spirit. Now, the Lord says furthermore: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you.”

[31] Here we see clearly the Holy Spirit’s office, that he is bestowed only upon those who are sunk in affliction — and misery. For this is the import of the words when he declares: You must not think that I give you peace such as the world gives. The world considers that peace means the removal of trouble or affliction. For instance, when one is in poverty he esteems it a great affliction, and seeks to be rid of it, fancying that riches

means peace. Likewise, one who feels death near thinks: If I could live, and vanquish death, I would have peace.

[32] Such peace, however, Christ does not give. He allows the affliction to remain and to oppress; yet he employs different tactics to bestow peace: he changes the heart, removing it from the affliction, not the affliction from the heart. This is the way it is done: When you are sunk in affliction he so turns your mind from it and gives you such consolation that you imagine you are dwelling in a garden of roses. Thus, in the midst of dying is life; and in the midst of trouble, peace and joy. This is why it is, as St. Paul declares to the Philippians 4:7, a peace which passeth all understanding. This art no man can achieve with his understanding, nor fathom with his senses. Christ alone bestows it. He says to you' Just pass down into the valley of death; there shall the Holy Spirit come to you and make you so courageous and joyful that you will not know death, yea, it will be sweet to you. The reason for this peace is that the Holy Spirit teaches one to know the great goodness and grace of Christ, making those who believe in him lords, like himself, over sin, death and all things. Therefore a Christian must possess the ability to be 2 joyful in good or in evil fortune, whether it be sweet or bitter. Some possess it in greater degree than others, for we are not all perfect, yea, none will become so perfect as never again to experience a struggle.

[33] I speak of the office of the Holy Spirit, what he is to do and how he is constantly to continue what he has begun, so that you may now begin to despise death. But you must continue and abide in this confidence, and work on, that you may constantly have less fear. You are not to be discouraged though you still shudder at death, and are not to think: I am told that the Holy Spirit makes the heart joyful so that it does not feel death, yet I am frightened at it; consequently I see plainly he is not in me. Other thoughts of this kind may come to your mind. All these thoughts we must drive away, despising them. For the Holy Spirit's office is not one that is finished, but is in process of fulfillment from day to day, and continues as long as we live, in such manner that sorrow is ever mingled with peace. If there were no sorrow, the Holy Spirit could not comfort us. The closing words of this Gospel lesson are especially comforting: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful."

[34] These words give further hint of the work of the Holy Spirit. Again we see with whom the Holy Spirit deals, namely, they who are filled with sorrow and affliction. Because of the fear and trouble which oppressed the disciples, Christ made effort to comfort them, although the moment when they should fully realize his comfort had not yet arrived. In effect he declares ' I say to you now, with words, that you are not to be troubled, but this does not as yet help you; you do not now rejoice. I tell it to you, however, that when the Holy Spirit comes and comforts you, then you may realize my comfort and be glad. He concludes by declaring: "Ye heard how I said to you, I go away, and I come unto you. If ye loved me, y would have rejoiced, because I go unto the Father: for the Father is greater than

I. "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe."

[35] I am human, he says, and shall now die; but I come to you again, through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if you loved me you would rejoice that I go to the Father. To love Christ is to love in him the humanity obedient to the sacred cross and which speaks only of suffering. No one can do this until the Holy Spirit comes; he alone creates this love in the heart. Christ's meaning is' When the Holy Spirit 2 comes you will be glad that I went to the Father. Now you cannot understand my sacrifice and therefore you cannot appreciate it; but when I go to the Father, you will love me because I have ascended to the Father and have given you the great blessing of the Holy Spirit. My suffering and death will be comforting to you when you see that I live again and that I come to help you and to make you partakers of all the treasures I have. Therefore, we Christians are to become lords over all God's creation, and to boastfully say of Christ: My Lord Christ, who takes my part, is lord over all things; what shall harm me? For the Father in his infinite power has made him lord over all creatures, and all things must lie at his feet.

[36] Thus you perceive how this Gospel lesson constantly refers to the office of the Holy Spirit, in order that we may rightly understand that he is given to us to comfort us and to bring us to love Christ. See, then, that you do not permit yourself to be deceived and to receive other teaching concerning the Holy Spirit than you have here heard.

The Day of Pentecost. Second Sermon. Sermon of Comfort Christ Preaches to his Disciples; or Love to Christ and the Comfort of the Spirit.

Text: John 14:23-31

23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

25 These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

28 Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.

29 And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.

30 Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.

31 But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence. John 14:23-31

[1] In today's Gospel Christ says plainly and bluntly: "If a man love me, he will keep my Word; he that loveth me not, keepeth not my words." The text stands there clear; whoever loves God keeps his commandments, and on the contrary, whoever does not love God, does not keep his commandments. Christ here simply casts out of his kingdom all who do not keep his commandments with pleasure and love. Let us thoroughly understand this. It is briefly pictured to us here who are and who are not Christians. No one is a Christian unless he keeps Christ's Word, as he here says. And no one can keep it, unless he first loves God. God had tested the plan of making people godly by means of force. For, in olden times, God dealt severely with his people, so that they were forced to keep his Word, and not to blaspheme God; to observe the Sabbath and to obey all the other commandments. To this end he threatened to afflict and punish them, severely, as is written in Leviticus 26:14ff. Thus, God from without coerced the people to be pious by means of the fear of punishment; but their hearts were not obedient. The result is the same in the present day. Therefore, to keep God's Word is a thing that can be accomplished only by divine love.

[2] Accordingly, in the New Testament, God ceased to punish and only administered the Word; for the means must yet come to the point that the divine love be present. Neither the stake, nor bulls nor bans help in the least. Where this love is not, all amounts to nothing, do as we will. If one were to take all the swords in the world in his hands, he would not bring a single heretic to the faith. The people may, indeed, appear to accept the Word, but in their inward hearts there is no faith. Hence God has abolished the sword in this matter and his plan of salvation aims to possess the heart. The bishops are commanded first to take the heart captive, so that it may find love and pleasure in the Word, and the work is then accomplished. Hence, he who wishes to be a true bishop, arranges all his administration to the end that he may win souls and develop a love for and a delight in God's Word and be able to oppose the false babblers with sound teaching, and to stop their mouths. Titus 1:2. This will never be accomplished by means of commandments, bans and bulls.

[3] Thus the true spiritual leaders fight. They strike Satan dead and rescue souls from him; for to pierce Satan to death is nothing else than to rescue from him a human being whom he has taken captive by deceitful teaching. And that is the right kind of spiritual tactics. But in case people

will not outwardly obey the Word, their parents should educate their children, and the civil government its subjects, to obedience. However, by this method, none are yet brought to believe. For it is affirmed in our text: “He that loveth me not keepeth not my words.” Thus you hear what a Christian life is, namely to love God; it is not to storm about, eat flesh, destroy pictures in churches, become monks or nuns — neither a married nor a single life avails here. It means to love, and they do this who keep his Word.

[4] Now, what is God’s Word? It is that we love one another as Christ loved us, and that we believe on him. If one truly possesses the Word, it must break forth out of the heart from pure love. One may possess the words and commands of man, even if he does not love; he may receive the command of a superior and execute it. But the only thing that will keep God’s commandments and Word is love. Therefore, observe how foolishly our princes and bishops act, in that they coerce and constrain the people to believe by means of force.

[5] How does one now acquire this love? The human heart is so false that it cannot love unless it first sees the benefit of loving. When, in the Old Testament, God struck blows among the people as if among dogs, and he dealt severely and fearfully with them, they naturally had no love for him. Then God thought: I must show my love to you and be so affectionate that you cannot help but love me. Then he took his Son and sent him into our filth, sin and misery, pouring out his mercy so freely and fully that we had to boast of all his treasures as if they were our own. He thus became a loving Father, and he declared his mercy and caused it to go forth into all the world that whosoever believes this and lays hold of it with his heart shall have a gracious and merciful God, who never becomes angry nor deals blows, but who, instead, is kind and affectionate. Now, where a heart believes and experiences this, and gets glimpses of so much, then it must place all its confidence and affection in God, and deal with its neighbor as God has dealt with itself. As a result the Word of God goes forth out of the heart, and his commandments will be kept with pleasure. Thus, first, there is no other God; secondly, man calls upon the name of the Lord; and thirdly, he lets God reign — God can do as he will, and he 2 possesses his soul in quiet and observes the Sabbath. In this way, the commandments of the First Table are fulfilled. Henceforth, he is kindly and humbly disposed toward all

persons, he honors his father and mother and serves his neighbor as his highest pleasure and with all the love of his heart. His thought is ever this: I will do to my neighbor, as God has done to me. Thus love alone is the fulfillment of the Law, as Paul says to the Romans 13:10.

[6] Now, no man can bring this love into the heart. Therefore, God struck in among the people with the Law that man might experience and feel that no human being could love the divine, righteous, just and holy Law. In view of this he gave us his Son, thus graciously poured, out his greatest treasures, and sunk and drowned all our sins and filth in the great ocean of his love, so that this great love and blessing must draw man to love, and cheerfully be ready to fulfill the divine commandments with willing heart. In no other way can the heart love or have any love; it must be assured that it was first loved. Now, man cannot do this; therefore, Christ comes and takes the heart captive and says: Learn to know me. Then the heart replies: Aye, who art thou? I am Christ, who placed myself in your misery to drown your sins in my righteousness. This knowledge softens your heart, so that you must turn to him. Thus love is awakened when one learns who Christ is.

[7] And a Christian should glory in this knowledge, as God says in Jeremiah 9:23-24: "Thus saith Jehovah, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth in this, that he hath understanding, and knoweth me, that I am Jehovah who exerciseth lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith Jehovah." So also, Peter in his Second Epistle (2 Peter 3:18) says: "But grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." In all the prophets and especially the Psalms and in many places in the Bible there is much written about this knowledge. It is this knowledge of Christ that must convert or it will never be accomplished. No one is so hardened that he will not be converted and made tender if once his heart knows Christ. And the same knowledge causes one to steadfastly live a godly life. Isaiah says, The time will come when this knowledge shall flow forth like a deluge. This came to pass in the time of the apostles. Therefore, whoever loves God will keep his commandments, 2 and that love brings a knowledge of God. Now Christ says, further, in our Gospel: "And my Father will love him."

[8] It comes to pass in this way: I know first, that Christ has served me by his whole life, and that Christ is God; thus I see that it is God's will that Christ should give himself for me and that the Father commissioned him to that end. Thus, I climb to the Father through Christ. Then my confidence in him begins to grow, so that I esteem him as a loving Father. Christ here means to say: Man must begin with my love and then he will come to the Father; Christ is a mediator. Therefore, I must first be loved — must first feel the great treasure and blessing in Christ. Hence, God takes the very first step and allows his dear child to die for me, before I ask him to do so, yea, before I ever know him. Then a confidence in and love to God grow in me; this I must feel. Christ also says here: "And my Father will love him;" that is, the convert will feel that he is placed with me in the same kingdom and co-inheritance, and will, through me' and with me and with my voice, say to the Father in comforting confidence: Dearly beloved Father. Then the text continues: "And we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

[9] When I come to the point of knowing that God is my Father, then I let him rule in my heart according to his pleasure, and allow him to be all in all. Therewith, my heart becomes a quiet, humble abode of God. Thus, God is a co-laborer with me and assist me as he says in Isaiah 66:1-2 and in Acts 7:49-50: "Thus saith Jehovah, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: what manner of house will ye build unto me? and what place shall be my rest? For all these things hath my hand made, and so all these things came to be, saith Jehovah: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my Word." The heart must come to the point where it knows God's glory. God's power and God's wisdom: and lets God rule in everything. It knows that all is God's work; therefore, it cannot fear anything, cold, hunger, hell, death, Satan, poverty or any like thing. Then the heart says: My God, who has made his abode in me, is greater than Satan, death and all the powers of hell.

[10] Thus there develops in man a confident defiance of everything upon earth, for he has God and all that is God's. He does all that he is now required to do, and fears not. On the contrary, where there is no love of God, that heart does not keep God's Word; and if the heart does not keep God's Word, the hand never will. There 2 God will never enter and make his abode. There the devil dwells, until the weak and despairing soul will

even fear the sound of a driven leaf, as Moses says in Leviticus 26:36. Man cannot endure the gnawing of conscience. The conscience can never know any peace when oppressed by sin, nor can it experience a joyful confidence in God yea, it will sink lower than hell, while confidence is higher than the heavens. There is then nothing but despair and fear for that heart. All creatures are above it. Such is a picture of the kingdom of Satan. Christ continues by saying: “And the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s who sent me.”

[11] These words Christ speaks only in order to bring us to the Father, either in a gracious or ungracious way, either with pleasure and love or with fear, for all must lean and depend upon him. Hence, whoever will not understand these words scorns God. Then no teaching, no words nor anything else will help in his case. Now Christ comes and says: “These things have I spoken unto you, while yet abiding with you. But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you.”

II. The Sermon of Comfort.

[12] Here Christ says, The Father will send you the Holy Spirit, who will bring to your remembrance what I told you, and the same Spirit will explain it to you. In other words: Your hearts are as yet rough and untutored and you cannot understand what I have spoken to you; but when the Holy Spirit comes he will make all so plain to you that you will experience the assurance that it is as I told you before. Thus, the Holy Spirit, and he alone, has explained the Scriptures and Christ, and made them clear. This knowledge, then, is sufficient for me and enables me to fulfill God’s commandments. Beyond this, however, I have no obligations. Christ courts his disciples further, and says: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”

[13] As if he had said: I shall now leave you. Farewell! It was a common greeting among the Jews, in the Hebrew language, when they met or parted, to say: Peace be with your That is as much as to say: Take good care of yourself, be of good 2 spirits, hope you may prosper; as we in German say: God greet you (Gott grusze euch), or God bless you!

[14] And the Lord adds the kind of peace he wishes them to have, and says: My peace I give unto you; not as the world is in the habit of giving peace. In plain words he distinguishes between his peace and the peace of the world. The disciples, however, did not understand it, just as they did not understand what it was to love and to keep God's commandments. Now, it is the nature of the world's peace that it consists only in outward things, in eating and drinking — and dancing; its pleasure is in the flesh. Christian peace, however, is in the heart, although at the same time the heart may suffer great persecution, fear, want and opposition. The Lord had told them of all these things in the words: "Ye shall weep and lament." The world will persecute you, will reject your teaching, will scourge, banish and finally put you to death; but in the midst of all ye shall have peace and rejoice. Cling only to me and my Word!"

[15] And his words were soon fulfilled. When they had received the Holy Spirit, Luke writes in Acts 5:41, Peter, John and the other disciples, though scourged and forbidden to preach, departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name. But the disciples (did not at this time understand and they were troubled because of the Lord's discourse. Therefore, he gives them further comfort and says: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful."

[16] These are consoling words, but for the time they are not effectual. Be not afraid, he says, for you have my peace. No one will harm you; only cling to me. The words they indeed hear, as do we, but without seeing their significance. Therefore he says in clearer language: "Ye heard how I said to you, I go away, and I come unto you."

[17] As if he said: Be not fearful because I said to you I go away from you: I will come again to you; yea, it is especially for your sake that I go away, that afterwards when I return to you, you may be the happier and be of good spirits. But neither did they understand this until the Holy Spirit later interpreted it to them. Just so it is with us in the time of temptation: we do not then understand what God intends to teach us; but later, when grace and comfort return, we understand it very well. The Lord says to the disciples: "If ye loved me, ye would have rejoiced, because I go unto the Father."

[18] His words mean: The only failing you have is that you do not love me, or do not understand what it is to love. If ye loved me, ye would gladly let me go; yea, ye would laugh for joy, because I depart from you. And the more you are visited with ill-fortune and adversity, the happier you should be. But human reason does not understand this. It is certainly true that the more a Christian suffers persecution from without, the happier he is in heart, and the more peace he possesses. The reason is that he loves Christ. This St. Paul well understood from his own experience when he wrote to the Corinthians in the second epistle (2 Corinthians 4:4-10): We are pressed on every side, yet not straitened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body.” And again, he says, in verses 16 to 18: “Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

[19] This is the experience of the Christian heart when the Holy Spirit has entered it. St. Paul writes more about this later, in the sixth chapter of Second Corinthians. It made an impression upon the heathen when they saw the Christians thus hastening to death; they thought the Christians were foolish and intervened to spare their lives. The Gentiles did not understand what it meant; but the Christians very well knew whence it came. Therefore the Lord adds: “For the Father is greater than I.”

[20] Even if I should tell you many things, ye would not understand them; they reach no farther than the ears and never enter the heart. However, when I return to the Father, then I will take upon myself the power to send into your hearts the Holy Spirit, through whose help ye may understand all that I said to you. For the present I am in the service of my ministry upon earth; I only speak and preach the Word as it has been commanded me by my Father. The Arians paid no attention here to the words: “I go to the Father,” which means nothing more than, I go and 2 receive the honor the Father has. It is as if the Lord had said to his disciples: I have two offices. At present I am upon the earth, where I am performing

my office of preaching, for which I was sent by the Father. When I come to the Father I will fulfill the other office, namely, this. I will send the Holy Spirit into your hearts. The disciples could not understand this, and neither do we understand how he administers the gift. He concludes by saying: "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe."

[21] The meaning is: I know very well that you do not understand this now; but I tell you it now so that, when it comes to pass as I have told you, you may remember that I declared it to you before, and you can then say: It is true. In what follows now in this Gospel, the Lord speaks of the hour of his suffering, that it is at hand, and says: "I will no more speak much with you, for the prince of the world cometh; and he hath nothing in me; but that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence."

III. The Conclusion of This Sermon of Consolation.

[22] In other words: The time of my suffering and death is at hand. The prince of this world, the devil, is present in his adherents, and will seize me. But he will accomplish nothing, for he will unjustly lay hold of me, desiring to crush me. His tactics will fail; I will triumph over him, and I will do it justly.

[23] One may reply: Did not Satan conquer Christ? Did he not put him to death? Christ himself answers this and says that he dies for the very purpose of satisfying the will of the Father. It is not due to the power of Satan that Christ dies, but to the will of the Father, who would blot out sin through the death of his only begotten Son. Hence, it does not rest in the power of the world nor of Satan to put to death either Christ or any of his followers. But it does rest in the will of the Father, who reveals his power through our weakness, before all his creatures; as St. Paul says in Corinthians 15:27. In view of this, Christ here says to his disciples: I will indeed die, but I will rise again. I die to the end that the world may know that I love the Father and that I do what my Father hath commanded me. I seek the Father's glory in this, who wills that I should so do. And all this for the sake of your salvation and blessedness. Therefore, be of good cheer and

let not your heart be troubled; for you will have great joy because of my death and my leaving you.

The Day of Pentecost. Third Sermon. The Promise of the Holy Spirit to Those Who Love Christ, and His Comfort Because of his Departure; or Christ Gives his Disciples a Five-Fold Promise.

Text: John 14:23-31

23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

25 These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

28 Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for

my Father is greater than I.

29 And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.

30 Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.

31 But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence. John 14:23-31

[1] Since pastors are expected on this day to preach on the Holy Spirit, it would be well to begin the Gospel lesson with the verses preceding, which it has been customary to read Pentecost evening, where Christ says: "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth" etc. These verses are closely connected with today's text, and they contain the first promise of the Holy Spirit. to the apostles. It is Christ's intent in the promise richly to comfort the disciples in view of his bodily departure unto the Father, whither he was going, that he might there prepare a dwelling-place for them and receive them unto himself. He also assures them that while here upon earth they shall do much greater works than he has done, and that whatsoever they shall ask in his name, that he will do. Moreover, he promises them that the Holy Spirit shall not be with them for a time only, as he has been in his own short stay in his bodily presence, but that the Holy Spirit shall continue with them forever; that they shall have in him a Comforter whose ministrations shall exceed the comfort which they have hitherto derived from his own bodily presence.

[2] This is a beautiful, glorious promise which Christ makes to his Church, that is, to the little company who believe on him, to whom he before said, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also." This is a glorious promise, that the Holy Spirit should certainly be with them and in them. It means that he shall be given them, not only in their office, but also that he shall be given into their hearts, to rule, teach and guide them, to give them strength and courage, and to protect and sustain them in every danger and need against the devil and his power. He says: "I will not leave you orphans: I come unto you."

[3] In the various instances where he describes the Holy Spirit, he does not designate him simply according to his nature, as he is and is called the Holy Spirit. The word would signify to them something not to be seen or felt; he would thus be incomprehensible to them. But, that he may be comprehensible and real in a bodily sense, Christ gives him a name signifying his office and work, which is the office of the Word. He thus conveys the idea of preacher, and he calls him the 2 Comforter and the Spirit of truth, who is with them by means of the Word of preaching, and who allows himself to be heard and seen. The two offices, that of comforting and that of leading into the truth, cannot be exercised otherwise than through the Word, or through teaching. Thus, we know how and where the Holy Spirit is to be found, and we need not be in doubt nor waver, gazing here and there for special revelations or illuminations. Each one should hold to the Word, and should know that through it alone, and through no other means, does the Spirit enlighten hearts and is he ready to dwell in them and to give true knowledge and comfort through faith in Christ. Where this is accomplished, where the Word concerning Christ is accepted by faith and the heart finds comfort in it, there we may know that the Holy Spirit is assuredly present and is performing his work, as has often been stated.

[4] Furthermore, the two names, “Comforter” and “Spirit of Truth,” are very affectionate and consoling names. The word “Comforter,” which is here used instead of the Greek word *paraclete* or the Latin word *advocate*, or *patron*, designates a person who acts as counsel for one who is accused or charged with some crime, and who in that capacity undertakes to defend him and win his case, to advise and aid him, and to admonish and encourage him as occasion may require. That, says Christ, shall be the office of the Holy Spirit when I have left you, and when ye shall find no comfort nor support in the world, when all the world shall be against you, and when the devil shall beset you and with his poisonous tongues of slander shall say the worst things about you, and shall pronounce you before all the world deceivers and rebels, and shall, furthermore, with the terror of God’s wrath, with melancholy and gloomy thoughts of your own infirmities, alarm your consciences and fill your hearts with fear, so that ye might well despair if ye were left in that state without comfort and strength. The devil appropriately bears the name *Diabolus*, that is *calumniator*, a

false, wicked slanderer, who accuses Christians before God day and night, as we find indicated Revelation 12.

[5] Now, says Christ, to protect you against this slanderer and accuser – I will send you, from my Father and in my stead, the Holy Spirit, who shall be your counselor and defender, and who shall intercede for you before God. He shall comfort and strengthen your hearts, so that you need not despair because of the abuse and 2 slander and the accusations and terrors of the devil and the world, but, on the contrary, you may possess fearless hearts and courage, and may boldly speak in defense of your cause, the faith and confession of Christ. He says, in Luke 21:15, “I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to gainsay.”

[6] This, we say, is portraying the Holy Spirit in the most friendly and comforting way. We are not to look upon him otherwise than as a kind and friendly comforter and helper, and we are to know that he was sent from God the Father and from Christ for that purpose; that he will certainly prove himself such through the Word, by showing us the pure grace, love and goodness of God. He shall assure our hearts that God, both the Father and the Son, is not angry with us nor does he condemn us, nor desire us to be filled with fear. The Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and Son to be a comforter, and has been commanded not to declare anything but what he has heard, as we have learned in the preceding Gospel.

[7] Such comfort begets a fearless heart and courage against the ravings of the world and the devil, and enables a Christian, whatever his outward sufferings may be, to endure it all, even with joy, and to conquer in the end, as did the apostles and martyrs, and many weak women and young virgins. The Christians — and such were these mentioned, know that the Holy Spirit is present in our faith and confession; that he will stand by them, and will direct and carry on the conflict against the devil and the world, so that the Christians shall not suffer defeat, but shall conquer, and, in spite of opposition, complete his work.

[8] In the second place, Christ calls him “the Spirit of Truth.” This he does for the comfort of those who believe the Gospel. They may know, through the witness of the Spirit, that the consolation of the Word is true and real; that it does not deceive, and that the courage and joy which it

induces are genuine and enduring, steadfast through storms and terrors, even to the gates of hell. For this comfort is not based upon uncertainties, as is the consolation of the world, but upon the Word of Christ and the everlasting truth of God.

[9] Christ gives this name to the Holy Spirit in contradistinction to the devil, who is also a spirit, but not a comforter and helper of Christians; he is their adversary and murderer. Neither is he truthful; he is the spirit of lies, who, by means of false fear² and false comfort having the appearance of truth, both deceives and destroys. He possesses the art of filling his own victims with sweet comfort; that is, he gives them unbelieving, arrogant, secure, impious hearts — as was said in the Gospel for the third day of the Easter festival. He can even make them joyful; furthermore, he renders them haughty and proud in their opinions, in their wisdom and self-made personal holiness; then no threat nor terror of God's wrath and of eternal damnation moves them, but their hearts grow harder than steel or adamant.

[10] Again, with truly pious hearts, which in many respects are timid and tender, his practice is just the opposite. He tortures them with everything terrible that can be imagined, martyring and piercing them as with fiery darts, until they may find no good thing nor comfort before God. His object in both cases is to ruin souls by means of his lies and to lead them to eternal death. The first class, who, should they be terrified, might repent, he fills with false comfort and security, but in the end, when their last hour has come he abandons them to sudden terror and despair; the latter class he worries with unceasing torments and fear, and robs them of the comfort they should have in God, in order that they may despair of God's grace and help.

[11] We should therefore rightly learn to understand the Holy Spirit, and should know that he is a comforter and does nothing else than to truly comfort, through the preaching of the Gospel in Christ, sad and timid hearts that know their sins and are being terrified and distressed by the devil beyond measure. He exhorts them to be comforted and to be joyful in God's promised grace in Christ Jesus. He keeps them therein, so that they continue in this truth and their hearts come to know that all other teaching and comfort, though purporting to be of God, are not genuine. The Holy Spirit cannot be present in false teaching. All such is but the devil's work — lies and deception with which he seeks to effect his murderous designs. The

Christian should allow no terror, threat or suffering possible on earth to force him from the real comfort of the Gospel.

[12] Comfort and truth, when the product of the Holy Spirit, are concealed and deeply hidden in faith. Christians themselves do not at all times experience them, but in their weakness sometimes miss the presence of these. For the devil, through 2 both the timidity within themselves and the wickedness of the world without, hinders and opposes believers to such an extent that it is often almost impossible for them to appropriate an atom of God's comfort; they find themselves in the same condition in which the great apostle Paul laments about himself (2 Corinthians 7:5), where without are rightings, within are fears. They cannot possess unalloyed comfort and joy, but the greater part of their experience proves to be sorrow and fear and deadly conflict. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:11: "For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus sake." Likewise in 1 Corinthians 15:13: "I protest by that glorying in you, brethren, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily." We also see many pious hearts that are always sad and downcast, tormenting and alarming themselves with their own thoughts, and being at the verge of despair because of the temptations of the devil. Where, say the world and our own flesh, do you find, under these circumstances, the Holy Spirit whom you Christians laud so much?

[13] A Christian should be wise here, and should not judge and determine things according to his own thoughts and feelings, but, in spite of such temptation and weakness, he should keep to the Word and the comfort of the preaching which the Holy Spirit gives to all poor and distressed hearts and consciences. Christ says in Isaiah 61:1-2, concerning the office which he should exercise through the Holy Spirit: "The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me; because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted; to comfort all that mourn."

[14] From this ye should learn — and you will find it everywhere in the Gospel — that God does not desire you to be sad or alarmed, but joyful, and comforted with the certain promise of his grace, which the Holy Spirit himself offers you. He declares that it is not the truth, but your false opinion and the devil's deception that lead you to feel and think in your heart of the wrath and punishment of God, as if he would condemn you to hell. Therefore, let God's Word be of more authority to you than your own

feelings and the judgment of the whole world; do not give God the lie and rob yourself of the Spirit of truth.

II. The Second Promise.

[15] Of this promise, this comfort, to allay our feelings and fears, Christ assures us in the words translated “desolate” he will not leave you desolate. The word translated “desolate” literally means “orphans.” By the use of this word Christ would intimate the condition of the Church. In the eyes of the world, and even in her own estimation, she has not the appearance of a prosperous and well-ordered organization; rather she is a scattered group of poor, miserable orphans, without leader, protection or help upon earth. All the world laughs at her and ridicules her as a great fool in thinking that she is the Church and comprises the people of God. Furthermore, each individual is so burdened and oppressed in his need and suffering as to feel that no one else lies so low or is so far from help as he.

[16] Such misery and fears grow upon one under the influence of the devil’s power, when he pierces the heart with his bitter, poisonous, murderous thrusts. Then the heart feels that it is not only forsaken by all men, but also by God himself. So it altogether loses Christ and sees no end to its misery. Of this we have heard before in the Gospel where Christ says (John 16:20): “Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; ye shall be sorrowful” etc. To be left thus, that is, to feel that all things have conspired to leave us comfortless and helpless, is to be left orphans indeed.

[17] As Christ has thus told his Christians beforehand of such suffering, so also does he wish to give this comfort and consolation beforehand, and desires to teach us not to despair because of suffering, but only to hold to his Word, even if it does seem that help is being too long delayed. He desires to remind us of the promise that he will not leave us fast in misery, and that we should accord him the highest honor due to God, by holding him to be true and faithful. He says: It shall not continue forever, but only a little, a short time. And he says here: “I come unto you.” Again: “A little while, and the world beholdeth me no more.” That hour will seem to you an hour of sadness indeed, yea, an unending hour of death. “But I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice.”

[18] This is a sufficient promise of friendship and comfort. But we need only to learn to believe it, and to experience the truth that in our greatest weakness he guides his Church by wonderful divine power and protects and upholds her, so that she shall endure in spite of all. Yea, it shall be that in the greatest sadness there shall be comfort; in the greatest misery and desolation, joy and help; in death, everlasting life; until these better things come to be our possession, and the heart, having overcome all evil and being filled with the unspeakable joy of salvation, hears the bold, joyful word of victory which Christ utters: "Because I live, ye shall live also," and as we beautifully sing in Psalm 118:15-17: "The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous. The right hand of Jehovah doeth valiantly. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of Jehovah." This is what St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:10 concerning comfort and help for these poor orphans: "We are always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body." And Christ says in Luke 12:32: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

[19] Observe, this is the sublime wisdom and knowledge of Christians, which the Holy Spirit has revealed to them and of which the world knows nothing whatever. The world must confess that it knows nothing of this comfort, and that, further, it is impelled by the devil to despise and resist the Holy Spirit's preaching concerning such comfort. Therefore, Christ passes judgment upon it for the comfort of Christians: "Whom the world cannot receive; for it beholdeth him not, neither knoweth him." Oh, that is a fearful utterance, to be told that it cannot receive the Holy Spirit. It must follow from this that the world has no part in the kingdom of God; that it is forever separated from God and must remain in the power of the devil and in the bonds of hell. But it is also a just and well-deserved punishment upon the world, for the world will not have it otherwise, since it so shamefully despises, blasphemes and persecutes Christ, the Son of God, together with his Word and the Holy Spirit. So much, then, on the office of the Holy Spirit, concerning which the chapter just before the text teaches. Upon this follows now the Gospel: "If a man love me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him."

III. The Third Promise.

A. The Occasion of This Promise

[20] Just a moment before he began with almost the same words when he said: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him.” Thereupon the pious apostle Judas asked: “Lord, what is come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not unto the world?” For he, together with the other disciples, was still entangled in the Jewish notion that Christ would become a secular lord and king; they hoped that they, themselves, should become great and mighty lords over lands and people, and oft had they disputed and quarreled among themselves as to who among them should be the greatest. Therefore, Judas is astonished at this saying of Christ and cannot restrain himself. He must come out with it and ask Christ what he means by saying that he will not manifest himself to any except to them alone. His thoughts must have been these: What kind of a king will he be if he will not show himself to anyone? If he who has hitherto gone about only as a servant though he has preached publicly and wrought wonders — if he now intends to begin his kingdom in such a private and secret manner and with such doubtful plans as not to allow himself to be seen or known by any but the few who love him, what kind of a king will he be? It seems to me, his thoughts were: You should now begin to manifest yourself fully, and let yourself be seen by all, even by your enemies, in order that all may be obliged to fall down at your feet. And what does it mean, that everything depends upon our keeping your Word? What shall we accomplish thereby if we do not add something else? And who are going to be your subjects if to know and love you is left simply to the choice of individuals?

[21] But Christ answers in the same strain just for the purpose of rooting out their Jewish notions and of portraying his kingdom to them in the right light. No, my dear Judas, he would say, it will not be as you think. The world has honor and glory here on earth, and power and might. It is by means of these that the world rules in the kingdom of men; those things do not concern you and me. But it is 2 essential that you love me and keep my Word. In such hearts I will rule, and to them alone can I manifest and show myself. For my government is not one of force and might, such as is necessary among the wicked men of the world, but I desire to rule men’s

hearts, and to have my subjects come to me cheerfully and of their own will. Those who do not believe on me, will not do this.

[22] God had before, often and in various ways, tried governing the Jewish people simply by the Law and under punishment; the result was that almost the whole nation was exterminate in the wilderness, and afterward the people were smitten again and again, and carried away as captives, until finally they were completely annihilated. In no way could he bring them to obey him in sincerity and to keep his commandments. And what should they keep? In the beginning, when God spoke with them and gave them the ten commandments, they were not able to endure nor to hear him, but prayed that he might permit Moses to speak with them; him they were willing to hear. And then when Moses came and brought the ten commandments, they were not able even to look upon his face, but made a veil for him; which veil, St. Paul says, is upon their hearts to this day, so that they cannot understand, much less experience in their hearts, what God asks of them — that they should love him with all their hearts and be obedient unto him.

[23] If, now, God, in the case of his own people, whom he had selected and honored above all others, was not able to bring them to himself through Moses and the prophets, how should he be able to accomplish more in another case by means of man's instruments — law and force? If he would have loyal subjects upon earth he must employ different means in his dominion. He would not accomplish his purpose if he were simply to compel disobedient nature by means of terror and threats; although threatening may still serve a purpose in revealing the certain result of disobedience and sin, and teaching men to tremble at the wrath of God. But love and friendship must attract before love and longing toward God are begotten.

[24] And only in this way can they be begotten: In place of the terror of God's wrath, which we have deserved by our disobedience, we must receive the Word of grace and the assurance that God is ready to withdraw his wrath and to pardon sin. Such assurances of friendship and grace Christ now gives in his Gospel. He begins his kingdom by leading hearts to learn of his love, and by teaching that he, through 2 his suffering and death, has procured for us God's grace and mercy as a free gift, and in addition has given the Holy Spirit. He so rules us that we continue in this kingdom Of

grace, the Holy Spirit working in us, so that we, on our part, begin to love God and to obey him willingly and cheerfully. B. To Whom This Promise Is Given.

[25] Concerning obedience he now says: “If a man love me, he will keep my Word.” And just before he said: “If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments.” Keep his Word or commandment — that is what the soul must do who loves Christ, who understands and appreciates what he gets from Christ; no one else will love him. He speaks here not of Moses’ word or the declaration of the Law, but of the proclamation of the love and grace which Christ has shown us by taking our sins upon himself and offering for us his body and blood, and by doing this from pure grace, that we might be comforted and thereby learn to know in real experience his love. And if we believe it, he requires nothing more of us than that we should be thankful for it and should continue in faith and confession, and out of love and honor to him seek the welfare of his kingdom by word and deed.

[26] This loyalty to Christ’s kingdom is now considered a simple thing by the presumptuous and inexperienced spirits who deem themselves so holy and so strong in the faith as to be able easily to do what they hear, and who think that the Word of God is something that is obeyed as soon as it is heard. For everyone who has not yet had the experience of grace thinks, Who would be so wicked as not to love Christ, nor to keep his Word which speaks of the grace of God? Just so did the people of Israel in the wilderness when Moses told them all the words of the Lord (Exodus 24:3); they all cried out with one voice: “All the words which Jehovah hath spoken will we do.” But when they were to do these words, their conduct was such that, on account of it, they were obliged to remain in the wilderness forty years — until they all had perished. Yes, if Christ bestowed gold and silver by means of his Word, or conferred honor and reputation upon our holiness and wisdom, then everyone would cheerfully keep the Word and hold it fast. But it is none of those things for which a man on earth has any desire; on the contrary, he is such an unlovely figure that all the world is offended and flees from him.

[27] Experience, therefore, teaches how difficult it is to keep this Word, for the holy cross has been laid upon it. Not only do our own flesh and the old nature resist, in accordance with its disposition, and prefer that which is easy and agreeable, but also, when one begins to confess the Gospel, then

the devil, with all his followers and confederates, bears hard upon one and everywhere attacks him by means of the persecutions of the world and by all kinds of temptations. He opposes him inwardly, with unending conflicts and fears of the heart, and outwardly, with constant danger of body and life, until one must cry to heaven for help. Experience certainly teaches that it is not such an easy, simple thing to keep the Word of Christ as it is to observe the juggling of Jewish ceremonies, of a man-made divine service, monkery and the like.

[28] Therefore, Christ says that the heart must cling to him and love him, for it cannot otherwise survive in the world, which is the devil's kingdom and is opposed to Christ. The Church upon earth must strive and contend with weakness, poverty, misery, fear, death, shame and disgrace. By necessity the Christian is driven to step out of himself and not to rely upon the advice, help or strength of men. He must love Christ in his heart, and must hold his name, his Word and his kingdom more precious than all things of the earth. Whoever does not do this, but seeks his own honor and glory, or the favor and friendship, the pleasures and enjoyments of the world, and who loves his own life more than Christ — to such a one it is useless to speak of these things. Jesus shortly afterwards says: "He that loveth me not keepeth not my Words."

[29] Christians, to whom Christ here speaks as to those who know him and know what they have in him — they, I say, should be moved to this love by the love and friendship which he has shown us in delivering us from sin, condemnation and eternal death, laying them upon his own shoulders. He thus surely deserves that we should love him. Therefore, shortly before, he reminded them of this when he said: "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments;" as if he would say: If ye know and feel that I have deserved this at your hands, then in turn do me the favor of loving me and keeping my Word; for if ye believe this and consider it, then ye will surely also love me.

[30] But "to keep his Word" does not mean simply "to love" with words; the living work and proof of love must be present. It is the love which battles and conquers. Such is the real nature of love that it does everything for the sake of the beloved, and nothing is too hard for it to suffer and bear, and do it even cheerfully; as we see also in the natural love which God has implanted in fathers and mothers toward their children, which is an image

of his divine love toward us. Such love is spent altogether freely upon those who are undeserving and is impelled to do them good. So Christ, when he dwelt in divine majesty, eternal God and Creator, showed the highest love toward us — toward us poor creatures, when we as yet had no kinship with him and deserved nothing but wrath and condemnation.

[31] Since love does these things for those from whom no love had been received and who had deserved no love, and since we, aside from this, would still be in duty bound to love him as our maker and God, even although he had not otherwise so greatly deserved it: how much more should we love him because he so greatly loved us and loved us first. If we would take this inexpressible kindness to heart as we should, then, of course, nothing that we might be called upon to endure and bear for his sake would prove irritating or too hard for us, so long as we might continue in his love. This, then, would not only be hearing his Word willingly, but also holding it fast and conquering. “And my Father will love him.” C. The Promise.

[32] There need be no sharp discussion here concerning the question why Christ speaks thus: “If a man love me” etc. — whether or no we had to love him first, It is certain that he first loved us, as is plainly stated in John 4:10: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Yes, if he did not begin to love us, we could never begin to love him. For no one can love God unless he believes that he was first loved by him and that he is a merciful God; otherwise the heart flees before God and inwardly hates him, as if he would cast us into hell, as was stated above.

[33] What Christ says here: “He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father” etc., is said concerning the manifestation of love. He indicates this when he says: I will manifest myself unto him; and again: We will come unto him. That is, if we continue steadfast in this love against the wrath, hatred and persecution of the enemies of Christ and the Church, namely, the devil and the world, then we shall experience the certainty that he will faithfully and firmly stand by us with his love, 2 and will help us in such conflict and need and give us the victory. This is probation, or experience which comes from patience in suffering, as St. Paul says in Romans 5:4. In such times, as has been said sufficiently, God’s love toward us so conceals

itself that nothing but the opposite is felt; it seems as if God had altogether forgotten us and his grace and love had been changed into anger.

[34] He that perseveres in these things and continues in this love, shall experience that God is true, and shall feel the comfort of divine love in certainty poured out into his heart, helping him to overcome all things. St. Paul again says in Romans 8:37-39: “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This is the victory and redemption through which we experience the truth of what we have believed — that he loves us.

[35] Christ purposely uses the words: “My Father will love him,” in order that he may draw us upward and reveal to us the Father’s heart, portraying it to us in that tender way which poor, distressed consciences can greatly appreciate. It is exceedingly difficult for the human heart to expect with certainty everything good of God and to appreciate all grace and mercy. Indeed, it is altogether impossible except through Christ the mediator. Coarse and impious hearts may be very strong and haughty at this point, bearing themselves hard in much conceit, and thinking that what they do is all very precious in the sight of God. Yes, they may do this until they come upon the peril and terror of death, brought about through the clear revelation of the Law; then there are upon all the earth no people more dejected and despairing. When their hour has come, they go down suddenly and no one can raise them up again.

[36] Much better and safer and more comforting, therefore, is the state of those who are constantly striving and struggling with terror and fear of God’s wrath, and who are so afraid that when they hear the name of God mentioned the world becomes too strait for them. Just for these has this comfort been uttered; yes, for their sakes God has at all times declared the promise of his grace and of the forgiveness of sins, and to that end has given his Son and all the good in the whole world, overwhelming it with blessings, in order that they, by all means, may learn to know his grace and goodness which, as Psalms 52 and 36 say, endureth continually, and reacheth unto the skies. The fact that a Christian lives and that he possesses a sound member is due solely to the visible grace and help of God. For the

devil, in whose kingdom the Christians are, here upon earth, is such a wicked, malicious spirit that he aims at nothing else, day and night, than to murder and destroy them.

[37] But however great, both in word and deed, God's promise of grace is toward those that fear him, yet they cannot lift up their hearts and joyfully look upon God. They are still constantly harassed with anxiety and fear lest God may be angry with them on account of their unworthiness and the weakness which is theirs. If they hear an angry word from God, or recall or learn of some fearful example of God's wrath and punishment, then they tremble and fear lest it strike them. The other class, on the contrary, who indeed should tremble before God, stiffly and proudly despise these things in their security, and comfort themselves with the carnal notion that God cannot be angry with them. Very difficult is it for the human heart to so balance itself that it will not become secure in success and prosperity, but remain humble, and again, in times of fear and misfortune, enjoy comfort and confidence toward God.

[38] Christ, everywhere in his utterances, speaks of comfort, that he may show the Father's loving-kindness, and himself as a faithful, well-meaning and gracious mediator. Gladly would he impress this upon our hearts. No one may doubt it if only he feels love and longing for Christ and can hold fast to his Word and believe that he has borne our sins and freed us from all wrath, sin and death; and if he furthermore continue therein with a sincere confession that Christ, without doubt, possesses the true, fatherly divine heart, full of unspeakable and boundless love toward him, and that it is his earnest will and purpose that the Christian should fear and be terrified at nothing, but should expect from God everything that is best and most lovely.

[39] It is, indeed, glorious comfort, in which you may well exult, as in the kingdom of heaven, and leap incessantly for joy — that Christ has assured and certified to you that, when for his sake and out of love for him you endure the persecutions of the devil or the world, it is pleasing to God the Father in heaven, and is the most acceptable thing that you can do for him. And such love from God toward yourself² you will also experience in help and victory from above. This comfort Christians should know; they should call to mind the treasure that is theirs in the Gospel and in the knowledge of Christ, to the end that they may praise God for it and be

thankful. This promise of love he continues to explain still further, and says: “And we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” D. Further Illustration of this Promise.

[40] This will be a really glorious and new Pentecost and an excellent manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit; a heavenly assembly or council for the hearts which are enlightened and aflame with love to Christ through the Holy Spirit, wherein the love of Christ and the Father shines and beams upon them. God and man will cleave unto each other as friends, for the Holy Spirit himself prepares the heart of man and consecrates it as a holy house and dwelling, a temple and dwelling-place of God. What a glorious, noble, loving and precious guest and house companion does man receive — God the Father and the Son and certainly with them also the Holy Spirit!

[41] Great glory and grace is this for men, that they are accounted worthy of being such an honored dwelling, castle, hall, yes, Paradise and kingdom of heaven, in which God dwells upon earth — they who are such poor, dejected, timid hearts, who feel nothing but sin and death, and who fear and tremble at the wrath of God, thinking that God is farthest from them and the devil nearest. Yet, these are the people to whom such things are promised, and they may freely comfort themselves with the thought that they are the true house of God and the true Church, not anointed with the foul oil of the consecrating bishop, but consecrated by the Holy Spirit himself, where God desires to rest and remain. The prophet Isaiah says concerning these, in chapter 66:1-2, directing his words against those who were proud and puffed up in the thought of their own holiness and divine service: “What manner of house will ye build unto me? and what place shall be my rest? For all these things hath my hand made, and so all these things came to be, saith Jehovah: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my Word.”

[42] And where else should God dwell? He finds no other habitation upon earth. Those self-constituted saints in their own estimation excellent, high and great, are 2 much too proud, much too high, wise, prudent and holy. They have passed up through and far beyond heaven, so that they could not be his habitation upon earth, although they boast of themselves as being the only church and people of God. So also God is far too great and holy to dwell with such proud, ambitious saints as these, who, like the devil,

their idol, wish to be equal with God and boast before him of their own holiness. Though they appear in all the pomp and glory and ornament of their fine self-made holiness, yet he does not do them the honor to look at them. He is found, however, in the humble cots of such as are poor and despised, who fear and believe the Word of Christ and would gladly be Christians, but who feel themselves to be very unholy and unworthy sinners.

[43] This is, certainly, a sublime, beautiful promise, and, as St. Peter (Peter 1:4) says, one of the precious and exceeding great promises granted unto us poor, miserable sinners, that we through them should become partakers of the divine nature, and should be so highly honored as not only to be loved of God through Christ Jesus and to enjoy his favor and grace — as the highest, the most precious and sacred thing — but should even have the Lord himself dwelling completely in us. For it shall not, he would say, be love — simply that he turns his wrath from us and shows a gracious, fatherly heart toward us — but we are also to enjoy that love; otherwise, his love to us would be vain and useless, as says the proverb: To love and not to enjoy etc. We are to find great benefit and treasure in his love, which shall be assured to us in its manifestation of deeds and gifts.

[44] These are the two things which Christians receive from God, namely, grace and gift, as St. Paul distinguishes them in Romans 5:15. Grace takes away sin, secures comfort and peace for the conscience, and places man in the kingdom of divine mercy; the kingdom of loving-kindness, as it is called in Psalm 117:2: “For his loving-kindness is great toward us, and the truth of Jehovah endureth forever.” But the gift or grant is this, that the Holy Spirit inspires new thoughts and creates a new mind and heart in man and grants him comfort, strength and life.

[45] That is what he means here when he says: “We will make our abode with him.” The effect of God’s grace and love must be that it makes the heart of man a throne and seat of the divine majesty, better and nobler than heaven or earth; as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:17: “The temple of God is holy, and such are ye;” likewise in 2 Corinthians 6:17: “We are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them.” These things are accomplished in this way: In addition to the grace by which a man begins to believe and to hold fast to the Word, God also rules in man through his divine power and agency, so that he constantly

grows more and more enlightened, becomes richer and stronger in spiritual understanding and wisdom, and better fitted to understand all matters of doctrine and practice. He furthermore makes daily progress in life and good works, becomes eventually a kind, gentle, patient man, ready to serve everyone with doctrine, advice, comfort and gifts; is useful to God and man; through him and because of him men and countries receive benefit; in short he is a man through whom God speaks, in whom he lives and works, and such a man's words, life and doings are God's. His tongue is God's tongue, his hand is God's hand, and his word is no more the word of man, but God's Word.

[46] His doctrine and confession as a Christian are not of men, but of Christ, whose Word he has and holds. So also the office of a Christian which he exercises is not of man's ability, but of God's. He holds it by the command, authority and power of God; it is granted of God through the Holy Spirit, as St. Peter says. In all things, then, he does only good, even as he has received every good from God; and outwardly, also, his body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:19. A Christian, good and true, brings forth only good fruit — does good and profitable works — resisting and avoiding evil.

[47] Observe now, what a worthy being the man is who is a Christian, or who, as Christ says, keeps Christ's Word. A wonderful man, indeed, is he upon earth, who is of more value in the eyes of God than heaven and earth; yea, he is a light and savior of the whole world, in whom God is all in all, and who in God is able to do all things. But to the world he is hidden; he is unknown. Moreover, the world does not deserve to know Christians. It holds them as its doormats, yea, like St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:13: "As the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things," because of whom the earth and inhabitants are cursed and must perish, and who, the sooner the better, should be executed, as a service to God and as purification of the world.

[48] Oh, what mockery must it have been to the ears of the Jewish saints and priests and Pharisees when they heard the words that declare how God will make his habitation only with those who hear the words of this man! They were only a little handful of timid, poor, despised people. As if God did not have a better and more glorious habitation, becoming his majesty, in the saints and superior persons who were the bright lights and the eminent

ones among God's people, in the holy city of Jerusalem! And the glorious temple and divine worship — did not the Scriptures and the prophets themselves call them the holy city and dwelling-place of God, the chosen place where God would rest, Psalm 132:14, and that forever? Of this they boasted very haughtily, and claimed that their kingdom, their priesthood and divine worship, should never fail.

[49] But here Christ ignores all these things as if he were totally indifferent to them, and utters the remarkable saying that the place of his own and his Father's abode — their habitation and their Church — is where a Christian is found, who keeps Christ's Word. Thus he discards the old habitation of Judaism and the temple of Jerusalem, and builds a new, holy, glorious Church and house of God, which is not Jerusalem or Judaism, but is spread abroad throughout the whole world, without distinction of person, place or custom. Jews, Gentiles, priests or laymen — it matters not. This house of God is not of stone or wood, made by the hand of man, but newly created of God himself, namely a people that loves Christ and keeps his Word.

[50] It is true that up to this time God was still the master of the house among the Jewish people; he had his hearth and fire there, as he says in Isaiah 31:9, but this was for the sake of his Word, proclaimed through the prophets, which was still there and which was always believed in by a few, and for the sake of the true Church of God, the land and the city were preserved. But now, since Christ himself has come, and the people do not want to hear his Word, but they persecute his apostles and the Christians and drive them out of the land, until no Christian can remain there — now the temple, the city and the land of Judaism must be desolated and ruined, the priesthood forever rejected, never again to be restored. For Moses and the prophets had before declared unto them that if they did not keep his Word, they should no longer be nor be called his people, and this city and temple should no more be his city and temple. Deuteronomy 32:21; Hosea 1:9.

[51] Here, now, you have the definition and the answer to the much-disputed question as to what the Church really is and whence is its power. We rightly and in truth say that it is ruled by the Holy Spirit. Christ says that the Father and the 2 Son dwell with it, and what it says and does is said and done through them; everyone at the risk of his salvation is bound to

hear the Church. So far are we agreed, as the basis of this and other promises, that there is a people upon earth which is called God's people, where he desires to be master in his house, prince in his castle, God in his Church; a people so precious and highly esteemed before God that he did not deem his very heaven above so great as to keep him from coming to his Church in this vale of sorrow and remaining with it until the end of the world. He would not have man to gaze up in vain and seek his Church in Paradise. He would have him find it here until the other life begins.

[52] There is, therefore, no dispute as to whether or not there is a Church upon earth to which we owe allegiance. She is, as it were, the sovereign or queen through whom God speaks and works. But the disputed question is, who and what is the Church? To decide this question and to discover the one rightful Church, one must not, says St. Augustine, judge according to men's words and opinions. We become sure of the case when we hear how Christ the Lord, himself, portrays it in his Word. Now, he designates it as the little company that believes in Christ and keeps his Word, for thereby one knows and feels such love. The Word, which is called the Word of Christ, must be the rule and touchstone by which the Church is to be discerned and by which it must govern itself. There must be a certain rule by which the Church shall measure its conduct. It will not do for individuals to formulate their own ideas of conduct, act accordingly, and then say that the Church is led by the Holy Spirit.

[53] Therefore, Christ binds the Church to his Word and makes that the distinguishing mark by which must be measured the teaching, the preaching, the rule of conduct. Is all done out of the love of Christ? Where you find conformity to the Word in these things, there you have discovered the right Church, and you are in duty bound to obey it. You certainly have warrant for concluding that God dwells therein and speaks and acts through that Church.

[54] St. Peter lays down this rule, as we have heard above in his epistle, where he says in 1 Peter 4:11: "If any man speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth." That is, whatever a member of this household shall do or say, let him see that he does and speaks that which is God's work and Word; otherwise, let him abstain from doing and speaking. Let him rule in his own house if he cannot measure his conduct by the rule of God's house.

Without this house, the world has its own word and work. Lords, emperors, princes, heads of families, each rules in his own dominion. In a rightly ordered household all things are guided by the will of the master of the house. Although the servants may in other things play the knave and be wicked, yet the master's bidding must be done, and things are ordered as he commands, So, in this house where God is Lord and ruler, it is his desire to be supreme, to be in all things implicitly obeyed. Only his commands are to be regarded and his work executed. It is his intent that everyone may know his will and in certainty rely upon it.

[55] This is the beautiful promise concerning the superabundant glory of Christians, namely, that God troubles himself so deeply for their sakes and comes so near to them; he does not manifest himself anywhere except in them and through their word and conduct. Thus God greatly distinguishes them from all other people. One single Christian, however lowly he may be, receives distinction and is more highly honored of God than all kings, emperors, princes and the whole world combined; for they have nothing of such reputation and honor. Moses says in Deuteronomy 4:7: "For what nation is there that hath a God so nigh unto them, as Jehovah our God is whensoever we call upon him?" There is reason, then, to look with favor upon the Word of the Gospel. We have every encouragement to cling boldly to it and for its sake leave everything in the world.

[56] But we must remember, as I have said, that among Christians upon earth there is still weakness in the things of the Word and faith. Christians well have need to cry to God and pray for the help and strength of the Holy Spirit. A beginning has been made in Christ's kingdom. Christians are indeed called and made the habitation of God, and in them God speaks and rules and works. But the work is not yet complete; it is an edifice on which God yet works daily and makes arrangement. It shall be completely prepared and perfected in his own good day. Wherefore, Christ here does not say, We shall find our abode prepared with him, but, "We shall make our abode with him."

[57] Christ brings with him all kinds of spiritual material that may be necessary for building, ornamenting and completing the dwelling. The Word and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are materials with which he builds. Though the dwelling is not altogether completed, yet through his grace and love it is accepted of God. Then the Christian becomes his house, and,

through the operation of the Word and the Holy Spirit, is constantly being prepared and improved, growing stronger in knowledge, wisdom, faith, gifts and virtues. That which remains of the old birth, still rough and uncouth, is being hewn off, or mortified, through the cross, through temptation and suffering and there is constant progress in grace and in the work of the Holy Spirit.

[58] Therefore, no one should despise a brother Christian nor despair concerning himself when he sees in another or feels within himself great weakness, enticement, inclination to unbelief, impatience etc., although at times he may even err and stumble, as did Peter when he denied Christ and was for that reason forsaken of God and rejected as a worthless instrument; but the Christian should again raise himself up through repentance and faith in the Word, and should comfort himself with the thought that he is of the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of grace, which is far mightier than sin. Romans 5:20. The Holy Spirit is given, not only as a means of imparting courage and strength, but also to comfort the stumbling one in weakness, and to make of him the habitation of God, in which God's love, which covers up such infirmities and imputes it not, constantly abides.

[59] Accordingly, as the prophet Zechariah, in beautiful words, in chapter 12:10, says, the spirit of grace and of supplication is poured out in the kingdom of Christ. This is the Holy Spirit, who together with the Father and the Son, lives in believers, speaks and works through them, and gives them comfort and the power to remain steadfast against sin, death and the devil's power. This he does not through a mere demonstration of his almighty power; but, in their consciousness of sin and unworthiness, he bears with them, and shelters and comforts them with grace and forgiveness in Christ. Being conscious of great weakness in this conflict, they are moved by him to pray and cry for help and strength; thus, the Spirit, through such praying and crying, conquers in them. These things St. Paul declares concerning the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:16 and 26: "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God;" and: "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity and maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

[60] Great saints often lament that they do not have enough comfort, joy and strength; they find that, in this state, they must comfort themselves with grace and sustain themselves through prayer and endeavor. St. Paul,

himself, in many places complains of his weakness, as in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9, where he says that there was given him, through the messenger of Satan, a thorn in the flesh, which so pierced and tortured him that he could not feel the Spirit's strength and power, and in anguish he besought the Lord three times that it might be taken from him. But he was told: "My grace is sufficient for thee." His crying and prayers were indeed heard, yet he was not relieved of his weakness. The spirit of grace within him, however, comforted and sustained him in the conflict so that he should not sink under it; to him was given the assurance: My power is made perfect, or overcomes, in the weak. "He that loveth me not keepeth not my words." E. Christ Adds a Decision to this Promise.

[61] There you have a short, vigorous decision, Whoever would be a Christian must love. To love means, cheerfully and willingly to keep God's Word. Either do this or nothing. We must sincerely desire and love Christ, or else abandon him altogether. For he that seeks his own in Christ, and does not sufficiently love him to be willing for his sake to sacrifice his own honor and reputation and righteousness, and to abandon everything earthly, is of no value to Christ's kingdom. It is not given to all to be Christians, though they may indeed boast of themselves in this respect. St. Paul says, 2 Thessalonians 3:2: "For all men have not faith;" for they have not yet known nor tasted his grace and love. Hence, they cannot love him nor obey the injunction of his Word, that they should be willing to risk or to leave anything for its sake.

[62] From this decision now follows the opposite phase of the question. Christ speaks of the alternative course and its consequences. In words short and concise, he declares that whoever does not keep his Word, certainly does not believe in him; furthermore, he dare not presume upon any love from God, but is already disunited from the kingdom of grace, and continues under everlasting wrath and judgment. John 3:36 says: "He that obeyeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

[63] Such souls must suffer the loss of all things. They cannot be God's habitation, nor have the Holy Spirit; they are not deserving of the grace that God should speak and work through them. Since they despise God's Word, God also despises them, and they are thus left without protection from the devil, who drives them about according to his will. 'In his wicked power,

they can neither will nor do God's pleasure, but, as St. Paul says in Titus 1:16, are "unto every good work reprobate." They can only bring harm and misfortune into Christendom. It avails not how much they may claim for themselves in respect of holiness, divine service, good works etc., nor that they imagine themselves nearest and dearest to God. Although they may otherwise be superior and highly endowed with wisdom, understanding etc., yet they have not the grace to effect anything good and pleasing to God or worthy of his blessing. All their attempts to work righteousness will be productive of evil. Psalm 109:7, says: "Let his prayer be turned unto sin" etc. On the other hand, in the kingdom of Christ, although those who love him have some sins and weaknesses remaining, yet these very things shall be made to prove helpful, and all things must work together for the good of these, his children. Again Psalm 37: says: "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for Jehovah upholdeth him with his hand."

[64] Among the Jews, in Christ's time, the most prominent class comprised such unhappy people. They were esteemed as most holy and wise, and made claims to be God's people above all others. Afterwards, in the Church there were heretics, schismatics and false brethren, who likewise professed great spirituality, love of truth and holiness, and yet through them the devil introduced misery and ruin. Such too, only worse in degree, is, at the present time, the whole rabble of popedom. They not only knowingly despise utterly God's Word, but also without any compunction whatever, persecute its heralds and oppose its preaching. They are people completely possessed of the devil, and in whom neither God, Christ nor the Holy Spirit can dwell. Their lives are openly of such a character that they are nothing but scandals and stains of shame in Christendom, as testifies the epistle of Jude (verse 13). Yet they desire forcibly to silence those who have the name and honor of the Church.

[65] That they are not the Church of Christ needs no further proof. It follows clearly enough from this saying of Christ that whoever does not love him does not keep his Word; whoever does not keep his Word, is no member of his Church, and has no part in his kingdom, as stated. That they do not keep Christ's Word nor love Christ is itself testimony against them, crying unto heaven. They continue in this evil until the present day, so blinded as not to heave one sigh of Christian repentance for the error and abomination of which they are convicted, and of which they must be

conscious, and by which they have led so many souls into ruin. Nor are they at all anxious that for the future, God's Word might be rightly preached and that poor souls find help. On the contrary, they resist with might and main and would rather see the country and its people, yea, the whole world, drenched in blood than that they should correct even one of their errors. From all this it may be seen how completely they are in the power of the devil, and that God's wrath must eventually reach them.

[66] Christians are set apart from all other people upon earth, not by certain outward signs or certain works which all non-Christians and hypocrites may likewise do, but only by this, that they love Christ and keep his Word. Therein faith and love to Christ are made manifest. Those who do not love Christ and keep his Word, and do not desire to, thus separate and cast themselves out. Love to Christ, as has been said, cannot remain secret and hidden, but it must manifest itself in word and deed. So, likewise, must unbelievers manifest themselves. Notice that it is not enough to hear the Word; it must be kept; that is, one must bear witness before all the world in deed and in confession, and must stand by the faith, even though it should mean the loss of everything on account of it. One's sincerity or hypocrisy will surely reveal itself.

[67] Now it should be plain why Christ, at the beginning, said that he would manifest himself, not unto the world, but unto those who love him. The world has no inclination to accept Christ in the character he has shown himself on the cross and in his unattractive earthly form. He does not bring the things it desires — worldly power, honor and riches, and praise and approval of its own wisdom, its holiness etc. It is completely sunk and submerged in lust and love of riches. Wherever it does not find these things, there it perceives nothing further, and will not be attracted. On the contrary, it retreats lest it be robbed of its earthly treasures. Especially does it repel the suggestion that worldly reputation and honor, temporal wisdom, virtues and holiness should be denounced and reduced to sin and shame before God.

[68] Therefore, the kingdom of Christ must remain hidden to the world and the Gospel be concealed; the world's heart must be blinded by the devil. People of the world can know neither Christ nor the Father, and he can make no abode with them, that they might experience some comfort from his Word and some power from his work. So the Gospel and the

knowledge of Christ certainly remain a revelation, and as St. Paul says in Romans 16:25 and 1 Corinthians 2:7 — a mystery, a hidden, secret thing. Not that it has not been declared publicly enough to all the world and clearly brought to the light, but the world despises it, and deems it foolishness and an offense compared with its own wisdom. Hence, it is believed only by a few simple people, who are not offended at the unattractive figure of the cross of Christ, hidden under which are comfort, strength, victory, life and salvation, treasures which are theirs through faith. The others do not deserve to know about this Gospel, for they do not desire it. Christ says in Matthew 11:25: “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes.” “And the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s who sent me.”

[69] Here, you see, he speaks of the oral Word, which they heard of him; and he so magnifies it that whoever despises and rejects it, has not despised the man who utters it but the divine majesty. Again, he comforts those who keep his Word with the assurance that thereby they are doing the will of God the Father. He does not want to let the matter rest with himself alone, but, as said, he wishes to draw us upward through himself to the Father. This he does everywhere in the Gospel of St. John, to shield us against great and dangerous temptation, wherein the devil is a master. It is in pious, suffering hearts that the devil labors most, that he may separate Christ from the Father. It is his intention that one who hears Christ’s Word may yet, in thought, undertake to find the will and heart of God outside of Christ.

[70] For the devil is content if one holds only to the man Christ and goes no further; yes, he is also willing that the word that Christ is truly God should be preached and heard. But what he opposes is, that the heart should unite Christ and the Father so intimately and inseparably as to be convinced that the Word of Christ and the Word of the Father are altogether the same Word and heart and will. Uninstructed hearts think- Yes, I, indeed hear how Christ in friendliness comforts troubled consciences, but who knows how I stand before God in heaven? This is not believing God and Christ as one, but it is making for one’s self another Christ 2 and another God. It is missing the true God, who would be found nowhere except in this Christ. Christ says concerning this, to Philip, in John 14:9: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” So, also, Christ says in John 7:16: “My teaching is

not mine, but his that sent me.” That is precisely what he says here: What you hear from me is assuredly my Father’s Word and will, and you need not search any further, nor be anxious, as though God were angry with you or had evil thoughts toward you; but you are to be positive that God is gracious and favorable toward you, for he has sent me from heaven to declare this unto you.

[71] Therefore, beware, by all means, of other thoughts or suggestions that may move you to doubt this, or that may direct you to look for another revelation of God’s will concerning you, aside from this Christ. In such search you must surely fail, yes, even meet with harm and destruction, if you think of finding the divine majesty elsewhere. Or you may be deceived by the devil, who, instead of God, offers his own phantom. For he possesses the art of representing himself in the majesty of God, even as he did before Christ, inducing souls to worship and obey him. If this scheme fails, he confuses his victim with all manner of thoughts and imaginations, in an attempt to tear him away from this Christ. Against this, a Christian needs to be fortified, and skilled in wisdom; he must learn to bind his heart and his thoughts alone to the Word of Christ, that he may not wish to know or hear any other God than him. This I have elsewhere treated at length.

#####The Other Part of This Gospel

IV. The Fourth Promise

“These things have I spoken unto you, while yet abiding with you. But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you.”

[72] These, now, are closing words which Christ speaks to his disciples — a conclusion to his sermon, his utterances of comfort. He wishes to part from them; he thus takes his leave and directs them to further future comfort, when the Holy Spirit shall be given them, who shall teach them to understand all these things and to experience this comfort in very deed. As if he would herewith say: So far I have been with you, and have done for you what I should and could do. I have given you my Word, and have comforted you by word of mouth, to which you are to hold when I depart from you. It is true that the comfort of the words which I have spoken is

indeed great and sublime; but while I am still with you, you do not take them to heart that you experience their sweetness and power. They remain only as the Word that I speak to you, and are as yet nothing more.

[73] But they are not to continue simply as my words and speech, but are also to become a part of your own experience; not a mere empty sound or echo, but a living comfort in your hearts. This however cannot be so long as I am with you, for ye now possess only the bodily and physical comfort of my presence; therefore, I must be taken from you, in order that this comfort may become effective in you and that the Holy Spirit may teach you these things. When ye have lost me and are left alone in danger, need and fear, then, for the first time, ye will realize the need of comfort and of praying for it. Then will the Holy Spirit find you to be really teachable pupils. He will prove to be your helper and reminder. Through his aid you may perceive to what end I said these things. Then shall your hearts experience the comfort and power of the fact that I manifest myself and the Father unto you, and so abide in you that others may also learn of this comfort through your word.

[74] And note well this text, how Christ here binds the Holy Spirit to his Word, and fixes his limit and measure, so that the Spirit may not go further than his Word. Everything which I have said he shall remind you of, publishing it further through you. Thereby he shows that in the future nothing else shall be taught through the Holy Spirit in all Christendom than what the apostles had heard from Christ, but which they did not yet understand, until the Holy Spirit had taught them. So the teaching may always proceed from the mouth of Christ, then be transmitted from one mouth to another, and yet always remain the Word of Christ. The Holy Spirit is thus the schoolmaster who teaches these things and brings them to remembrance.

[75] Secondly, it is shown here that this Word precedes or must be spoken beforehand, and that afterwards the Holy Spirit works through the Word. One must not reverse the order and dream of a Holy Spirit who works without the Word and before the Word, but one who comes with and through the Word and goes no farther than the Word goes.

[76] Thirdly, the example of the apostles show how Christ rules his Church in her weakness; the Holy Spirit does not dwell in Christians at all times, nor so soon as they have heard the Word does he come with such

power and effectiveness as to enable them to believe it all and rightly to understand and grasp it. And in our case there is a great difference between hearing the Word and feeling in it the power and effect of the Holy Spirit. For although the apostles are so far advanced — the Holy Spirit working so much in them — as to hear Christ’s Word willingly and to have begun to believe, yet even they cannot take these words of comfort to heart until the Holy Spirit teaches them after the departure of Christ.

[77] So it is at present. We hear God’s Word, which is in fact the preaching of the Holy Spirit, who is at all times present with it, but it does not always at once reach the heart and be accepted by faith; yea, in the case of those who are moved by the Holy Spirit and gladly receive the Word, it does not at once bear fruit. One may not, indeed, for a long time feel that he has been made any better or comforted and strengthened, especially where as yet he has experienced no fear and danger, but only peace and rest. This was the case with the apostles before Christ was taken from them; they thought of nothing more than of preserving bodily comfort. Therefore, it must, in our case, come to this: In need and danger we look about and sigh for comfort; then the Holy Spirit can perform his office of teaching the heart arm bringing to its remembrance the Word preached.

[78] It is then profitable always to hear the Word and to train one’s self therewith, even if it does not at once reach the mark, in order that in time of need the heart may recall what it has heard, and may begin rightly to understand it, and to feel its power and comfort. As an illustration, the embers that have lain under the ashes for a time will burn again and kindle if one stir and blow upon them. One should, therefore, not look upon the Word as ineffective or as having been preached in vain, nor seek for another because its fruit is not at once apparent.

[79] It is not worth while here to answer the papists, who, in this text “He shall teach you all things” etc., want to find support for their figment and so foolishly say that Christ has not taught the apostles all that they needed to know, but has left and reserved much for the Holy Spirit to teach them. Such drivel is sufficiently destroyed by the text itself, which declares in clear, plain words: “The Holy Spirit shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you.” So, also, before this, he directed them everywhere to his Word alone, as he says: “If a man love me, he will keep my Word.” Likewise, in John 16:14, he says concerning the

Holy Spirit: “He shall not speak from himself but he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you.”

[80] But it is a sin and a shame to hear and suffer such pretension in Christendom as this, that the Holy Spirit should teach — I will not say something adverse only, such as the pope, as the live Antichrist, with the open abominations of his doctrine, teaches, things directly against Christ, namely, those things which the pope urges most as merit of personal work, the offering of the mass, denial of the cup, celibacy, calling upon departed saints, lies of purgatory and fictitious power — but that he should teach something different and better than Christ the Son of God has taught, who himself is the teacher, sent from heaven for that purpose. Or that Christ should have omitted something more needful, which it was necessary to reveal and teach by means of the councils. Excepting the first councils, wherein the Scriptures established against the heretics the one doctrine concerning the deity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, the councils dealt only with the lesser matters of doctrine, which pertain merely to things of human arrangement and ordinances, for which the Holy Spirit’s power is not needed, either to promise or to give 2 anything. Ah! he has much higher things to teach and to reveal, things concerning which human councils can neither order nor establish anything: how one may escape God’s wrath, conquer sin and death, trample the devil under foot. Christ alone teaches these things and he says that whoever would accomplish them must keep his Word.

[81] If these perverted, shameful glosses of the papists were not otherwise faulty, one should condemn and curse them as the devil’s poison and lies because they tear hearts from the Word of Christ. If one thinks Christ has not taught everything, then eyes and ears are at once wide open to gaze and listen elsewhere and one thinks: Oh, there must be still something great, not taught by Christ, which the Holy Spirit is still to teach! Oh, if I could but hear and know this, then I should surely be saved!

[82] The result of this is harm and mischief: one does not attach importance to the Word of Christ, and when he afterwards hears anything new, he deems it a precious thing and necessary unto salvation. Christ, in order to warn us against everything that is not his Word, as if against the devil’s poison, not only binds the Holy Spirit to his Word, that he should not teach anything else, but he himself, in his preaching appeals to his Father’s

command and says: It is not mine, but my Father's Word. How, then, can one sanction councils in teaching or ordering some new thing when they can never present any authority for such action? The apostles have the command from Christ and the Holy Spirit that they should teach nothing but the Word of Christ, as they, themselves, testify; hence; councils and all men are in duty bound to abide by the same command and to show that what they teach is the same doctrine. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you."

V. The Fifth Promise.

[83] This is bidding them a friendly good night. Christ was willing and able to speak with his disciples in the most loving manner. Well, I must away, he says, and cannot speak much more with you, therefore ye have my good night, and let it be well with you. I wish and give you nothing else but peace, that is, that it may be well with you. (For, according to the Hebrew language, "peace" means nothing else than to give and to bestow all good.) That is to be my last farewell. Ye shall suffer no hurt nor want because of my departure. I will richly repay you, for ye shall have from me, in my stead, the best that ye can wish, the peace and good of the fact that in my Father ye have a merciful God, whose thoughts toward you are those of a father's heart and love. And in me ye shall have a good, faithful Savior, who will do you all good, and not forsake you in any need, will defend and stand by you against the devil, the world and all wickedness, and in addition will give you the Holy Spirit, who shall so rule your hearts that you find in me true comfort, peace and joy.

[84] That is what is meant when he says, My peace is given you and left with you. Not as the world gives peace; for it is not able to give such peace and blessing, all its peace and good being not only transient but also uncertain and changing with each hour. The world bases peace and comfort only upon transient things — gold, possessions, power, honor, the friendship of men etc. When these are gone, then peace and confidence and courage are gone. Though it were in the power of the world to give and preserve all these, yet it has not, nor can it have, true eternal peace, so that a heart enjoys God's favor and is certain of his grace and of everlasting life.

[85] But since this is not the world's peace, the holy cross is laid upon it; then, measured by reason and by our feelings, it means no peace, but distensions, anguish, terror, fear and trembling. Christ says in John 16:33: "In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world;" that is to be your peace. Therefore, ye are not to think that ye will have a kingdom and power and ease in the world, or that men will receive your preaching, since ye do not proclaim and bring to it what it seeks and enjoys. But only hold fast to my Word, then ye shall have peace against the devil and the world. This they shall not take from you with their dissensions.

[86] Observe, thus Christ has secured and satisfied his Church with peace, a peace that abides in the midst of thorns and briars, that is, of tribulation and temptation. The devil and the world, for the sake of the Word and of confession of Christ, will sting, torture and plague you; so that, as the Word is a Word of grace, love and of the peace of God and Christ toward us, so is it here in the world a Word of wrath and trouble. Therefore, when the heart feels oppressed, in anguish and even 3 terrified and as if a fugitive before God on account of the devil's suggestion, this peace must be fixed in faith, the heart may inclose and secure itself in the Word of Christ and say: I know, nevertheless, that I have God's pledge and the witness of the Holy Spirit, that he wants to be my kind Father and is not angry. with me, but assures me of peace and all good through Christ, his Son. If he is my friend, then let the devil and the world, so long as they do not want to smile, be angry and rave with their affliction. "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful."

[87] This is the real, friendly, personal voice of the faithful Savior; he would gladly write upon the hearts of his Christians that they should have and expect from him nothing else but peace and every good. He well knows how difficult it is to retain this peace and comfort of the heart, and how the devil opposes here; even if a man is courageous and able to despise and overcome the wrath and enmity of all the world, Satan tries to drive him into terror and fear before God. Yes, Christ knows this well — that natural flesh and blood shudders and that no one laughs when it goes ill with him, when all that he has is taken and he is delivered to the hangman; much less when the devil actually seizes the timid heart and mangles it between the spurs, so that it can scarcely get its breath for anguish.

[88] But hear ye well, he wishes to say, what I say unto you for the sake of my Father, that he does not want you to be fearful, nor are ye to be concerned about any affliction or fear. Ye are to know that it is only the miserable spirit of lies, the devil, who wishes to make you fearful, and who, under the name and appearance of God, wants to blind and deceive pious hearts. As a devil he does nothing publicly, for he knows that where he is known, his cause is already lost. Therefore let not your heart be taken, but be only the stronger and the more undismayed, and this from love and obedience to my Father and myself, but for the confusion and vexation of the devil and the world.

[89] If one could believe these words, and could see how they are the words of Christ the Lord, he would surely be comforted, and be able to despise what all hell may do to terrify him. For whom should he fear who knows that Christ, and God through him, together with the Holy Spirit, give him the pledge of grace and peace, and command him to be joyful and without fear? It is only because of our weakness that we are not able here to believe Christ, and that our flesh and blood, feeling their unworthiness, believe the devil and his false fears rather than the true and gracious Word, in which God if only we begin to believe on Christ, announces unto us forgiveness of sin and perfect salvation. “Ye heard how I said unto you. I go away and I come unto you. If ye loved me, ye would have rejoiced, because I go unto the Father; for the Father is greater than I.”

[90] All is intended richly to comfort the disciples and to strengthen them in view of his departure; therefore he speaks very plainly with them, saying: “If ye loved me” etc., and yet he means it beyond measure most kindly, even as the dearest friend would feel toward another. I have told you, says he, and it is true, that I must leave you. Ye do not like to hear this, for ye know that, so long as I am with you, joy is your only portion in me. But, my dear disciples, if ye have heard the one message, then hear the other likewise, and listen to what is said, that I will again come to you with better and greater ‘comfort and joy than ye so far have had in me.

[91] Yes, if ye rightly loved me, as ye think, ye should be glad that I now go away from you, for it is in truth to your best interest, and from the heart ye should be pleased, both for your sake and mine, and should not want to see it otherwise. For my departure does not mean that ye will lose me, or that I or ye shall suffer any hurt; but it is alone for your sake that I should

enter into my glory, in my Father's kingdom, and, sitting at the right hand of the Father, should become a mighty Lord over everything in heaven and upon earth, where I can protect and help you against everything that seeks to injure you. This I cannot do now, upon earth, in my humility and littleness, where I have been sent to suffer and die.

[92] For what he says — the Father is greater than I — is not said of the personal, divine essence of his own nature nor of his Father's as the Arians have falsely interpreted this passage, not wishing to see why or whereof Christ so speaks here; but concerning the difference between the kingdom which he shall have with his Father and his service or servile state in which he was before his resurrection. Now I am small, he wishes to say, in my work and station as a servant; as he says in Matthew 20:28: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." That is making one's self little, and, as St. Paul says in Philippians 2:8, humbling one's self, or casting one's self beneath all things and letting sin, death, devil and world tread upon one. But this littleness shall not continue, he says, for that would be a complete undoing; it shall only be a passageway, the way and means by which I come to the Father, where I shall no longer be little, but great and powerful, as he is, and where I shall rule and reign with him forever.

[93] That this is the plain, simple meaning of this text appears from the fact that he is speaking here properly of that which he calls going unto the Father. It is not a change in his person or essence. In that sense we do not say of him that he goeth unto the Father, or that he went forth and was separated from the Father, for he is and remains one with the Father, in one divine essence, without beginning or end, to eternity; he dare not ascend higher nor grow greater. But he is speaking concerning the change of office, from his state of service to that of glory and eternal dominion.

[94] Therefore, what is said here about going to the Father and about the Father's being greater, means nothing else than the glorification of Christ, and is said that it may appear what and who he is; not what he in his person should or could be, for that he was already and from eternity, though it was not yet revealed and could not be known, since he was still in the servile, suffering, dying state. The Father was greater than he; not according to the essence of the two persons, by which God is Father and Christ is the Son,

but according to dominion and glory. As the schools state it: not by the first act but by the second etc.

[95] Therefore, he says, ye should much prefer to see me lay aside this little, humble state and this form of a servant and enter into my own dominion in the character of ruler, which I have enjoyed with my Father from eternity. For this present state upon which I entered through my incarnation of the virgin, necessitates suffering and abasement; but there I shall enjoy supreme authority, with all things under my feet.

[96] Now this was said not alone to the disciples, but also to all Christians; for the experience of the apostles is that of Christendom at all times. Christians find themselves in fear and anguish, without comfort and help; with the apostles, such a state would be called a going away of Christ. Such going away grieves in truth; and doubtless the apostles were sorely hurt; they fell into such despair that they all denied Christ and were scattered. This is the hour of deep mourning, when laughter and joy are precious, and there is nothing but need and misery. Here, says Christ, we should rejoice and be glad. Yes, if anyone could do it. Flesh and blood, of course, cannot. St. Paul confesses in 2 Corinthians 7:5, that in the flesh he had no rest even though he rejoiced in spirit and in faith and boasted of tribulation and of his weakness. And Christ himself says concerning this, in Matthew 26:41: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." The flesh cannot judge nor think otherwise than it feels, and it prefers not to feel, but to get rid of all that oppresses and torments it.

[97] If you would learn the art of dominating your feelings and living above them, you must listen, and hear and grasp the word which Christ utters: Dear Christians, do believe me, it will not be to your injury, but for your good. My departure does not mean that ye will be forsaken by me, but that I, through this going away, shall conquer, and that ye may experience my power and might as I, seated at the right hand of the Father, rule over your sin and over your enemies, the devil, death and hell; then none of these shall touch you by a hair's breadth, except at my will, and shall not hurt you, but rather serve and benefit you. Therefore, do heed my Word above your feelings. If I have told you the truth, saying that I shall go away, which ye shall now be able to prove, so also will I not deceive you in the other matter of my coming again; ye shall be able to say: I did not believe that my

Lord Christ would be so near to me and would have helped me in such a wonderful manner; now I could not wish that he had not gone from me.

[98] Behold what comfort it is in the hour of greatest need, when Christ seems altogether lost, that one may have the victory if he still holds on to the Word of Christ as to a life-saving plank, until he gets out of danger! Thus, he does not sink when the flood of trouble overwhelms horse and wagon. That is what it means, then, to rejoice over the departure of Christ; according to the flesh, altogether a weak and very secret joy. Yet, in so far as faith holds fast to the Word, it is nevertheless joy, until faith overcomes and the experience follows that Christ has not forsaken us, but, seated at the right hand of the Father, protects and helps us out. But none can know this except he experiences it. As the saying is, when the water runs into his mouth, he must learn to swim. "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe.

[99] This, of course, is said concerning experience. I, indeed, say it to you now in words, but it does not at all enter into you, nor become effective, as yet. I say it in order that ye may, nevertheless, have a little comfort when ye think of it and recall that I had told you beforehand that thus it must be; when ye have once been helped, your faith will be strengthened and ye may also contend further and overcome. "I will no more speak much with you, for the prince of the world cometh: and he hath nothing in me; but that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence."

[100] Come, then, says he; now we must part. The devil is coming on. He will seize me and think that if he only gets me, then it will be a sorry case with you. As prince and lord of the world, he has destroyed so many that he thinks to continue lord and prince over you. He will also get me between the spurs and undertake to vanquish me. But he shall fail and shall find me to be another than he supposed. With others, he has indeed a claim upon them; he finds them in sin and guilty of eternal death. But in me he has no right of claim and thereby he passes judgment upon himself that, with death and hell, he must lie at my feet, and, moreover, secure nothing from those who are mine.

[101] Thus, in the hour of his greatest conflict, he gathers courage and boldness for himself from the strength of his innocence and his advantage

over the devil and death, wherein they must meet their ruin by him and forfeit their claim upon those who believe in him and for whose sake he surrenders himself. Thus, by his blood and his death, he takes revenge on the devil for all other blood and death. This blood, which cries for vengeance, is, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says (Hebrews 12:24), far different blood from that of Abel, which cried to God against the murderer. That is a type of this blood which pronounces condemnation upon the devil and death for all the shed blood of his believers since the beginning of the world. Thus Christ seeks, not alone by his divine power, but also by the weakness of his suffering and death, to despoil the devil of his power and dominion over the Christians, so that he must be cast out, as he says in John 12:31, and leave him the prince and captain of salvation.

[102] Why, now, does he do and suffer these things? The devil has no claim upon him and he could easily escape him or could vanquish him. But it must be done, 3 says he, that the world may realize that I love the Father and fulfill his commandment. This is the comforting word by which he reveals to us the Father's will and heart, that we may see all this which he does and suffers for our sakes was so determined by the Father's good will; that thus he, as the true, faithful mediator, might appease all of the wrath and displeasure of God, and assure our hearts of his fatherly grace and love. For how should God yet be angry with or condemn us, since he has so earnestly commanded his Son to divest himself of all his divine glory and might and, for our sakes, cast them under the feet of the devil and of death? But oh, Christ says, if the world but knew and believed that I do not do this of myself, but out of great love, giving my body and life remains of the old birth, still rough and uncouth, is being out of obedience to my Father! Whoever can believe that, is saved already, rescued from the devil and death.

Pentecost Monday. Christ as Mediator and Savior and His Judgment on the World and Believers.

Text: John 3:16-21.

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. John 3:16-21

[1] This is another of the true Gospel lessons, such as John is accustomed to write; for he writes in a way to make him alone worthy the name of an evangelist. Now, 3 as you have often heard, the Gospel teaches nothing but that one must learn to know Christ alone, and so the Holy Spirit teaches nothing ore. Therefore, examine Only the words themselves; they. are weighty, precious and comforting beyond measure. First Christ says: “For

God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

[2] Now, notice that Christ represents the Father to us as none else than the all-loving and magnetic one, and he brings us through himself to the Father. Everything Christ does tends to help us to acquire a loving confidence in the Father. To simply fear the Father confers no benefit; but to bear to him a companionable love of rare quality makes us blessed. Now, Christ says here, the Father so loved the world that he gave his beloved child for the world, and instituted for us a way to come to him; that way is Christ. I have often said that faith alone is not sufficient before God, but the price of redemption must also be in evidence. The Turk and Jew, too, believe in God, but without means and mediator.

[3] What is now the cost of redemption? Today’s Gospel points this out. The Holy Spirit teaches everywhere that we do not possess the Father except through a mediator, and he will not allow us to approach the Father without one. Now, the schools teach us to approach the Father without a mediator, through our own good works. That means to reject Christ as a mediator, as Jeremiah tells us did the godless, who thought and said: Let us send wood to him as his food, and we will root him out of the land, and there will be no remembrance of his name. But their plans did not result as they intended they should. Therefore, let us never join them. It would be at the peril of our lives, for we should be despising the priceless sacrifice which the Father made for us. But let us thank the Father for ordering it as he has, and placing between us one who is God and equal with God, and also man, on a level with man; for we are human and he is God. Where God and man oppose each other, man meets with instant destruction, for he cannot stand against God. God has intervened by placing as mediator one who is alike true God and true man. Through him we are to come to the Father; with the price we can pay nothing is accomplished.

[4] Now, the schools teach that man is to be saved by his own works; they say: Whosoever becomes a monk or nun, or repeats every day the little prayer of St. Bridget, shall be eternally saved; and all the books are full of like teachings. This is no less than saying: I will work enough to escape perdition; I will turn my sins into vapor, to disappear and open a way into heaven. They wish to discover the sacrifice or price of salvation in themselves and to ignore Christ as mediator. But they must perish, since

they fain would come to the Father without a mediator, without Christ, whom the Father holds up before us out of his gracious goodness. Christ teaches here that we are not lost, but have eternal life; that is, that God has so loved us that he allowed the ransom to cost him his only beloved child. Him he placed in our stead to suffer misery, hell and death, and let him drink our cup to the dregs. This is the way we are to be saved.

[5] Now, if there were another way to heaven doubtless he would have made it known to us. There is no other. Therefore, let us cling to the words, firmly pilot our hearts along this way and keep within it, and let us close our eyes and say: If I had the merits of all the saints, the sanctity and purity of all virgins, and the piety of St. Peter besides, still I would not give a fig for all I call my own. I must have another foundation on which to build, namely, the words: God has given his Son, that whosoever believeth on him, whom the Father sent out of love, shall be saved. And let us defiantly boast that we must be sustained. Let us fearlessly establish ourselves upon his words, which neither Satan, hell nor death can overthrow, for the Father mightily writes his Word over these terrors and all that clings to them. Come what will, let us say: Here is God's Word; that is my rock and anchor; to that I cling and that abides; and where that abides, there I abide also. For God cannot lie; sooner would the heavens and earth perish than the smallest letter or tittle of his Word would fail.

[6] Notice carefully now that man must have a mediator, and that mediator is Christ. Ascend upon him to the Father, and say: Although I cannot exist before thy majesty nor that of any angel — all must shake and tremble — yet I have here one, Christ, whom thou canst not fail to regard. I am under his protection and rely upon thy Word that thou wilt receive me through him. Thou wilt not reject me, for thou must reject him before thou dost reject me. In this way one must come to the Father through Christ, thereby gaining a beautiful and loving refuge in him.

[7] This lifts up and cheers a timid, despairing conscience and gives it peace. Aside from God's Word nothing helps, neither cowls nor tonsures, neither the priesthood nor monkery. No human work, be it called ever so holy, is able to silence God's judgment and give peace to our hearts. God has, out of love, given us his Son, through whom we shall be saved; therefore, let no one make another way than this. Guard yourself against adding to it, for so you would but render it valueless. He who adds to it,

leads from the right road upon a branch road that goes into the wilderness. Hence, let not your conscience trust in any work, in any merit of saints, but alone in the Word of God. That will not lie to you, but its promise will be sufficient. Then you will lay hold upon God with his own words; upon them you can build; to them you can anchor your heart and confidence. Now follows, further, in this Gospel: "For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him."

[8] With these words one can apprehend God as he is to be apprehended. You do not seek him; rather he seeks you, and pictures his Son before you as a Savior and not as a judge. Thus there is developed for you a refuge in the Father.

[9] It is a common practice to represent the gracious Savior as a judge, and from this practice has sprung a dependence upon the merits of saints, causing us to turn away from Christ and take refuge in the saints. We fancy that the saints are more gracious and more kindly disposed to us than even God himself. Therefore, one says, St. Peter is my apostle; another says, St. Paul is my patron; and so on with St. Barbara, St. Erasmus and others. But God cannot permit this; the glory must belong to him. My conscience must rest upon the foundation, the eternal, all-knowing truth, else it is a failure. Now, God alone is the truth, and the conscience must rest upon him and nothing else.

[10] If I picture Christ as only a judge, I shall fear him. The result will be that soon I am constrained before him, grow afraid of him and then hate him, and my heart becomes corrupt and blasphemous. But when I know him as the Gospel pictures him, and long for him as the best friend that my heart can choose, then it is well; love soon follows. No friend can do as much for us as he has. I forget father and mother and love him; then I have a strong confidence in him. But if one simply fears him, then that one falls back on his good works and makes no recognition of Christ as mediator, thinking to run into the presence of God without him. In this 3 way he works his own ruin. It is with him as the psalmist says of the fools and godless, Psalm 53:5: "There were they in great fear, where no fear was." And in Proverbs 28:1 Solomon says: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." For their stubborn hearts are afraid before Christ, though he is still their best friend, and they run when no one pursues, solely because of their stubborn and false conception of Christ.

[11] Then learn from this lesson to know Christ aright and to hold him between yourself and the Father; let him alone be the sacrifice which shall secure heaven and salvation. Oh, when this passage comes to mind in the hour of death, when the test comes, what comfort to meditate on its message — how the Lord came not to condemn the world, but to save it. He who believes, cannot be lost, but will be saved, since it is true that naught accomplishes our salvation except Christ alone, who came to be our Savior. Then believe on him. In the words we are studying, he calls everybody, and even threatens as well as calls, concluding thus: “He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

II. The Judgment Christ Passes upon the World and Believers.

[12] When the learned schools would make people godly, they hold before them the judgment, making it as hot as they possibly can; in this way they lead men into terror, where they abandon them, never pointing out a way of escape. Here Christ also presents the judgment and threatens men, but at the same time he tells them how they may flee from wrath. This is his teaching: There will be a judgment, which no one can escape except those who believe without any ifs or ands. If you add anything thereto, you have entered upon the byway into the woods and are lost; for he that believeth not, is lost already. I am the only door that opens into heaven. The way is narrow; you must become small if you wish to pass through the rock. Those who are decorated with good works, like a workrighteous person with shells, can never force their way through. They must divest themselves and become small. One can meet the conditions only when he despairs of himself. If you come hampered with great burdens of good works, you will never be able to forge a way into heaven; you must lay them aside before you can enter.

[13] From this it follows that where faith is, there sin does no harm; for faith makes us Christ's. But where faith is not, there is either fear and hatred of God, or a profligate, sinful life. We met with this same truth when we learned that the Holy Spirit will convict the world in respect of sin because, as Christ says, they believed not on him. The only sin is unbelief. Faith roots out all sins. Unbelief is the only reason why man does not know God. Because of it he is in fear in the presence of God. When a man is in fear, he

hates and blasphemes God, heaping up his sins and keeping none of the commandments. Now, Christ gives a reason for this judgment; he says: "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil."

[14] The light is Christ the Lord, manifest in the knowledge of him, as he is here pictured in this Gospel. As a glance into the sun, we may look into this Gospel and see what God is. This light is come into the world through the preaching of the apostles and has shone through the whole world. Man is its enemy only because of his evil works; the whole world is fast therein. Why do not the pope and bishops, the priests and monks, permit their deeds to be exposed and their manner of life brought to light? For the reason that their works are evil. Now, the light reveals to us that all our works amount to nothing and we must have Christ alone. When we apply the test of that light, they say: Nay, should I have fasted and prayed so long for nothing? Get out, you heretics! If men no longer believed in the efficacy of works, no one would attend vigils and the mass; then the monks' kitchens would become small and their cellars empty. Since they cannot tolerate such a possibility, they must hate the light.

[15] God has blinded them so that they build on stone and wood, overlooking the foundation of truth and failing to build upon Christ. The Gospel aims, however, to establish the heart upon the eternal foundation truth. Now, if one would overthrow their manner of building, the light must be brought and their works be made manifest, that they may be put to shame. They will never tolerate such inspection, however, but must protect their doings, with the consequence that they become enemies to this light. That is just what the Lord says: "For everyone that doeth evil, hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest their works should be reprov'd."

[16] They hate the light, says Christ; because they do evil; they lead a shameful life, at the same time believing it to be a godly life. The devil, also, would be a fine fellow. He is anxious to sit in a clean place, and not lie before the door; he would come within the heart, but never to the light; he would wear the cloak of respectability, so that his injustice be not seen. Now, let us take the light of day as an illustration. The sun will not refuse to rise because I am lazy and would gladly sleep an hour or two longer. No, it goes forth in its course and does not hide its light, although it is not agreeable to me. Likewise will the Sun of righteousness arise; the evildoers

are unwilling to come into the light, but they cover and guard their sins and evil deeds. Thereby they merit the judgment; for they have not only done wickedly, but they wish to defend their action, which is a double sin

[17] But the righteous gladly approach the light, willing that all may pass judgment upon their works, and they even let the devil examine them. They have cultivated in good soil, because they possess faith, and they go forth in their faith to help the poor. These works are wrought in them by God, hence they cannot be evil. Thus a righteous person gladly permits all the world to act as judge upon his works. It is a beautiful thing when a believer, finding his work is rejected, says: Yes, there is no good at all in the works of my own doing, but the works that are wrought in me by Christ, my Lord, they are good. He desires no honor, but will ascribe all honor to God; will possess all in God that he should possess, and can, with a good conscience, go to the light and not be put to shame. That is what Christ means in his closing words: "But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God."

[18] Now we have heard what our consolation and our final and only refuge is, upon which we should lay our foundation and build. No person who professes to be a Christian dare undertake to do any work, imagining thereby to be saved; he is not saved except through Christ alone, whom it cost his all. We must come to salvation through him and his work, with nothing else added to it. If we build upon human works, we are reckoning directly against God's grace.

[19] On the other hand, we must not abandon works, saying as do the impudent: Aye, then I will do good works no longer in order to be saved. True, you dare do nothing with the intent of its being meritorious for salvation, for the forgiveness of sin and for the pacifying of the conscience; you have sufficient for these in your faith. But your neighbor has not sufficient; you must extend a helping hand to him. That you may perform such service, God permits you to live; if not so, your execution would soon be called for. You live for the purpose of serving by your life, not yourself, but your neighbor.

[20] Christ the Lord had also sufficient; what the world had was his. He might have passed us by, but it is not the nature of true life to do so. Nay, cursed be that life into perdition that lives for self; for to so live is

heathenish and not Christian. Then those who have at present their sufficiency from Christ, must follow the example of Christ and with utter sincerity do good to their neighbors, as Christ did to us; freely, without the least thought of obtaining anything thereby, only with the desire that it be pleasing to God.

[21] We Christians are like a child born in the father's house. It brings the title to the inheritance with it, in its flesh and blood; the title to the heritage belongs to it by virtue of its birth. A servant, however, acquires his merit, not in the family, but outside of it. When the child of the house is grown, it must, nevertheless, help to increase and improve the inheritance, making it more valuable; but it does not, first of all, gain the inheritance by works, for that is acquired already by virtue of its birth. Just so, if we believe on God, then we are already heirs and need not to acquire inheritance by our works; yet we must be co-laborers with the Father to increase it. Paul speaks in like manner to the Philippians: "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." Philippians 2:5ff. That is: Lead such an outward life that it may be like the example of Christ, and help your neighbor with your life and property, thinking not of winning the birthright by your works. Guard your sonship, not by your own foolhardiness, but by faith, and be a colaborer in extending the kingdom.

Pentecost Monday. Second Sermon. God's Love and Gifts in Christ, and Christ's Judgment on the World and Believers.

Text: John 3:16-21.

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.

21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. John 3:16-21

[1] This is one of the best and most glorious Gospel lessons, such as John particularly wrote. It is worthy to be written in golden letters, not upon paper, but if possible upon the heart; it ought to be made the daily lesson and meditation of Christians, who should repeat it to strengthen their faith and awaken their hearts to prayer. The words make the sad joyful and the dead alive, if the heart only firmly believes them.

[2] It also gives instruction on the chief article of Christian faith, on the glory and liberty of Christians, whereby sin, the Law, God's wrath, death and hell are banished from believers and abolished, besides all human wisdom, righteousness and holiness are made futile in that which belongs to God's kingdom. He says: "Whosoever believeth on the Son of God should not perish, but have eternal life" -death, the devil, the terror of the Law, must be banished forever, our merit and worthiness doing nothing to that end. The excellent, great, eternal and divine treasure is thus portrayed here, which we should possess so as to be without fear before the judgment and condemnation of human nature through Adam's fall, and instead have salvation and victory, and every blessing besides. All this is offered and bestowed out of pure grace, and thus represented only as a gift that can be secured solely through faith.

[3] In vivid and significant words the evangelist briefly sketches this grace and gift in Christ, that he may magnify it and portray minutely all concerned — the giver, the recipient, the gift, its fruits and benefits. All is so eloquently great that it is indescribable, and it is difficult to believe only because of its very greatness.

[4] Before considering this, however, let us hear why and for what purpose Christ so speaks. He expresses it in the following words: “That whosoever believeth on him should not perish” etc. Here he would show the world the misery and helplessness in which it lies; that it is entirely lost, and would have had to remain lost eternally, had Christ not come with this proclamation; for all its wisdom, art, doctrine, law, and free will would not avail in this respect; and in spite of all its teaching and endeavors, it is and will remain lost forever. For, from its very birth, it lies in sin, under the wrath of God, in the devil’s kingdom, and under the-power of death, unable to help or free itself from this condition. Indeed it is so dazed and torpid that it would never have known nor realized its misery had this not been revealed to it through the Word.

[5] Christ teaches the same truth at greater length in the declaration made to Nicodemus, just preceding this text, where he tells him plainly and clearly, that neither he nor any of the Jews of his kind, though they had the Law, and diligently performed works and outward divine services (which were at that time, indeed, the most commendable in the world), could thereby ever get to heaven or see the kingdom of God. For such life and works are still but the works of man, who, in his natural descent from Adam, is but flesh without spirit, that is without true understanding and knowledge of the divine will, and without genuine and heartfelt obedience to God; in short, it cannot convert itself to God, since it has wholly and fully turned away from God. Therefore, through the Law, man could never liberate himself from sin, the wrath of God and eternal death. Accordingly, if he would see the kingdom of God, he must be born anew, and have an entirely different nature, one that does not proceed from the flesh, as the old one did, but from the Spirit, and which is spiritual; and to this end another word and declaration must be received than that which they have in the Law, and a power beyond man’s ability.

[6] That we may become new men, he says, we must first be delivered from the curse of the old birth, that is, freed from sin and death. But since

we still have flesh and blood, and live on earth, the old birth continues. Of itself, it must remain what it is by nature. Under its thrall, man, at death, must be damned, for no man is able to appease and remove the wrath and condemnation passed upon him; therefore, no one would ever see God, nor enter heaven. As Christ says: “And no one hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven” etc. Hence another way had to be found. It could be only through some heavenly being, righteous and innocent in the fullest sense, pleasing and acceptable to God, who would adapt his perfections to our human nature, so that the sin and condemnation that was its by birth might be taken away, and it might be reconciled to God and rescued from eternal death, and might turn to God and begin again rightly to know, love and obey him, and thus experience the beginning of the new birth, and eventually, through death, be thoroughly purified of remaining uncleanness of the old man, forever free from sin.

[7] Now, the wrath of God against sin is so intense that no creature could have devised means to appease him or effect a reconciliation; the condemnation was so enormous that no angel was mighty enough to remove it, and reinstate life. Therefore, that one Person, even God’s Son, had to take upon himself sin, God’s wrath, and death, under which humanity helplessly lay, and make the sacrifice for 3 them. Of this, Christ himself says, immediately before this text, that the Son of Man must be lifted up, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, “that whosoever believeth on him should not perish”. Here he adds the cause which moved God to accomplish this great work, when he says: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

[8] With these words he leads us directly into the Father’s heart, that we may see and know that it was the great and wonderful counsel of God, resolved from eternity, that we should receive help through this Son. All had to be fulfilled, that God’s truth might stand, even as he had promised aforetime in the Scriptures. It is thus apparent that God does not intend to cast us out, and to condemn us on account of our sins; but that he wills that, for the sake of this Savior and Mediator, if we fear his wrath on account of our sins, and keep in mind and firmly believe this eternal divine will, we should attain to the eternal grace of God and to eternal life.

II. This Glorious Grace and Gift in Particular.

[9] Now, let us consider what significant and comforting words these are which depict in their every relation, and in manifold ways, this marvelous work of God, with its inexpressible treasure which is here freely offered us. In the first place, the Giver is not a man, an emperor or a king, nor even an angel; but is the exalted, eternal Majesty, God himself, compared with whom, all men, however rich, powerful and great they may be, are nothing but dust and ashes. Isaiah 40. How shall we describe him? He is incomprehensible, immeasurable, inexhaustible.

[10] He is, then, no more a taskmaster, who simply makes demands upon us — as Moses calls him (Deuteronomy 4:24), a devouring and consuming fire — but a rich, overflowing, eternal fountain of grace and of all gifts, who justly deserves to be called Gebhard (a prince or champion of givers). In comparison with him, what are all emperors and kings, with their gifts, gold, silver, land and people? Here the heart should expand and increase with desiring, wishing and expecting that which the Lord God intends to give; for it indeed must needs be something great and 3 valuable that could well become this exalted Majesty and rich God. Compared to such a Giver and gift, everything in heaven and on earth must be very small and insignificant.

[11] In the second place, why does he give, and what incited him to it? Nothing but pure, inexpressible love. He does not give because it is a debt or duty, nor because anyone has asked or pleaded, but he is moved to do so by his own goodness as the Lord who willingly gives, and delights in giving gratuitously and without solicitation.

[12] As there is no greater Giver than God, so there is no greater virtue, either in God or men, than love. One will sacrifice everything for what he loves, even his life. Patience, humility and all other virtues are nothing compared with it, or else are included in its essence. For whom I love, with him I will certainly never be angry, nor injure nor annoy him, nor make myself intolerable to him, but I will be ready to serve, counsel and help him whenever I see that he needs me. In short, I am his fully, as to my body, goods and all my possessions.

[13] Accordingly, here, again, the heart shall grow and become strong against all sorrow, because such wealth of unfathomable divine love is set before us, flowing from a fatherly heart and having its source in the highest virtue, which is the fountain of all good, and which, therefore, makes the gift valuable and precious; just as the proverb deems a small gift valuable, when it says: It comes from a loving hand. For where there is love and friendship, one does not look upon the gift so much as upon the heart; it is love which adds great value to the gift. If God had given me only an eye, a hand or a foot, and I knew that he did it out of fatherly love, it would be much dearer to me than a thousand worlds. Now, since he gave us precious baptism, his Word, absolution and the Lord's Supper, they should be regarded as our daily paradise and heaven; not on account of the appearance of such gifts, which are not great in the eyes of the world, but on account of the great love from which they are given.

[14] In the third place, consider the gift itself. It must, without doubt, be something excellent and inexpressibly great, that such a rich Giver gives us, with such sincere and generous love. What does he give? Not great kingdoms, not one or more worlds full of silver and gold, not heaven and earth with all they contain, not the 3 entire creation, but his Son, who is as great as he himself. That is an eternal, incomprehensible gift, even as the Giver and his love are incomprehensibly great. He is the fountain and source of all grace, goodness and kindness; yes, the very essence of the eternal blessings and treasures of God. That is love, not with words, but in deed, in the highest degree, proven with the most precious goodness and wonderful work of which God himself is capable.

[15] What more can he do and give? Since he gives his Son, what does he yet withhold, that he does not give? Yes, he gives himself wholly and entirely, as Paul says, Romans 8:32: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" Certainly, everything must have been given with him, who is his only begotten, beloved Son, the Heir and Lord of all creation; therefore, all creatures, angels, devils, death, life, heaven and earth, sin, righteousness, everything present and future, are subject to us. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:22-23: "All are yours: and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's"; for this Son is all in all.

[16] In the fourth place, how and in what manner is the Son given? Look upon him, in what he has done and suffered! For us he becomes man, is put under the Law, that is, under the wrath of God (on account of our sins). He is put to death, even the most ignominious death — lifted upon the cross and suspended in the air. He was condemned (even as Christ shortly before this had said), taking upon himself the wrath and fury of the devil and hell, and contending with them to such extent that it must be said that he was wholly abandoned. Yet he trampled the devil, sin, death and hell under foot, and obtained the victory over them through his resurrection and ascension. All this he gave us that it might be our own, that we might possess both him and all that he accomplished. And this he does in such a way that the gift may not be said to have been conferred upon us, either as wages or on account of merit, nor is it loaned, borrowed or for recompense, but freely given and bestowed out of purely benign grace. The receiver shall and can do no more in this case than to open his hand and take what God so graciously gives him, and what he truly needs, with love and thanksgiving.

[17] In the fifth place he portrays the recipient, who is, in a word, the world. This is indeed a wonderful and peculiar case of loving and giving. Here the one loved is in strange contrast to the one loving. How can this love of God for the 3 world be explained? What does he see in the world, that he is so ready to unbosom himself toward her? If it had been that he loved the angels, they are at least glorious and noble creatures, worthy of his love. But what, on the contrary, is the world but a great mass of people who neither fear nor love nor praise nor thank God, who misuse every creature, blaspheme God's name and despise his Word, and are, furthermore, disobedient, murderers, adulterers, thieves, knaves, liars, betrayers, full of treachery and all malice; in short, transgressors of every commandment, and in every particular refractory and obstinate, adhering to God's archenemy, the abominable devil? Behold, this delicious and gracious fruit! He bestows, as if upon a beautiful and beloved bride and daughter, his dear Son, and with him all things, whereas he would have had more than sufficient reason, at the very mention of the world, instantly to crush her with thunder and lightning to powder, and cast her into the abyss of hell. The word "world" is a sound hateful to God beyond expression; and this is a most strange paradox: God loves the world. Here two things that are in the highest degree antagonistic are combined. It is almost like saying:

God loves death and hell, and is the friend of his most bitter eternal enemy, the accursed devil.

[18] That is indeed a boundless proof of love, and makes the gift inexpressibly great, when the Giver and he to whom it is given are placed side by side, and God is represented as pouring out his whole heart to his hateful, hostile image, whereas he should have visited him only with anger, vengeance and damnation, and when he pays no attention to the fact that the world is full of contempt, blasphemy, disobedience toward God, and stupendous ingratitude for all the gifts he bestowed upon it heretofore, but swallows up all its vices and sins. Though the Giver be ever so great and beneficent, the wickedness and viciousness of the world, which is excessive and immeasurably great, ought to deter and repel him. For what man can even mark and sufficiently realize his own sin and disobedience? And yet this great love so overcomes God that he take away from the world all and every sin and transgression, and remembers them no more against it forever, so that they are dead and gone, and instead he gives his Son, and with him all things.

[19] By this, the truths for which Paul and the articles of faith contend, have now been sufficiently and irrefutably demonstrated and proven; namely That we have 3 forgiveness of sins and eternal life, without merit or worthiness on our part, out of pure grace (*gratis*), and alone for the sake of his beloved Son, in whom God so loved us that this love has taken away and blotted out all our sins and the sins of the whole world; for there was nothing but sin in us, instead of which he has bestowed his love and forgiveness upon us, even as the prophet Isaiah (40:2) says concerning Jerusalem, and as we ought to preach in the Gospel: “Her iniquity is pardoned. that she hath received of Jehovah’s hand double for all her sins.”

[20] Therefore, this gift — all of grace — is much greater, transcends and is mightier, than all the sins on earth, so that the unworthiness of any man, yes of all men together, aye the eternal wrath and condemnation which they have deserved, cannot be so great that the greatness of this love and grace, or forgiveness, does not in every particular outweigh, yes, engulf them; as Paul says, Romans 5:20: “But where sin abounded, grace abounded more exceedingly;” and Psalm 103:12 11:12: “For as the heavens are high above the earth...so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” For what else can that be than forgiveness of sin, when he loves the

world while it yet lies in sin, abomination and blasphemy? If he could so love the world, his enemy and blasphemer, as to give so much, even himself, for it, how could he be angry with you and not be willing to forgive your sins, if you desire and seek his grace?

[21] What heart would not cheerfully render all good things to him who has shown such love as to bestow his dear Son upon wicked and despairing people, that is, upon the whole world, which means all people, who never did anything good, but at all times have done that which was contrary to his commandments? How can people like these expect such great love and such inexpressible riches as a reward? To think of what I have done and what has been my experience in my monastic life, when I crucified Christ daily for fifteen years, and practiced all kinds of idolatry! and yet, notwithstanding the fact that I so sorely provoked him, he loves me so that he no more remembers all my wickedness but reveals to me his Son, and himself, with all grace. This, indeed, may be called incomprehensible riches of unfathomable love.

[22] O Lord God, how little the world takes such great and sublime things to heart! Should we not all rejoice and be glad of heart that we have lived to see the time that we can hear such things, and love and praise our God therefore, and in 3 gratitude, not only willingly serve him, but gladly suffer all things and even smile if we should have to die for the sake of his Word and obedience and to allow these bodies — worms of the dust — to be consumed by fire or sword, or suffer any other form of martyrdom? So little thankful is shameful, abominable unbelief, in its great and blind darkness, of which Christ himself later complains, that there are hearts so possessed, rigid and dead that they can hear such things and yet not believe!

[23] In the sixth place, we have the final cause why and for what purpose he does all this, and what his intention is. Of course, he has not bestowed it that I may have meat and drink from it, or inferior temporal benefit, riches, honor, power; nor has he given it that it may harm and poison; he has not given his Word, baptism, and the Lord's Supper as poison, but that they might be of the greatest benefit to us. As he says, they are given that man may not be lost, but may have everlasting life. It is not for the purpose of giving me many golden crowns and kingdoms, for then I would still remain in sin and death: but that I might be free from hell and eternal death, and not be lost eternally. That is what this gift is to effect; for

me hell is wiped out, and the devil cast under my feet, and out of a fearful, sad and humiliated heart a joyful and living one comes forth. In short, God has done all this that I might have an eternal, imperishable life in exchange for eternal destruction and death.

[24] It must follow upon the reception of such a great and imperishable gift that, when the Son of God is rightly known and embraced with the whole heart, we have the victory over and are rescued from all evil, and enjoy eternal freedom, glory and happiness; for where he is, there everything must be good. Not that we have earned this, but in his great and eternal love God took pity on us in our misery and helplessness, and gave us his Son that we might be helped; otherwise we would have been lost and would have had to remain eternally lost, and notwithstanding all our work-righteousness and divine services, and never attained to eternal life.

[25] He who would now puff up his heart, on account of these facts, has reason enough so to do. For what more glorious and better could heart desire, than that it should be told that eternal life shall be bestowed upon it; that it shall never see death; that it shall never experience want, distress, sadness and temptation, but 3 have pure joy, and a perfect wealth of everything good, and have the assurance that we have a gracious God, and that all creatures will joyously smile upon us? From this it is very evident that it is not God's purpose and intention to deceive and destroy people, as the devil would make timid hearts believe, holding up to them the Law and their unworthiness; but that he would bestow life, and such life as is eternal and blissful. As a pledge and veritable testimony of this, he gives us his only Son, which he would never have done had he not loved us but was still angry and intended to condemn us.

[26] This and similar glorious and comforting passages should be rightly treasured and valued by every Christian, above all else in the world, for they are words which no one can exhaust or fathom; and when they are rightly believed, they ought to make one a good theologian, or more — a strong, joyful Christian, who can speak and teach of Christ aright, judge all other doctrines, advise and comfort anyone, and patiently bear all things that he may experience.

[27] But here we must pray for the Holy Spirit to impress this upon our hearts, and must daily exercise ourselves in these things, so that we retire

and rise with these words in our minds. But now, just as we regard them, so is their effect upon us. If they do not enter our hearts they cannot produce the fruit they ought to; they must bewail the ingratitude of the world, which makes them pass by our ears and hearts without affecting them, while it runs after perishable goods, honor and fame, thus losing this everlasting treasure; for this it will condemn and curse itself in hell eternally.

[28] In the seventh place, and lastly, in what manner may we lay hold of such a treasure and gift, or what is the purse or safe in which it may be kept? It is faith alone, as Christ here says: “That whosoever believeth on him, should not perish” etc. Faith holds out its hands and opens the sack, and allows itself to be presented with good things. As God, the Giver, in love bestows this gift, so we are the recipients by faith, which faith does nothing more than receive the gift. For it is not our doing, and it cannot be merited through our work. It has already been bestowed and presented. All you need to do is to open your mouth, or rather your heart, hold still, and allow it to be entirely filled. Psalm 81:10. This can be done in 3 no other way than by believing these words; for you observe that he here requires faith, and faith fully and perfectly appropriates this treasure.

[29] Here you may see, also, what faith is and is called. Not simply an empty thought concerning Christ, that he was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered, was crucified, arose, ascended into heaven, but a heart that grasps and embraces the Son of God, as expressed in these words, and positively holds that God gave his only begotten Son for us into death, and loved us so that, for his sake, we should not be lost, but have eternal life. Therefore, he plainly says: “That whosoever believeth on him.” It must be a faith which does not look upon its own works, nor upon its own strength and worthiness, that is, its own quality or the inwrought and infused virtue of the heart, of which the blind sophists dream and imagine, but without dependence on itself, holds to Christ, embracing him as its own bestowed treasure, being assured that on account of him God was moved to love us, but not on account of one’s own work, worthiness and merit; for these things are not the treasure that God gave, that is, Christ, God’s Son, in whom we must believe.

[30] Of what benefit is the gift of faith if it is nothing more than such an empty vessel? Of what value unless one looks upon and comforts one’s self in the thought of what is comprehended in it, and what alone makes it

precious, so that one may say: Faith may be but a little and insignificant monstrance or pix or box, but in it, nevertheless, there is so precious a gem that heaven and earth cannot contain it.

[31] Therefore we so teach from the Scriptures concerning faith — that through it alone we are justified and acceptable before God; because it is faith alone that grasps and retains this treasure, the Son of God. If I weigh this gift and my works in the same balance, the contrast and preponderance is so overwhelmingly great that the holiness of all men is nothing compared with the smallest drop of blood Christ gave and shed for us, to say nothing of all he did and suffered; therefore I can, in no respect, depend upon my virtue and worthiness.

[32] And why should we boast so much about our efforts when we learn that we are so situated that we would all be lost forever had not this treasure been given for us? Thereby the glory is taken, not only from all human works, but from the entire Law of God; for, though one possessed it all, and according to his ability complied with all its demands, he still has not attained what is necessary to save himself from eternal destruction. What other purpose have these words: “That whosoever believeth on him should not perish” etc? They are a continual testimony that neither Moses (the Law) nor yet the holiness of all men, could redeem from death or give eternal life. Therefore, everything depends entirely upon this only Son of God.

[33] Now, you may see what a sublime and significant matter is embraced in this passage, since the Giver, so great and mighty, the Creator of every creature, does not simply say: Good morning! and bestow a friendly smile; but he loves, yes loves, so sincerely that he does not simply give a beggarly gift of perishable goods, but his greatest and most precious treasure, his Son, who is also Lord of heaven and earth. This love he does not show his friends only, but his enemies, and no creature but the devil himself is less worthy this love than his enemies. For no other purpose did he give himself for them than that he might snatch them from death and hell, and render them certain of eternal life. Of what wonder could one speak or think, that is more marvelous in every particular?

[34] However great and unutterable all this is, that is still greater and more wonderful in comparison, that the human heart has been enabled to

believe it all. That must indeed be a great heart which can embrace more than heaven and earth can hold. Hence it must be evident what a great, sublime and divine power and work faith is, which can do that which it is impossible for nature and all the world to do, and it is therefore no less a wonder than all the other miracles and works of God. It is even more wonderful than that God became man, born of a virgin, as St. Bernhard says. These things, as we have heard, namely the love of the Giver and of him who was given, and the unworthiness of the recipient, placed side by side, are incomparable as to greatness. On the one hand everything is so great, and on the other, man's heart is so small and narrow and weak that the infiniteness of difference is startling and amazing.

[35] Should I be told that God has granted to me, above all other men, the gift that I should live on earth several thousand years, in the enjoyment of peace and happiness, and all that my heart desired, I would answer: Nay, that cannot be God's word, it is too much to believe. Who am I, that God should give me such 3 things? How much less can the heart of man realize that God gave him such a treasure, his Son, and with him eternal life and salvation! Who can express this amazing fact? How precious and excellent even this temporal life is! And who would give it for all the kingdoms, all the gold and possessions of this world? But the extent of this life compared to eternal life and its blessings is much less than a single moment. In short, eternal life is inconceivable; we can only try to conceive by subtracting from it, or contrasting it with the loss and misery that is called eternal loss.

[36] Now, the Christian must eventually acknowledge that the honor belongs to God, and to Christ the Lord; that God's Word is the truth, and it must denounce man's own unbelief as a lie. Where this acknowledgement is made, the Holy Spirit has already begun with his power and work of faith, and the heart is opened, so that it can lay hold of this treasure, which is greater than heaven and earth; true, the heart proceeds in great weakness, and on earth it can never attain such faith as it should, and does not get beyond the longings and groanings of the spirit, for salvation is inexplicable to man, and the heart must cry out: Oh, that it were true! or: Oh, that one could believe it!

[37] Nevertheless such sighs and little sparks of faith are of so much account that God recognizes them as complete faith and says: As thou believest, even so be it unto thee, and since thou hast believed it, thou shalt

surely be saved. For this word is a power and strength that is mightier than all the terrors of sin and damnation, and this gift is so great that sin and death and hell are swallowed up by it as is a little drop of water in a glowing furnace, or as a little spark on a straw is extinguished when it falls into the great ocean. If only the heart, in temptation, could recall these words, neither devil nor hell could affright it, and it would joyfully say: Of what should I be afraid? Have I not the Son of God, given to me by the Father, in testimony of which he gives me the Word, which I know is his Word? That cannot lie to me any more than he could lie and deceive me, even though I, alas! cannot believe it as firmly as I should:

[38] You say: Yes, I would gladly believe it if I were like St. Peter and St. Paul and others who are pious and holy; but I am too great a sinner, and who knows whether I am predestinated? Answer: Look at these words! What do they say, and of whom do they speak? “For God so loved the world”; and “that 3 whosoever believeth on him.” Now, the world is not simply St. Peter and St. Paul, but the entire human race taken collectively, and here no one is excluded: God’s Son was given for all, all are asked to believe, and all who believe shall not be lost etc. Take hold of your nose, search in your bosom, whether you are not also a man (that is, a piece of the world) and belong to the number which the word “whosoever” embraces, as well as others? If you and I are not to take this comfort to ourselves, then these words must have been spoken falsely and in vain.

[39] And surely, this has not been preached to any other than to humanity. Therefore, beware lest you exclude yourself and give place to the thought: Who knows whether it has been given to me? For that would be accusing God of falsely speaking in his Word. But, on the contrary, make a cross for yourself with these words, and say: If I am not St. Peter or St. Paul, I am, nevertheless, a part of the world. Had he intended to give it to the worthy only, then he would have had it preached to the angels alone, for they, are pure and without sin. He could then not have given it to St. Peter, to David, or to Paul, for they were sinners as well as I. No matter what I am, I know that God’s Word is true; and if I do not accept it, then I am committing, above all other sins, this sin also, that I blaspheme the Word of God and the truth, and charge God with lying. “For God sent not his Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him.”

[40] In these words you hear even more forcibly and clearly what are the will and intent of God concerning the world, that is, concerning those who are in sin, and who, therefore, are already under judgment and sentence of condemnation. He takes away everything that would terrify us on account of our sins. He says plainly and clearly that Christ was sent, and his kingdom established, not for the purpose of judging and condemning. Such judgment and sentence have already come upon all men through the Law, because all are born in sin, and are, therefore, consigned to death and to the executioner, and there is nothing lacking but for the sword to be drawn. Now Christ steps between, according to God's command, and orders both judge and jailer to halt, rescues the condemned and sets him free. This is the reason why he comes to help the world, which he found already under condemnation. This is also proved by the words he spoke: "But that the world should be saved through him." These words show very clearly that the world was under condemnation, for why, otherwise, was salvation necessary?

[41] But at this time salvation was preached to the Jews, and had not yet been heard by the world generally; but they did not believe that they were in such a condition that Christ had to come and save them, a lost and condemned people; they looked for a Christ who should commend and honor them on account of their Law and their holiness, therefore they could neither believe nor accept his proclamation. In John 8:33, when he told them that the Son of God should make them free, they retorted: "We are Abraham's seed, and have never yet been in bondage to any man;" as though they would thereby object: "How dare you say that you have been sent to save us? We are not a condemned people, as the heathen are.

[42] But now we hear that Christ has been sent to save those who are judged and condemned; that we should know that he has come to save us. who acknowledge and realize this. For there must some be saved, so that he shall not have come in vain. These are none other than those who are oppressed and terrified on account of their misery and condemnation; to them the friendly words are addressed: "For God so loved the world", that is, those who feel not love, but only wrath and condemnation. And God sent his Son, not to judge, but to save those who are already judged, etc. To those who do not believe that they are sinners and condemned, the Gospel

is preached in vain: for much less will they believe that. they are saved through Christ alone.

III. Judgment upon Believers and the World.

“He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

[43] Here is the verdict which makes the distinction between the saved and the damned. It does not depend upon how worthy or unworthy you are, for it has already been determined that all are sinners and deserve to be condemned; but it depends upon whether you believe in this Jesus Christ or not. If you believe, then you are acquitted, and the judgment and condemnation taken away: if you will not believe, the judgment will remain upon you; yes it will only become greater and heavier than before, because you simply augment sin by not accepting Christ, who is to free you from judgment and condemnation.

[44] And this, again, is a comforting passage with which to oppose the temptation and terrors of timid consciences which sigh for consolation and long to know how they stand in the sight of God. Such should hear and take these passages to heart; to them they are addressed, that they should know that God sent his Son not to judge but to save, and that God has already decreed that whosoever believeth in his Son shall not be judged, and shall have no reason to fear any judgment and condemnation, but is freed. The Law's judgment and condemnation are taken away from him, and God's grace and eternal life are promised and bestowed upon him through Christ, if he only believes these words.

[45] On the contrary, a fearful judgment is passed upon those who do not believe this proclamation, but undertake to appear before God and be saved on the basis of their own holiness and merits; for they are at once denied and cut off from all grace, and included in condemnation, from which they shall find no relief so long as they do not believe, even though they may have done many great and important works and walked apparently in eminent holiness. Christ's condemnation is not waiting them, simply, but they have already been judged through the Law of God, because they did not acknowledge their sins and that, by nature, they were under God's

wrath. What is still worse, they try to make themselves appear beautiful and pious before God; moreover, they oppose him with the sin of despising the Son of God, who was given for their reconciliation and redemption. Hence, the eternal wrath and curse must come upon them, because they do not seek forgiveness of their sins in Christ, but increase and confirm them by their contempt. This is what John the Baptist also says, John 3:36: “He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

[46] Christ gives the reason for this: “Because he hath not believed,” he says, “on the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Because everyone is already guilty, being under sin and condemnation, therefore God will not liberate anyone, nor receive him, except through this Son, whom he gave and set apart for reconciliation; and that means, therefore: Believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God, that is, in the Word which the Son preached of him. For faith cannot see what he here gives, neither can it be grasped and realized with the senses; it apprehends no more than the name which has been given him, and the oral Word, heard with the ears. To this he would hold and bind us, that by faith in it we should escape judgment, and be saved. The rest are justly damned, not because they have sin, but because they despise the Son and will not believe in the name that has been proclaimed to them for their salvation and eternal bliss. For to this name, wherever it is preached and believed, all creation and sin and death must yield, and by it the devil and all the gates of hell shall be frightened and flee away.

IV. The Judgment of the World.

“And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil.”

[47] Here the contention begins about this name and proclamation of Christ, and the verdict of condemnation against the unbelieving is manifest, because they do not receive this saying, but, on the contrary, oppose God, and wickedly adhere to their own conceit and arrogance in direct opposition to the clear Word of God and the revelation of his will. This can be nothing but darkness, because it is contrary to the light of his Word, which shines publicly before all the world, bringing believers to the knowledge of God

and salvation, but uncovering and revealing the thoughts of others, as the aged Simeon prophesied concerning Christ, Luke 2:35, showing that they are not what they make themselves appear to be before the world when they deck themselves with a false appearance of holiness, but they are contemptible, poisonous worms, pernicious and accursed people.

[48] From this contrast which Christ makes above in verse 16, you may see what the world, is; I mean the tender, pious, holy hypocrites and eminent servants of God. They are people who are not only in darkness, that is, in error and ignorance (which could be pardoned), but they at the same time love these things; that is, they uphold and defend and adhere to them, to the displeasure of God and his Word. And so perverse and steeped in Wickedness are they that they bitterly hate both God the Giver and the great and precious Gift, his beloved Son, rejecting this divine love and Gift, notwithstanding their unworthiness. These are, forsooth, loving, pious children, who cannot bear and endure the truth, but hate and reject their own salvation.

[49] What shall we say of such wickedness of the world? Who could believe that people on earth could be so wicked and possessed of devils, that even when they hear and see the light of such inexpressible divine love and benefaction, which would bestow upon them eternal life through his Son, nevertheless will not endure this proclamation, but look upon it as the most harmful poison and heresy, against which everybody should close his ears? Yea, though this light is so plain that they can. say nothing against it, but must confess that it is the truth, yet they are so bitterly angry that they neither can nor will accept it, but knowingly oppose it. That, I say, no human heart could believe if Christ had not said so; yea, no one would understand these words if facts and experience had not taught and proved them. It should ever be regarded an accursed, hellish wickedness not only never to inquire in the least about God's Word, to despise his love and grace, and not to honor the truth, but, in addition, knowingly to love and seek his own damnation; as Paul says in Acts 13:46, concerning the Jews, that they judged themselves unworthy of eternal life.

[50] That is what they do who call themselves God's people, and are the most holy and pious before the world, full of so-called good works and services before God. They will not suffer in the least that their life and works should be called wicked, as Christ does here. Since the Holy Spirit

would show them their sins, and lead them to Christ, that they might be redeemed from their sins and condemnation and be saved, they accuse this doctrine of forbidding and condemning good works, and say that it ought not, therefore, to be tolerated. And so God and his Word must bear the blame of their wickedness, although he would correct them and very willingly help them to lead a godly and blessed life. He has done enough for the world, everything that is necessary to do, in that he has permitted his light to shine for it and offered and certified to it his love and eternal life in Christ. What reason can it now offer why it should not be justly condemned according to its own judgment, and on account of its own guilt? “For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be revealed. But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be manifest, that they have been wrought in God.”

[51] Thus it is proved that their works are evil, because they hate the light and will not suffer themselves to be placed openly in the light, that they may be tried, and 3 that it may be manifest whether they are upright or not, but they seek only to appear well and to shine before men. Just so the world acts in its affairs, even as Christ says, and everyone does as he pleases and desires, and yet does not want to be regarded as having done wrong, but would be considered faultless and pious by all. Although a man in his acts is exceedingly rude in the presence of people, yet he seeks to screen and cover his deeds. That is why no one can be condemned unless he be publicly convicted and confuted. Everyone comes before the court to prove himself to be right and his opponent to be wrong; therefore, in order to get at the truth, his conduct must be exposed through public testimony and proof.

[52] Indeed, it is in itself sufficient evidence of the fact that there is something wrong, when one will not allow himself to be taken to task, and is afraid of and resists being brought publicly before the light, or will not suffer information to be given and justice to be done. Even as he who lies nude in bed resists and rages before he will allow the covers to be removed; yes, squirms, wriggles and resorts to whatever expedient he can devise that his nakedness may not be exposed; so every wretch, murderer and adulterer, however wicked he may be, even though his own conscience condemns him, wants to be called a man of honor. Much less will the world submit to be judged in the things which reason does not condemn or censure, and

when the devil adorns and veils himself with a most beautiful demeanor and appearance. And so everyone who does that which is wicked wants to be considered pious, pure and holy, and therefore persecutes the Gospel, because it chastises him.; wherefore, God must continue with his light until it may finally become manifest whose fruit they are who persecute Christ, who would help them and all the world. God's Word, which brings them all grace and blessedness, they blaspheme and reject; pious, innocent people, who confess his Word and love Christ, they exile and murder.

[53] This, also, is one of the fruits of the Gospel, that it rebukes and convicts evil, and exposes the devil, who formerly reigned in pomp, unhindered, and in the appearance of God himself. Now, however, he raves and rages because he is so exposed that his presence is apparent to all. Now, it must become manifest which is the true and which the false Church. and who are the true, pious children of God, and who are the devil's children and hypocrites, liars and murderers.

[54] "But he that doeth the truth," says Christ, "cometh to the light" etc.; that is, he who through the Word of God is brought to a knowledge of his sins, seeks grace and loves Christ, and is also made manifest. Yea, he, himself, comes to the light, holds fast to God's Word, honors the truth, and is willing that all his doctrines, deeds and his disposition may be made manifest; he defies all devils and men, and openly and fearlessly lets himself be seen and heard, proved and persecuted. Even so, God be praised! through our Gospel, pious Christians do, in their confession and in their lives; whilst others, on the contrary, cover their doings and try to justify themselves with lies and deceit, and all kinds of knavery, that they might, notwithstanding that they have been put to shame by the light of our doctrines and teachings, give their doings some coloring. Therefore, by their works and manifestations it may be known who is upright, and who in truth performs such works as are done in God, according to his Word and will, and are pleasing in his sight.

Pentecost Tuesday. The Preaching Office, the Preachers and Hearers.

Text: John 10:1-11.

1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.

7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.
John 10:1-11

[1] This Gospel treats of the office of the ministry, how it is constituted, what it accomplishes and how it is misused. It is indeed very necessary to

know these things, for the office of preaching is second to none in Christendom. St. Paul highly esteemed this office, for the reason that through it the Word of God was proclaimed, which is effective to the salvation of all who believe it. He says to the Romans 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." We must now consider this theme, since our Gospel lesson presents and includes it. It will, however, be a stench in the nostrils of the pope! But how shall I deal differently with him? The text says: "He that entereth not by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber (murderer)."

[2] This verse has been explained as having reference to those who climb, by their presumption, into the best church livings through favor and wealth, recommendations or their own power, not obtaining them by regular appointment and authority. And at present the most pious jurists are punishing people for running to Rome after fees and benefices, or after ecclesiastical preferment and offices. This they call simony. The practice is truly deplorable, for much depends upon being regularly called and appointed. No one should step into the office and preach from his own presumption and without a commission from those having the authority. But under present conditions, if we should wait until we received a commission to preach and to administer the sacraments, we would never perform those offices as long as we live. For the bishops in our day press into their offices by force, and those who have the power of preferment are influenced by friendship and rank. But I pass this by, and will speak of the true office, into which no one forces his way (even though his devotion urge him) without being called by others having the authority.

[3] True, we all have authority to preach, yea, we must preach God's name; we are commanded to do so. Peter says in his first Epistle, 1 Peter 2:9-10: "But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: who in time past were no people, but now are the people of God: who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." Nevertheless, 3 Paul establishes order in 1 Corinthians 14:40 and says: "In whatever you do among yourselves, let everything be done decently and in order." In a family there must be order. If all the heirs strive for lordship, anarchy will reign in the

family. If, however, by common consent, one of the number is selected for the heirship, the others withdrawing, harmony will obtain. Likewise, in the matter of preaching we must make selection that order may be preserved. But since all who are Christians have authority to preach, what will be the outcome? for women will also want to preach. Not so. St. Paul forbids women to put themselves forward as preachers in a congregation of men, and says: "They should be subject to their husbands." For when a woman will not submit to being led and governed, the result will be anything but good. These are, however, the words of Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11-12: "Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection. But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness." If it happened, however, that no man could be secured for the office, then a woman might step up and preach to others as best she could; but in no other instance.

II. Preachers of the Word to Preach Nothing But the Word.

[4] So much for the call into the office. But Christ is not speaking of that here; for something more is required, namely, that no rival or supplementary doctrine be introduced, nor another word be taught than Christ has taught. Christ says in Matthew 23:2-4: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat: all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe: but do not ye after their works; for they say and do not. Yea, they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger." Although these of whom Christ here speaks were regularly appointed, yet they were thieves and murderers; for they taught variations from Christ's teaching. Christ reproves them in another place, in Matthew 15:3, where he holds up before them their traditions and tells them how, through their own inventions, they have transgressed the commandments of God, yea, totally abolished them. We have also many prophets who were regularly appointed and still were misled, like Balaam, of whom we read in Numbers 22; also Nathan, described in 2 Samuel 7:3. Similarly many bishops have erred.

[5] Here Christ says: He who would enter by the door must be ready to speak the Word concerning Christ and his word must center in Christ. Let it be called "coming" when one preaches aright; the approaching is spiritual,

and through the Word — upon the ears of his hearers, the preacher comes at last into the sheepfold — the heart of believers. Christ says that the shepherd must enter by the door; that is, preach nothing but Christ, for Christ is the door into the sheepfold.

[6] But where there are intruders, who make their own door, their own hole to crawl through, their own addition. different from that which Christ taught, they are thieves. Of these Paul says to the Romans 16:17-18. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned, and turn away from them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent.” Paul does not speak of opposing or antagonistic doctrines, but of those placed beside the true doctrine; they are additions, making divisions. Paul calls it a rival doctrine, an addition, an occasion of stumbling, an offense and a byway, when one establishes the conscience upon his own goodness or deeds.

[7] Now, the Gospel is sensitive, complete and preeminent: it must be intolerant of additions and rival teachings. The doctrine of earning entrance into heaven by virtue of fastings, prayers and penance is a branch road, which the Gospel will not tolerate. But our Church authorities endorse these things, hence they are thieves and murderers; for they do violence to our consciences, which is slaying and destroying the sheep. How is this accomplished? If only I am directed into a branch or parallel road, then my soul is turned from God upon that road, where I must perish. Thus this road is the cause of my death. The conscience and heart of man must be founded upon one single Word or they will come to grief. “All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field.” Isaiah 40:6.

[8] The doctrines of men, however admirable, fall to the ground, and with them the conscience that has built upon them. There is no help nor remedy. But the Word of God is eternal and must endure forever; no devil can overthrow it. The foundation is laid upon which the conscience may be established forever. The words of men must perish and everything that cleaves to them. Those who enter not by the door — that is, those who do not speak the true and pure Word of God, without any addition — do not lay the right foundation; they destroy and torture and slaughter the sheep. Therefore, Christ says further in this Gospel: “But he that entereth in by the

door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice.”

III. A True Preacher Should First Use the Law Aright and then Preach the Gospel.

[9] The porter here is the preacher who rightly teaches the Law — shows that the Law exists and must reveal to us our helplessness; that the works of the Law do not help us, and yet they are insistent. He then opens to the shepherd, that is, to Christ the Lord, and lets him alone feed the sheep. For the office of the Law is at an end; it has accomplished its mission of revealing to the heart its sins until it is completely humbled. Then Christ comes and makes a lamb out of the sheep — feeds it with his Gospel and directs it how to regain cheer for the heart so hopelessly troubled and crushed by the Law.

[10] The lamb then hears Christ’s voice and follows it. It has the choicest of pastures, and knows the voice of the shepherd. But the voice of a stranger it never hears and never follows. Just as soon as one preaches to it about works, it is worried and its heart cannot receive the teaching with joy. It knows very well that nothing is accomplished by means of works; for one may do as much as he will, still he carries a heavy spirit and he thinks he has not done enough, nor done rightly. But when the Gospel comes — the voice of the shepherd says: God gave to the world his only Son, that all who believe on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Then is the heart happy; it feeds upon these words and finds them good. The lamb has found its satisfying pasture; it wants none other. Yea, when it is given other pasture, it flees from it and will not feed therein. This pasture always attracts the sheep, and the sheep also find it. God says in the prophecy of Isaiah: “So shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish all in the things whereto I sent it.” Isaiah 55:11. “And he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. When he hath put forth all his 3 owns, he goeth before them and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers.”

IV. The Hearers Have a Right to Judge the Sermon.

[11] In this text there are two thoughts worthy of note: the liberty of faith, and the power to judge. You know that our soul-murderers have proposed to us that what the councils and the learned doctors decide and decree, that we should accept, and not judge for ourselves whether it is right or not. They have become so certain of the infallibility of the councils and doctors that they have now established the edict, publicly seen, that if we do not accept what they say, we are put under the ban. Now, let us take a spear in hand and make a hole in their shield; yea, their resolutions shall be a spider's web. And you should, moreover, use upon them the spear which, until now, they have used upon us, and hold before them its point.

[12] Remember well that the sheep have to pass judgment upon that which is placed before them. They should say: We have Christ as our Lord and prefer his Word to the words of any man or to those of the angels of darkness. We want to examine and judge for ourselves whether the pope, the bishops and their followers do right or not. For Christ says here that the sheep judge and know which is the right voice and which is not. Now let them come along. Have they decreed anything? We will examine whether it is right, and according to our own judgment interpret that which is a private affair for each individual Christian, knowing that the authority to do this is not human, but divine. Even the real sheep flee from a stranger and hold to the voice of their shepherd.

[13] Upon this authority, the Gospel knocks all the councils, all the papistic laws, to the ground, granting to us that we should receive nothing without judging it, that we have besides the power to judge, and that such judgment stands until the present day. The papists have taken from us the sword, so that we have not been able to repel any false doctrine, and, moreover, they have by force introduced false teachings among us. If now we take the sword from them they will be sorry. And we must truly take it, not by force, but by means of the Word, letting go all else that we have, saying: I am God's sheep, whose Word I wish to appropriate to myself. If you will give me that, I will acknowledge you to be a shepherd. If you, however, add another Gospel to this one and do not give me the pure Gospel, then I will not consider you a shepherd, and will not listen to your voice; for the office of which you boast extends no farther than the Word goes. If we find one to be a shepherd, we should receive him as such: if he is not, we should remove him; for the sheep shall judge the voice of the

shepherd. If he does not give us the right kind of pasture, we should bid farewell to such a shepherd, that is, to the bishop; for a hat of pearls and a staff of silver do not make a shepherd or a bishop, but rather does the office depend upon his care of the sheep and their pasture.

[14] Now the papists object to judgment being passed upon any of their works; for this reason, they have intruded and taken from us the sword which we might use for such a purpose. Also, they dictate that we must accept, without any right of judgment, whatever they propose. And it has almost come to such a pass that whenever the pope breathes they make an article of faith out of it, and they have proclaimed that the authorities have the right to pass such laws for their subjects as they desire, independent of the judgment of the latter. These conditions mean ruin to the Christians, so much so that a hundred thousand swords should be desired for one pope. This they know very well, and they cling hard to their laws. If they would permit unbiased judgment, their laws would be set aside and they would have to preach the pure Word; but such a course would reduce the size of their stomachs and the number of their horses.

[15] Therefore, be ye aroused by this passage of Scripture to hew to pieces and thrust through everything that is not in harmony with the Gospel, for it belongs to the sheep to judge, and not to the preachers. You have the authority and power to judge everything that is preached; that and nothing less. If we have not this power, then Christ vainly said to us in Matthew 7:15: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves.” We could not beware if we had not the power to judge, but were obliged to accept everything they said and preached.

V. Preachers Are to Force No One to Believe

[16] The second thought is, no one shall be forced to believe; for the sheep follow him whom they know and flee from strangers. Now, Christ’s wish is that none be forced, but that they be permitted to follow from willing hearts and of their own desire; not out of fear, shame or strife. He would let the Word go forth and accomplish all. When their hearts are taken captive, then they will surely come of themselves. Faith does not go forth from the heart unless it has the Word of God.

[17] Our noblemen are now mad and foolish in that they undertake to drive people to believe by means of force and the sword. Christ here wishes the sheep to come of themselves, from their knowledge of his voice. The body may be forced, as the pope, for example, has by his laws coerced people to go to confession and to the Lord's Supper, but the heart cannot be taken captive. Christ wants it to be free. Although he had power to coerce men, he wished to win them through his pleasing, loving preaching. Whoever lays hold of Christ's word follows after him and permits nothing to tear him from it. The noblemen wish to drive the people to believe by means of the sword and fire; that is nonsense. Then let us see to it that we allow the pure Word of God to take its course, and afterward leave them free to follow, whom it has taken captive; yea, they will follow voluntarily.

[18] By this I do not wish to abolish the civil sword; for the hand can hold it within its grasp so that it does no one any harm, but it holds it inactive. It must be retained because of wicked villains who have no regard at all for the Word; but the sword cannot force the heart and bring it to faith. In view of its inability, it must keep silent in matters of faith; here one must enter by the door, and preach the Word and make the heart free. Only in this way are men led to believe. These are the two expedients — for the pious and the wicked: the pious are to be drawn by the Word, and the wicked to be driven by the sword to observe order.

VI. The Marks of False Preachers

[19] Now, Christ interprets his own words. He says that he is the door to the sheep, but all the others who came before him, that is, those who were not sent by God as the prophets were, but came of themselves, uncommissioned, are thieves and 3 murderers; they steal his honor from God and strangle human souls by their false doctrines. But Christ is the door, and whoever enters by him will be saved, and will go in and out, and find pasture. Here Christ speaks of the Christian liberty, which means that Christians are now free from the curse and the tyranny of the Law, and may keep the Law or not, according as they see that the love and need of their neighbor requires. This is what Paul did. When he was among the Jews, he kept the Law with the Jews; when among the gentiles, he kept it as they kept it, which he himself says in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23: "For though I was free from all men, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain

the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak: I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the gospel's sake, that I may be a joint partaker thereof.”

[20] That, the thieves and murderers, the false teachers and prophets, never do; they accomplish nothing but to steal, strangle and destroy the sheep. But Christ, the true and faithful shepherd, comes only that the sheep may have life and be fully satisfied. This is enough on today's Gospel for the present. We will conclude and pray God for grace rightly to lay hold of it and understand it.

Pentecost Tuesday. Second Sermon. Three Classes of Preachers; or How We Enter the Sheepfold through Christ and the Sheep hear.

Text: John 10:1-22.

1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the

sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.

7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

15 As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

16 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

17 Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.

18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

19 There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings.

20 And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?

21 Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?

22 And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter.
John 10:1-22

[1] This Gospel lesson presents to us in a picture and parable that which is elsewhere taught concerning Christ's kingdom and the office of preaching in the Church. The same topic, is continued in the Gospel of the good shepherd immediately following our text. Both portions distinguish the different kinds of teaching that claim to point to heaven; and from these words we may correctly judge which are the true teachings of the Holy Spirit. There are three distinct kinds of teaching here considered. Only one of them can save the soul. The first is the teaching of those whom Christ calls thieves and murderers; the second, that of the porter of the sheepfold; the third, that of the true shepherd, to whom the porter opens and whom he permits to enter. John says that the disciples did not rightly understand this parable until Christ explained that he himself, and he alone, was the door of the sheepfold and that he was likewise the shepherd. We, too, would not understand it if he had not shown us the interpretation.

I. The First Class of Preachers – Thieves and Murderers.

[2] It is a fact that these three classes are always found in the Christian Church. Herein is danger, and the need that the people be warned to be on their guard and to protect themselves well against teachers who spread heresy and destruction, and whose only object, wherever they appear among the sheep, is to steal from them the true pasture of pure doctrine and God's Word, and to destroy their souls also. Therefore the apostles diligently warned the Christians against such teachers. Paul, in Acts 20:29-30, prophesies to them saying: "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock," etc.

[3] Such are they who would lord it over souls with doctrines formulated or invented by their own wisdom, or who, with good intent, would dictate to them about what they should do if they would be saved. As, for example, did the Pharisees and scribes among the Jews; they thought themselves saved by their own human doctrines and writings and the worship of good works. And they in the papacy expect to be saved by that utter filth — their own false and self-chosen works, worship and monkery; not to mention their public idolatry and shameful lying nonsense — praying to deceased saints, their indulgences, purgatory and the like. They indeed do not wish to be regarded as thieves and murderers; they would be respected in the world

as worthy, invaluable, and safe teachers and preachers. But when they are made manifest by the Word of Christ, it is discovered that they awfully mislead and ruin the souls who follow them.

[4] They are called thieves because they come stealthily sneaking, and with smooth speech, as Paul says in Romans 16:18; and they come also with imposing airs, and in true sheep's clothing, especially advertising their faithfulness and their love of souls. But these are the very marks by which, as Christ teaches, they are to be known; they do not enter by the door, but climb up some other way, or, as Christ himself explains, they come before him and without him, not pointing and directing to him as the only Shepherd and Savior.

[5] For the words "came before me" do not refer to those who preached before Christ; nor only to those who undertake to preach without a call and secretly sneak into the fold, who are certainly no better than thieves and murderers. But the words refer in general to all those — even to them who have a true call and are regularly installed in office — who do not begin with and adhere to the doctrine of faith in Christ as the chief article of Christianity, but mislead the people, directing to their own holiness and their own worship, which ignores faith in Christ. If it were not for this error, such teachers would never harm with their doctrine; for all doctrines concerning works would be harmless if they did not teach faith and trust in works as being sufficient to merit the forgiveness of sins. But in no case is to be tolerated the teaching that we are to place in them our confidence and faith, for it should be centered alone in Christ; nor that we esteem them to be a special service to God when they are without the Word of God.

[6] We could also without wrong keep all the commandments of the pope and of his councils if they be not in opposition to God's Word — when they refer only to outward order and the observance of certain times — the use of certain clothing, meats, and the like; as in other things a person may follow custom. Yes, such outward and immaterial things were without harm if they did not claim that they are necessary to salvation or serve to promote it. Just so the greater part of their priestcraft and monkery is mere unprofitable, useless jugglery and simply child's play, appropriate to a Shrove Tuesday carnival performance or to a puppet show. But that they should command man to do such works at the peril of being lost, and say, He who fails to do them shall fall under the wrath and displeasure of

God Almighty and of all the saints, and be condemned to hell — that is the wolf-like and murderous voice of the true Antichrist in Christendom.

[7] Now, these destructive thieves and murderers are the great multitude; they are always in the majority in the world. And they cannot be different since they are out of Christ. The world desires such wolf preaching, and is not worthy of anything better since it will not hear nor respect Christ. Hence it is that there are so few true Christians and faithful preachers, always outnumbered by the members of the false church. Teachers and pupils mislead one another; as Moses says, the drunkards draw the thirsty after them and lead them to ruin. Deuteronomy 29:19. But Christ on the other hand comforts the true Church with his counsel to his dear sheep to guard against the false teachers and not to listen to, nor follow, them; as he says later, in plainer words: “My sheep hear my voice, but they hear not the voice of strangers.”

[8] True, the sheep may at first and for a time be deceived by the false appearance and actions of thieves and robbers. Such has been the case hitherto under the papacy when all the pulpits and churches were filled with the false and only a few sheep heard the voice of Christ, the true shepherd; as Christ declared in Matthew 24:24, saying, that they would lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Yet, at last he shall help them to hear the voice of the true shepherd and follow him. And many such have been snatched out of the errors of papacy even on their deathbeds, and have laid hold of Christ and died in him.

[9] Now, these are the first class of cursed teachers and preachers who directly oppose Christ and only mislead and ruin souls. These he sharply distinguishes from himself, and passes judgment, teaching that we are not to hear them at all nor tolerate them, and that they who, themselves out of Christ, point the people elsewhere, are only thieves and murderers.

II. The Second Class of Preachers – Porters of the Fold.

[10] There are other preachers, who advocate God’s law and commandments, not devised of themselves, but taken from the Scriptures. Such were the teachers or scribes among the Jews, so far as they adhered to Moses and the Scriptures; of whom Christ says: “The scribes and the

Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe." Matthew 23:3.

[11] These teachings in themselves do not oppose Christ, but they who make use of them to teach the people to trust in themselves and in salvation through the works of the Law, are thieves and murderers like the others; for they also hinder and restrain the sheep from coming to Christ.

[12] But if these preachers are to rightly serve, faithfully and helpfully, they must not themselves climb into the sheepfold like the others, nor attempt to be shepherds; they must be simply porters and servants of the true shepherd, Christ, keeping the sheep in shelter and safety and not allowing strangers to break in upon them, and preparing for and giving place to the shepherd, who himself leads them out to pasture and in. Further, their office is appointed not to feed themselves, but to open to the shepherd; then the sheep hear the shepherd himself and are fed by him.

[13] Such among the Jewish people were Moses and the prophets, likewise John the Baptist; and such are all who still preach the Law for repentance, to point the people to Christ, who shall save them from sin and death. So, then, such exercise both offices of the porter. They restrain strangers who come as shepherds to draw the sheep after them, taking care that the sheep be not misled by the delusion of a false confidence in their works, but learn to know their sins and danger and be ready to heed their shepherd. Paul speaks of the office of the Law, in Galatians 3:23-24, mentioning how it was given that we might be kept in ward under it, and shut up unto the future faith in Christ. "So," he says, "the Law is become our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Where the Law is so taught that man, threatened by the wrath and punishment of God, is outwardly held under good discipline, and restrained from presumption and carelessness, and is inwardly urged by fear and terror to feel his helplessness and misery and to recognize his own inability — where the Law is so taught, the fold is rightly closed and guarded, and the sheep cannot run away into error and thus become a prey to wolves.

[14] But this preaching and office of the porter is not enough for the sheep. For if they should remain thus shut up, they would suffer and die from hunger. Therefore another duty of the porter is to open the door to the true shepherd, who himself comes and feeds the sheep. It is all for his sake

— the preaching and teaching in the Church; otherwise one would not dare be a doorkeeper or preacher.

[15] It is, however, opening the door to Christ when we thus teach the Law, as we said. God requires us to keep these commandments at the peril of our eternal condemnation. And though you have kept them as perfectly as you can, you must know that you will neither be justified nor saved thereby before God; for you can never fulfill them, as you are indebted to do. And if you were to fulfill them, still you would not thereby merit that God should give you more than he has already given you, for which you are in duty bound to obey him; as Christ says: “Even so ye also, when ye shall have done the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do.” Luke 17:10. Therefore you must, after all this, have Christ, the Lord, for the true shepherd, who gives you his fullness and riches, and you must be fed, pastured and saved by him.

[16] Thus you rightly fulfill both offices, and correctly distinguish the doctrine of works from the doctrine of faith — we are to keep the Law, but not trust in it; for faith alone will keep us and comfort us with Christ’s pasture. So, works rest upon the obligation of the Law, and faith upon grace in Christ.

III. The Third Class of Preachers, in Whom Alone Christ is Found.

[17] Now, where the door is opened to the shepherd and he enters, the sheep receive comfort and help; as Christ says at the close of our Gospel lesson: “I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.” For as Christ rules, guides and leads them, feeds and keeps them, he works in them through his Word and the power of the Holy Spirit, and they grow daily, becoming richer in knowledge, stronger in faith, in consolation, in patience, having victory in suffering and other trials, and of themselves bear fruit, teaching, serving and helping others. And thus the office and work of the shepherd, whose own the sheep are, go on continually, when he himself receives the sheep and works his will in them, which he does by his voice, that is, the external Word and preaching.

[18] Therefore, Christ calls himself the door by which the sheep go in and out. For, as he is the shepherd and also the sermon through which he comes to us and by which he is made known, so faith in our hearts, by which his power and work are experienced, is simply Christ dwelling and working in us, making us in our life and work complete in him. So all goodness goes forth from him and is received through faith in him; we are pleasing to God only because of him, and are not dependent upon anything else, neither have we comfort from any other source.

[19] With the same figure in which Christ speaks of his office, which he administers through the Word, he speaks also of his sheep, telling how they are to conduct themselves in his kingdom — when the door is opened to him, they at once hear his voice and learn to know it. It is truly a comforting, cheering voice, whereby they are released from terror and fear and brought into liberty, where they can look to God in Christ for grace and all comfort. And where they once recognize this shepherd, they confidently hold to him alone and do not listen to the doctrine of any other. For they have, as the nature of sheep is, very keen ears, that respond to a very soft voice, and are very docile, recognizing and distinguishing the voice of their shepherd from all others who pose as shepherds. For now the experience of their own consciences and the witness of the Holy Spirit in their hearts testifies that no other doctrine or word can console the heart nor bring man rightly to trust in God and call upon him, except the voice of this shepherd, Christ. Therefore they reflect upon it without any doubting or wavering whatever. They do not gaze in wonder at what others teach or do, at what the world likes or the councils decree; if there were not a single person upon earth to agree with them, they would still be assured that they hear the voice of their true shepherd.

[20] Yes, and they are of admirable intelligence; if they were, without fear or danger, given the choice, each pious soul would rather follow his conscience and plant himself upon Christ and his grace than upon his own works, even if he had an abundance of the latter. For of his works he is doubtful. Yea, he knows that they cannot stand before God's judgment; as David and all the saints say: "Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight no man living is righteous." Psalm 143:2. But he knows that grace is assured to him; for it is God's Word and truth.

[21] What mean Christ's further words: "And he calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out"? All hear the harmonious voice of Christ — the preaching of the Gospel: faith, baptism, hope and salvation they all have in common and in equal measure. The grace that Magdalene has is the same as that of the Virgin Mary, and that of Peter the same as the dying thief experienced.

[22] But there is a difference when he begins to call by special names those who are in the same grace; as a shepherd has special marks for each sheep and calls one "Brownie," another "Blackie," or such names as he will. Likewise Christ produces special works in each individual when he comforts, admonishes, and helps him in his needs and cares, through his Word. Also he distributes to men his gifts: to one a stronger faith than to another, or more understanding; gifts to teach and explain the Scriptures, to preach, to rule. Again, he uses an individual for a special work, to accomplish more and greater things than another; he visits one with much suffering and another with little; he extended the Gospel farther through Paul than through the other apostles; he called Peter and led him to suffer in a different way than he did John.

[23] Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, says: "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit," etc. As in the same house there are many kinds of work, many occupations, but all the workers are members of the same family, having the same kind of food; and as there are many members in the same body and each has its special work and use, and yet all are of the same body and the same in health, deriving a common pleasure from the food and nourishment: so in Christ's kingdom there are many kinds of gifts, of works and sufferings, distributed to each according to his capacity and calling; but all are sheep of the same kind, sharing all his blessings, and one is as dear to him as another. He says further: "He leadeth them out. When he has put forth all his own, he goeth before them" etc.

[24] This leading them out is, as I said, Christian liberty. They are now free; no longer penned up and captive under anxious constraint and fear of the Law and of divine judgment, but happily pastured and nourished in Christ's sweet kingdom of grace. Of this liberty St. Paul says: "Ye are not under law, but under grace." Romans 6:14. Again he says: "Now that faith is come, we are no longer under a tutor." Galatians 3:25.

[25] This liberty does not mean that the sheep may now without a fold and without a keeper run from their shepherd unrestrained into error; or that Christians can do whatever the flesh lusteth for. But it means that, now free from terror and fear of wolves, thieves and murderers, they may live with their dear shepherd, in love and pleasure following where he leads and guides; because they know that he so defends and lovingly oversees them that the Law dare no more accuse and condemn them, even though they are weak as to the flesh and have not perfectly fulfilled the Law.

[26] For here the Lord, God's Son, is the shepherd, who takes the sheep under his grace, his shelter and protection; and he who will accuse or condemn the sheep, must first accuse or condemn the Lord himself. Paul gloriously and defiantly says in Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," etc.; likewise in verses 33 and 34: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." This is, I say, freedom of conscience — freedom from the condemnation of the Law. Now that we are in Christ, the Law has no claim on us, for the material, bodily life has no place here. It has its own external government and law, unrelated to spiritual life in the kingdom of Christ. "When he hath put forth all his own, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him."

[27] That is the Christians' life under their shepherd. Christ ever rules, leads and guides them. They remain with him in the liberty of faith, wherein they walk, following his example in obedience and good works, of which example Peter says: Christ has "left you an example, that ye should follow his steps." 1 Peter 2:21. And Christ himself says in John 13:15: "I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you." Christ's kingdom, as I said, was not instituted that we might indulge the lusts of our flesh; but that we, released from the captivity of the Law, under which we could not in sincerity do anything good, follow Christ forward cheerfully and with a good conscience in our lives and works. And each responds as Christ calls him, a special instrument for Christ's use.

[28] To follow the advancing Christ means that our whole lives and all our works be in the faith of Christ — a constant exercise of faith, wherein we recognize and are assured that because of this dear shepherd we have

favor with God. Thus our works and lives, weak and imperfect in obedience as they are, are also under the wings of the mother hen, and are pleasing to God because of the shepherd. In this confidence we now begin to be obedient, to call upon him in our temptations and needs, to confess his Word and serve our neighbors. And thus, both in the inner and the outer life — which Christ here calls “going out and in” — we are to find pasture; that is, comfort, strength, help, the increase of faith, and everything good. To this end a Christian constantly needs the Word of Christ as his daily bread; he needs to learn from it and to exercise himself in it. Therefore, Christ says again, in concluding his words on the sheep that follow him: “For they know his voice.. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers.”

[29] That means, they know now how to keenly distinguish doctrine, faith and life; for they have the standard of the Word, which teaches them to cling alone to this shepherd, and thus be enabled to rightly judge everything offered to them and shun and condemn that which directs and leads them otherwise. Therefore, under this shepherd they abide indeed safe, undeceived and rightly led; they are excellent, intelligent, well sheltered, contented, secure and blessed sheep.

[30] Notice that this parable pictures so beautifully to us Christ and his sheep that we see the inner life of his kingdom and the treasure we have from him. And it finely symbolizes how we should teach the Law and faith and works in the Church. But the Pharisees and their blind leaders and the false saints understand naught of this; as John here says: “But they understand not what things they were which he spoke unto them.”

[31] Yes, although Christ even interprets and illustrates these things in plain words, yet his hearers do not understand them. They consider and estimate his words from the low plane of their own reason, which learns nothing beyond the doctrine of the law of works, and seeks the fulfillment of the same by its own strength; as Paul, in Romans 10:3, says of them: They seek to establish their own righteousness, and do not subject themselves to the righteousness that avails before God. Hence, when they hear the doctrine of our salvation, how our lives must be hid in Christ alone and nothing avails without him, they begin to blaspheme; as they say of him at the end of this sermon in verse 20: “He hath a demon, and is mad; why hear ye 3 him?” So in our day they revile the doctrine of faith as heresy, and

say that we forbid good works; but thereby they candidly reveal their own blindness — they do not understand what Christ, faith and good works are.

[32] We, however, who have — God be praised! — the true knowledge, should learn from this Gospel two things: First, that nothing should be taught in Christendom except that which pertains to this one shepherd, Christ — and every individual should guard against all that does not point to him for enlightenment of the conscience and for strengthening the hope of salvation; or that is not enjoined and commanded as necessary to keep. Therefore, Christ calls himself the door, through whom alone we must go out and in; and true doctrine and faith, and life proceed only from him, lead to him and are found in him.

[33] The second truth is that all Christians have the power and right to pass judgment upon any doctrine, and to turn from false preachers and bishops, refusing obedience to them. For you hear in this Gospel that Christ says of his sheep: “My sheep hear my voice, and a stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of the stranger.” The reason Christians can rightly judge is because they apply the standard — as I mentioned — from this Word of Christ, that all who fail to teach Christ are thieves and murderers. These words have already passed the judgment and further knowledge than that of Christ is unnecessary. Christians, then, are in duty bound to follow this judgment, fleeing and avoiding all it contains, it matters not who, how wise or how many they are.

[34] Here are deposed from their office and power those who wish to rule in the Church and yet do not teach Christ’s Words but their own commands, and who require the people to obey them as bishops occupying the appointed seats of authority in the Church. So it is the duty of Christ’s sheep to follow Christ’s judgment, holding such teachers as dethroned, condemned and excommunicated from the Church of Christ, and fleeing from them as accursed. And they who wish to remain godly, and Christ’s true sheep, should never yield this power and right of judgment, nor permit themselves to endorse, accept or follow what others may decree, contrary to its teaching, be they pope, bishop or councils.

Pentecost Wednesday. Faith and Coming to Christ, and the True Bread from Heaven.

Text: John 6:44-51.

44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

45 It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.

46 Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father.

47 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

48 I am that bread of life.

49 Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.

50 This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.

51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. John 6:44-51

[1] This Gospel text teaches exclusively of the Christian faith, and awakens that faith in us; just as John, throughout his whole Gospel, simply instructs us how to trust in Christ the Lord. This faith alone, when based upon the sure promises of God, must save us; as our text clearly explains. And in the light of it all, they must become fools who have taught us other ways to become godly. All that human ingenuity can devise, be it as holy and as

luminous as it may, must tumble to the ground if man be saved in God's way — in a way different from that which man himself plans. Man may forever do as he will, he can never enter heaven unless God takes the first step with his Word, which offers him divine grace and enlightens his heart so as to get upon the right way.

[2] This right way, however, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Whoever desires to seek another way, as the great multitudes venture to do by means of their own works, has already missed the right way; for Paul says to the Galatians: "If righteousness is through the Law," that is, through the works of the Law, "then Christ died for naught." Galatians 2:21. Therefore I say man must fall upon this Gospel and be broken to pieces and in deep consciousness lie prostrate, like a man that is powerless, unable to move hand or foot. He must only lie motionless and cry: Almighty God, merciful Father, now help me! I cannot help myself. Christ, my Lord, do help now, for with only my own effort all is lost! Thus, in the light of this cornerstone, which is Christ, everyone becomes as nothing; as Christ says of himself in Luke 20:17-18, when he asks the Pharisees and scribes: "What then is this that is written. The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner? Everyone that falleth on that stone shall be broken to pieces; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust." Psalm 118:22. Therefore, we must either fall upon this stone, Christ, in all our inability and helplessness, rejecting our own merits, and be broken to pieces, or he will forever crush us by his severe sentence and judgment. It is better that we fall upon him than that he should fall upon us. For this reason the Lord says in this Gospel: "No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day."

[3] He must surely perish whom the Father does not draw. Thus it is decreed, that whoever does not come to this Son must be condemned forever. The Son is given to us only to the end that he may save us; besides him, nothing saves us, either in heaven or on earth. If he does not help us, then nothing will. On this Peter says in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:11-12): "He is the stone which was set at naught of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner. And in none other is there salvation; neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved." Where, in the light of this, are our theologians and professors who taught us that we become pious through our many

good works? Here the great master Aristotle is put to shame, who proclaimed that reason strives for the best and always follows after the good. Christ says to this: No; if the Father comes not first and draws men, they must forever perish.

[4] Here all men must confess their incapacity and inability to do the good. Should one imagine he is able to do anything good of his own strength, he does no less than make Christ the Lord a liar; he would rudely and defiantly come to the Father and in all rashness ascend to heaven. Therefore, where the pure and plain Word of God goes, it breaks into pieces everything that is exalted of man, it makes valleys of all their mountains, and all their hills it makes low, as the prophet Isaiah (40:4) says. Every heart that hears this Word must lose faith in itself, else it will not be able to come to Christ. God's works do nothing but destroy and make alive, condemn and minister salvation. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, sings of the Lord: "Jehovah killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up." 1 Samuel 2:6.

[5] Hence, a person who is thus smitten in his heart, by God, to confess that he is one who, on account of his sins, must be condemned, is like the righteous man whom with the first words of this Gospel God wounds, and because of that wound fixes upon him the band or cord of his divine grace, by which he draws him, so that he must seek help and counsel for his soul. Before he could not obtain any help or counsel from God, nor did he ever desire it; but now he finds the first comfort and promise of God, which Luke 11:10 records thus: "For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." From such promises will he ever continue to gain courage as long as he lives, and will ever win greater and greater confidence in God. Just as soon as he hears that grace is the work of God alone, he will desire it of God as from the hand of his gracious Father, who wishes to draw him. Now, if he is drawn by God to Christ, he will certainly experience what the Lord here says: "He will raise him up in the last day." For he has laid hold upon the Word of God and trusts God. In this he has a sure sign that he is one whom God has drawn, as John says in his First Epistle (1 John 5:10): "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him."

[6] Hence, it must necessarily follow that he is taught of God, and that he knows now in truth that the meaning of God is nothing more than

Helper, Comforter, 3 Savior, as we say of those who rescue us from danger: Thou wast today my God. From this it is now clear that God will be to us nothing less than a Savior, a helper, and a giver of all blessedness, who neither demands nor desires anything from us. He only gives, he only offers to us; as he says to Israel in Psalm 81:10: "I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Who would not be kindly disposed to such a God, who approaches us so lovingly and graciously, and offers us his favor and blessings if we only acknowledge him as God and are willing to be taught of him? They cannot escape the severe, eternal judgment of God who ignore such grace, as the Epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrews 10:28-29) says: "A man that hath set at naught Moses' law dieth without compassion: of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing."

[7] Oh, how diligent and earnest St. Paul is in all his Epistles that we may always grasp the knowledge of God aright! How often he expresses the wish for growth in the knowledge of God! As if he would say: If you only knew and understood what God is, then you would be already saved, then you would gain love for him and do only those things well-pleasing to him. Thus he says to the Colossians (Colossians 1:9-12): "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray and make request for you, that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to the might of his glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." And in Psalm 119: David says: "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy Law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart."

[8] Thus you learn from the first utterance in today's Gospel that this knowledge must come from God the Father; he must lay the first stone of the foundation in us, else we will never do anything. But this is accomplished in the following way: God sends us preachers, whom he has taught, to preach to us his will. First he instructs us that our entire lives and characters, however beautiful and holy they may be, are before him as

nothing, yea, are as abomination, and displeasing; this 3 is called a preaching of the Law. Then he offers us grace; that is, he tells us that he will not utterly condemn and reject us, but will receive us in his beloved Son, and not merely receive us, but make us heirs of his kingdom, lords over all that is in heaven and upon earth. This is called preaching grace or preaching the Gospel. But God is the origin of all; he first awakens preachers and constrains them to preach. This is the meaning of St. Paul's words when he says to the Romans: "So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ." Romans 10:17. This truth the words of the Lord in today's Gospel also declares, when Christ says: "It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Everyone that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he that is from God, he hath seen the Father."

[9] Now, under the first preaching, the preaching of the Law, namely, that we with all our works are condemned, man is restless and fearful before God, and knows not what to do with his life and deeds. He suffers from an accusing and timid conscience, and, if relief from some source were not to come quickly he would have to despair forever. Therefore, we must not long delay with the other preaching; we must preach the Gospel to him and lead him to Christ as the one whom the Father has given to us to be our mediator, that we should be saved solely through him, out of pure grace and mercy, without any works or merit on our part. The heart rejoices at this word and runs to such grace as a thirsty deer to the water. This longing David keenly experiences when he says in Psalm 42:1-2: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God, my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God."

[10] Now, when one comes to Christ, that is, to his Gospel, he hears the personal voice of Christ the Lord, which confirms the knowledge God taught him, namely, that God is nothing but a very gracious Savior, who wants to be gracious and merciful to all who call upon him. Therefore, the Lord adds: "Verily verily, I say unto you, He that believeth hath eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world."

[11] In these words the soul finds a well prepared table, at which it satisfies all hunger; for it knows for a certainty that he who speaks these words cannot lie. Therefore the soul falls upon the Word, clings to it, trusts in it, and also builds its dwelling-place in the strength of this well-prepared table. This is the feast for which the heavenly Father slayed his oxen and fatlings and invited us all to it.

II. The Bread of Heaven.

[12] The living bread, of which the Lord here speaks, is Christ himself, of whom we partake. If in our hearts we lay hold of only a morsel of this bread, we shall have forever enough and can never be separated from God. The partaking of this bread is nothing but faith in Christ our Lord, that he is, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:30, “made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” He who eats of this food lives forever. Therefore, the Lord says, immediately following this Gospel lesson, where the Jews strove among themselves about this discourse of his: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

[13] The bread from heaven the fathers ate in the wilderness, as Christ says here, was powerless to keep them from dying; but this bread makes immortal. If we believe on Christ, death cannot harm us; yea, it is no longer death. The Lord utters the same truth in another passage when he says to the Jews: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my Word, he shall never see death.” John 8:51. Here he speaks definitely of the Word of faith, and of the Gospel.

[14] But one may say, as did the Jews, who took offense at these words of the Lord: The saints, nevertheless, died, and Abraham and the prophets likewise died. We reply to this: The death of Christians is only a sleep, as the Scriptures everywhere call it. A Christian neither tastes nor sees death; that is, he is never conscious of any death; for this Savior, Christ Jesus, in whom he believes, has destroyed death so that he no longer needs to taste it and pay its penalty. Death is to the Christians only a transition of life, yea, a door to life: as Christ says in John 5:24: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He

that heareth my Word, and believeth him that sent me, 3 hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.”

[15] Therefore, a Christian life is a life of bliss and joy. Christ’s yoke is easy and sweet; the reason it seems to us galling and heavy is that the Father has not yet drawn us, and so we have no pleasure in it, neither does this Gospel lesson minister comfort to us. If we, however, rightly appropriated the words of Christ, they would be of much greater comfort to us. By faith we partake of this bread that has come down from heaven, Christ the Lord, when we believe on him as our Savior and Redeemer.

[16] In this light I now remind you that these words are not to be misconstrued and made to refer to the Sacrament of the Altar; whoever so interprets them does violence to this Gospel text. There is not a letter in it that refers to the Lord’s Supper. Why should Christ here have in mind that Sacrament when it was not yet instituted? The whole chapter from which this Gospel is taken speaks of nothing but the spiritual food, namely, faith. When the people followed the Lord merely hoping again to eat and drink, as the Lord himself charges them with doing, he took the figure from the temporal food they sought, and speaks throughout the entire chapter of a spiritual food. He says: “The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life.” Thereby he shows that he feeds them with the object of inducing them to believe on him, and that as they partook of the temporal food, so should they also partake of the spiritual. On this subject we will say more at some other time.

[17] Now let us here notice that the Lord approaches us so lovingly and graciously, and offers us himself — his blood and flesh — in such gentle words that it should in all reason move the heart to believe on him; to believe that this bread, his flesh and blood, born of the Virgin Mary, was given because he had to pay the penalty of death and suffer in our stead the torments of hell, and, besides, to suffer the guilt of sins he never committed, as if they were his own. This he did willingly and received us as brethren and sisters. If we believe this we do the will of the heavenly Father, which is nothing else than that we believe on the Son. Christ says, just before our text: “This is the will of my Father, that everyone that beholdeth the 3 Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” John 6:40.

[18] It is now evident that whoever has faith in this bread of heaven — in Christ, in this flesh and blood, of which he here speaks that it is given to him and that it is his — he also accepts it as his own, and has already done the will of God and eaten of this heavenly manna; as Augustine says: What do you prepare for your mouth? Only believe, and you have already eaten.

[19] The whole New Testament treats of this spiritual supper, and especially does John here. The Sacrament of the Altar is a testament and confirmation of this true supper, with which we should strengthen our faith and be assured that this body and this blood, which we receive in the Sacrament, has rescued us from sin and death, the devil, hell and all misery. Concerning this I have spoken and written more on other occasions.

[20] What is the proof by which one may know that this heavenly bread is his and that he is invited to such a spiritual supper? He needs only to look at his own heart. If he finds it so disposed that it is softened and cheered by God's promises and is firm in the conviction that it may appropriate this bread of life, then he may be assured that he is one of the invited; for as one believes, even so is it done unto him. From that moment on, he loves his neighbor and helps him as his brother; he rescues him, gives to him, loans to him and does nothing for him but that which he would desire his neighbor to do for himself. All this is attributable to the fact that Christ's kindness to him has leavened his heart with sweetness and love, so that he has pleasure and joy in serving his neighbor; yea, he is even in misery if he has no one to whom to show kindness. Besides all this, he is gently and humbly disposed toward everybody; he does not highly esteem the transient pomps of the world; he accepts everyone as he is, speaks evil of no one, interprets all things for the best where he sees things are not going right. When his neighbors are lacking in faith, in love, in life, then he prays for them, and he is heartily sorry when anyone gives offense to God or to his neighbor. To sum up all, with him the root and sap are good, for he is grafted into a rich and fruitful vine. in Christ; therefore, such fruits must come forth.

[21] But if one has not faith and is not taught of God — if he never eats of this bread from heaven — he surely never brings forth these fruits. For where such fruits are not produced, there is certainly no true faith. St. Peter teaches us in 2 Peter 1: that we should make our calling unto salvation sure by good works; there he is really speaking of the works of love, of serving

one's neighbor and treating him as one's own flesh and blood. This is sufficient on this Gospel. Let us pray for God's grace.

Trinity Sunday. The Holy Trinity, and Christ's Conversation with Nicodemus on the New Birth.

Text: John 3:1-15.

1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:
2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye

believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.
John 3:1-15

I. The Holy Trinity.

[1] Today we celebrate the festival of the Holy Trinity, to which we must briefly allude, so that we may not celebrate it in vain. It is indeed true that the name “Trinity” is nowhere to be found in the Holy Scriptures, but has been conceived and invented by man. For this reason it sounds somewhat cold and we had better speak of “God” than of the “Trinity.”

[2] This word signifies that there are three persons in God. It is a heavenly mystery which the world cannot understand. I have often told you that this, as well as every other article of faith, must not be based upon reason or comparisons, but must be understood and established by means of passages from the Scriptures, for God has the only perfect knowledge and knows how to speak concerning himself.

[3] The great universities have invented manifold distinctions, dreams and fictions by means of which they would explain the Holy Trinity, and have made fools of themselves. We shall therefore quote only passages from the Scriptures in order to determine and establish the divinity of Christ. In the first place, we quote from the New Testament, where we find many proof texts; for instance, John 1:1-3: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made.” Now if he is not made, but is himself the Maker, he must indeed be God. John also says afterwards: “And the Word became flesh.”

[4] Again, we quote from the Old Testament, where David says, in Psalm 110:1: “Jehovah saith unto my lord, Sit thou at my right hand,” that is, sit upon the royal throne and be a lord and king over all creatures, all

which must be subject to thee — “until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” In Psalm 8:4-8, we read: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him but little lower than God, and crownest him with glory and honor. Thou makest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, 3 the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.” That means: Thou hast made him Lord of the whole world. Paul explains this passage, in Ephesians 1:20 and Colossians 2:9-10, in a masterly way. Now, if God has set him at his right hand and made him lord of all in heaven and on earth, he must indeed be God; for it would not be fitting that he should set him at his right hand and give him as much power over all creatures as he himself possesses, if he were not God. God will not give his glory to another, as he says in Isaiah 48:11. Thus, we have here two persons, the Father, and the Son to whom the Father has given all that is subject to him. To “sit at the right hand of God” means to be over all God’s creatures; he must therefore be God to whom is given all this.

[5] God has also commanded us not to worship strange gods. Now, we read in John that, according to the will of God, we should honor the Son even as we honor the Father. These are the words of John 5:19-23, where Christ says to the Jews: “Verily, Verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and greater works than these will he show him, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth the dead and giveth them life, even so the Son also giveth life to whom he will. For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son; that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father that sent him.” These are, to my mind, truly clear and distinct words concerning the divinity of Christ. Now, as God commands that we should have only one God, and should not render to any other creature the glory which belongs to God and is due him, and yet he gives this glory to Christ, Christ must indeed be God.

[6] Paul says in Romans 1:2-4: “The Gospel he promised afore through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was born of

the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; even Jesus Christ our Lord.” Therefore, according to the flesh he began to exist, but according to the spirit he existed from eternity, although it was not clearly understood before; as it was not necessary that we should make a God of him, but only that we should declare and understand that he is the Son of God. This is the work of the Holy 3 Spirit, as Christ himself says in John 16:13: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth.” And elsewhere the Evangelist writes, John 17:1-5: “These things spoke Jesus; and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee: even as thou gavest him authority over all flesh, that to all whom thou hast given him, he should give eternal life. And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ. I glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do. And now, Father. glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”

[7] We also read in Psalm 2:8: “Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” He is truly enthroned king of all. He is God’s child, and the world it subject to no other prince or king. Likewise, in another psalm, David openly calls him God, when he says: “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a scepter of equity is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” Psalm 45:6-7. God will make no one such a king who is not God, for he will not give the reins out of his hands; he alone will be the Lord over heaven and earth, death, hell, the devil and all creatures. If he, then, makes Christ Lord of all that is created, Christ must truly be God.

[8] We can, therefore, have no surer foundation for our belief in the divinity of Christ than that we enwrap and en-’close our hearts in the declarations of the Scriptures. The Scriptures gradually and beautifully ‘lead us to Christ; first revealing him to us as a man, then as the lord of all creatures. and finally as God. Thus we are successfully led to the true knowledge of God. But the philosophers and the wise men of this world would begin at the top and so they have become fools. We must begin at the

bottom and gradually advance in knowledge, so that the words of Proverbs 25:27 may not apply to us: “It is not good to eat much honey; so for men to search out their own glory is grievous.”

[9] Our faith in these two persons, the Father and the Son, is therefore sufficiently established and confirmed by passages from the Scriptures. But of the Holy Spirit, the third person, we read in Matthew 28:19 that Christ sent forth his disciples, saying to them: “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Here divinity is also ascribed to the Holy Spirit, since I may trust or believe in no one but God. And I must trust only in one who has power over death, hell, the devil and all creatures, whose authority withholds them from harming me, and who can save me. None will suffice except one in whom I may trust absolutely. Now, Christ in this passage commands that we should also believe and trust in the Holy Spirit; therefore he must be God. In the Gospel according to John, Christ speaks frequently to his disciples of the Holy Spirit, his power or existence.

[10] In Genesis 1:2 we read: “And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” But this passage is not as clear as the one last quoted; the Jews attack it and affirm that the word “spirit” in Hebrew signifies “wind.”

[11] David says in Psalm 33:6: “By the word of Jehovah were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the Spirit of his mouth.” Here it is quite clear that the Holy Spirit is God, because the heavens and all their hosts were made by him. And, again, David says in Psalm 139:7-8: “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there.” Now, this cannot be said of any creatures — that it is everywhere and fills the whole world — but only of God, the Creator.

[12] Therefore, we cling to the Scriptures, those passages which testify of the Trinity of God, and we say: I know very well that in God there are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; but how they can be one I do not know, neither should I know it. This may suffice for the first part. Now we will come back to the Gospel and say something on that in the time that is left us.

II. Explanation of this Gospel. Christ's Conversation with Nicodemus.

I. The Conversation in General.

[1] In this Gospel you see clearly what reason and free-will can do. You may see it distinctly in Nicodemus, who was the best of the best, a prince and leader of the 3 Pharisees, and the Pharisees held first place in their day. They were, however, in the highest things — in spiritual life — altogether blind and dead before God, however holy, wise, good and mighty they may have been considered by men. The longer Nicodemus associates with Christ, the less he understands Christ, although he is expected to understand only earthly things and the manner of Christ's death. Reason is so blind that it can neither perceive nor understand the things of God, nor all things which properly belong to its own sphere. This is a blow to nature and human reason, which have been rated so high by philosophy and the wise men of this world; the wise ones have said that reason always strives to attain the best.

[2] God has here given us an example showing that even the best in nature must fail. In instances where human nature is at its best it is blind, not to speak of its envy and hatred. Christ has here demonstrated by examples, words and deeds that human reason is altogether blind and dead before God, Hence, it cannot appreciate divine things nor desire them.

[3] Now, Nicodemus, who is a pious and well-meaning man, cannot grasp the work and Word of God; how then would Annas and Caiaphas? He comes to the Lord at night, which he did from fear, not desiring to be called a heretic by others. From this we may conclude that he was in nature an old Adam, cowardly seeking Christ by night, and that he did not yet possess the true light. If he had been a "new man," he would have come in the bright light of day, fearing no one. Because of his hypocrisy, the Lord deals sharply with him, cutting off his salutation and all further speech, as we shall see. Nicodemus approaches the Lord with these words: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him."

II. The Conversation in Detail

[4] He thinks that he has uttered these words in all sincerity; but there is still the old life and nothing but hypocrisy. For this reason Christ will not accept his salutation, but will take from Nicodemus everything in which he feels secure and will make a “new” man of him, giving him a new heart and enabling him to walk 3 by faith. He says to him: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

[5] Christ’s words are as if to say: No, my dear Nicodemus, I am not moved by your beautiful words. You must give up your old life and become a new man. You have not the faith which you say you have; you are still afraid. Although the natural man hears the Word of God, the Gospel, and delights in it, yet it does not enter the heart. Therefore, we must slay reason and experience the new birth. This is what Christ means when he says that we must be born anew. Reason cannot understand this, wherefore Nicodemus replies: “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?”

[6] Thus reason takes offense at the Spirit, imagines unreality’s and conceives of this new birth as a natural birth. Therefore Christ proceeds, explaining this birth to him to clear his misunderstanding, and says: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

[7] In other words: The new birth of which I speak must be otherwise explained. I do not abolish the natural birth but I speak of a birth which is of water and the Spirit. Then he continues: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is borne of the Spirit is spirit.”

[8] These words cannot be grasped by reason, which seeks to explain the words “Spirit” and “water,” speculating how such birth may be. Here it sees nothing in the nature of a birth and therefore plays the part of a fool by saying: How can a man be born of water and the Spirit? Indeed, such a source would produce but water bubbles.

[9] Now, Christ speaks and destroys reason, saying: “Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things?” You should teach others the spiritual birth, that they might become righteous, but you yourself do not understand it. He defeats reason and the whole law and says: My friend, do you not know how these things can be? It is plain to me, as it was also to the prophets, who corroborate my words. Renounce your reason and

close your eyes; cling only to my Word and believe it. Again he says: “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew. The wind bloweth where it will, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.”

[10] As if to say: You presume to judge spiritual things by your reason, and at the same time you cannot understand the simple things of nature. He calls Nicodemus’ attention to the wind. No philosopher or scientist has ever been able to comprehend and describe the nature of the wind — where it has its beginning or where it ends. We cannot see where the wind comes from, or how it blows past us, or how far it goes. Now, if we cannot by our reason fathom those things which we see daily in nature, much less will we be able to fathom with our reason the divine works which God accomplishes within us.

[11] How a man is born anew may easily be told in words. When, however, it is a question of experience, as it was here with Nicodemus, then it is a hard matter to understand and it requires effort to attain the experience. It is easy to say: We must blind our reason, disregard our feelings, close our eyes and only cling to the Word — finally die and yet live. But to persevere in this, when it becomes a matter of experience and when we are really tested, requires pains and labor. It is a very bitter experience.

[12] An example of this new birth we have in Abraham, whose son was to inherit the world and whose seed was to be like the stars in heaven, as was promised him in Genesis 15:5 Then God came and commanded him to slay his son. Now had Abraham acted as reason dictated, he would have concluded thus: Aye, God has given me this seed, by which he has promised to increase my family, and now he commands me to offer him up as a sacrifice. Surely, God cannot command this; it must be the devil. But Abraham slays reason and honors God, thinking: God is so powerful that he can raise my son from death and increase my family through him. or he can give me another son, or effect his purpose in some other way, which I do not know. So Abraham commends all to God. Here Abraham leaves his old life and surrenders himself to God, believes in him and becomes a new man. Then the angel comes and says to him: “Abraham, Abraham, lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him,; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son,

from me,” Genesis 22:11-12. Abraham could not have imagined that God would thus come to his rescue; nay, he had already in his heart slain his son.

[13] Now, the beginning of this birth was in baptism. The water is baptism; the Spirit is that grace which is given to us in baptism. The result of this birth is clearly seen in the hour of death or in times of test by poverty and temptation. He who is born of the flesh fights to defend himself, looks hither and thither, employs his reason to make his living. But he who is born anew reasons thus: I am in God’s hands, who has preserved and nourished me before in a wonderful manner: he will also feed and preserve me in the future and save me from, all sorrow and misfortune.

[14] When we are about to die we feel that we must depart and we know not whither; the house of shelter is not ready and we know not whether it will be a white or a black house. For where there is flesh and blood, there is still the old Adam, who does not know where he shall go, whether below or above, to the left or to the right; on what he should rest his soul and depart. Then there is anxiety and misery in the nature of a real hell; for the torment of hell is nothing but fear, terror, dread and despair. But if I believe in God and am born anew, I close my eyes and do not grope about. I am willing that the condition of the soul be changed entirely, and I think: O God, my soul is in thy hands; thou hast preserved it during my life and I have never known where thou hast put it. Neither do I wish to know, to which place thou wilt now assign it. I only know that it is in thy hands and thou wilt take care of it. Thus we must abandon the life of the flesh and enter into a new life, being dead to the old. This is a real dying and not merely a painful sensation, like the scratching off of a scab, as the philosophers have said; and they have compared the entering upon the new life with the rinsing of a pot by the cook. There must be a real change and an entire transformation of nature, for the natural state and natural feeling must be completely overthrown.

[15] Now, the Lord says here: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” “Flesh” means the whole man, with body and soul, reason and will, who is not yet born of the Spirit. For the soul has entered so deeply into the flesh to guard and protect it from harm that the soul is more flesh than the flesh itself. We see it in death, when the flesh does not willingly give up life because the soul is still present; but as soon as the soul has departed, the body allows itself to be mutilated and permits everything that may be done

with it. The Lord our God also alludes to this with these words in Genesis. spoken before the deluge: "My Spirit shall not strive with 3 man forever, for that he also is flesh." Man does not desire the destruction of the flesh, or, in other words, to die; but this is the will of the Spirit, wherefore he desires that the flesh may soon be destroyed. Thus the nature of the soul must change and it must become an enemy of the body, desiring that the body may die, so that it (the soul) may enter into a new life. That this will be, we are to believe, but not to know how. It is the work of God, and he has not commanded us to fathom it.

[16] Thus the Lord would point out with this simile of the wind that the spiritual man is neither here nor there and is not limited to any time or place. He does not put on a hood, neither does he do any of the things that are merely material. for he knows that they will not avail. In brief, no pilgrimage. no fasting, no money given for masses, no good work at all. is of any avail; there must be a new life, that is, all our works must perish and come to naught, as has been said. The new life, however, consists not in dependence upon works, but it abides and perseveres in the grace of God, which he gives us through Jesus Christ. If I would then hold my ground, my works and all I have devised must fall to pieces and come to naught. Consequently, there is in the new man no definite beginning nor end. We indeed hear the blowing of the wind. but do not know whence it comes and whither it goes. Thus it is here: A man preaches and the Word is in his mouth, but no one knows whence it comes to him, what it will accomplish and where it will bring forth fruit.

[17] Hence, we conclude from this passage that a Christian should not depend upon works, upon certain places or persons. Reason wonders at this and inquires: How can it be that everyone, who is born of the Spirit is to be compared with the wind and that all our works mean nothing? What results can possibly follow? If this were so, all priests, monks and nuns, with their beautiful and worthy lives, must be condemned. Christ answers Nicodemus' question, "How can these things be?" as follows: "Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things?"

[18] In other words: You surely should know this, because you are one of those who teach the people, but I see that you know nothing of it. That which I have explained to you. namely, that we must be born anew, you should have taught the people. But you have taught them the contrary —

have endeavored to know whence the wind comes and whither it goes, have concerned yourselves about its blowing and 3 other useless things; but the things most necessary to you and the people, you have disregarded. Hear then what I tell you: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.”

[19] As if Christ said: Should I point out to you how these things can be? It cannot be done. You should believe me. since you say yourself that I am a teacher come from God. When I have said that a man must be born anew and that all your works are worthless, it cannot be demonstrated so that you may see it with your eyes; it can only be explained in words. If you believe it, you will understand it. But Nicodemus did not understand it. Therefore, the Lord, disclosing more and more to him his folly, continues: “If I told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

[20] I have only told you of earthly things — how we must all come to naught; that man is dust and must return to dust: how the wind blows — and yet you do not understand it. What would you know if I should tell you much about God? I have spoken to you about insignificant things, and you do not understand them. How would you understand if I told you that our immortal bodies, after death, will shine as bright and clear as the sun? And what if I told you of what comes after death? You would understand this much less. He then explains to Nicodemus a few of these heavenly things and continues: “And no one hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven even the Son of man, who is in heaven.”

[21] Reason does not understand what this means, for it is a sermon from heaven; as if Christ would say: The Son of man came upon earth and yet remained in heaven. He again ascended into heaven; that is, he became Lord of heaven and earth and all creatures. Know then that I am he who has come down, who even descended into hell, and yet remained in heaven. For when Christ was in death, he lived; when he was considered the most insignificant and despised of men, he was before God regarded as the most worthy of honor, and the greatest. He ascended again into heaven, after he rose from the dead, assumed again all power, and has become Lord of all creatures on earth. No one has followed him in this.

[22] We are truly also in death, but at the same time we are in heaven like Christ. Sin and death rule within us, but they have not been able to Conquer Christ; nay, in his hand and in his power are life and death, as he says in John 10:17-18: “Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” No one but Christ obtains such power that all things are subject to him. Although before the world he was dead, yet he lived before God, his Father; and although before the world he was in great disgrace and shame, he was yet greatly honored by God. But all this he did only for our sakes. For in the fall of our first father Adam, we are all fallen. Christ had to atone for this fall by his disgrace, shame, ignominy and death, so that we might again obtain honor and life.

[23] Christ rebukes Nicodemus here again, as he had done before when he said: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” He says in effect: You presume to, ascend into heaven and to escape from hell, but you will fail. Flesh and blood cannot enter into heaven. Only he ascends into heaven, who has come down from heaven, so that the control of all may be in his hands. He can destroy all that lives, make alive all that is dead and make poor all that is rich. It is then here determined that nothing can enter into heaven that is born of the flesh. But Christ’s ascent into heaven, as well as his descent to us, was for our benefit, so that we, who are carnal, might also enter heaven. Yet it is only on the condition that first our mortal body must perish. In short, we cannot affect anything by our own works, for God will save us only through Christ, who alone is the ladder by means of which we ascend into heaven. How this ascent into heaven is granted to us, how it becomes our own, Christ explains when he says: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life.”

[24] What does Christ mean by this? He means that all who would enter heaven and follow him must become new creatures; he ascended into heaven that we might follow him. The narrative to which Christ refers is written in Numbers 21:6-9: “And Jehovah sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, because we have spoken against Jehovah, and against thee; pray unto 3 Jehovah, that he take away

the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And Jehovah said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a standard: and it shall come to pass, that everyone that is bitten, when he seeth it. shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and set it upon the standard: and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked unto the serpent of brass. he lived.”

[25] Christ uses this Scripture to point to himself; his reference is as if to say: Just as the Jews in the desert, who were bitten by fiery serpents, were saved by looking upon the serpent of brass, which Moses set upon a standard, so it is also with regard to me. None who looks upon me will perish; that is, all those who have an evil conscience, are tormented by sin and death, should believe that I have come down for their sakes and have ascended again. Then neither sin nor death shall harm them; nay, they shall not perish in all eternity. Whoever would enter heaven and be saved, must be saved by this serpent, which is Christ; otherwise he will perish. Thus, this Gospel condemns freewill and everything of human accomplishment and points only to this serpent.

[26] The spiritual significance of the narrative in Numbers is this: The serpent, which bit and poisoned the Jews is sin, death and an evil conscience. I know that I must die and that I am under the power of death; I cannot free myself and must remain in this state until a dead serpent is set up for me, one which, because it is not alive, can harm no one, but rather benefit, as did the serpent of Moses. Now, this is Christ. I see him hanging on the cross, not beautiful nor greatly honored. If his death upon the cross were in fashion to win for him the plaudits of men, the flesh might say that he deserved his honors and his exaltation by his works. But I see him hanging in disgrace on the cross, like a murderer and malefactor; thus, reason must say that he is cursed before God. The Jews believed that this was true and they could only consider him the most cursed of all men before God and the world, for they remembered this passage in the Law of Moses: “He that is hanged is accursed of God.” Deuteronomy 21:23.

[27] Moses had to set up a serpent of brass, which looked like the fiery serpents, but did not bite or harm anyone, nay. it rather saved the people. Thus, Christ also has the form and the appearance of a sinner, but has become my salvation; his death is my life; he atones for my sin and takes away from me the 3 wrath of the Father. The living, fiery serpent is within

me, for I am a sinner, but in him is a dead serpent; he was indeed regarded a sinner, but he never committed any sin.

[28] If, then, man believes that the death of Christ has taken away his sin, he becomes a new man. The carnal, natural man cannot believe that God will gratuitously take away and forgive us all our sins. Reason argues in this manner: You have sinned, you must also atone for your sin. Then it invents one good work after another and endeavors to take away sin by good works. But the Gospel of Christ is: If you have fallen in sin, another must atone for you, if a man believes this, he becomes one with Christ, and has everything that is Christ's.

[29] This Gospel, then, signifies that our works are nothing, and that all human power can do is useless, but faith in Christ does it all.

Trinity Sunday. Second Sermon. Christ's Sermon to Nicodemus on the New Birth, and the Righteousness that Avails before God.

Text: John 3:1-15.

1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:
2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can

he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3:1-15

[1] This is another beautiful Gospel and treats of the foremost and chief doctrine in Christendom, namely, the article, How a person becomes holy and righteous in the sight of God. And there is here placed before us a beautiful allegory, showing how reason at its best and holiness in its highest state on earth run aground upon the genuine truth and spiritualness of this matter. For this person, Nicodemus, is highly praised by the Evangelist John, who states that he was great both as to the esteem with which he was regarded among his fellow men, and also as to his beautiful life in accordance with the Law. He was a ruler of the Jews, that is, a counselor in their governmental affairs; and in addition a Pharisee, that is, one of the most learned men, for they were regarded as the wisest. Moreover, he was one of the most pious men; for the members of this sect. were considered

the greatest saints. Thus, no fault or blame can be laid on him, and he cannot be made greater: in the government he is a ruler, in knowledge the wisest, and in his life the saintliest.

[2] Above these, there is in him another grace, namely, that he has a fondness for Christ, the Lord. This was a virtue far above the other three. The other rulers and Pharisees, though they were the wisest and holiest men, persecuted Christ and allied him with the devil; and no one dared to grumble at their decision; for the grumbler was expelled from the council and unchurched. Still, Nicodemus is so holy as to love Christ and to approach him in secret in order to speak with him and show his love for him.

[3] Indeed, he must have been a particularly excellent man among the Pharisees and a man as truly pious as he could be by nature and according to the Law, earnestly seeking the truth and inquiring how and what men were teaching and preaching. Being a wise man, he also observed that this Jesus must be an extraordinary person, and was moved by his miracles to desire to hear him personally and to speak with him regarding his doctrine. For, no doubt, he had heard and learned that John the Baptist recently had introduced a new sort of preaching and baptism and had proclaimed the Messiah, who was then coming, while he had sharply and severely attacked and reproved the Pharisees, as this man is now also doing. Accordingly, he is moved to go to him and to hear what it is that he teaches, and what he is reprovng. For an intelligent person like himself cannot understand why there should be anything deserving censure or blame in the Pharisees' holy life according to the Law and in their beautiful works.

[4] Therefore, he goes to Christ with thoughts like these: Christ will rejoice to see me come and will be highly pleased because such a great and excellent man, one of the rulers and of the best of men, so humbles himself and shows such honor to a lowly person like Christ as to go to him and to seek his friendship, a thing Christ dare not expect of anyone. Thus he sets out in a pleasant mood, expecting to be made welcome and to be very kindly received. Nor has he the least fear that possibly he may be reprovng or put to school, but he imagines that, since he is acting like a good friend, Christ will in turn treat him respectfully and kindly. Occasionally it still may happen that an earnest preacher is deceived by a person of this sort and

allows the good opinion expressed to tickle him, causing him to flatter and fawn in turn.

[5] Nicodemus, then, begins with these words: “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God” etc. That is great praise for this preacher, by which Nicodemus offers his testimony that Christ’s doctrine is from God; that is, that it is genuine truth and God’s Word, notwithstanding Christ was not thus esteemed by all the Pharisees and rulers, but rather considered a seditious spirit and an impostor who had come forward without a commission from the proper authorities, and, in opposition to them, would attach the people to himself etc. Nevertheless, since Christ introduces a doctrine other than that which they had learned heretofore from the Law, and since he assails the Pharisees so vigorously, Nicodemus is as yet perplexed and desires to know what better and different things Christ can possibly teach. His remarks are as if to say: We see and know very well that your doctrine is beyond reproach and censure and must be true and divine; and whoever wants to bear witness to the truth must so confess. For this is 3 proven by the signs and wonders which you do and which no other ever has done nor can do. However, what do you mean by bringing forward another doctrine and by reproving us? Are our doctrine and works, then, vain and valueless? What do you find in them to censure? We surely have the Law of Moses, which, without a doubt, was given by God. Why, then, do you reprove us when we exert ourselves with all diligence to keep and fulfill the Law, as though God had no pleasure therein and we could not thereby enter heaven? And why do you receive publicans and other manifest sinners instead? What other and better things with which to please God can be taught or practiced?

[6] Thus you see that the question which Nicodemus seeks to have answered by Christ is none other than, How may a person lead a righteous life in the sight of God or, as the apostles express it, how become righteous and obtain eternal life? To this question Christ returns a curt and dry answer; he shows himself an altogether different person than Nicodemus had expected to find him. First, he affronts Nicodemus rather harshly, and repels him, as it were, with a thunderbolt, saying: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

[7] This is a hard text indeed, and an unfriendly reply to so friendly a greeting. For with these words he upsets all pretensions of Nicodemus; yea,

he demolishes and condemns all his works and life. He means to say: You consider me not qualified to censure your beautiful discipline and worship as Pharisees, and unable to teach anything better; that is, you do not regard me more than a teacher and instructor of human works, even as you place no higher esteem on your Messiah and expect him to be no more than a person who will praise and laud, guard and keep, your Law and regulations, and who on that account will place you in high honor and authority. But since you take me for a master come from God, I will tell you something that you have not heard before and do not know: My dear Nicodemus, do not imagine that you will please God and be saved by your life and works, no matter how beautiful and precious they may be, even though they be according to the Law. Although it is true that God has given the Law and demands that you keep it, still you are not righteous in God's sight on that account; for it is one thing to have the Law and another to fulfill it. It is far from being fulfilled by your outward performance of its works. It must be kept wholly and perfectly, with body and soul, and from the innermost heart, without any disobedience and sin whatever. You Pharisees and self-righteous people are not doing this; for you imagine that you can give God his due by outward holiness, and, relying on and being secure in such holiness, you live in a false confidence, void of the fear of God, yea, you despise his wrath against sin. Moreover, you despise and condemn other people who do not regard your holiness highly and do not pattern after it.

[8] To state the matter briefly, he says: Your life and works, which you consider holy, and those of all Pharisees, yea, of all men, are void and avail nothing in the sight of God. A change must take place by which a person is born anew, that is, he must become an entirely different person; otherwise he cannot enter the kingdom of God. There, now, you hear what is my doctrine, about which you have inquired. I do not teach in opposition to the Law of God, to destroy it, but I only charge you with not having kept it, yea, with not understanding it, though you pretend to be its instructors and imagine that you are fulfilling it. You imagine that I ought to preach the Law, the same as you do, and that if the laws of Moses, which you claim to have kept, are not sufficient, I ought to bring to you a new and better law teaching good works, just as you set up many self-elected works in addition to God's Law, as though you had already fulfilled it.

[9] But I am not telling you of new articles, laws or works, for those the Law enjoins are already more than you can do and keep. But I teach that you must become altogether different persons. My teaching is not concerning what you must do or not do, but concerning what you must become. It aims not at the performance of new works, but first at being born anew; not at a different life, but at a different birth. It will not do to put the end before the beginning, or alongside of it; to expect fruit before or as soon as there is a root. The tree must first be made new and there must be a good and proper root, if the fruits and works are to be good. It is not the hand and foot or their actions that must be changed, but the person, that is, the entire man. If this has not taken place, works are of no value and of no avail whatever and a person cannot see the kingdom of God; in other words, he must remain under the condemnation of sin and everlasting death.

[10] This was, verily, strange and unheard of preaching, and a rough and surly answer to our holy Nicodemus who had come to the Lord well intentioned and thinking that he was in the right way. He had expected least of all that Christ would or could condemn his goodly life and his zeal in keeping the Law. On the contrary, he had hoped that Christ would have to praise them as an example to others, or that he would urge him to continue, or would suggest to him some other work which he was yet to do. Such he was prepared to hear and to do. And now he hears instead that Christ utterly rejects him and condemns all his good and holy living, thus proceeding in an altogether absurd manner. He praises Christ as a good man; Christ in turn accosts him, saying: And you are a bad man. He gives honor to Christ and calls him a teacher come from God; Christ in turn tells him that both his doctrine and life are wrong and have already been ruled out of heaven. For what else is the meaning of his words than this: You are doing many beautiful works and imagine yourself to be holy and without reproach, so that you must needs please God. But I tell you, all that you have done in your past life, or that you may still do in this life, is lost labor and condemned in God's sight, and not only your works but also your heart and your entire nature — all that you are and all that you do. All must be put aside; the tree with its root and fruits must be cast out and burned, and a new tree must be created.

[11] Thus, this first part of Christ's conversation with Nicodemus is nothing else than a real, sharp call to repentance. Christ, like a faithful

preacher, takes pity on Nicodemus because he is so ignorant and still very far from the kingdom of God. Hence he curtly closes and denies heaven to him, yea, he condemns him and hands him over to the devil, stating that, as he now lives or may be able to live in the future, he can never enter the kingdom of God, but must be lost and remain in the power of the devil, of death and of hell. He does this in order that Nicodemus may be brought to a knowledge of self and attain to a genuine understanding and life before God. Penitential preaching of this sort is particularly needed by people like Nicodemus, who pursue their course in the righteousness of their own works and claim to be holy and righteous in the sight of God because they are blameless in the eyes of the world.

[12] Thus, Christ always begins the preaching of the Gospel with this point: He first reveals and teaches that which no man's reason has gathered or known from the Law, namely, that all men in their natural state and life are condemned and under sin. St. Paul also proves this conclusively in the very beginning of his Epistle to the Romans. And this is the first sentence and conclusion here laid down 3 that, in his natural state and with his every ability, man cannot fulfill the Law of God, though he may attempt to keep it; that keeping the Law does not mean doing its work outwardly, as far as human strength is able; and that, consequently, the Law cannot aid man to become holy in the sight of God nor save him from sin and everlasting wrath.

[13] If this were in man's power and could be brought about in our nature by means of the Law, Christ could not say regarding all men, as he does here: "Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." That is certainly saying that man in his old nature, no matter to what eminent height he may attain by his gifts of reason, wisdom and virtue, cannot rid himself of sin nor of the power of death, nor can he please God. In short, there must be an entirely different being; that is, the entire person must be changed so as to obtain an altogether new mind and heart, and new thoughts and feelings.

[14] Thus you see overthrown, as by a mighty thunderbolt, all the teaching and boasting of men who undertake to instruct people how to become righteous by the strength and works of human nature, or who would at least have works placed alongside of faith, and who claim that men must contribute something themselves toward their righteousness. For here you

are clearly told that a person must be born anew or changed before he can see the kingdom of God or do anything to please God. Now, man surely cannot contribute anything to his birth by his own works; nay, before he can be active at all, his birth must have been accomplished. Then, since a new birth is demanded here, the works and activity of the old birth can never be of any value or aid; in fact, they are all rejected and condemned beforehand.

[15] Nor can the claim stand that the works which follow the new birth contribute something toward our righteousness, for the new birth must have occurred before a person can be active by virtue of it; that is, one must first belong to the kingdom and to heaven before he begins to do works that are pleasing to God. But this point will be more fully explained by the following verses, in which Christ states the process of the new birth. We have here only the introduction, in which he overthrows the Pharisee's conceit and establishes the contrary doctrine. On hearing this Nicodemus becomes perplexed, and because he does not know what to make of Christ's words, he blurts out and says: "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

[16] He wishes to say: What a queer and absurd statement and teaching that is! Who ever heard of a person being born anew, or that it is at all possible to be born differently from the way in which one has been born? What do you mean by proposing and demanding such an impossible thing? If you wish to teach people, you must tell them something that a human being can do. This is the answer which the wisdom and reason of men return to the preaching of repentance and of the new birth, by which the Law receives its true glory. And, indeed, they must answer thus, because they do not know otherwise. Owing to that outward training in a holy life which a person can obtain by his own strength, provided he hear the Law, Nicodemus cannot endure to hear these things so commendable in the eyes of the world shall all be counted worthless and shall be condemned, especially since there are very few men who thus lead a beautiful and virtuous life. All the rulers of this world, intelligent, wise and great though they are, consider it harmful teaching to depreciate such a beautiful life, and on that account charge the Gospel with aiming to forbid good works etc.

[17] However, by so doing, they testify to their own blindness and ignorance in these divine matters. Nicodemus, who passes for a teacher and instructor, by the confession of his own mouth, seals his wisdom with

greater foolishness, because he is dreaming about a natural birth from father and mother and imagines that he comprehends Christ's meaning and has effectually blocked his aim. Such is the corrupt habit of human reason, which ever assumes to pass judgment on the Word of God and to act as its tutor, though it does not understand it. As if Christ, whom Nicodemus has to acknowledge a teacher come from God, were not wise enough himself to know that a person cannot be born again in physical birth, and that such a birth would not benefit him! And, indeed, Christ himself meets this conception. "Jesus answered: Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

[18] He means to say: You need not instruct me how to express myself. I know very well what I have said, and in order that you may know that a person does not enter the kingdom of God by his own ability, I say again that he must be born differently, or he cannot enter. However, I do not speak of natural birth, of one's descent from 3 father and mother, of which you are dreaming because you know of no other birth; but I am speaking of a different birth, a new birth, of water and the Spirit. You certainly have heard me reject this very birth from father and mother by which you and all other men, Jews or not Jews, have been born. Even were I to grant this to be the meaning of a person's new birth, still, a person might be born over again from his mother's womb as many as a hundred times, and yet every new birth of this kind would not be different nor better than the former. The reason he declares as follows: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

[19] These are two clear sayings by which he overthrows the Pharisee's conception and dream of a natural birth, and explains his opening remarks, in which he had stated that, unless a person receives a different birth, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. The term, "that which is born of the flesh," defines all that man is, and is able to do, according to his human nature in its present state, since Adam. For the Scripture significance of "flesh" is the natural man, in his human sense, born from father and mother, as he lives, works, thinks, speaks, and acts, no matter when, how often, or of whom he is born, or whether he is called a Jew or a gentile. John 1:12 speaks of being born of blood, that is, born in the natural way, from the holy fathers, or obtaining birth through the will of man and therewith accepting membership among the people and children of God. All this is nothing but

flesh, that is, it is void of the Spirit. However, to be void of the Spirit means nothing else than what he terms not being able to enter the kingdom of God, that is, being condemned in sin, under the wrath of God, to everlasting death.

[20] This certainly is a curt, unvarnished, solemn and awful verdict on all men in their natural state. It lays down the conclusion that by the teaching and works of the Law, such works as man is able to do in accordance with it, no person becomes rid of sin nor is righteous in the sight of God, because his nature is not changed by works but remains what it was before. For this reason no person can, under the Law, enter the kingdom of God nor obtain life everlasting.

[21] Again, he says: "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." He calls "Spirit" that which God works in us above the ability of human nature, namely, such spiritual knowledge, light and understanding as he reveals to us, to the end that we may know God, turn to him, lay hold of his grace, and cling to him. In order that man may receive these revelations, his heart must first be renewed and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, that he may learn to know God's will toward him and may understand the way to obtain grace and everlasting life.

[22] The preaching and teaching of the Law alone cannot do this; it, indeed, demands works and obedience of us, but since these things are not possible to our nature, which is characteristic of the very reverse, the only effect of the Law, when correctly understood, is to make us guilty and to condemn us to everlasting hell under the wrath of God. And it is for this purpose that it must be preached, for it was given by God to the end that man should learn this truth first. Now, if man is not to remain under condemnation, but is to look to God for grace and comfort, the preaching of a different word must be added. We are here told that such word is the preaching and office of the Holy Spirit, revealed and brought down from heaven by Christ, the Son of God. Christ speaks of this office now and explains more fully later.

[23] Thus there is shown us by this passage the reason for what the first part of this discourse has stated, namely, the reason why a person cannot enter the kingdom of God in the nature he has by birth, and why another birth is necessary, one which must be accomplished by the Holy Spirit.

Christ rebukes here not only human ignorance and error, but he also begins to teach what the new birth is and how it takes place, although he does not here include all parts which belong to it, but shows, in the first place, only *causas efficientes*, the causes and means from which this new birth springs and by which it is effected. Later he will tell how it is acquired, and by whom; also the way to receive it. Therefore, we must look at these words a little more closely, so as to learn what being born of water and the Spirit means.

[24] Note, in the first place, that he directs Nicodemus to the external ordinance in the Church, namely, to preaching and baptism, because he says that one must be born of water and the Spirit. He is speaking of the ordinance which had been introduced by John the Baptist, the forerunner and servant of Christ. The Pharisees and Nicodemus knew this very well, because they had seen it. By pointing him to this ordinance, Christ wishes to confirm the preaching and baptism of John as institutions that are to be in force and operation forever, and are appointed by God³ for the purpose of the new birth, and so it is that no one shall go to heaven who does not accept them or who despises them. It is as if he were to say: If you wish to see the kingdom of God at all, you will all have to accept this very preaching and baptism that John practiced, and which you Pharisees were unwilling to accept because you would not suffer yourselves to be reproved by him and were offended at his new and unheard of preaching against your holiness by the Law. All your Mosaical and legal washings, purifications, sacrifices, worship and holiness will be of no help nor benefit to you. You can enter the kingdom of heaven and be saved in no other way than by this ordinance which preaches Christ and baptizes in his name.

[25] This ordinance he magnifies by stating that it is the office and work of the Holy Spirit, by which a person is born anew; that it is not simply baptizing with water, but that the Holy Spirit also is present. A person thus baptized, is baptized not with water only, but with the Holy Ghost. The presence of the Spirit could not be claimed for any other washings and baptisms with water, such as the ceremonial washings of the Jews, else a new baptism would not have been necessary; and it could not be claimed that another means aside from the Mosaical Law and form of worship was necessary for a person's new birth of the Spirit. The reason is plainly this,

because through the Mosaical ceremonies the Holy Spirit is not bestowed and does not act.

[26] Thus he shows that there is no other means by which a person is born anew and enters the kingdom of God than the office of preaching and baptism, and that the Holy Spirit is connected with this office and by its means operates in the hearts of men. He does not speak of the Spirit in his hidden and unknown qualities, such as he is in his divine person and essence, without the means by which he has revealed himself, but of the Spirit as revealed in the external ordinance, by which he is heard and seen, namely, by the office of Gospel preaching and the administration of the Sacrament. God does not intend to come and act through his Holy Spirit secretly and privily, nor deal with each individual in a particular manner; in that case, who could know for certain where and how to seek and find the Holy Spirit? But he has ordained that the Holy Spirit shall be revealed to the ears and eyes of men by the Word and Sacrament, and shall be active through this 3 external ordinance, so that men may know that the effects which there take place are truly caused by the Holy Spirit.

[27] Therefore, the words “Except one be born anew of water and the Spirit,” are equivalent to saying, A person must be born anew by the preaching of the Gospel and the ordinance of baptism, by which the Holy Spirit operates. For by means of the Word he enlightens the heart and reveals God’s wrath against sin; and, on the other hand, by showing us the grace of God which has been promised for the sake of his Son, Christ, he so kindles our hearts that we begin to believe and soon turn to God, take comfort from his grace and call upon him. And in order to rouse and strengthen our faith he adds baptism as a sure sign, along with the Word, to show that he washes away and blots out our sin and promises at all times firmly to keep for us this grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit which he has promised us. Of this more shall be said at another time.

[28] Observe from this text how Christ in plain words ascribes to baptism, which he calls water, such glory and power as to say that the Holy Spirit is present in it, and that by its means a person is born anew. By this statement all false doctrines and errors against the doctrine of faith and baptism are overthrown. Among them, in the first place, is that of the papists, and others like them, who seek to obtain righteousness and salvation by their own works. For you are told here that a person’s own

merit and holiness, which he possesses by his old birth from flesh and blood, or has achieved by following his own choice and imagination, are insufficient and avail nothing toward this end. There must be a new birth by holy baptism, toward which man can contribute nothing himself, but through the will and grace of God the Holy Spirit is bestowed by means of the preaching of the Word and by water, which act as father and mother at this new birth by which one becomes a new, pure and holy person and an heir to heaven.

[29] In the second place, the pretense of the Anabaptists and kindred sects is here overthrown, who teach people to seek the Spirit outside of and without the Word and Sacraments, by special revelations and operations from heaven, without means etc. Yea, they despise blessed baptism, considering it no more than mere useless water. Hence they are in the habit of saying blasphemously: What can a handful of water benefit the soul? However, Christ says clearly that the Holy Spirit is present with this water, and states that a person must be born anew of this water. He certainly refers to real, natural water, such as John used and as he commanded his disciples to use when baptizing. Therefore St. Paul in Ephesians 5:26, calls baptism a washing of water by which the Church of Christ is cleansed, and in Titus 3:5, he calls baptism the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

[30] Yea, Christ so orders his words in this passage as to place at the head “water” and after it the “Spirit,” to indicate that we must not look for the Spirit without and outside of the external means, but know that the Spirit intends to operate in, through, and with the external means and ordinance. Hence both must remain united, and a person must be born anew, of water, by the Holy Spirit, or of the Holy Spirit with and by water. Aside from this instance, it is quite true that, if there were water only without the Spirit, there would be no greater effects than in other water and washings, and there certainly would not result a new birth. For this reason, this birth is called a birth, not of water only, but also of the Spirit, besides and with the water. The Holy Spirit acting at this birth is the male, and the water is the female part, or mother.

[31] Moreover, you gather from these words that baptism is not such an unnecessary thing as the sect of the Anabaptists blasphemously claims, stating that one can easily omit it or put it off till old age; or gabbling that

baptism is of no benefit to infants, merely because they do not understand how it can be. There is here a plain saying which includes all men in this divine ordinance, namely, that all who wish to enter the kingdom of God must be born anew of water and the Spirit. Hence, it will not do at all to despise this matter, or to put it off, for that would be willfully despising and setting aside the ordinance of God. Such an action, indeed, could not be taken with the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Moreover, it is certain that Christ does not exclude infants in this passage, but they are embraced in it, and if they are to enter the kingdom of God, baptism is to be communicated and administered to them. He assuredly would have them born anew and desires to operate in them. In another place he commands that they shall be brought to him and says that of such as are brought is the kingdom of heaven. Now, if they are to come to Christ, they must not be denied the means and symbols by which Christ operates in them.

[32] But this I say of the common ordinance and rule, which ought to be observed wherever and whenever baptism can be obtained. In an extreme case, where it cannot be obtained, there must be exceptions, just as in similar cases of necessity; then the desire to be baptized must suffice, and the person must be brought to Christ and offered to him on the strength of his Word. Of this matter I do not wish to speak further at present. Now, this is what Christ has stated regarding regeneration by the baptism of water and the Spirit. He continues: “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew. The wind bloweth where it will, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.”

[33] It seems a marvelous and rare saying to Nicodemus, the wise, intelligent, holy Pharisee, that his work and holiness, and that of all men as well, is so utterly rejected that it is of no avail in the sight of God; that he must let go of it all, no matter how many and how great things he may have accomplished in his life; and that he must become another man. There is really nothing better of which Nicodemus has knowledge or that he understands how to do. Also, he is directed preeminently to this ordinance, in which nothing is done or seen except the external ceremony of baptizing one with water, and the hearing of the Word; and he is to believe that through the reception of these such a change takes place in one that he is born anew and becomes pure, holy and righteous in the sight of God, all of

which blessings cannot be attained in any way by human work and ability. Alas! he muses, how is this possible? What can be accomplished by such an insignificant matter as being baptized or bathed with water? Is it not a matter of far higher merit to exercise one's self with great earnestness and diligence in good works and holy worship according to the Law and to shine in the splendor of a beautiful, upright life and of great virtue? Can you name and extol anything nobler and better in all the world?

[34] While the Pharisee is thus musing and wondering, Christ replies, explaining to him by a parable what he had said about the new birth of water and the Spirit; he tells him that this matter is not to be considered by the rule of reason, which has regard to the brilliancy of meritorious works and exemplary life and admires them, imagining that they must be as commendatory in the sight of God as in its own estimation. My dear Nicodemus, he says, I will tell you how this takes place: Your conception of the matter is not the right one; you view it as you would anything perceptible to the senses or to reason. But this is a matter which is beyond the fathom of human reason and thought, and it is accomplished in man by the Holy Spirit.

[35] Its process in the heart is similar to the phenomenon of the wind, which blows and blusters when and where it will, and passes through all that grows and moves and lives in creation. In the case of the wind there is no more than a breath or air, which lies still for a while but suddenly begins to move, to blow and rush, and you do not know whence it comes. Now it blows here, now there, producing all kinds of sudden changes of weather, and yet you cannot see it nor conceive what it is; you only hear it rushing. You notice its presence, its stir and motion upon the water or in the fields of corn, but you cannot tell, when it strikes you, when or where or at what distance from you it took its start and how far beyond you it will stop blowing, nor can you appoint time, space and measure for its coming and going. In brief, it is in no man's power at all to bind and rule the wind, to start or to calm it; it moves freely, of its own accord, and does its work without let or hindrance, when, where, and in what manner it pleases. No man can do ought in this matter, nor discover the process and origin, but as Psalm 135:7 says, God brings it out of his treasures and secret places, which no man knows beforehand, nor can discover.

[36] “So is everyone,” he says, “that is born of the Spirit.” You must not stand gaping to see great and excellent works of specious holiness which strike the eye. You must not attempt to estimate and grasp these spiritual matters with your reason and according to the Law and external aspect, examining what great works the person is doing who is entitled to be called a person born anew and an heir of heaven, and how he is living and conducting himself. This matter cannot be thus grasped and comprehended, nor can it be pictured and represented in such a manner that we could say: Behold that person; he is a pious Jew and, moreover, a Pharisee who keeps the Law with great earnestness and diligence, hence he is a living saint and a child of God etc. But this new birth which begets children of God, or righteousness in the sight of God, is quite a different thing. It takes place in one’s heart, not by a person’s own choice or action — for that is all flesh and cannot see the kingdom of God — but by the word of the Gospel, which reveals to the heart both the wrath of God against men — inducing repentance — and his 3 grace through the Mediator, Christ, for the consolation and peace of their conscience in the sight of God.

[37] No peculiar or glorious manifestation, indeed, will be seen outwardly in this exalted and supreme work, for there is nothing required for it but the Word and water, which we hear and perceive, and yet the power and efficacy of the Holy Spirit is present, kindling and quickening the heart unto true fear of God, true confidence and comfort in his grace, and also unto true prayer, thus renewing the heart and causing a person who receives the Word into his heart to overcome God’s wrath, and sin, death, the flesh and the world, to turn to God sincerely and to conceive a desire and love for everything good.

[38] These are genuine, living works of the Holy Spirit, far greater and more glorious than the righteousness of man’s works, which latter possess indeed a great glamour, and are much vaunted in the eyes of men, but are merely dead things, powerless to change in any wise the heart, and which are not followed by genuine and unfailing comfort, and transformation of life. Man, in his own righteousness, remains in the old carnal state of mind, without repentance, in unbelief and doubt, in secret contempt, disobedience, hatred of and enmity against God. This is afterward evident in the real conflict and terror of conscience, where actual flight from God, despair and finally impatience and blasphemy against God, ensue.

[39] Such are the genuine fruits of the great and beautiful holiness of Pharisees. Their holiness is without the knowledge of Christ and without faith, and yet claims to be righteous and holy by the rule of the Law. In the end, the great and knotty problem arises which Paul in Romans 7:13 calls sin aroused by the Law. Sin is made exceedingly sinful by it; that is, it is made great and grievous, submerging a person and causing him to perish in everlasting death. Yet, previously, that same sin and hidden malice of the heart was for a while covered with the outward show of great and holy works in obedience to the Law, permitting the person to live secure in his carnal mind and, as St. Paul says, without the Law, that is, without a genuine knowledge and perception of sin and, hence, also utterly without the Spirit.

[40] On the other hand, wherever the Holy Spirit is present he effects a new heart and mind in one, who no longer flees from God but, though he knows and acknowledges that he has sinned and merited God's wrath, still takes comfort from the grace of Christ, which Christ has promised and proclaimed by the Word of God to those who repent and believe. Thus one obtains a childlike heart toward God as his dear Father, and can cheerfully come before him and call upon him by faith in the Mediator, Christ.

[41] Such a new heart and life, I say, is wrought in one by the Holy Spirit through no other outward or visible means than through the Word and baptism, though these produce no external show whatever. It is effected inwardly, before the least change can be seen in a person, and yet Christ says that it truly is, and is called, a birth of the Spirit. Reason and human wisdom cannot comprehend how so significant a work should be accomplished by things apparently so very insignificant. Though reason hears, still it does not believe. Nicodemus, too, is still more startled, wondering at these words, and is rebuked by Christ because he wants to grasp the matter with his reason and not to believe it.

[42] We have, accordingly, in this parable a beautiful picture which clearly presents to our eyes the process of this new birth. In the first place, there is the external office of the Word and the power which the Holy Spirit exerts through it. As there are in the wind these two features — the blowing, which is the wind itself, and the sound, which is heard without, though the blowing is not seen nor felt except by the person who receives the force of the wind — in like manner there are two features in the new

birth; namely, the Word, which is a physical sound that one hears, and the Spirit, who operates with and by the Word. This power is not seen nor felt by anyone except him whom the Spirit seizes, and yet it certainly occurs wherever the external Word and baptism are agents. The Spirit, accordingly, can be seen and apprehended bodily, as it were, in this external institution, which provides us with a certain sign indicating where we are to look for him and where he operates, although the inward power is concealed to human eyes.

[43] Accordingly, as I have stated, you must not understand these words “born of the Spirit” as referring to the Holy Spirit in his invisible and incomprehensible divine essence in heaven, but to the manner in which he must be known and apprehended in the Church here on earth, in the Word and symbols. Hence, where 3 these things are heard and seen one may say: There you hear and see the Holy Spirit. Just as you say of the blowing of the wind: There you hear and see the wind. In brief, all that is accomplished by the office of the Word and baptism must be declared to be effected by the Holy Spirit. Just as Christ in our text calls that person born of the Spirit who has received the Word and baptism or as he says elsewhere, who believes and is baptized, etc. Mark 16:16.

[44] In the second place, this parable aptly shows that Christianity is not bound up in external affairs, places, persons, garments and other things, such as the outward holiness of the Jews required. A Christian is set up in the liberty of the Spirit, rid of the Law and all its bonds. He cannot be bound and made captive by any sort of laws, rules or works that may be proposed to him with a view of his becoming righteous through their efficacy in the sight of God. (We are not speaking now of his outward life, in which he may keep all laws, provided, however, it is done without injury and damage to his spiritual liberty of mind and conscience.) Hence, by faith in the Word and in his baptism he remains a free man, superior to all laws, because he has through Christ forgiveness of sin, the grace of God and the Holy Spirit, and governs his entire life accordingly. Through the Holy Spirit, who operates in his heart, he is now become righteous, and has been quickened into life, and, except as the Holy Spirit by the Word guides and directs him, he does not look for other teaching regarding works of holiness.

[45] Hence, as Christ here states, Christianity is like the wind which blows where it will, and yet no one sees or knows whence it comes and whither it goes, through what distance or extent it passes. In like manner, the Spirit in a Christian cannot be confined by rules and teachings, nor can it be determined by reason, but it must be untutored and unjudged by everybody, as St. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 2:15. It is not felt, heard and manifested outwardly except in the Word and in its proclamation, by which everybody must be governed, without regard to the persons of men who preach it, no matter how great and holy they are; the only requirement is that they exercise the office and Word of the Spirit aright.

[46] However, it is and always will be strange, a thing at which human wisdom will be offended and scandalized, that such a significant, sublime, divine work should be accomplished in so humble and mean a way, by the puny voice of a poor mortal who utters only these words: I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the 4 Son, and of the Holy Spirit; and again: By the command of the Lord Christ I announce to thee the forgiveness of sins, etc. There is nothing in these acts but the breath or sound of the words which strike the ear, and yet these great things are claimed to be accomplished by it, namely, that you are cleansed from sins, saved from everlasting death, quickened and made a new-born child of God.

[47] Much pain and labor are involved before a person is naturally born into this world; ten months he must lie in his mother's womb, and afterwards both mother and infant are in extreme danger of losing their lives in the birth which ushers man into only this miserable mortal life. But in this case of the new birth it is so easy and so soon accomplished that no work could be easier. There is only the Word spoken to one and he is baptized with water, and yet the effect — provided only the heart lays hold by faith — is so significant that the person in that moment is born to everlasting life and snatched out of everlasting death and hell.

[48] However, it is part of the perverse arrogance of reason that it wants, in so momentous a matter, to decide and to pass judgment, according to its conceptions, its way of looking at the matter, and after the standard of greatness as it appeals to the senses, refusing to regard the will of God and to recognize his ordinance, when he has issued his word of command in this matter, and hence it is he who is himself preaching, baptizing and operating through the external means. Divine results would necessarily follow, even if

he were to produce them through external means still more insignificant. That is the reason why Christ so harshly assails and rebukes Nicodemus, who undertakes to form his judgment here on the ground of his wisdom. “Nicodemus answered and said to him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.”

[49] Here you can see how into Nicodemus’ comprehension has utterly failed to enter what Christ had stated regarding the new birth by baptism and had explained by means of a parable, namely, that the true spiritual character of this matter could not be seen with the eye nor judged, determined and grasped, as Nicodemus wished to do, by the wisdom and understanding which he possessed from the teaching of the Law. He is so confounded by Christ’s reply that he steps back forthwith, and cannot help being offended at Jesus because the latter proposes what, in his opinion, is an absurd idea. His attitude is as if to say: Is only this single act of baptizing a man with water to be of value, and shall the Law, which God has explicitly commanded us to keep and which he has confirmed with great signs, be pronounced worthless and void? How is it possible that your baptism is such a momentous affair when a person cannot see at all its effects?

[50] Before finishing the discourse which he had begun, Christ returns a scathing and solemn answer, in order to show Nicodemus his ignorance and to rebut his carnal notion. Why, he says, you are a teacher of Israel, that is, a person whose duty it is to teach and govern the people of God, and are you so utterly ignorant of these things? Is it not a shame that you who have been appointed to instruct and wish to be extolled as teacher of other people, possess no true perception whatever of these divine things? In what respect are you better than heathen, who are not the people of God and have not God’s Word? For you have no knowledge except that of human works of holiness, such as intelligent and wise men among the heathen also teach. You are utterly ignorant of the teaching which ought to be common knowledge in the Church, regarding Christ, the kingdom of God, and authentic spiritual things. And yet you have the Word of God abundantly in Moses and the Scriptures. You ought to teach the people from the Law to

know the wrath of God against their sin, and, in consequence, to seek grace by faith in the promise of Christ. Instead you have perverted everything; you have no knowledge nor experience of genuine repentance, and yet you parade your holiness, secure and insolent, confirming yourselves and others in contempt of God and in unbelief, and with all this, you are dreaming about a Messiah who shall crown you for your Jewish holiness and give you the dominion of the world. Such things you do who pretend to be the foremost people on earth, and by so doing you go farther away from the kingdom of God and merit for yourselves more grievous punishment than others, even manifest sinners. who are more easily instructed and converted than you who pose as great saints.

[51] That I call reading him a good, sharp lesson. However, it is done in a friendly spirit, because Christ is talking to a person who, unlike the rest, is not stubbornly despising Christ; and this admonition is necessary in order that he may show 4 Nicodemus the way out of his ignorance, and to rouse his attention to instruction on the subject of how he is to enter the kingdom of God and heaven. Accordingly, he proceeds: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, we speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen,” etc.

[52] You who pretend to be teachers have no knowledge and understanding of things which should be understood by everyone in that society of men called the people of God. And yet, you refuse to believe the teachings which are apparent from the Word and testimony of God, and you judge simply according to your notions. No, it will not do that with your blind and uncertain conceptions you should act as tutors in the things of our definite teaching and testimony, and that you dispute their truth. How much will a pupil learn who starts out by questioning the correctness of his master’s teaching and wanting to be master himself before he has begun to learn? If you have no knowledge and understanding, you must not pass judgment and pretend to be smart in this matter. If you have not seen these things, we have — John and all my prophets; and we are not offering you uncertain fancies, such as a person spins out of his own head, but the doctrine which God has revealed and has had witnessed by the Holy Spirit. It is useless for you to try to accept this doctrine by your reason, or to grasp, to see with your eyes, to feel, how this new birth of man takes place, in the same way that you behold and grasp your works of external worship. You

must lock up your reason and open only your ears and your heart, and believe what God's Word tells you, which Word we have surely received from God with the command to teach and to testify unto it.

[53] If you wish to know which is the way, listen: You must believe and receive the Word, and let go of your notions which undertake to comprehend and encompass matters that no reason can understand nor attain unto. Else what need would there be of teaching God's Word which I have heard and received from the Father, as also John and the prophets have received it by divine revelation from the Holy Spirit and have borne witness unto it? Thus St. Peter in his Second Epistle 2 Peter 1:21, says that no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke, being moved by the Holy Spirit. For this reason he commands that nothing is to be taught in the Church except that which we know for certain to be God's Word, not what seems good and right to human reason and wisdom.

[54] Therefore, Christ very properly rebukes his Jewish teachers who would rule and instruct men's consciences in the matter of their relation to God without certain testimony from God's Word, and who would harmonize their teaching with human reason. The result of such practice leaves the hearer in doubt and uncertainty, confused with heathenish notions of men and never arriving at the true knowledge and experience of the truth. "If I told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

[55] I have hitherto told you of earthly things — how a person must be born of water and the Spirit, that is, how the Spirit operates through the external office of the Word and of baptism — things which you can see and grasp with your understanding. You have heard my doctrine expressed in a parable, in a figure of things familiar to you, and you are forced to confess that I have spoken correctly. Now, if you are unwilling to believe the things presented to you in a material way, much less will you be able to believe if I tell you of things not earthly but heavenly and pertaining to the counsel of God, which no one knows except God alone and he who comes from heaven, namely, the Son of God. Whoever wishes to comprehend in any measure the things of heaven must hear and believe him alone who is come from heaven, and who has seen and who testifies of these things. He says:

II. The Righteousness that Avails Before God

“And no one hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, who is in heaven?”

[56] Here he begins to speak of infinite and heavenly matters — of the secret, eternal, unspeakable counsel and will which God framed in eternity. And thus he completes the second part of this discourse regarding the new birth, that is, how a sinful person becomes righteous, a child of God and an heir of heavenly and eternal life; whence baptism has such power and by whom it has been acquired and merited; also how it must be received. And he now begins to speak of himself as the Messiah promised and sent by God, God’s Son and his office and work. Of these things the Pharisees were in utter ignorance, things which seemed far more strange to them than those he had already told them. They could not at all conceive that their Messiah had to be sent from heaven that he might redeem and propitiate all the world, and particularly his own Jewish people, who were condemned and lost, under the wrath of God, and this notwithstanding they had the Law and the ceremonial of Moses. Much less did they understand that he had to die on the cross, that he must be crucified and become a sacrifice for their sins and the sins of the whole world, and that his dominion was not to be in the nature of an earthly kingdom. To be told these things was utterly offensive and intolerable to them. The reason was because they failed to recognize that the whole nature of man in the sight of God merited only damnation and perdition; and because, in their holiness, they regarded themselves as being without sin, or were so bold as to imagine that they could put away and atone for their sins by their own good works and so would need no Messiah, but only one who would deliver them from their temporal bondage and foreign oppression and who would avenge them upon their enemies.

[57] Christ’s words mean: My dear Nicodemus, withdraw your thoughts entirely from your own legal righteousness and holiness, and that of all other men, and be careful not to try to enter the kingdom of God by their merit. All ability of men, no matter how wise, learned and holy they are, is of no avail. It is determined with God from the beginning that no man can enter heaven as he is descended from Adam.

[58] Yea, there has never been a saint who in his own merit could go to heaven, no matter who he was, whether Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, John or any other. None of these was distinguished as worthy to

enter heaven — to reconcile God, to take away sin and death, to merit eternal life for himself and others. But before man can reach heaven, that is, enter the kingdom of God and receive eternal life, there must first come from heaven One who has eternal righteousness and life in himself, who is able to appease God's anger and to abolish sin and death. He must be the Mediator by whom we, too, may enter heaven. Yea, for this very purpose One had to come down from heaven and, for our sakes, become flesh and blood like we are; that is, he had to take upon himself our misery and sin.

[59] With these words Christ directs us to himself as the point of all that he had said before regarding the new birth and the kingdom of God, that it may be manifest that no one can avail himself of these things, except through him and for his sake. Without him, it would be in vain that man should even desire to be delivered from his old birth, to be renewed by the Spirit, and to become pure. For had not One first obtained for us these things no one could have realized them. Nor would there be any virtue in holy baptism and the Spirit if they were not bestowed through him and for his sake. Accordingly, the point on which all now depends is that this person, by whom we, too, may be saved, must be known and apprehended. This fact he sets forth in conclusion.

[60] It is thus that he pictures his own person: He is the promised Savior come from heaven, that is, he is the true Son of God from eternity; for if he is come from heaven he must have been with God in eternity. But he is descended from heaven, not as an angel who appears and after a while disappears again, but he has taken upon himself the nature of man and, as John 1:14 says, has dwelt among us on earth. For this reason he here calls himself the Son of man, that is, actual man, having flesh and blood like we have.

[61] The signification of this descent of the Son of man is that he has cast himself down into our misery and affliction, that he has taken upon himself our sins and made himself a sacrifice to the everlasting wrath of God which we had merited by our sins. To this he alludes when he here says that he must be exalted. Now, since this man comes down from heaven, personally he must be without any sin whatsoever, innocent and of divine purity. It cannot be said of him that he was born of flesh, as we are, but of the Holy Ghost; and his flesh is not sinful flesh and blood, but is pure and holy. All this was wrought to the end that he might be able to make our

sinful flesh and blood pure and holy by his purity and his holy, immaculate sacrifice.

[62] But what do these words import: “The Son of man, who is in heaven”? How is it that he has descended from heaven and is still in heaven? Did he not first ascend in the clouds on the fortieth day after his resurrection? True, he descended into our flesh and blood and humbled himself below all men, unto death on the cross, as a man forsaken and accursed by God. However, he was not in the meantime separated from God, but he remained with God all the time and hence was always in heaven; he exists from eternity, ever beholding his Father and present with him, ruling and working together with him, co-equal in power and might. These features of his omnipotence were not in any wise apparent in his 4 humbled state, when he divested himself of the form of God, as Paul says in Philippians 2:7, and went about in the form of a servant, enduring suffering and death, until such time as he was delivered from this state and was exalted again and sat down at the right hand of God, having now been made Lord over death and hell and all elements of his human nature. All this he has manifested by his visible ascension when he was taken up in the clouds before the eyes of his disciples, and in the same visible manner he shall return and be seen by all men.

[63] That is the explanation of the record that the Son of man descended and ascended and at the same time remained in heaven in divine essence and power, and in eternal communion with the Father. He does not have reference to a material change of place but to a spiritual removal from humiliation to exaltation, from his suffering and death to his resurrection and heavenly communion with the Father, in which he is not restricted by material conditions. His divinity and communion with the Father he has had from eternity and has continued in possession of them all the time, even from the moment he took upon himself the limitations of his human nature. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life.”

[64] Here he shows how we may also enter heaven; that is, he shows what he has done for us and how we are to receive and become partakers of his blessing. With these words he proclaims the grand work of redemption, which was decreed by God in his eternal counsel and which, therefore, had so to be accomplished out of the unutterable and fathomless love of God

toward the human race, who would not that it should perish (as we have heard in the Gospel for Pentecost Monday, which follows soon after these words). Since there was not elsewhere any help or redress, any expedient for appeasing his eternal wrath against sin, any hope of redeeming men from everlasting death by the agency of any creature in heaven or earth, the only Son of God had to take our place and become a sacrifice for our sin, thereby to appease God's wrath and make payment for us. This work now is our salvation and comfort and the power that is operative in baptism to the end that we may become new-born men and enter heaven.

[65] This is the teaching: His ascending and descending and his being in heaven pertain to himself, and do not help us. They are his prerogatives and no one can do the same. However, he says: I have all things in my power and dwell in heaven above, yet I do not wish to ascend alone, but to draw men upward with me; they could not otherwise ascend, but if they cling to me it shall be accomplished. I shall suffer myself to be crucified and shall rise. Those who believe that I have died for them, I shall draw after me, although they cannot enter heaven by their own strength. Thus he places us on his shoulders and bears us up to the place to which he ascends. Hence, our salvation is not by our strength, but by that of another. With these words all our works are rejected once more.

[66] Now, he introduces a beautiful allegory from Numbers 21:6-9, which aptly depicts Christ. When the Jews were journeying in the desert, the way being long and bread and water failing, they murmured against Moses and became very impatient. Then it was that God sent fiery serpents among them, which bit the people. In the countries toward the South there are great deserts, where no food nor drink is found, and there are also multitudes of noxious vermin. The serpents on this occasion were a particularly vicious kind, for their bite caused such fever and such an unquenchable thirst that people had to die. For this reason they are called fiery serpents, such as the Greeks called Dipsades. There may, however, be another reason for the term, for we read that some of the serpents in those countries are so fiery that when they hiss or give forth breath, there issues, as it were, sheer fire from them.

[67] On account of this cruel affliction of the Jews there was much pitiful crying and calling among the people to Moses, but he could give no advice until God took pity upon them and said to Moses: Make thee a

brazen serpent, like those which are biting the people, and set it upon a standard. Everyone that is bitten, when he seeth it, shall live. “And Moses,” so the story runs, “made a serpent of brass and set it upon the standard, and it came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked unto the serpent of brass, he lived.”

[68] Behold now, how Christ has been typified in this story. In the first place, the main point is that the Jews, when bitten by serpents, could find no aid nor remedy until they were helped by looking at such a simple thing as the brazen serpent. This serpent had the appearance of a real serpent, but it was dead and without venom, yea, it was salutary. Not that the brass could help them; what made it efficient was the fact that there was affixed to it God’s order and this promise: 4 Whoever is bitten and looks at the serpent, shall live. This word was wrapped about the serpent, and by virtue of it the serpent helped the people.

[69] Now, Christ makes application to himself and says: “As Moses lifted up the serpent, even so must the Son of man be lifted up” etc. This is the true explanation and interpretation of this allegory, or figure: We, too, have been stung or bitten by the deadly fang of the devil, which is sin. As St. Paul says, sin is a fiery, poisonous bite, or sting. If the poison enters the conscience, there is never any rest. Sin hurls against us and sets upon us death; death drives man, causing him to feel that he is in a veritable hell. And there is no help nor redress. You may do as many works as you please, you are condemned, nevertheless, until this miracle of grace arrives for you; that is, another serpent is raised up which is not poisonous nor harmful and has only the form of a serpent.

[70] But why does Christ not choose a different symbol? Why that of the serpent by which men had been bitten? Surely, he might have chosen some other figure. The reason is stated by St. Paul in Romans 8:3: *De peccato damnavit peccatum*. For sin he condemned sin. He has driven out death by death: he has overcome the Law by the Law. How has he done this? Christ was made a sinner upon the cross, bearing the title of an arch fiend in the midst of knaves. He suffered the judgment and punishment which a sinner must suffer. He was innocent, he never committed any sin; yet, the name of a sinner and the guilt and punishment verily settled upon him, and thus he has abolished sin by taking upon himself the sin which was not his, and by suffering himself to be judged and condemned as a malefactor.

[71] Now, although he is indeed innocent, nevertheless he is like unto a sinner, and there is in him a salutary sin, by which he means to save us, who are truly sinners, from the deadly poison. He has condemned sin upon the cross; for sin wronged him when it condemned him and inflicted death upon him. For this reason he now obtains authority over the sin of the whole world and rightly and justly condemns sin, because it tried to condemn him. Accordingly, he now pronounces to all who believe, this verdict of justice in place of their sin: Sin shall not harm you; for it is become amenable to me and owes me penitence. Therefore it shall either be no sin, or else a sin that has been sentenced.

[72] Now, the conclusion which Christ draws is expressed thus: "That whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have eternal life." That is saying as much as was said in regard to the serpent: "Whoever looks unto it shall live." To look unto Christ crucified is to believe on him. By that act sin is canceled and cannot hurt us; or, if it does hurt us, it shall cause no harm. Accordingly, all depends on looking unto Jesus and not on any work. However, while on the former occasion looking was a physical action, looking in this instance is performed spiritually, in the heart, by believing that Christ by his innocence has destroyed sin.

[73] Now, Christ might have died upon the cross a thousand times and we would have been helped just as little as the Israelites would have been helped by raising a thousand serpents of their own accord, if this word of promise had not been issued, namely, as is written: "Whosoever believeth on him shall not perish" etc. This word appropriates and applies to us these blessings and makes us certain that we shall reach heaven; that is, certain that for the sake of this exalted and crucified Christ, we shall obtain the grace of God and victory over the power of sin, death and hell, and shall receive eternal life, if we believe on him and are thus borne upward clinging to him.

[74] Behold, this is the allegory which faithfully depicts to us the misery and need of our entire human nature, and the office of redemption of Christ our Lord, and the manner of obtaining these blessings we have been discussing. It shows how all men were mortally wounded by the fiery, hellish poison of the devil, and no remedy nor aid could have been procured for them if the Son of God had not been given and had not appeared for this purpose, that he might destroy the works of the devil, as 1 John 3:8 states.

And this he did, not by a display of the great power, force and might of his divine majesty, but in the greatest weakness and infirmity, by his suffering and dying, when he hung upon the cross, an accursed, noxious worm. But there is a salutary death in the form of this dead serpent; it brings to all who, by their sins, have been poisoned and tainted unto eternal death, a healing balm by means of which they recover and are saved forever.

[75] It is very strange to say and to believe that this salvation is achieved utterly without human cooperation. Yon poor Israelites who had to lie among the fiery serpents were not helped at all, though they tried every remedy that they could secure; they only grew worse the more they labored and the longer they strove to defend themselves against the serpents. And at last, when they had despaired of all help and there was no more comfort and hope, no other plan is proposed to them than this, that they must have raised among them just such a serpent, made of brass — a sight that might have terrified and awed them still more! — and must lift their eyes unto this serpent. And yet, it came to pass that whoever obeyed this word of God recovered forthwith and remained unharmed thereafter.

[76] So, in this instance, whoever desires to obtain unfailing aid and salvation against sin and eternal death must hear and follow this strange counsel of God, letting go of every other comfort and endeavor, and must fix his heart upon this Christ alone, who has borne our sins and death in his own body. For it is settled that for our salvation no other name under heaven shall avail except that of Christ crucified. Acts 4:12.

[77] Thus, Christ has delivered the entire discourse concerning the new birth, or the righteousness of man in the sight of God, going through all the parts which must needs be taught in this connection, namely, whence and by what means it is effected and how it is obtained. He has instructed us concerning the Word, baptism and the Spirit who works through these means; concerning the merit and sacrifice of Christ, for whose sake the grace of God and eternal life are given us; and concerning faith, by which we appropriate these blessings. Accordingly, you must now so retain the thread of this entire discourse that the end shall agree with the beginning. When you are asked: How does the new birth take place, in which the Spirit through the water and the Word makes a person a child of God? You must answer: In the way that Christ has here stated — it takes place when, over and against the terror on account of your sin, you grasp this comfort, the

belief that Christ, the Son of God, is come from heaven for your sake and has been raised upon the cross for you, in order that you should not perish but have eternal life. This faith is the chest, or shrine, which holds the treasure of the forgiveness of sins and the heritage of eternal life, and man is saved by it; as Christ says, “Thy faith hath made thee whole” etc.

First Sunday after Trinity. Examples of Unbelief and Faith. The Rich Man and Lazarus.

Text: Luke 16:19-31.

19 There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

27 Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them

hear them.

30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. Luke 16:19-31

[1] We have hitherto heard in our Gospel lessons of various examples of faith and of love; for as they all teach faith and love, I hope you are abundantly and sufficiently informed that no human being can be pleasing to God unless he believes and loves. Now in this Gospel text the Lord presents to us at the same time an example of faith and of unbelief or of the state of the godless, in order that we also may abhor the contrary and the opposite of faith and love, and that we may cleave to faith and love more diligently. For here we see the judgment of God upon the believers and the unbelievers, which is both dreadful and comforting. Dreadful to the faithless and comforting to the faithful. But in order that we may the better grasp the meaning of this text we must picture to ourselves both the rich man and poor Lazarus. In the rich man we see the nature of unbelief and in Lazarus the nature of belief.

Part I. The Rich Man

[2] We must not view the rich man according to his outward conduct; for he is in sheep's clothing, his life glitters and shines beautifully, while he tactfully conceals the wolf. For this Gospel text does not accuse him of adultery, of murder, or robbery, of violence or of having done anything that the world or reason would censure. Yea, he has been as honorable and respectable in his life as that Pharisee who fasted twice a week and was not as other men, of whom Luke 18:11f. speaks.

For had he committed such glaring sins the Gospel would have mentioned them since it examines him so particularly that it describes even the purple robe he wore and the food he ate, which are only external matters and God does not judge according to them. Therefore he must have led outwardly an exemplary, holy life; and according to his own opinion and that of others, he must have kept the whole law of Moses.

[3] But we must look into his heart and judge his spirit. For the Gospel has penetrating eyes and sees deep into the secret recesses of the soul; reproves also the works which reason cannot reprove, and looks not at the sheep's clothing, but at the true fruit of the tree to learn whether it is good or not, as the Lord teaches in Matthew 7:17. Hence if we judge this rich man according to the fruits of faith, we will find a heart and a tree of unbelief. For the Gospel chastises him that he fares sumptuously every day and clothes himself so richly, which reason never considers as especially great sins. Besides, the work-righteous people think it is right, and that they are worthy of it, and have merited it by virtue of their holy lives, and they do not see how they thus sin by their unbelief.

[4] For this rich man is not punished because he indulged in sumptuous fare and fine clothes; since many saints, kings and queens in ancient times wore costly apparel, as Solomon, Esther, David, Daniel and others; but because his heart was attached to them, sought them, trusted in and chose them, and because he found in them all his joy, delight and pleasure; and made them in fact his idols. This Christ indicates by the words "every day," that he lived thus sumptuously daily, continuously. From this is seen that he diligently' sought and chose such a life, was not forced to it nor was he in it by accident, or because of his office or to serve his neighbor; but he only thereby gratified his own lust, and lived to himself and served only himself.

[5] Here one traces the secret sins of his heart as the evil fruit. For where faith is, there is no anxiety for fine clothing and sumptuous feasting, yea, there is no longing for riches, honor, pleasure, influence and all that is not God himself; but there is a seeking and a striving for and a cleaving to nothing except to God, the highest good alone; it is the same to him whether his food be dainty or plain, whether his clothing be fine or homespun. For although they even do wear costly clothes, possess great influence and honor, yet they esteem none of these things; but are forced to them, or come to them by accident, or they are compelled to use them in the service of others. Thus queen Esther says, that she bore the royal crown against her will, and that she had to wear it for the sake of the King. David also would rather have lived a private life; but for the sake of God and of his people, he had to become king. In like manner all the saints considered that they were constrained to fill their stations of influence, honor and glory; and their

hearts were never entangled by them, and labored in these external things to be helpful to their neighbor, as Psalm 62:10 says: “Trust not in oppression and become not vain in robbery; if riches increase set not your heart thereon.”

[6] But where unbelief reigns man is absorbed by these vanities, he cleaves to them, seeks them and has no rest until he has acquired them, and after he possesses them, he feeds and fattens himself with them as the swine wallow in the mire, and finds at the same time his happiness and felicity there. He never inquires how his heart stands with his God and what he possesses in God and may expect from him; but his belly is his God; and if he cannot get what he wants, he imagines things are going wrong. And lo, these dreadful and wicked fruits of unbelief the rich man does not see, he covers them over, and blinds his own eyes by the good works of his pharisaical life, and hardens himself until no teaching, exhortation, threatening nor promise can help him. Behold, this is the secret sin which today’s Gospel punishes and condemns.

[7] From this now follows the other sin, that he forgets to exercise love toward his neighbor; for there he lets poor Lazarus lie at his door and offers him not the least assistance. And if he had not wished to help him personally, he should have commanded his servants to take him in and care for him. It may have been, he knew nothing of God and had never experienced his goodness. For whoever feels the goodness of God, feels also for the misfortune of his neighbor; but whoever is not conscious of the goodness of God, sympathizes not in the misfortune of his neighbor. Therefore as he has no pleasure in God, he has no heart for his neighbor.

[8] For the nature of faith is that it expects all good from God, and relies only on God. For from this faith man knows God, how he is good and gracious, that by reason of such knowledge his heart becomes so tender and merciful, that he wishes cheerfully to do to everyone, as he experiences God has done to him. Therefore he breaks forth with love and serves his neighbor out of his whole heart, with his body and life, with his means and honor, with his soul and spirit, and makes him partaker of all he has, just like God did to him. Therefore he does not look after the healthy, the high, the strong, the rich, the noble, the holy persons, who do not need his care; but he looks after the sick, the weak, the poor, the despised, the sinful

people, to whom he can be of benefit, and among whom he can exercise his tender heart, and do to them as God has done to him.

[9] But the nature of unbelief is that it does not expect any good from God, by which unbelief the heart is blinded so that it neither feels nor knows how good and gracious God is; but as Psalm 14:2 says: he cares not for God, seeks not after him.

Out of this blindness follows further that his heart becomes so hard, obdurate and unmerciful that he has no desire to do a kindness to his fellow man; yea, he would rather harm and offend everybody. For as he is insensible to the goodness of God, so he takes no pleasure in doing good to his neighbor. Consequently it follows that he does not look after the sick, poor and despised people, to whom he could and should be helpful and profitable; but he casts his eyes upward and sees only the high, rich and influential, from whom he himself may receive advantage, gain, pleasure and honor.

[10] So we see now in the example of the rich man that it is impossible to love, where no faith exists, and impossible to believe, where there is no love; for both will and must be together, so that a believer loves everybody and serves everybody; but an unbeliever at heart is an enemy of everybody and wishes to be served by every person and yet he covers all such horrible, perverted sins with the little show of his hypocritical works as with a sheep's skin; just as that large bird, the ostrich, which is so stupid that when it sticks its head into a bush, it thinks its entire body is concealed. Yea, here you see that there is nothing slyer and more unmerciful than unbelief. For here the dogs, the most irascible animals, are more merciful to poor Lazarus than this rich man, and they recognize the need of the poor man and lick his sores; while the obdurate, blinded hypocrite is so hard hearted that he does not wish him to have the crumbs that fell from his table.

[11] Now all unbelieving people are like this rich hypocrite. Unbelief cannot do nor be different than this rich man is pictured and set forth by his life. And especially is this the character of the clergy, as we see before our eyes, who never do a truly good work, but only seek a good time, never serving nor profiting anyone; but reversing the order they want everybody to serve them. Like harpies they only claw everything into their own pockets; and like the old adage runs they "rob the poor of his purse." They

are not moved in the least by the poverty of others. And although some have not expensive food and raiment, yet they do not lack will power and the spirit of action; for they imitate the rich, the princes and the lords, and do many hypocritically good works by founding institutions and building churches, with which they conceal the great rogue, the wolf of unbelief; so that they become obdurate and hardened and are of no use to anybody.

These are the rich man.

Part II. Poor Lazarus

[12] Likewise we must not judge poor Lazarus in his sores, poverty and anxiety, according to his outward appearance. For many persons suffer from affliction and want, and yet they gain nothing by it; for example King Herod suffered a great affliction, as is related in Acts 12:23; but afterwards he did not have it better before God on account of it. Poverty and suffering make no one acceptable to God; but, whoever is first acceptable to God, his poverty and suffering are precious in the eyes of God, as Psalm 116:15 says: "Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints."

[13] Thus we must look into the heart of Lazarus also, and seek the treasure which made his sores so precious. That was surely his faith and love; for without faith it is impossible to please God, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, Hebrews 11:6. Therefore his heart also must have confessed that he even in the midst of such poverty and misery expected all good from God, and comfortably relied upon him; with whose blessings and grace he was so richly satisfied, and had such pleasure in them, that he would have heartily and willingly suffered even more misery, if the will of his gracious God had so determined. See, that is a true, living faith, which softened his heart by the knowledge of the divine goodness; so that nothing was too heavy or too much to suffer and to do. So clever and skillful does faith make the heart, when it experiences the grace of God.

[14] From this faith follows now another virtue, namely, love to one's neighbor, so that he is willing and ready to serve everybody; but since Lazarus is poor and in misery himself, he had nothing with which he could serve others; therefore his good will is taken for the deed.

[15] But this lack of service in temporal things he abundantly makes good by his services in things spiritual. For even now, long after his death,

he serves the whole world with his sores, hunger and misery. His bodily hunger feeds our spiritual hunger; his bodily nakedness clothes (or feeds, as some editions read) our spiritual nakedness; his bodily sores heal our spiritual sores; in this way he teaches and comforts by his example, how God is pleased with us, when we are not prosperous here upon the earth, if we believe; and warns us how God is angry with us, even if we are prosperous in our unbelief; just as God had pleasure in Lazarus in his misery, and was displeased with the rich man.

[16] Tell me, what king could have rendered a service to the whole world with his possessions, like poor Lazarus has done with his sores, hunger and poverty? Oh, the wonderful works and judgments of God! In what a masterly manner he puts to shame the cunning goddess and fool of this world, namely, reason and worldly wisdom! She stalks abroad and fixes her eyes rather upon the beautiful purple of the rich man, than upon the wounds of poor Lazarus; she would rather center her eyes upon a healthy, handsome person, as this rich man was, than upon a revolting and naked person like Lazarus; yea, she holds her nose before the stench of his wounds and turns her eyes from his nakedness. Thus the great goddess and fool of this world overlooks God in the very presence of such a noble treasure, and always quietly passes her own judgment, and at the same time makes this poor person so precious and dear, that all the kings hence are not worthy to serve him or to dress his sores. For what king, do you think, would not now with his whole heart exchange his health, purple and crown for the sores, poverty and misery of poor Lazarus, if it were possible for him to do so? And what person is there who would now give a snuff for the purple and all the riches of this rich man?

[17] Do you not think that this rich man himself, had he not been so blind and had known that such a treasure, a man so precious in the eyes of God, was dying at his gate, would have run out, and dressed and kissed his sores, and laid him in his best bed; and made all his purple and riches to serve him? But at the time God's judgment went forth, he did not see that he could do it. Then God thought, truly, you are not worthy to serve him. When later the judgment and work of God were accomplished, the wise fool begins to come to himself; and since he suffers now in hell he will gladly give his house and land, to whom before he would not give a crumb

of bread; and wishes now that Lazarus might cool his tongue with the tips of his fingers, whom before he would not touch.

[18] Behold, even at the present day God is filling the world with such judgments and works, but no one sees it; yea, everybody despises it. There are continually before our eyes poor and needy persons, whom God lays before us as the greatest treasures; but we close our eyes to them, and see not what God does there; later, when God has done his work, and we have neglected the treasure, then we hasten and wish to serve, but we waited too long. Then we begin and make sacred relics of their garments, shoes and furniture, and make pilgrimages to and erect churches over their graves, are occupied with many like foolish deeds and thus ridicule ourselves in that we permit the living saints to be trodden under our feet and to perish, and we worship their garments, which is neither necessary nor of any use; so that indeed our Lord will let the judgment fall as he did in Matthew 23:29-33, and say: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye witness to yourselves, that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell?”

[19] All believers are like poor Lazarus; and every believer is a true Lazarus, for he is of the same faith, mind and will, as Lazarus. And whoever will not be a Lazarus, will surely have his portion with the rich glutton in the flames of hell. For we all must like Lazarus trust in God, surrender ourselves to him to work in us according to his own good pleasure, and be ready to serve all men. And although we all do not suffer from such sores and poverty, yet the same mind and will must be in us, that were in Lazarus, cheerfully to bear such things, wherever God wills it.

[20] For such poverty of spirit may exist in those who have very great possessions; as Job, David, Abraham were poor and rich. For David in Psalm 39:12 says: “I am a stranger with thee, a sojourner, as all my fathers were.” How could that be, since he was a king and possessed extensive lands and large cities? Thus it came about; although he indeed possessed

these, yet his heart did not cleave to them, and they were as nothing compared with the riches he had with God. Likewise he had said of the health of his body that it was as nothing compared to the health of his soul before God, and he would indeed not have murmured, had God afflicted him with bodily sores and sickness. So Abraham also, although he had not the poverty and affliction of Lazarus, yet he had the mind and will to bear what Lazarus did, if God had visited him thus. For the saints should have one and the same inner mind and spirit, but they cannot have the same outward work and suffering. Therefore Abraham also recognized Lazarus as one of his own and received him into his bosom; which he would not have done, were he not of the same mind and had he not taken pleasure in the poverty and maladies of Lazarus. Thus is set forth the sum and meaning of the Gospel, that we may see, how faith everywhere saves and unbelief condemns.

Part III. Questions Suggested and Answered

[21] This Gospel lesson suggests several questions. First, what is the bosom of Abraham, since it cannot be a natural bosom that is meant? To answer this, it is necessary to know that the soul or spirit of man has no rest or place where it may abide, except the Word of God, until he comes at the last day to the clear vision of God. Therefore we conclude that the bosom of Abraham signifies nothing else than the Word of God, where Christ was promised, Genesis 22:18, to Abraham, namely: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." In these words Christ is promised to him, as the one through whom every person shall be blessed, that is, shall be delivered from sin, death and hell, and through no one else and through no other work. All who have believed this passage, have believed on Christ, and have become good Christians, and have also through faith in this Word been released from sin, death and hell.

[22] Thus were all the fathers before the birth of Christ carried into Abraham's bosom; that is, at their death they were established in this saying of God, and they fell asleep in the same, they were embraced and guarded as in a bosom, and sleep there until the day of judgment; excepting those who have already risen with Christ, as Matthew 27:52 teaches, where they also remained. In like manner we, when we face death, must lay hold of and trust in the Word of Christ with strong faith, as John 11:26 says:

“Whosoever believeth on me shall never die,” or like passages; and thus die in this faith, fall asleep, be embraced and guarded in the bosom of Abraham until the day of judgment. For the word spoken to Abraham and the word spoken to us is the very same word; both speak of Christ, that we must be saved through him. But the former is more particularly called Abraham’s bosom, because it was spoken first to Abraham and began with him.

[23] Likewise on the other hand the hell here mentioned cannot be the true hell that will begin on the day of judgment. For the corpse of the rich man is without doubt not in hell, but buried in the earth; it must however be a place where the soul can be and has no peace, and it cannot be corporal. Therefore it seems to me, this hell is the conscience, which is without faith and without the Word of God, in which the soul is buried and held until the day of judgment, when they are cast down body and soul into the true and real hell. For just as Abraham’s bosom is God’s Word, in which believers rest through faith, and fall asleep and are guarded there until the day of judgment; so must that on the contrary ever be hell, where God’s Word is not, into which the unbelievers are cast until the day of judgment. That can be nothing else than an empty, unbelieving, sinful, and evil conscience.

[24] The second question is: How then did Abraham and the rich man converse with one another? Answer: It could not have been a conversation with the natural voice, since the bodies of both were lying in their graves; likewise as little was it the natural tongue that complained of being tormented; nor was it natural fingers and natural water that were desired from Lazarus. Therefore this all must be in the conscience thus: When the conscience is awakened by death or by the agonies of death, then it will have a testimony of its unbelief and will see then for the first time the bosom of Abraham, and those embraced by it, that is, the Word of God, in which it should have believed and did not; from which it has the very greatest pain and anxiety as in hell, and finds neither help nor consolation.

[25] Then thoughts arise in the conscience, which held such a conversation, if they could speak, as this rich man did with Abraham, and seeks then whether the Word of God, and all who have believed in it, would help; and with so much anxiety that it would receive the least comfort from the very meanest of men, but even that cannot be granted to him. Then Abraham answered him, that is, his conscience took such a view of the Word of God, that it cannot be; but he had his portion of good things in his

life, and he must now suffer; while the others are comforted, whom he despised.

[26] At last he feels, that it is declared unto him: There is a great gulf fixed between him and the believers, that they will never be able to come together. These are the thoughts of despair, when the conscience feels that the Word of God is withdrawn forever from him; accordingly the thoughts of his conscience rage and would gladly have the living to know that such are the agonies of death, and he craves that someone would tell it to them. But it is to no purpose; for he feels an answer in his own conscience, that Moses and the prophets are sufficient, whom they ought to believe, as he himself should have done. All such thoughts pass between the condemned conscience and the Word of God, in the hour of death or in the agonies of death; and no one can perceive what it is, except the one who experiences it; and he who experienced it wished that others should know it, but all is in vain.

[27] The third question is: When did that take place, and if the rich man still daily without ceasing suffers thus until the day of judgment? That is a subtle question and not easily answered to the inexperienced. For here one must banish the idea of time from the mind and know that in the other world there is neither time nor hours, but all is an eternal moment or wink of the eye; as 2 Peter 3:8 says: "A day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day," Psalm 90:4. Therefore it seems to me that in this rich man we have an example of the future of all unbelievers, when their eyes are opened by death and its agonies; which can endure but for a moment and then cease until the day of judgment, as it may please God; for here no definite rule can be established. Therefore I dare not say that the rich man suffers still at present as he suffered at that time; and I dare not deny that he still suffers thus; for both depend upon the will of God. It is sufficient for us to know that his example and the beginning of the suffering of all unbelievers are here clearly set before us.

[28] The fourth question is: Shall we pray for the dead; since here in the Gospel there is no intermediate state between Abraham's bosom and hell, and those in Abraham's bosom do not need it, and it does not help those in perdition. We have no command from God to pray for the dead; therefore no one sins by not praying for them; for what God does not bid or forbid us to do, in that no one can sin. Yet, on the other hand, since God has not

permitted us to know, how it is with the souls of the departed and we must continue uninformed, as to how he deals with them, we will not and cannot restrain them, nor count it as sin, if they pray for the dead. For we are ever certain from the Gospel, that many have been raised from the dead, who, we must confess, did not receive nor did they have their final sentence; and likewise we are not assured of any other, that he has his final sentence.

[29] Now since it is uncertain and no one knows, whether final judgment has been passed upon these souls, it is not sin if you pray for them; but in this way, that you let it rest in uncertainty and speak thus: Dear God, if the departed souls be in a state that they may yet be helped, then I pray that thou wouldst be gracious. And when you have thus prayed once or twice, then let it be sufficient and commend them unto God. For God has promised that when we pray to him for anything he would hear us. Therefore when you have prayed once or twice, you should believe that your prayer is answered, and there let it rest, lest you tempt God and mistrust him.

[30] But that we should institute masses, vigils and prayers to be repeated forever for the dead every year, as if God had not heard us the year before, is the work of Satan and is death itself, where God is mocked by unbelief, and such prayers are nothing but blasphemy of God. Therefore take warning and turn from these practices. God is not moved by these anniversary ceremonies, but by the prayer of the heart, of devotion and of faith; that will help the departed souls if anything will. Vigils, masses, indeed help the bellies of the priests, monks and nuns, but departed souls are not helped by them and God is thus mocked.

[31] However, if you have in your house a spook or ghost, who pretends that the departed can be helped by saying masses, you should be fully persuaded that it is the work of Satan. No soul has yet since the beginning of the world reappeared on the earth, and it is not God's will that it should be so. For here in this Gospel you see that Abraham declares that no one can be sent from the dead to teach the living; but he points them to the Word of God in the Scriptures, Deuteronomy 31: "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." By these words Abraham turns to the command of God in Deuteronomy 18:11, where God says: "Thou shalt not be a consulter with a familiar spirit." Isaiah 8:19. Therefore it is surely nothing but the contrivance of Satan that any spirits should let themselves be entreated and that they should require so and so many masses, such and

such pilgrimages or other works, and appear afterwards in the clear light and pretend that certain persons are saved. In this way Satan has introduced error so that the people have fallen from faith into works, and think their deeds may accomplish such great things. And thus is fulfilled what St. Paul declared in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11, that God would send upon them powerful error, and temptation to unrighteousness, because they have not received the love of the truth that they might be saved.

[32] Therefore be prudent and know that God will not let us know how it is with the dead, so that faith may retain its place in the Word of God, which believes that God will save the believers after this life and condemn the unbelievers. If now a familiar spirit present itself before you, take no notice of it; but be assured that it is the devil, and conquer him with this saying of Abraham, "They have Moses and the prophets," and likewise with the command in Moses, "Thou shalt not be a consulter with a familiar spirit;" then he will soon be gone. If he leave you not, then let him make a noise until he is tired, and in firm faith suffer his wantonness. And if it were possible that it were indeed a departed soul or a good spirit even, then you should neither learn nor inquire anything of him, since God has forbidden you to do so; because he has sent his Son himself to teach us all that is necessary for us to know. What he has not taught us, that we should gladly not wish to know, and be satisfied with the teachings of the holy Apostles, in which he is preached to us. However, I have further written on this subject in the Postils on the Gospel for Epiphany and in my booklet on the Misuse of the Mass; where you may read more along this line.

[34] Likewise, to give an example, we read in the *Historia Tripartita* (A History in Three Parts) of a bishop, who came to Corinth where he had come to attend a Council, and as he could not find a suitable lodging for himself and his attendants, he saw a house unoccupied and condemned as uninhabitable, and he asked if he might not be allowed to occupy it. Then they told him in reply that it was infested with nightly ghosts, that no one could live in it, and often people were found dead in it in the morning. Then the bishop said but little and immediately entered and lodged there the same night, for he very well saw that the devil was the author of all these ghost stories, and as he had firm faith that Christ was Lord over Satan, therefore he was not moved by his stratagems and he entered to lodge with him. And thus that house was made free by the prayers and presence of a holy man

from infesting ghosts and horrifying specters. Behold, you see that the ghosts are Satan, and there is little use to dispute with them; but one should despise them with a cheerful spirit as nothing.

[35] A similar story we read about Gregory, the Bishop of Cappadocia, in which he crossed the Alps and lodged with a heathen sexton or clerk of the church, who had an idol, that answered him the questions he asked; and he made his living by telling the people secret things. Now the bishop knew nothing of this, and proceeded the next day as soon as it was morning on his journey. But Satan or the evil spirit could not endure the prayers and presence of the holy man, and at once he betook himself out of the house, so that the heathen sexton could no longer receive answers as before. As soon as he felt his great loss, he set up a great howl to call back his idol, which appeared to him while he was asleep, and said, it was his own fault because he had lodged the bishop, with whom he (the evil spirit) could not remain. The sexton hastened to overtake the bishop and complained to him that he had taken his god and livelihood, and returned evil for the kindness extended to him. Then the bishop took paper out of his pocket and wrote these few words: “Gregory sendeth greetings to Apollinius. Be thou at liberty, O, Apollinius, to do as thou hast done before. Farewell.” The sexton took the letter and laid it by the side of his idol; then the devil came again, and did as before. Finally the sexton began to think, what a poor god is he, who allows himself to be driven away and lead by my guest who was only a man. And at once he started to the bishop, was instructed and baptized, and grew in his faith, so that he became the eminent bishop of Caesarea, a city in Cappadocia, upon the death of the bishop that baptized him. Behold, how simply faith proceeds, and acts joyfully, securely and effectively. Treat all your troublesome evil spirits in the same way.

Second Sunday after Trinity. The Great Supper and the Invitation

Text: Luke 14:16-24.

16 Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:

17 And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.

18 And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.

19 And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.

20 And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

21 So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

22 And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.

23 And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

24 For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper. Luke 14:16-24

[1] Here in this Gospel lesson, as everywhere in the Scriptures, we are to be careful that we grasp, as well as we can, the true, simple meaning, as we have often heard, and establish our hearts and consciences in that meaning. For whoever will contend with Satan, dare not waver and sway hither and thither, but must be convinced of his cause and be armed with clear sure written documents, for if the devil gets him on his fork through his unsettled notions, he will then toss him here and there as the wind does the dry leaf.

[2] Therefore we must here in this Gospel grasp its true meaning, in which we may be able to stand. It is not to be understood as referring to the holy Sacrament or the bread of the altar, to which the Papists have pulled it as it were by the hair on holy Corpus Christi day, along with many other passages of Scripture, which have not in a single letter any reference or

very little to that Sacrament. But the meaning and substance of this text is, that while the Gospel is preached and published in all the world, few people accept it. And it is here called a supper or an evening meal, because the Gospel shall be the last word or doctrine that will usher in the end of the world.

[3] Therefore this supper is nothing else than a rich, expensive meal, which God has provided in Christ through the Gospel, in which he spreads before us great possessions and rich treasures.

[4] This invitation, however, took place thus, as the text says: The Lord sent out his servant to invite the guests to this costly supper, that is, the Apostles were all sent forth with one and the same word into all the world, to bid and call to this supper with one voice and with one Gospel, or with one message. Thus, when St. Peter arrived at and preached in a place where St. Paul had preached before, it was the same teaching which the one preached as the other, and the hearers also could say: Behold, he preaches just like we heard before from the first one; they agree and are one and the same. In order to show this unity, the Evangelist says: "And he sent forth his servant," and says not, his servants, as if he spake of many servants. But the message, the servant should execute and with which he should gain recruits, was: "Come; for all things are now ready."

[5] For Christ had been crucified, had destroyed sin and death by his death, had risen from the dead, the Holy Spirit had been given, and in short, all things pertaining to this supper were now ready. It all was so prepared that it did not cost us anything; for the Father through Christ bore all its expenses, in order that we without our merit and assistance might enjoy his treasures, and become rich and prosperous.

[6] At that time he sent his servant first among the Jews, to invite them to the supper, who had the promises and oracles of God; for the Law and all the prophets were framed to the end that they should prepare a people for God, as the angel Gabriel said of John the Baptist to his father Zacharias: "He shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn unto the Lord their God. And he shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to walk in the wisdom of the just; to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him," Luke 1:15-

17. But what do the guests say to the message of the servant? The text tells us, “And they all with one consent began to make excuse.”

[7] That is what the Lord in Matthew 10:37-38 says: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me.” Now observe how few there are who are thus experts in leaving all for Christ. For whoever will come to this supper, must esteem the Gospel above everything, body and riches, wife and child, friend and foe; yea, he must forsake everything that separates him from the Gospel, let it be as good, right and holy as it ever can be.

[8] Do not think that these men who excuse themselves here were engaged in public, coarse sins, and in unrighteous employment and business. No. They were occupied in a laudable, good employment. For it is never wrong that we buy and transact business, that we honestly support ourselves, or take a wife and live in the married state. But the reason we should not come into the state of these persons, is that they were unwilling to leave these things, but hung to them with all their hearts. Now we must be willing to leave them, if the Gospel require it.

[9] Should you then say: I would gladly follow and cleave to the Gospel, and cheerfully also do all things besides; but shall I leave my land, my home and servants, my wife and child, that is hard? Has not God commanded that I should labor to support my wife and child? Observe, therefore, this is also the sum of it all; the Gospel is the Word of the cross and the word of offense, so that everyone is easily offended by it. Yes, God commanded you to do this, he commanded you besides to honor and love him above all creatures, and esteem him higher than all things you may know, as the first and greatest commandment teaches: “Thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37. Therefore you must let all things go rather than let them separate you from his love and his Word.

[10] However, he loses nothing, who forsakes anything for the Gospel’s sake. Do you lose for its sake your temporal life, God will indeed give you another and a better, an eternal life; as Christ in Matthew 10:39 says: “He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall

find it.” Must you leave your wife and child; remember, God cares for you, he will give them a much better father than you are; and if you only believe it will certainly come to pass. For you have such great pledges and rich promises and admonitions, that he will not let his Word fail; but will maintain it, if we only heartily trust in and yield to it. As he said in Matthew 19:29: “Everyone that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands for my name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life.” Here stand his very word and promise, what wish we further? Or what do we desire that is greater? Ay, where then is the trouble? Only in our faith. Therefore no one comes to this supper, unless he brings with him a true faith, which God honors and loves above all creatures. But what does the Lord do, who lets the guests be invited, and who thus excused themselves? The text says: “Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in hither the poor, and maimed, and blind, and lame.”

[11] To go out into the streets and lanes means nothing but that the Jews made themselves unworthy of the Gospel, to turn from them and for the disciples turn to the heathen. For Christ commanded his disciples before his resurrection that they should not go into any way of the Gentiles nor preach in any city of the Samaritans; but go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and feed them, Matthew 10:5-6, as they did. But since the Jews after the resurrection of Jesus Christ resisted his Word and would not accept it, then the disciples spake to them as we have an example in Acts 13:46-47: “It was necessary that the Word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee for a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Isaiah 49:6. But what does it mean when he says to the servant: “Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in, that my house may be filled.”

[12] This is to be understood as referring to those of a dispirited, timid conscience, who also belong among the guests of this supper, they will be constrained to come in. However it is not an outward but an inward and spiritual constraining, and takes place in this way: When the Law is preached and sin is unfolded or made manifest, that man comes to a

knowledge of himself, so that compelling and constraining them to come in means, to force anew the sins into the conscience, that thereby man may acknowledge, that he is nothing, that all his works are sinful and damnable, and thus quickly receives a despairing conscience and a bashful and terrified heart, in which every refuge and help are taken from him and everywhere he is unable to find any comfort in them, and finally despairs of all help in himself.

[13] When this now takes place, it is called “constraining,” for you should not delay his “coming in,” but help him out of his state of despair. But this takes place, when you comfort him with the Gospel and tell him how he may be delivered from his sin, and say to him: Believe in Christ, that he has freed you from sin, then your sins are forgiven you. That is what “constrains them to come in” (*compelle intrare*) means; and it does not mean outward compelling as they explain it, so that they drive rogues and wicked persons, as it were with police force, to this supper; for that accomplishes nothing, and it is not the sense of the Gospel. Therefore do the constraining energetically in the conscience only, and let it be an inner and spiritual constraining. And the Lord says further to the servant and to others: “For I say unto you that none of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

[14] These words are the conclusion and summary of this Gospel lesson, that those, who are the most certain and wish to taste of this supper, shall not taste of it. The reason you have heard. Therefore in brief, the guests, who are here invited and came not, are those who imagine they could obtain the supper through their own works, they greatly exert themselves and are sure of their cause, they wish to taste of the supper. But the Lord concludes with powerful words and says: “That none of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper.” Why then, dear Lord? They have done nothing bad and neither have they been occupied with false teachings. Why, the reason is that they have denied the faith, and did not publicly confess it before everybody, and did not esteem this rich and expensive supper above all creatures. For since it is costly and precious, it therefore also requires something from the people who esteem it so, and it puts them under some obligation, be it what it may. See, that is the sense of this Gospel text briefly considered. Whoever desires to develop it further, may do so.

Second Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. The Great Supper and the Guests.

Text: Luke 14:16-24.

16 Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:

17 And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.

18 And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.

19 And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.

20 And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

21 So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

22 And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.

23 And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

24 For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper. Luke 14:16-24

[1] The Papists, contrary to the order of the ancient Church, have appointed this Gospel lesson for the first Sunday after Trinity, because they celebrated it the week during the festival of Corpus Christi, as is still the custom among them. For they interpreted the supper, of which this Gospel speaks,

to signify the Sacrament of the Altar, and thereby desired to establish the Communion in one part or form only, which, as you well know, is one of their chief abuses and an anti-Christian perversion of this sacrament, concerning which we do not agree with them.

[2] Inasmuch as young people are growing up and know nothing about such festivals or pompous demonstrations, and as we older persons forget it also, it is well to remind our people, so that, when our youth come to their churches and see such things, they may not be offended, but may be able to say: That it is not right, that they should play with the holy Sacrament and carry it about, in order thereby to dispense so many false indulgences, not with the intention thereby to honor the Sacrament, for then they would have carried about the entire Sacrament, or both elements, bread and wine. But to the shame and disgrace of the Sacrament, they do this that they themselves may thereby be honored, namely, that the distinction be maintained, that the order of priests is a more special and a higher order before God, than the common order of Christians; because the priests alone receive the entire Sacrament or both elements, the body and the blood of Christ, and other Christians, as people of a lower order, must be satisfied with only one part of the Sacrament.

[3] This difference they sought to introduce among the people by such a festival in order thus to praise their order above others, to the shame and disgrace of the holy Sacrament and our Lord Jesus Christ, who did not institute his holy Sacrament for a special order over and above the common order of Christians; just as he also did not suffer and die for a special order, but for the comfort of his Christian church which is not divided, but consists of one body, of the one only Head, Jesus Christ, where all the members, so far as life and character are concerned, are equal; although their works are unequal and different.

[4] This abuse, which is very great and harmful, we must not overlook, but picture it forth in its true colors, because the Papists insist with such hardened and impenitent hearts on their own godless conduct. For how does it happen that the holy Sacrament must be used to make a distinction among Christians? Whereas Christ our Lord instituted it chiefly for the comfort of the conscience and for the strengthening of our faith, and further that Christendom should be like a bond, by which Christians are bound together in the most intimate manner; that they be as one bread or one loaf, not only

that they might have in common and at the same time one God, one Word, one Baptism, one Sacrament, one hope, one confidence, and all the grace and treasures of Christ in common; but that in their external life they are also one body, where one member assists, serves, helps, advises and sympathizes with the others.

[5] This use of the holy Sacrament the Papists have thus entirely abolished, so that they alone have wholly taken the Sacrament to themselves, and thereby have formed an extra class that was to be better than common Christians. Yet, in order that the common people might also highly esteem the one part of the Sacrament and not entirely despise it, they celebrated this festival every year for eight days, When they played with the one part, with the wafer, in a grand procession through the city and carried it about with cymbals and stringed instruments, so that they made the people stare with wonder, and made them think that even if the order of priests were grander and greater before God, yet, they too had something of which they could publicly boast.

[6] For this purpose they used this Gospel lesson, although it agrees very poorly with the teaching of the Sacrament under one form. Just as though this master of the house had prepared a feast for mice, and only gave them something to eat and nothing to drink; and yet they themselves sing about it: *Venite, comedite panem meum, Et Bibite vinum meum*. Come, eat my bread, And drink my wine! And after all, they only gave them the one form, the bread, and kept the wine for themselves. But thus our dear Lord God is constantly treated; whatever he institutes and orders must be perverted and put to shame by the devil and his imps. Thus the Sacrament has also been treated, which on this festival even at the present day is still most horribly blasphemed by the Papists.

[7] For as said before, they do not keep this feast in honor of the holy Sacrament, else they would bear in their processions both parts, and the entire Sacrament; but they do it to honor themselves, and they had to raise it high, not for our benefit, but only that we might know what the difference is between a priest and a lay member. In other things, where God has so created them, it is proper to observe the difference, for instance, that a woman is a woman, and a man a man, that worldly government must be distinguished from its subjects, and in like manner other worldly conditions. However, that men should here make a difference where God has put away

all differences; that the Pope and bishops, yea, even St. Peter or St. Paul should have a better baptism or a better Gospel than any other common Christian is wrong. Therefore it is also wrong that they wish to have a better Sacrament than other Christians, for Christ our Lord and Savior, as already said, did not institute the Sacrament to make a difference among his Christians, but for the sake of equality, just as baptism and the Gospel, that we may have just as much from it as other persons.

[8] This I desired to say briefly for the sake of the young, and also for our sakes, that everyone should learn to know the devil, and beware of the abominations which Popery has introduced, and has thus divided the Christian church which our Lord God has made one, while they condemn and persecute us because we will not allow ourselves to be made mice and rats who eat without drinking, or only receive the one part. For this reason we in our church have altogether done away with this festival, because the Papists have made it nothing else but pure idolatry, and have gone straight against the order and institution of Christ, bringing disgrace to the holy Sacrament and a positive injury to Christianity. For we will remain with the unity of Christians, that one is as good as another, and all differences are here at an end. This is enough here for the sake of the young and the common people. We will now take up the Gospel lesson.

[9] The occasion of this sermon by Christ was the miracle which the Lord Jesus Christ performed in the house of a Pharisee, when he healed one sick of the dropsy. But the Evangelist tells how they followed him and were on the watch for him, in order to catch him. Therefore, he also begins to lecture them, and tells them how they are filled with pride and vanity, and crowd into the highest seats, until he at length comes to the host, and reads a text also to him, how he should invite his guests; not the rich who can invite him again and thank him for it, but the poor, who may welcome him again in the life to come.

[10] Following this address one of them who thought himself much more learned than Christ the Lord, begins to say: "Oh, how blessed is he who eateth bread in the kingdom of God." As though he would say in his great wisdom: You make yourself unprofitable enough by your preaching! If it would depend on preaching, I can do that, too, even better than you; for I consider this a truly great sermon: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God."

[11] Christ replies to him: Yes, says he, I will tell you how blessed you and your comrades are: “A certain man made a great supper, and bade many,” and they despised it and would not come. This blow was meant for him. As though he would say: You say much in the words, that he is a blessed man who eats bread in heaven! Oh, but you are in very great earnest! What an excellent holy man you are, namely, you are one of those who are invited and yet do not come. These are hard, sharp and terrible words when rightly considered; for he is speaking to real thoroughgoing rogues, who sat about the table, not because they wanted to learn anything, but in order to observe him closely to see by what means they might come to him and take him. To those he spoke this parable: “A certain man made a great supper.”

[12] This man who prepared this supper is our Lord God himself. He is a great and rich Lord, who also once prepared a feast according to his glorious majesty and honor, and it was such a supper which is called great and glorious not only on account of the host, who is God himself, for it would be a glorious supper if he had only given a vegetable broth or a dry crust; yet the food is beyond all measure great and costly, namely, the holy Gospel, yea, Christ our Lord himself. He is himself the food, and is offered unto us through the Gospel, how he has made satisfaction by his death for our sins, and has redeemed us from all the misery of eternal death, of hell, of the wrath of God, sin and eternal condemnation.

[13] This preaching of Christ is the great and glorious supper with which he feeds his guests and sanctifies them through his holy Baptism, and comforts and strengthens them through the Sacrament of his body and blood, that nothing may be wanting and a great plenty may be at hand and all become satisfied. Thus this supper is justly called a glorious, great supper on account of the fare and food, so costly and richly prepared that no tongue can describe it and no heart sufficiently grasp it. For it is an eternal food and an eternal drink, by partaking of which a man shall nevermore thirst nor hunger, but be forever satisfied, his thirst is quenched and he becomes joyful; and this not only for one man, but for the whole wide world, even if it were ten times wider, they would all have sufficient. For it is an inexhaustible food and an everlasting drink, as our Gospel says: He who believeth on this Lord Jesus Christ, that he was born for us of the Virgin Mary and crucified for our sins under Pontius Pilate, died, descended

into hell, and rose again from the dead and sitteth at the right hand of God, etc.; he who believes this, eats and drinks truly from this supper. For to believe in Christ the Lord means to eat and to drink, from which the people become satisfied, fat and stout and strong, so that they are joyful forever.

[14] This is rightly called a great supper, because it is so precious, and is offered to so many people that everyone may eat until he is satisfied, and yet the food never becomes less. For it is such a great and strengthening food that it endures forever and gives eternal life, for it nourishes us differently than our mere bodily eating and drinking. If one has eaten and drunk enough today, he must still eat again tomorrow. But this is an eternal food and lasts forever. With this Christ gives those hypocrites at the table to understand that it is a different supper from what they had given him; and yet they are such rogues and knaves, that although they gossip and talk about it a great deal, yet they despise God and his mercy, eternal life and salvation, and hold everything else dearer. It follows further: “And he bade many.”

[15] The many who are bidden are the Jews and all the people of Israel, who from Abraham on, and especially through the prophets had been invited. For to the patriarch Abraham the seed was promised through whom the blessing should come, and to him as the father of this people was this supper first announced. After that the prophets carried it further and directed the attention of the people to it, so that nothing was wanting on the part of the Lord our God, and all were diligently invited. Therefore St. Paul in his Epistles everywhere tells the Jews: *Judaeis primum et Graecis*: To the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

[16] Now when the hour came to go to the table, that is, when the time came for our Lord Christ to be born, to suffer and rise again from the dead, then the servants went out, John the Baptist and the Apostles, and said to those who were bidden, to the people of Israel: Dear people, hitherto you have been invited, now is the time to come, now the supper is ready! Your Lord Jesus Christ, your Messiah is already born, has died and rose again, therefore do not remain away any longer, come to the table, eat and be happy, that is, accept your promised treasure with joy, who has according to promise delivered you from the curse and condemnation and has saved you. And this message was brought especially to the leaders of the people, who

held high places in the spiritual and civil governments. But what did they do with it? “And they all with one consent began to make excuse.”

[17] This was a lesson for those guests who sat with Christ at the table, and especially for the good-for-nothing babblers, who wanted to master Christ and preached much about the bread in the kingdom of God; blessed is the man who eats bread in the kingdom of heaven! Yes, Christ answers, do you want to know how blessed you are? I will tell you. The bread is now on the table and the supper prepared. John the Baptist was here, I and my Apostles invite you now to come to the supper; but you do not only stay away, you let the host sit at his great and glorious supper, but you even want to excuse yourselves and yet be pure. Hence it is a twofold sin, not only that you despise the Gospel, but even claim to be doing right, and to be even holy, pious and wise; this is a very grievous sin. It were already too wicked not to believe in the Word of God our Lord; but as they go further and despise it, and yet want to be just besides, is going entirely too far. As our young noblemen also do, who have disgraced and blasphemed the Sacrament and have given to us erring creatures only one part, and at the same time excuse themselves, and claim thereby to have done right. Yea, they also condemn us, and oppress us with all kinds of martyrdom, murder and drive away the people who truly desire to enjoy the whole Sacrament. But let them only pour out their rage hot enough, who knows, who will yet be compelled to sweat in this bath?

[18] The Jews acted and excused themselves thus: Oh, we cannot accept the doctrine, for it is opposed to the priesthood and to the law, which God himself has given us through Moses. Besides, it also creates divisions in our kingdom, which God has confirmed. We must see how to maintain our own affairs! Thus the first one excuses himself with his land, the second with his oxen, and both think they do well; the third does not even excuse himself at all, he simply refuses, and says he cannot come.

[19] These are the excuses of the Jews as well as our own, which we prefer against the Gospel, for we are no better than they were. They first pretended that the law of Moses had to remain, and because the Apostles preached against the law, that neither their law, temple nor priests were necessary, for a greater priest was present, Jesus Christ, of the tribe of Judah; they would not tolerate such preaching, but held to their law as they still do. Thus it has come to pass that they still wait at the present day, and

must wait until the last day for their Messiah to come, and they hope that he will prepare all things, the old priesthood and kingdom as it was in the time of David, when he will give them everything in the greatest abundance.

[20] For Christ here treats of these three parties. The first says: I want to see my farm. These are the foremost and best among them, among the Jews they were the entire priesthood and the chief rulers. These said: We priests must work, cultivate and harvest the land, that is, we must rule the people, and wait upon the priesthood God has entrusted unto us, as Christ also calls ministers cultivators of the soil who sow the Gospel. But as the teachings of the Apostles are opposed to this, it is wrong, and we are justly excused when we do not accept their doctrine.

[21] Thus others also who had offices in the civil government excuse themselves with the oxen. For oxen are called the rulers of the people, Psalm 22:12: "Many bulls have encompassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round." These also have a fair excuse and say: We have a kingdom and government, instituted and appointed of God, with this we must remain and see to it how we may preserve it.

[22] The third class says: The Gospel is a doctrine that will not allow covetousness, nor permit us to strive to have sufficient for our bodily needs, but commands us to risk everything, body and life, money and goods, for Christ's sake. Therefore, we will and cannot come, for we must see how we may keep our own, which God has given us. For to take a wife is not to do or undertake anything dishonorable, but to enter an honorable state, and to be at home and plan how to support yourself, which is everyone's duty. But all this is just that by which an honest housefather commits sin, when he only thinks of this, how he may become rich, keep house well and prosper. God grant it whether it be done with or against God. For the Jews took into consideration only how Moses had promised them if they would be good and keep God's commandments, to give temporal blessings, cattle, lands, wife, child, and all things should be blessed and prosper. Therefore they only sought to have their cellars and kitchens full, and to be rich, and then they thought that they were good, and that God had thus blessed them, as the Psalm says, Psalm 144:13-14.

[23] Just in this very manner our Papists still excuse themselves and say: The doctrine is right, of course, but we must still adhere to the Church and

her orderly government. Again, we must above all things maintain obedience to the worldly power, so that there may be no disturbance and insurrection. Thus they are troubled just like the Jews. If they would accept the Gospel, they fear they might lose their Church and government, whereas the Gospel alone builds up the true Christian church, and prevents all injustice, violence and insurrection. Besides covetousness is also present; since they see nothing in the Gospel but mere poverty and persecution, so that it goes as it does here, that they simply and without fear refuse to obey the Gospel and say, they have taken wives and cannot come, and still they want to be Christians and claim to have done just right, and want to be regarded as pious bishops, good princes and good citizens.

[24] But how will it go with them? Just as it did with the Jews. They held so long to their law, priesthood, kingdom and treasures, until they at last went to destruction, and lost one after the other; so that now they dwell here and there and have their homes under foreign princes as if living in a swing. This is the reward for which they labored. For they desired not this supper, and preferred their kingdom, priesthood and houses, rather than the Gospel. Therefore they lost all three, and received the sentence that none of them should taste of this supper, and thus be deprived of both, of temporal things here on earth, and of the everlasting feast in heaven. The same will also certainly be the fate of our adversaries.

[25] Thus Christ our Lord lectured this sharp doctor and his associates at the table, and showed them how they stood before our Lord God, namely, that God was angry at them, and would look out for other guests, as follows: "Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servants, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in hither the poor, and maimed, and blind, and lame."

[26] As though he would say: Very well, inasmuch as this must be done, that you must examine your land and oxen and take unto you wives, and on this account neglect my supper, that is, you want your priesthood, kingdom and wealth, and will let me and my Gospel go, hence I will let you go, too, that on this account you will lose all, and I will provide me other guests. Therefore go forth, my servant, into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in hither the poor and crippled, the lame and blind. This was also done among the Jews. For as the great lords, princes and priests, and those who were the best among the people would not accept the Gospel, for

reasons already given, our God and Lord accepted the humble fishermen, the poor, miserable and despised little flock, as St. Paul also says, 1 Corinthians 1:26-28: “For behold your calling, brethren, that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the world that he might put to shame the things that are strong, and base things of the world, and the things that are despised, did God choose, yea, and the things that are not, that he might bring to naught the things that are.”

[27] According to this passage all that are wise, holy, rich and powerful, God has rejected, because they will not accept his Gospel; and the foolish, simple, and the most insignificant little lights, as Peter, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew and the like, who were poor fishermen and needy beggars, whom he here calls the poor, the maimed, the lame and blind, are chosen, whom no one would have considered worthy to be the servants of the priests and princes of the people. These were left like dregs, and as Isaiah says, the dregs of the good costly wine; the best among the people, the priests, the leaders, the rich and powerful are cast out as a vessel of good wine, and the dregs alone are left, which the Lord here calls the poor, the lame, the maimed and the blind. These are promoted to grace and honor, so that they become acceptable to God and dear guests, because the others, the high and great people will not come.

[28] What the Pharisee now says: “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God”- to which Christ answers: Yes, blessed are they; but you and your followers are concerned about your farm and oxen. You speak of these things, therefore you shall know that a supper has been prepared, of which the poor shall eat, as the text says, Matthew 11:5, *Pauperes evangelizantur*, the poor have the Gospel preached to them. For the powerful, the saints, the wise do not want it, therefore it has come to pass that both priests and leaders have been cast away as the best wine, because they have held so firmly to their oxen, their land and their wives; and in their stead have been promoted the poor beggars, who came to the Gospel in this glorious supper.

[29] This is to press the Jews very hard, and especially this one here, who wants to be wise and to eat bread in heaven, and yet he clings to his priesthood and kingdom, let Christ and his Gospel be what they may. For

his heart is so constituted that he does not need Christ at all to make sure of heaven, but thinks our Lord God will say to him and all the Jews: Come, you Jews, and especially you priests, you saints, you princes, you fat citizens, for you the supper is prepared! Yes, says he, it is true, you are invited, but you care nothing for it and excuse yourselves and claim that you are right. Therefore I cast you away, and accept rather the most humble people, even if I shall obtain no one but the despised, the poor, the maimed and the lame.

[30] Thus it shall also be done to our adversaries, and nothing shall help them, though they be great, holy bishops, powerful princes and lords, and think that our Lord God will not thus cast them away, and accept only the poor rats' nest at Wittenberg, and the humble flock who love the Gospel. Yes, my dear friend, if God has cast away the best among his people who had such glorious and great promises, and took the dregs, neither will he give it to thee. Simply because you are great, holy and powerful, will not enable you to eat bread in heaven, for the poor have the Gospel preached to them. For our Lord is much greater, stronger, wiser and holier than all kings and all devils; therefore he cares but little about your holiness or power. And if you will still defy him and so wickedly despise his Word, he will then also rise up against you, so that all your wisdom, power and holiness will come to naught.

[31] Thus far this Gospel lesson pertains only to the Jews; for Christ speaks of the lame and cripple who are found in the streets of the city. The people of the Jews are called a city, because they were a constituted and well-ordered people, and had the law, the worship, the temple, the priests and king, all of which was ordained by God himself and established by Moses. Now he also sends his servant into the highways and commands him to take guests wherever he could find them, even the beggars along the hedges and everywhere. "And the Lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in that my house may be filled."

[32] This refers to us, the heathen, who have dwelt in no city, who were without any worship of the true God, but were idolatrous, and did not know what we or God were. Therefore our condition is properly called a free, open place on the highways, in the field, where the devil walks over us and has his quarters.

[33] Go thither, he says, and constrain them to come in. For the world arrays itself against the Gospel in every way, and cannot tolerate this doctrine, and yet this housefather wants his house full of guests, for he himself has thus made preparations, and he now must have people to eat, drink and be joyful, even if he had to make them of stones.

[34] Here we can also see that Christ our Lord suffers the world to stand so long for our sakes, although he would have sufficient reason, because of our sins to destroy it every moment. Yet he does not do this because he still desires more guests, and because of the elect who also belong to this supper. Now, because his servants bring the precious Gospel to us, is an indication that we who are baptized and believe, also belong to this supper, for we are the great lords of the hedges, who are blind, poor and lost heathen.

[35] But how shall we be constrained, as God does not want any forced worship? He constrains us by having the Gospel preached to all men: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." Here he shows us both heaven and hell, death and life, wrath and grace, and reveals unto us our sins and ruined condition, so that we may be awakened on account of it, because we hear that a man as soon as he is born, naturally belongs to the devil and is condemned. This is part of this constraint, by which one is terrified at the wrath of God and desires grace and help from him.

[36] When this has taken place by preaching and the hearts are thus stricken and awakened, he then desires that we should preach thus: Dear friend, do not despair because you are a sinner and have such a terrible sentence passed upon you; but do this, go forth and be baptized and hear the Gospel. Here you will learn that Jesus Christ has died for your sake, and has made satisfaction for your sins. If you believe this, then you will be safe against the wrath of God and eternal death, and you shall eat here at this glorious supper and live well, become hearty and strong.

[37] This means rightly to constrain, namely, to terrify with sin, not as the Pope constrains with his ban. He does not properly awaken the conscience, because he does not teach what sin really is, but deals with his foolish work, saying, whoever does not observe his order and human tradition, shall be put under the ban. But the Gospel begins to reveal sin and the wrath of God from heaven, Romans 1, that we all live unrighteously and

godlessly, without exception. This our Lord commands us to preach through the Gospel when he says to the Apostles: “Go forth and preach repentance.” But a man cannot preach repentance unless he declares that God is angry at all men, because they are full of unbelief, contempt of God and other sins.

[38] This wrath must terrify them and make their consciences timid and fearful, that they constrain themselves and say: O, Lord God! What shall I ever do to be relieved from this distress? Now when man is terrified and feels his wretchedness and misery, then it is right to say to him: Sit down at the table of this rich Lord and eat, for there are yet many tables without guests and plenty to eat, that is, be baptized and believe in Jesus Christ, that he has made satisfaction for your sins. Otherwise, there are no means to aid you, except you be baptized and believe. Thus wrath will cease and heaven will shine with pure grace and mercy, forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

[39] Therefore these words, “Constrain them to come in” are for the poor, miserable multitude of those who are constrained, that is, especially we, who before were lost and condemned heathen, the lovely and comfortable from the masses, by which God desires to forcibly portray and show unto us his unfathomable grace. For it must ever be an unspeakable love, that he shows in these words that he is so desirous for our welfare and salvation, that he commands us not only to call and encourage poor sinners to come to this supper in a friendly way, but also desires them to be urged and constrained, and that such urging is not to cease, that they may only come to his supper. By this he sufficiently shows that he will not cast them away or permit them to be lost, wherever they themselves will not only through malicious contempt and hardened impenitence oppose such efforts to constrain them. So that he is as Tauler said, immeasurably more anxious to give and help us, than we are or ever can be to receive or to pray, and demands and requires nothing more difficult from us, than that we should widely open our hearts and accept his grace.

[40] This constraining, however, is necessary in preaching both repentance and forgiveness of sins; for without repentance we remain too hard and obdurate under his wrath, in our sinful nature and in the kingdom of the devil. And moreover, when the terror of divine wrath strikes us, we are again too fearful, modest and disturbed, to take this to heart and believe, that he will show us such great grace and mercy, and we are always full of anxiety that we do not belong to them, and that he will reject us because of

our sins and great unworthiness. Therefore he must himself command and work that men continue and persevere evermore to constrain and urge as much as possible, both by holding forth wrath for the wicked and grace for the faithful. Wrath and repentance urge man to run and cry for grace. This is then the right way a person goes to this supper, and thus from Jews and Gentiles there will be one Christian church, and all will be called alike poor, miserable people, lame and crippled, for they accept the Gospel heartily and with joy.

[41] Those, however, who will not do this, be they as wise and as shrewd as they please, receive this sentence, they shall not taste of this supper, that is, the wrath of God shall remain upon them and they shall be condemned on account of their unbelief. For here our Lord does not inquire, as before said, whether they be rich, wise or holy. Therefore, although they be already secure and think there is no danger, they will nevertheless experience, that this sentence will stand, when the Lord here concludes: Non gustabunt, “they shall not taste of my supper.” We, however, who accept it and with terrified hearts on account of our sins do not reject the grace of God which is made known to us in the Gospel through Christ and is offered to us, shall receive grace instead of wrath; instead of sin, eternal righteousness; and instead of eternal death, eternal life.

[42] In our time this terrible sentence, as we see, most powerfully goes forth against the Jews and the Turks, and no savor of the Gospel is left them; yea, it is to them a disgust and abomination, so that they can neither tolerate nor hear it. So are also our Popes and bishops, they shall not even smell this supper, not to say anything of their being filled with it. But we, who by God’s peculiar grace have come to this doctrine, shall become hearty, strong and joyful by it, and at the table of this supper we are of good cheer. God grant that we may thus remain constant to the end! Amen.

[43] Thus in this parable the Lord would admonish us to esteem the Gospel as dear and precious, and not hold to the crowd who think they are smart, wise, powerful and holy. For here stands the sentence: They shall be cast off and shall never taste of this supper; as among the Jewish people they have been cast off, and only the small dregs thereof remained. Thus it will also be with us, when we prefer our land, oxen, wives, that is, as it is at present called, spiritual or worldly honor along with temporal goods, to the Gospel.

[44] He declares in simple, humble, short but very earnest words: “They shall not taste of my supper.” As though he would say: Very well, my supper, too, is something, and what does it profit if it be better than their oxen, lands, homes and wives, when they now despise it, and regard their lands, oxen and homes, more precious? And when the hour shall come when they must forsake their oxen, lands and homes, then they would gladly also taste of my supper. But then, too, it shall be said: Dear friend, I am not at home at present, I cannot now wait on the guests, go forth to your lands, to your oxen, to your homes, they will, of course, afford you a better supper, because you have so securely and impudently despised my supper. Of course, I have cooked for you and let it cost me dear; this you have rejected with disdain. If now you have cooked better things, eat and be joyful, but you shall not taste of my supper.

[45] This will be to them all a hard, terrible, and unbearable sentence, when he will call his supper everlasting life, and their lands, oxen and homes the everlasting fire of hell; and remain firm by this forever, that they shall not taste of his supper, that is, there shall be no more hope for them forever. For there, neither repentance nor sorrow will avail, and from thence there shall be no return. Therefore, these are exceedingly violent words, which show the great and endless wrath of the master of the house, for this is customary with great lords and high people, when they are real angry, they do not speak many words. But what they do say, every word weighs a hundred pounds, for they intend to do more violently than they can express in words. How much more do those short words of the Almighty Lord signify an inexpressible wrath, which can never be reconciled.

[46] Yet we act as though a fool or a child had spoken such hard, terrible words, at which we could laugh and make sport, or as though it were our Lord’s jest and mockery, and neither hear nor see what the text plainly says, that he is angry, and has spoken this in great wrath; and that he is not a fool or a child, but the Lord and God over all things, before whom we justly tremble and are terrified, as the Scriptures say, the mountains with their base and foundation, and both the sea and the waters flee before him. But no creature is so hard and perverse as man, who has no fear whatever for anything, but despises and makes light of it.

[47] But we are indeed sufficiently excused who say: This is our boast. For on that day the whole world must bear witness and confess that they

have heard it from us, saw and experienced it, and it does not worry us if they condemn it as heresy. We will gladly bear it, that they call it heresy, and we hear it enough and beyond measure, and thank them kindly besides, that they cry it down as heresy. For thereby they always confess that they have certainly heard, seen and read it. I desire nothing more of them, for in that they confess that they have heard it, they testify that we have not been silent. If then we have not been silent, but have faithfully and diligently taught and preached this, so that our enemies themselves say that we have pressed it too hard, then let that man judge us, whom we hold has commanded us so to preach, and then let that god defend or condemn them, who urges them to condemn us. It shall be known in God's name, whose God is the true God, and whose Christ is the true Christ, and which church is the true Church. It shall be known when the snow disappears.

[48] Although there can be no better government for this world than the devil's, or instead of the devil's, the government of the Pope, for this is what the world wants. What the devil wants goes forth and mightily prospers; what God wants both in the spiritual and worldly government, never succeeds and has innumerable hindrances, so that, if I could separate the world from the church, I would gladly assist to subject the world to the Pope and the devil. But Christ our Lord will do this and other things besides, and will keep his supper far enough from the world and the devil.

Third Sunday after Trinity. Christian Conduct Toward Sinners. The Parable of the Lost Sheep.

Text: Luke 15:1-10.

1 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.
2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.
3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying,
4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?
5 And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.
6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.
7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.
8 Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?
9 And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.
10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. Luke 15:1-10

[1] The words of the Gospel are living and quickening, if we only comprehend them aright. But, in order that we may learn to understand this Gospel better, we will now place before us two classes of men, namely, public sinners and Pharisees, and will make Christ their judge. You have often heard that it is our duty, for love's sake, to serve our neighbor in all things. If he is poor, we are to serve him with our goods; if he is in disgrace, we are to cover him with the mantle of our honor; if he is a sinner, we are to adorn him with our righteousness and piety. That is what Christ did for us. Philippians 2. He who was so exceedingly rich did, for our sake, empty himself and become poor. He served us with his goods, that we in our poverty might become rich. He was made to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

[2] Now, the outward works of love are very great, as when we place our goods in the service of another. But the greatest is this, that I surrender my own righteousness and make it serve for the sins of my neighbor. For, outwardly to render service and help by means of one's goods is love only in its outward aspect; but to render help and service through one's righteousness, that is something great and pertains to the inward man. This means that I must love the sinner and be his friend, must be hostile to his vices and earnestly rebuke them, yet that I must love him with all my heart so as to cover his sins with my righteousness. I am commanded to rebuke; but Christ tells me, in Matthew 18:15-18, how I am to do this: "If thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone; if he hear thee, then hast thou gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church; and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican. Verily I say unto you, what things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

[3] In short, such an enemy of my neighbor am I to be that I cannot let him suffer. So dearly must I love him that I shall even run after him, and shall become like the shepherd that seeks the lost sheep, like the woman that seeks the lost piece of silver. On this occasion, therefore, we shall speak concerning such great work of love as is shown when a pious man invests the sinner with his own righteousness, when a pious woman invests the most wanton harlot with her own honor.

[4] This is something that neither the world nor reason will do. A work like this cannot be done by honorable and pious men who are actuated only by reason, by men who would prove their piety by turning up their nose at those who are sinners, as here the Pharisees do who murmur and grumble at public sinners.

[5] This is what our monks do. They have gone about making faces at all who lie in their sins, and have thought: "Oh, but this is a worldly fellow! He does not concern us. If, now, he really would be pious, let him put on the monk's cowl." Hence it is that reason and such hypocrites cannot refrain from despising those who are not like them. They are puffed up over their own life and conduct, and cannot advance far enough to be merciful to

sinner. This much they do not know, that they are to be servants, and that their piety is to be of service to others. Moreover, they become so proud and harsh that they are unable to manifest any love. They think: "This peasant is not worthy to unloose the latchet of my shoes; therefore do not say that I am to show him any affection." But at this point God intervenes, permitting the proud one to receive a severe fall and shock that he often becomes guilty of such sins as adultery, and at times does things even worse, and must afterwards smite himself, saying: "Keep still, brother, and restrain yourself, you are of precisely the same stuff as yonder peasant." He thereby acknowledges that we are all chips of the same block. No ass need deride another as a beast of burden; for we are all of one flesh.

[6] This we clearly see in the two sorts of people here presented to us as examples. In the first place, we have the Pharisees and hypocrites who are exceedingly pious people, and were over head and ears in holiness. In the second place, we have the open sinners and publicans, who were over head and ears in sins. These, therefore, were despised by those shining saints, and were not considered worthy of their society. Here, however, Christ intervenes with his judgment and says that those saints are to stoop down and take the sinners upon their shoulders, and are to bear in mind that, with their righteousness and piety, they are to help others out of their sins. But, no! That they will not do. And this is indeed the way it goes.

[7] A truly Christian work is it that we descend and get mixed up in the mire of the sinner as deeply as he sticks there himself, taking his sin upon ourselves and floundering out of it with him, not acting otherwise than as if his sin were our own. We should rebuke and deal with him in earnest; yet we are not to despise but sincerely to love him. If you are proud toward the sinner and despise him, you are utterly damned.

[8] These, then, are great and good works in which we should exercise ourselves. But no man pays attention to them. Such works have entirely faded away and become extinct. In the meantime, one resorts, in the name of the devil, to Saint James, another proceeds to build a church, a third provides for the saying of masses, — this one does this, the other does that, and no one thinks of praying for the sinner. It is therefore to be feared that the holiest are in the deepest hell, and that the sinners are mostly in heaven. But it would be a truly Christian work, if you received sinners, if you entered into your closet and there said, in earnest prayer to the Lord: "Oh,

my God! of such a person I hear so and so, he lieth in his sins, he hath fallen. Oh, Lord, help him to rise again,” etc. This is just the way in which to receive and serve the sinner.

[9] Moses acted thus when the Israelites worshipped the molten calf. He mingled freely with the people in their’ sins. Yet he punished them severely, and caused three thousand men to be slain from gate to gate. Exodus 32. After that he went up and bowed down before God, and prayed that he would forgive the people their sin, or blot him out of the Book of Life. Behold, here we have a man who knew that God loved him and had written his name in the book of the blessed; and yet he says: “Lord, I would rather that thou shouldest damn me and save the people.”

[10] Paul, too, acted thus. At times he rebuked the Jews severely, calling them dogs and other names. Yet he knelt down and said: “I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren’s sake.” Romans 9:3. It is as if he had said: “I would willingly be anathema, if only the mass of the people might be helped.” Such a course as this is much too lofty for reason, and passes beyond its conception. It is thus that we, too, must act, and thus that we must serve our neighbor.

[11] Again, we have an incident in the first Book of Samuel. When the people demanded a king, and would not be ruled by God’s Word alone, but lost faith in the Lord, and said that they wanted a temporal king to go out before them and fight their battles, like all the nations, 1 Samuel 8:20. Then God came and punished them for the sin of having despised him, and spake thus to the prophet Samuel: “They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me.” After that the people came to Samuel and besought him to pray for them, saying: “Pray for thy servants unto Jehovah thy God, that we die not; for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask a king.” Then Samuel, among other things, said unto them: “Far be it from me that I should sin against Jehovah in ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way. Only fear Jehovah, and serve him in truth with all your heart, for consider how great things he hath done for you.” 1 Samuel 12:19-24.

[12] David also acted thus. When the Lord inflicted the plagues upon Israel he spake unto the Lord and said: “Lo, I have sinned, and I have done

perversely; but these sheep, what have they done? Let thy hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house."

[13] Such should be your bearing toward sinners; inwardly the heart in service, outwardly the tongue in earnest. God requires this of us; and this is what Christ, our Captain, has manifested in himself, as Paul says to the Philippians 2:4-9: "Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others. Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross."

[14] Christ was filled with all righteousness, and might justly have condemned us all as sinners. But he did not do so. What did he do, then? He gave himself to be our Servant. His righteousness has served for our sins, his fullness for our feebleness, his life for our death. This we find illustrated, for our example, in the Gospel before us, where he bears himself with such friendliness toward sinners that the Pharisees murmur. The Lord therefore sets before them the following parables in order to teach how they are to receive sinners and be of service to them, saying: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it, etc. Or what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a lamp, and sweep the house, and seek diligently until she find it?"

[15] Christ is both the shepherd and the woman; for he has lighted the lamp, that is, the Gospel, and he goes about in the desert, that is, the world. He sweeps the house, and seeks the lost sheep and lost piece of silver, when he comes with his Word and proclaims to us, first our sins, and then his grace and mercy. Christ's declaration, that he is the shepherd and has laid our sins upon his back or shoulders, makes us trust in him fully, and makes publicans and other sinners run after him. These would not have come unto him thus, had they regarded him as a hard and wrathful judge; for they had previously acknowledged themselves to be sinners and in need of his grace. And so they were drawn to him when they heard his loving doctrine. Here

comes the sheep out of the wilderness, and here the lost piece of silver is found.

[16] Learn from this, then, that our neighbor is to be sought as a lost sheep, that his shame is to be covered with our honor, that our piety is to be a cover for his sins. But nowadays, when men come together they backbite one another; and thus they would show how zealous they are against sin. Therefore, ye men, whenever ye come together, do not backbite your neighbors. Make not one face at one person and another at someone else. Do not cut off one man's foot and another man's hand; make no such traffic of living flesh. Likewise, ye women, when you come together, conceal the shame of others, and do not cause wounds which you cannot heal. Should you meet with anything like this in someone's house, then throw your mantle over shame and wounds, and close the door. A very good reason for doing this is, that you would have others do the same to you. Then, if you have kept the matter secret, bring the parties before you afterwards, and read them a good lecture; and let it remain with you as a secret.

[17] Christ, too, acts thus. He keeps silent and covers our sins. He could, indeed, expose us to shame, and could tread us under foot, as our text shows that the Pharisees did. But he does not do so. All will be brought to light, however, at the final judgment. Then everything hidden must be revealed. Then the virgin must place her crown upon the harlot, the pious woman must throw her veil over the adulteress, and everything we have must serve as a garment to cover the sins of others. For every man shall have his sheep, and every woman shall have her piece of silver. All our gifts must be the gifts of others.

[18] Hence there is, in God's judgment, no greater sin on earth than that pious men and women and virgins commit when they despise those who lie in their sin and would appropriate to themselves their natural gifts, puffing themselves up and despising their neighbor.

[19] Hence this Gospel is very comforting to sinners. But whilst it is friendly to sinners, it is a source of great fear to Pharisees. Had this Gospel been nothing more than a good counsel, it would not have been so comforting; but now that it has been commanded I can recognize the mind of God in Christ, since he will have it so, and enjoins that we are to cover the sins of others. Yea, what is still more, Christ himself does this, and to

this end was he sent; for no man fulfills the law of God as perfectly as he. We are scarcely a spark amid the divine fire and light. He is the fire of which heaven and earth are full.

[20] The Gospel is spoken to those only who acknowledge their sins, and their sins they acknowledge when they repent of them. But this Gospel is of no use to the Pharisees, for they do not acknowledge their sins. To those, however, who do acknowledge them, and are about to despair, the Gospel must be brought. But at this point the devil sets up a game, and suggests to the consciences of those who acknowledge their sins and long to be freed from them, that this one should resort to Saint James, that one to Rome, this one should take refuge in prayers, the other in confession. And then they are told: "Give six pounds of wax, have so many masses said, do this, do that, and thus you will be freed from your sins." Thereby they are led farther and farther from the Gospel, and are brought to the standpoint of works. In this way they must certainly despair at last.

[21] Therefore, when you feel your sins gnawing at you, and feel your heart trembling and agitated, place yourself beside the publicans where they are standing. These are the very ones who shall receive the Gospel. Do so joyously, and say: "Oh, God! it is thy word that says there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance, and that all the righteous and angels are to interpose and cover up sins. Now, Oh, God! I have come to this that I feel my sins. I am already judged. I need but the one Shepherd who seeketh me; and I will therefore freely venture on thy Gospel."

[22] It is thus that you come to God. You are already the sheep placed upon his shoulders. You have found the Shepherd. You are the piece of silver in the hand. You are the one over whom is joy in heaven in the presence of all the angels. We are not to worry, if we do not experience or feel this at once. Sin will daily decrease, and its sting will drive you to seek God. You must struggle against this feeling by faith, and say: "Oh, God! I know thou hast said this, and I lean upon thy Word. I am the sheep and the piece of silver; thou the shepherd and the woman."

[23] You might say: Yes, this I will gladly do; but I cannot atone for my sins. I can render no satisfaction for them. Consider then the publicans and sinners. What good have they done? None. They came to God, heard his

Word and believed it. Do the same. His are living words. The Gospel is too deep to be fathomed by human words. Conscientious men who tried it readily understand this.

[24] The learned and idle may determine the meaning of the ninety-nine in the desert. It is enough for us to learn the main thought of this Gospel.

Third Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. The Doctrine of Christian Liberty; Grace and the Forgiveness of Sins.

Text: Luke 15:1-10.

- 1 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.
- 2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.
- 3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying,
- 4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?
- 5 And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.
- 6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.
- 7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.
- 8 Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?
- 9 And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours

together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.

10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. Luke 15:1-10

[1] This Gospel contains the teaching we hold and boast of as our chief doctrine, which is called the true Christian teaching, namely, the doctrine of grace and forgiveness of sins, and Christian liberty from the law. It is a very loving and friendly admonition to repentance and the knowledge of Christ. And it is ever a pity, that a godless, impudent person should be permitted to hear such an excellent, comforting and joyful sermon. And yet it is more sad, that everyone graduates so soon in it and masters it so that he thinks he knows it so well that he can learn nothing more from it. Yet God, our Lord, does not permit himself to become vexed or weary in repeating it yearly, yea, every day, and enforces it as though he knew nothing else to preach, and as though he had no other skill or art. While we poor, wretched people immediately become so overlearned, so satisfied, tired of it and disgusted besides, that we have no longer a desire or love for it.

[2] But before we take up the subject taught in this Gospel, let us first examine what St. Luke gives as an introduction to show what prompted Christ to preach the following sermon, when he says: “Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him to hear him,” because they wanted to be near him to hear his word, and he expresses freely and plainly what kind of people he had about him, namely, those who openly lived as they should not live, and were called downright sinners and wicked people. Thus it would appear that the Pharisees had sufficient reason to blame him, because he, who pretended to be a pious and holy man kept company with such low characters.

[3] For at that time the men scattered hither and thither through the land were called publicans, to whom the Romans gave charge of a city, or of the revenue, or other duties or offices, and required of them a certain amount of revenue; just as the Turks or Venetians now assign a city or office to a certain person from which he must give many thousands of dollars a year, and whatever he extorts over and above that amount is his own. In this manner they proceeded. Those who collected such revenue and tax

proceeded so that they had a profit from it. And as this sum thus appointed was large for each city or office, the officers extorted without let or hindrance, so that they might enjoy more as their own; for their masters were so close with them that they could not gain much for themselves, if they desired to act justly and take advantage of no one. Hence they were reported in all lands as being great extortioners in whom little good or honesty could be found.

[4] Thus the other great crowds in general were called “sinners,” who otherwise were worse people and publicly lived in a shameful and wild way, in covetousness, adultery and the like. Such drew near to Christ in order to hear him, since they had heard, that in the light of his doctrine and his many miracles he was an excellent man.

[5] Now, after all, there was a spark or two of virtue and honesty in them, that they had a desire for Christ and gladly heard his doctrine, and see what he did. Inasmuch as they well knew that he was a good man, and heard nothing but good of him, both in words and deeds, so that their doings did neither agree nor harmonize with his life; and yet they feel no enmity against him, nor flee from him, but go to him, not to seek anything evil in him, but to see and hear something good, and to hope that they might become better.

[6] The Pharisees and the scribes, on the contrary, who were held and esteemed as the most pious and holy, were such poisonous reptiles, that they were not only enemies of Christ, and could not bear to see or hear him, nor suffer poor sinners to come to him and hear him that they might be made better, yet they even murmured and blamed him for harboring and receiving them, and said: Behold, is this that excellent and holy man? Who will now say that he is of God, as he associates with such rogues and wicked people? Yes, he is a “wine-bibber and a glutton,” and they say in another place, “a friend of publicans and sinners.”

[7] Such names he must bear from these holy people, not because he was riotous or given to gluttony and drunkenness, but only because he permitted them to come to him, and did not thrust them from him nor despise them. For they thought he should have done so, and should have gone forth in a gray frock with a sour countenance and remained secluded from common people, and when he saw such publicans and sinners, he should have held

his nose and looked the other way, so that he would not become polluted by them, as they themselves like holy people were accustomed to do. As Isaiah, 65:5, writes of them: that they kept themselves so pure that they would not dare to touch a sinner; as may also be seen in the example of Luke 7:39, where the Pharisees so bitterly opposed Christ, because he allowed himself to be touched by a woman who was a sinner. Now, these were they who at all times desired to be his master, and to prescribe to him and give him rules how he should conduct himself and live holy. Hence they murmur here, because he does not hold to them and avoid such public sinners as they do.

[8] Now Christ is also a little self-willed and shows here that he is simply not to be dictated to by anyone, and that he will be free in all things, as we see also everywhere in the Gospel, that a peculiar firmness or self-will is found in this man, who is nevertheless at other times so mild a man, willing and ready to help, the like of whom was never found on earth. But when they came to him with laws and wanted to be his teachers, then all friendship was at an end, he starts and bounds back, as when you strike on an anvil, and he speaks and does just the contrary they demand of him, although they even say rightly and well, and have God's word for it, as they do here where they come and say: You should do thus, you should hold to the society of good people and not to sinners. This is a precious doctrine taken out of the Scriptures; for Moses himself writes that they should avoid the wicked, and put away evil from among them. They have the text on their side, and come trolling with their Moses, and want to bind him and rule him by their laws.

[9] But, whether it be God's law or the law of man, he will in short be unbound, like the unicorn, of which it is said, that it cannot be taken alive, it matters not how you attempt it. It will suffer itself to be pierced, shot and killed, but it will never submit to be taken. Thus Christ also acts, although you approach him with laws to throw them over him, he will not endure it, but he bursts through them as through a spider's web, and gives to them besides a good lecture. As in Matthew 12:3, where they blamed his disciples because they plucked the ears of corn on the Sabbath day, citing the divine command to keep the Sabbath day holy; he turns it around altogether and bursts through the commandment and proves besides, both by Scriptures and examples, just the contrary. Again, in Matthew 16:22-23,

where he tells his Apostles how he shall suffer and be crucified, and when Peter with good intentions comes forth with the law of love and sets before him God's commandment and says: "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall never be unto thee." In this connection he also gives him a good strong reply, and handles him roughly and unfriendly, and says: "Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men."

[10] In short, wherever they begin to deal with him only according to laws, he resents it and will be free from all laws, and be the Lord of them all, by which he thrusts them from him, and will observe no law at all, as though he were bound to keep it. And yet, on the contrary, when it springs from himself no law is so trifling, but that he will gladly keep it, yea, even much more than the law could demand, so that a more willing servant could not be found, when he is left free without a master. Yea, he even humbles himself as lowly as to wash and kiss the feet of Judas, his betrayer, and even protects his disciples at night, as history relates of him, and we may well believe, as he says himself, Matthew 20:28: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." There, of course, belong the works of the law, but not as springing out of the law nor compelled by the law. As also may be seen by his life in that he always goes about hither and thither in the land, sleeps at night on the bare earth, fasts forty days without rest, and performs so many labors that they feared he might lose his mind, Mark 3:21, or harm his body. He does whatever he should and can, but he will be free and unbound, and will have no laws prescribed to him, and wherever one attempts it, there he halts and defends himself most determinedly. Thus he is both the most obstinate and the most kind of all men, and at the same time he is neither stubborn nor slavish, who will do nothing to which he is driven by the law, and yet he does all things in abundance like a flood of good works, when he is only permitted to work of his own free will, without being mastered and taught.

[11] This has been written for us as an example, that we may learn what a true Christian man he is according to the Spirit, and that we should not judge him according to the law, nor master him according to our own shrewdness; for this reason also Christ is our Lord, that he may make out of us such people as he is himself. And as he will not suffer himself to be bound by any laws, but is Lord over the law and all things, thus also the faith of a Christian church should not suffer it. For through Christ and his

baptism we are to be so highly exalted and liberated that our conscience according to faith may know no law, but simply remain unmastered and unjudged by the same, that nothing else may be so cheerful to us according to the internal experience of conscience, than as though no law had ever appeared on earth, neither ten nor one commandment, either of God, or the Pope, or the emperor; but at all times stand in liberty, that we can say: I know no law, and do not desire to know any.

[12] For in this state and nature by virtue of which we became Christians, all human works cease, and hence all law. For where there is no work, there can be no law to demand work and to say: do this, leave that; but we are through baptism and through the blood of Christ simply free from all works, and justified by mere grace and mercy, and even live before God alone by them. This is, I say, our treasure, according to which we are Christians and live and stand before God. For how we should live according to the outward life in our flesh and blood before the world, has nothing whatever to do here.

[13] Therefore a Christian must so learn to rule his conscience before God as not to permit himself to be ensnared by any law, but whenever his faith is attacked by the law, let him defend himself against it, and act as Christ does here and in other places, where he shows himself so firm, exceptional and odd, that neither Moses nor any legal exacter can do anything with him, although he is otherwise the most humble, the most gentle and friendly of men.

[14] However, this is an excellent and sublime art, which no one knows but he alone who was the master of it, who was able to defy all laws and teachers of law. But we cannot attain to this high degree, for the devil sports with our flesh and blood, when he attacks a man in his conscience and makes him tell what he has done and not done, and disputes with him both concerning his sins and piety. Here a man is drawn into a pit of clay and deep mire, so that he cannot extricate himself, but only sinks deeper and deeper. For it rests upon him as a heavy load and presses him down, so that he is not able to rise above it, under which he goes on and consumes himself with it, and cannot obtain peace. As I also feel in my own experience, when with my labor I cannot extricate myself, although I labor incessantly, and though I strangle myself to get out of the pit, that I might rise above the law, and accomplish enough to compel it to be quiet and say:

Well, you have done sufficient, now I am satisfied with thee! But it amounts to nothing, for it is such a deep pit and mire, out of which no one can emerge, even if he take the whole world to his assistance, as all can bear me witness who have tried it, and still daily experience.

[15] Now the cause of this is that our entire nature is so that it is in short inclined to be occupied with works and laws and hear what they dictate and follow those who say: Why does he eat with publicans and sinners? If he would eat and drink with us, then he would do right. Again: Why do your disciples pluck the ears of corn and do what one ought not to do on the Sabbath day? And they always act and dispute with the law until it says: Now you are good. For it cannot rise higher nor understand anything better than that the doctrine of the law is the highest doctrine, and its righteousness is the best life before God. Thus human nature remains in the law, forever captive and bound. And as it lays hold and makes the attempt, it can never quiet the law, so that it has nothing to demand or to punish, but is compelled to remain captive under the law as in a perpetual prison. And the longer human nature struggles and afflicts itself with the law, the worse it becomes until entirely overcome.

[16] What then am I to do when the law attacks me and oppresses my conscience, because I am conscious of not having done what it requires? I answer: Behold what Christ does here, he sets his head against it, and grows firm, and allows no law to be forced upon him, even though it be taken from the law of God. Thus you must learn to do, and flatly say to it: My dear law, let your contention cease, and go your own way, for I have nothing to do with thee; yes, just because you come to dispute with me and inquire how good I am, I will not hear thee; for nothing avails before this judge, with whom we now dispute, nothing what I am and shall do or not do; but only what Christ is, gives and does. For we are now in the bridal chamber, where the bride and the bridegroom should be alone, you have no right to enter there, or speak on this subject.

[17] However, in this very way the law still continues to knock and say: Yes, nevertheless you must do good works, keep God's commandment, if you want to be saved. Here answer again: Do you not clearly hear, that it avails nothing now to consider this. For I have already my righteousness and the sum of all salvation in Christ my Lord without any works, and I was already saved long before thou camest, so that I have no need whatever of

thee. For as I said, where works are of no avail, the law also amounts to nothing, and where no law is there is also no sin. Therefore nothing shall rule here except the bride alone in the bridal chamber with Christ, in whom she possesses all things together, and lacks nothing that is necessary unto salvation, and the law must remain excluded with drums and trumpets, and courageously despised and banished when it would attack the conscience. For it does not belong here, it comes out of season, and wants to make a great ado where it should not intrude, for here we are in the sphere of the article of faith; I believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, who suffered for me, died and was buried, rose again from the dead, etc. Before him must give place the law of Moses, of the emperor and of God, and I am to repel everything that would dispute with me about sin, right or wrong, and everything I may do.

[18] Behold, Christ would here present to us such liberty, so that we as Christians according to our faith may tolerate no other master, but only hold that we are baptized and called unto Christ, and through him have become justified and sanctified, and say: This is my righteousness, my treasure, my work and everything against sin and wrong, which the law can do and bring against me. If you want another righteousness, work, law, sin, then take them where you may, you will not find them in me. In this way a man may defend himself and withstand the suggestions and temptations of the devil, either referring to past or present sins; so that these two may be kept wide apart, Moses and Christ, works and faith, conscience and the outward life; so that when the law attacks me and would terrify my heart, then it is time to give the good law a furlough, and if it will not go, bravely drive it away, and say: Gladly would I do and promote good works where I can at the proper time, when among the people; but here where my conscience must stand before God, I will know nothing of them, in this only let me alone, and do not speak to me of what I do or fail to do. Here I will not listen either to Moses or the Pharisees, but my baptism and Christ only shall reign here in full sway, and I will like Mary sit at his feet and hear his Word. But Martha must stay out and go about in the kitchen and do her housework, and in short, leave the conscience alone.

[19] But how is it, if I still continually have sin in me, that is certainly not right? I answer: It is true, I am a sinner and do wrong; but I am not going to despair on that account nor run straight to hell, or flee from the

law; for I have still a righteousness and work far above Moses, by which I apprehend him who has apprehended me, and I cleave to him who has embraced me in baptism and laid me in his bosom, and by his Gospel has promoted me to the fellowship of all his benefits, and commands me to believe in him. Where he is, there I command the Pharisees, and Moses with his tables, all lawyers with their books, all men with their works, immediately to be silent and depart. For here no law has any right to accuse or demand, although I have not done it nor can I do it, for in Christ I have all things in abundance, whatever I need or lack.

[20] Such, I say, is the Christian's doctrine and skill, and it belongs only where Christ reigns, and the conscience acts as in God's presence. But this is not preached to rough, impudent and light-minded people, who understand nothing of it, and who as St. Peter says in his second Epistle, 3:6, only confuse and pervert such doctrine to their own condemnation, from which they take license to live as they please, and say: Ho! why shall I do good works? What harm is it if I am a sinner? Has not Christ abolished the law? Now, this too will not avail, for here you must view Christ from another point, and observe what he further does. For here he himself says that he is the man who seeks the poor lost sheep, and besides proves it by his present deed, in that he receives publicans and sinners, and preaches to them. Here you will see that he does a great deal more than what the law has commanded, and by his example also teaches thee to do likewise. He is so proud that he will not be under the law; and again he is so willing that he desires to do much more than the law can require. Do thou also likewise, and wait not first until you are driven and tormented with the law, but do what you should of your own accord without the law, as St Peter admonishes, 1 Peter 2:16 "As free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bond servants of God;" and in Romans 6:18 says: "And being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness." These are they who do all things with a free conscience without the coercing of the law.

[21] For where the Gospel is truly in the heart, it creates a new man who does not wait until the law comes, but, being so full of joy in Christ, and of desire and love for that which is good, he gladly helps and does good to everyone wherever he can, from a free heart, before he ever once thinks of the law. He wholly risks his body and life, without asking what he must

suffer on account of it, and thus abounds in good works which flow forth of themselves. Just like Christ will not be compelled to pick up a straw, but without compulsion he permits himself to be nailed to the cross for me and the whole world, and dies for the lost sheep. This may indeed be called work above work.

[22] Therefore learn now carefully to discriminate, both rightly to place and to divide these things, when it comes to the test, and when the law and sin would dispute with the conscience, that you courageously take the word out of the mouth of Moses and tell him to be still, and order him out to your old man, whom you are to lead into the school of Moses, that he may dispute with him and say: Listen, you are both lazy and slow to do good, and to serve your neighbor. When you should praise Christ, you rather drink a bottle of beer. And before you expose yourself to danger for Christ's sake, you prefer to rob and cheat your neighbor wherever you can. For the same lazy scoundrel who will not move, whose hands will not work, whose feet will not go where they should, whose eyes are not chaste, here you may take stones and smite the old Adam until he does move.

[23] Therefore, when Moses attacks me where it is right, I am to say to him, I will gladly hear and follow thee, namely with my hands and life, aside from the faith and righteousness of my conscience before God, there thou mayest reign like a schoolmaster amid the servants of the family, and order me to be obedient, chaste and patient, to do good to my neighbor, to help the poor, to praise and honor God, besides allow myself to be disgraced and slandered for the sake of his Word, and suffer the world to bring upon me all its torments. In all this I am well pleased, and am willing to do even more than I am able as to the outward man. For Christ says the spirit is willing, and more than willing, but the flesh is weak. For thus he permits himself to be circumcised, to offer in the temple, to be scourged and crucified, none of which was necessary for him, nor could the law demand them from him. But should Moses go further, where he has no right, that is, into my heart and conscience, there I will neither hear nor see him. For there I have another great and unspeakable treasure, called Christ, with his baptism and Gospel. In a word, what concerns the outer man, there Moses cannot burden nor urge too much, but he dare not in the least burden the conscience. For where the Spirit is who brings us Christ, he is above all law, as St. Paul says, 1 Timothy 1:9: "That law is not made for a righteous man,"

and yet he at the same time does more than he is able to accomplish according to the flesh. For after the flesh we are nothing but sinners, and as to our person we would of course have to remain condemned under the law; but by virtue of Christ and baptism we rise high above all law.

[24] Thus let Moses carry on his rough work, aside from Christ to urge those who are not Christians, or ever spur the old Adam. For Christians he cannot thereby make either pious or righteous; but of course he does this, namely, he shows them their duty, which according to the Spirit they gladly do, and much more besides, except that the flesh does not willingly follow nor obey the Spirit, so that on this account they still need not be admonished and urged. But at the same time the conscience must remain free, for the law has no right here before God to accuse and condemn. Wherefore in Christianity such doctrine and admonition must be upheld, as even the Apostles did, whereby everyone is admonished and reminded of the duty of his calling.

[25] But Moses must be allowed to have absolute rule over those who are not Christians, and burden them both outwardly and inwardly, so that he may force and torment them to do what is right and omit what is wrong, although they do it not gladly, like the licentious multitude and stiff-necked people, who neither esteem nor understand the liberty of Christ, although they can prate and boast of the Gospel, and yet they only misuse it for their licentiousness. They should remember that they belong under Moses. For they are not people who can grasp our doctrine. They go along so securely and think they have no need of the Gospel, or that they know it well enough; but it is only for those who thus dispute with the law because of their sins and the wrath of God, and are frightened by it and feel their hearts say to them: Woe is me! how have I lived? How shall I stand before God? And thus they go about too timid and bashful, whereas others are too hard and presumptuous, so that they neither feel nor care for any law nor for their sins and distress. Hence to both it is unequally distributed, so that those who ought to have nothing to do with the law are the only ones to feel it and they have too much of it; but the others, who only ought to feel it, do not concern themselves about it at all; yes, the more you try to terrify them with the law and the wrath of God, the harder they become. Therefore they need another master, namely, the hangman and the sheriff to teach them; if they will not do good in God's name, that they may be obliged to do it in

the name of someone else, and have no thanks for it, but receive hell-fire and all torments as their reward.

[26] On the contrary, Christ, here and everywhere, as I have said, teaches us, who feel our sins and the burden of the law, and would gladly be Christians, both by his example and his sermons, to accustom ourselves to contend against it, and directs us from ourselves to himself, and not to give place to the devil, who by the law would invade the bride chamber of Christ, and sit in his place, that is, rob the conscience of its joy and comfort, in order that he may force man into despair, so as not to be able to lift up his head or heart to God. For this is called the Christian's art, who should learn and know more than the vulgar, profane crowd can know and understand, namely, that they are able to contend against and withstand the devil, when he attacks us and desires to dispute with us with the aid of Moses; so that we simply allow him no argument or conversation, but direct him from Moses to Christ and stay with the latter; for he only goes about cunningly to bring us from Christ under Moses; for he knows when he accomplishes this, he has the victory.

[27] Wherefore be on your guard that you be not led from the way or be tempted out of your sphere; but, although he already sets forth many things from the law, which is also God's Word, which you are in duty bound to obey, you can answer him and say: Dost thou indeed not understand that I will now neither know nor hear of any law? For we are now within a sphere and on ground, where there is no question as to what I shall do or leave undone. I already know well enough, that I have not done, nor do I do, what the law requires; but here is the question, how may I acquire a gracious God and the forgiveness of sins, and how shall I learn the article of faith concerning Christ? Here I will abide in the arms of Christ and hang about his neck, and creep into his baptism, God grant it, and let the law say and my heart feel what they may. If we can only keep this chief part pure, and this bulwark firm and well secured, then I will gladly do and suffer externally as much as is laid upon me.

[28] Behold, whoever learns this art well is a truly perfect man, as Christ was, so far above all law that he might also call St. Peter a devil, the Pharisees fools and blind leaders, and stop the mouth of Moses and order him to keep quiet, and thus live entirely without any law, and yet fulfill all laws and be proud and firm against everything that would bind and lead him

captive, and yet also of his own free self be serviceable and subject unto all men.

[29] But here we are always deficient, that we can never properly learn this, for the devil lies in our path and leads us so far that we pervert it and are only too willing and modest to hear everything the law says and become frightened at it, when we should raise our head and neither hear nor follow it. Again, in external matters, we are only too liable to fall into license, when we should courageously keep down the body and exercise it with the law, that it may be compelled to suffer everything that causes it pain, because it still continually commits sin; yet, so that sin here remain without, where it should remain, and have its Moses to lay upon its back and oppress it. But internally no sin or law ought to reign, but Christ alone with pure grace, joy and consolation. Then all things would go right, and man would be prepared for every good work, both to do and suffer all things with joy, with a glad and willing heart, out of good, honest faith in the grace of God through Christ, [so that the conscience remain a master over all laws, and the flesh be subject to all laws.]

[30] Now, whoever can do such things, let him thank God, and see to it, that he be able to do it only not too well or loudly boast that he has great skill. For I, and those like me, cannot yet accomplish it as we should, although we have indeed tried it most and practiced it the longest; for it is, as I have said, a skill that no one possesses but Christians, all of whom must remain scholars and learn it all their lives; except only those other secure spirits, who pretend that they alone know everything, and yet with such pretended skill they know nothing at all, and thereby have departed farthest from it. There is not a more vexatious thing, nor a greater affliction or harm that can happen to Christendom than that everything becomes full of factions and sects through such sophists; while they are only people who serve neither God nor the world, and hear rightly neither the law nor the Gospel, but securely despise the former and become disgusted with the latter, and are always seeking some other doctrine. But we do not preach in their behalf, for they are unworthy of it, and are punished by God so that they can never learn it or derive any benefit from it, although they hear it; also, that we nevertheless only retain it and that they take nothing of it from us, except that they hear only an empty sound and noise of it. This is the first part which Christ here teaches by his own example; [how we should

keep our conscience free from all disputations of the law and from all the terrors of the wrath of God and of sin]. Now let us examine this beautiful sermon of the Lord, where he begins and says: Part II “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?”

[31] Christ the Lord is not only firm, in that he refuses to obey their doctrine and despotism, but also shows good reasons for doing so, and with great and fine skill overthrows their objections and stops their mouths, so that they have nothing to say against it, yes, he circumvents them by their own actions and example, and forces them in their very hearts to be ashamed of themselves, that they demanded such things of him and blame him in such weighty matters, which they themselves do in much more trifling things, and wish to do them even with honor.

[32] For how could he answer them better than to say: “You great masters and dear sophists, would you order and teach me that I should thrust from me poor sinners who desire me and come unto me to hear my words? While even you yourselves for the sake of one lost sheep do much more, when among a hundred you miss a single one, you leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, that is, in the field with the shepherds, standing all alone, and run after the one of the hundred and have no rest until you find it, and this you call a good and praiseworthy deed, and if anyone would reprove you for it, you would consider him mad and foolish. And should not I, the Savior of souls, do the same for men as you do for a sheep, although there is no comparison whatever between a soul and everything else that lives and moves of all the creatures on the earth. Then should you not in your hearts be ashamed of yourselves, to boss and reprove me in a work which is infinitely better than the work you yourselves praise and are compelled to praise? So, if you reprove me, you must first condemn yourselves.”

[33] This is called giving a good answer, and in all honor putting them to silence, while he gives sufficient reasons why he does not at all need their great authority, yea, he will not, neither should he, endure it. And so they run on as is their nature, for they obtain thus nothing but their own sins and shame. For it is truly a shame to all masters, and an insufferable outrage, for them to attempt to dictate to him, who is appointed of God Lord over all.

But it ought to be as I said, whoever desires to direct and judge a Christian, and lead him away from his baptism and the article of faith in Christ, and to govern him by his wisdom and laws, does not only make a fool of himself, but also causes abomination and murder; for he defiles God's temple and sanctuary, and with a devilish outrage invades his kingdom, where he alone should reign through his Holy Spirit. Wherefore he fairly and justly deserves that God should also put him to sin and shame before all the world, because he wants to be a master in the devil's name, whereas Christ alone is master, and with his head he runs against him who is too high and wise for him.

[34] Therefore it is not a good thing to trifle with Christians, for they are living saints, who are undisturbed before all the world only because of their man whose name is Christ; for men gain nothing in him at any rate, as he will not suffer others to teach and rule him. So also a Christian can and should not suffer it, for if he suffers it and gives place and yields to suggestions of this kind, where one would blame and master Christ in him, or attack his faith with the law and doctrine of works, then he is lost and fallen from Christ. Therefore let us only hold firmly to him, and care not if the whole world outwits and masters us. For when we abide in him and hold fast to the true sense of this article of faith, we will easily overcome all such fanatics and put them to shame. For this Christ shall and will remain uncorrected and without a master, but he alone will rule and reform the whole world, so that they shall either by grace acknowledge him as their Lord and Master, and themselves as fools, or without grace be exposed to shame and utterly perish.

[35] But, as I have said, this sermon is much too good, sweet and comforting for the coarse, rough crowd, and the mad, knotty mob, and so we do not preach it to them that they may know it; but only to those who are in the terrors and anxiety of conscience, or in the danger and toils of death, and when the devil disputes with them about their sins, to drive them into melancholy and despair. To those this lovely picture must be presented, that they may become comforted and joyful. But the rest, who already live in drunkenness and know but very little of melancholy and spiritual sorrow, are to be diverted to Moses and mister hangman and his servants, and afterwards to the devil. For it is painted so very friendly and much better than any man can paint it, and no one is so eloquent as to outline it or equal

it with words, but as much as possible it must be grasped by faith in the heart. However, we must notice a little of it, so as to give an occasion to meditate upon it.

[36] Christ says I have a hundred sheep, that is, the little flock of entire Christendom, from which number one is lost and fallen from the communion of Christians. If you would know how it is with my heart, only truly describe such a shepherd and his lost sheep!

[37] For while the shepherd is merely a man and tends the dumb animals, created to be slaughtered and killed, yet he has such a sympathetic heart for his lost sheep, that he is in as great anxiety to find the sheep as it is to find its shepherd. For as soon as the sheep knows, as it does by instinct, that he is its shepherd, it is not at all afraid, but runs up to him with all confidence, and walks along before him in perfect trust. Yes, as soon as it only hears his voice, it bleats and runs after him, and has no rest until it comes to him. And thus there is of course the purest friendship and love between them both, and they have toward each other only one heart and one mind; so that if the lamb could speak and pour out its heart, it would desire nothing but its shepherd. Again, the shepherd has no other cares and anxieties than how he may again find his precious pet, that has gone from him and strayed away. He makes haste, and sends out servants wherever he thinks it may be found, and never ceases until he has found it and brought it home. For he knows well enough what a poor animal it is, as it can live only by the help and under the protection of its shepherd, and cannot at all care for itself, but is wholly lost and must perish, if deprived of its shepherd, and besides it is naturally fearful and inclined to stray; and as soon as it leaves the way and loses the shepherd, it is at once discomfited and cannot rest, although it comes among other shepherds and sheep, and the stranger calls it; yet it runs in its fright through briars and water and everything before it until it falls a prey to the wolf or otherwise perishes.

[38] But still it has in it the virtue and good nature, that it holds with all diligence to its shepherd and knows his voice so well, and when it hears it, it runs immediately to him, and will not permit itself to be taken from him, though all the world may call and coax. And though it be already lost or gone astray, still it has the hope as much as instinct gives it, if it can only once again hear its shepherd, it would be cheerful and void of all care. Thus the shepherd is not for the purpose, when he finds it again, to be angry at it

and thrust it away, or to cast it into the jaws of the wolf; but all his cares and thoughts are, only to allure it in the most friendly manner and treat it in the tenderest way, he takes it upon his shoulders, holds and carries it, until he again brings it home.

[39] The picture painted before us by this creature of God is, how Christ shows his disposition toward us, what he will do for us and what we may expect from him. For, as all this is true in nature, much more is it true in the kingdom of Christ, which is a kingdom of grace, pure love and consolation. Wherefore keep in mind this sheep that belongs to the shepherd, then you will also find, with how much more and greater affection he takes it to himself and how friendly and perfectly and heartily he cares for it, to bring it back. By this he would set forth and indeed pour out his inexhaustible love and ardent desire toward poor, sinful, frightened and weak consciences, which are his true sheep.

[40] For when a man has lost this shepherd and does not hear his voice, it is with him exactly as with the lost sheep, which always wanders ever farther and farther from him. And though he even be allured and called by strange doctrines to run over to them and think it is coming to its shepherd, yet it does not find him, but always runs from one corner to another, and the longer it runs the farther it goes astray, and it has no comfort nor help, until it again hears the voice of its true Shepherd ringing in its ears. As also experience plainly shows us, and everyone can experience it in his own heart. For if the second article of the creed concerning Christ be taken away or not taught, then here comes a factious spirit, there a fanatic, where one perverts the sacrament of the altar, the other baptism, and one preaches this, the other that, concerning strange holiness of life, and each one entices the poor sheep to himself, and pretends to be the Shepherd, by which the sheep strays more and more, until it loses the way altogether.

[41] Moreover, the devil also joins in with his own thoughts, which he shoots into the heart: Ah, if you had done this and that, or not done it! by which the heart becomes only more fickle and erring, that it does not know whither to go. This certainly takes place when Christ is removed out of sight, and the article of faith concerning him is not taught. It matters not how they teach, advise and admonish, it will only be worse and approach nearer destruction, unless the true Shepherd with his own voice comes again to him.

[42] Therefore we should now learn rightly to know and recognize Christ our Lord, that we may not regard him as a tyrant or an angry judge, as hitherto he has been preached to us, and as the devil always presents him to the heart, as one standing behind us with a sword. But as the little lamb naturally beholds its shepherd, not at all as one who would frighten, hunt and strike it down, but as soon as it first sees him, it becomes happy and obtains a hope as though it received help already, and needs no more to fear or care, and runs straight up to him with all confidence.

[43] Thus too, if our confidence is to begin, and we become strengthened and comforted, we must well learn the voice of our Shepherd, and let all other voices go, who only lead us astray, and chase and drive us hither and thither. We must hear and grasp only that article which presents Christ to us in the most friendly and comforting manner possible. So that we can say with all confidence: My Lord Jesus Christ is truly the only Shepherd, and I, alas, the lost sheep, which has strayed into the wilderness, and I am anxious and fearful, and would gladly be good, and have a gracious God and peace of conscience, but here I am told that He is as anxious for me as I am for him. I am anxious and in pain about how I shall come to him to secure help, but he is in anxiety and worry and desires nothing else than to bring me again to himself.

[44] Behold, if we could thus portray his heart, and press it into our own heart, that he has such a gushing desire, anxiety and longing for us, then we could not dread or fear him, but would joyfully run up to him and abide with him alone, and hear no other doctrine or teacher. For wherever a different doctrine comes, be it of Moses or others, it will certainly accomplish nothing, except only to hunt us down and torment us, so that we can find neither rest nor peace. Wherefore Christ also says, Matthew 11:28-29: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest for your souls." As though he would say: "Run about and seek wherever you will, hear and learn everything that man can preach, yet you will find no rest nor peace of heart except in me alone."

[45] We will gladly permit the preaching of good works, the ten commandments and all other moral teaching; but to preach to the conscience bound in torment and terror on account of its sins, there shall positively be no other word preached except the Word of Christ. For this is

that poor lost sheep, which neither shall nor can have and suffer any master, except this its only Shepherd, who does not deal with it by compulsions and the requirements of the law, but in the sweetest and tenderest manner, and takes upon himself the dear sheep with all its distress, sins and anxiety, and himself does what the sheep should do, as we shall hear further.

[46] But, as I have sufficiently said before, we must well distinguish here between two kinds of preaching, or the voice of Moses and the voice of Christ, that by no means you may permit any Moses to come to the lost sheep, though his preaching be ever so excellent. For if these things be confused and we attempt to comfort the troubled conscience with the law thus: Be of good cheer, you have not committed murder nor adultery and done any other outrage, or you have indeed meant it all good! This also is comfort, but it will not last long nor hold out against the cuffs of the devil. For this is nothing more nor less than a consolation with yourself, by which the poor sheep is not benefited, for it remains astray and lost in spite of this, and it cannot help itself or come to its Shepherd.

[47] However, if he is to be helped, he must be shown the true Shepherd, who comes and seeks him to bring him home, and let his voice be heard, then he can receive true comfort, so that he dare answer Moses and say: I now no longer care either for thy comfort or terror, and you may make me just as bad as you can, you may make me a murderer time and again, and say I have hanged my father and mother; but now, because I am in anxiety and terror before the wrath of God and eternal condemnation, I will neither hear nor Obey thee. For I myself feel and confess, that I am, alas, a poor lost sheep; but this is my salvation and comfort in which I triumph, that I have the Shepherd who himself seeks me, his lost sheep, and carries me on his shoulders. Let us now discuss this, and not how good or bad I am, but how I am to come to Christ.

[48] Therefore, all preaching must be adapted to the capacity of the hearers. For I have said that this doctrine is not suited to a carnal and hardened man, even as it does not profit to give a hardy thresher sugar and costly delicacies, which are intended for the sick, but give him a good piece of hard bread and cheese and a drink of water. But other soft and delicate food reserve for the sick and young children, who cannot digest anything hard. Thus you must also observe here how rightly to divide and give each one his proper portion, like a prudent householder. Likewise, that you hold

fast to the preaching of Moses and the law, until you find hard and vicious people, who live secure and without fear. These you must permit to eat only the coarse food of common laborers, that is, to hear the angry Moses, who thunders and flashes from Mount Sinai, who destroys the children of Israel and slays them in the desert, and drowns King Pharaoh in the Red Sea.

[49] But wherever there are troubled, weak hearts and consciences, which have now become lost sheep, there keep silent about Moses and all the works of God, done under the law, and speak only of the works done by Christ in the time of grace, and well impress the poor conscience how he shows himself toward the lost sheep; namely, that he is the dear, good Shepherd, who is so anxious and concerned about the sheep that he drops everything and leaves all lay, only that he may find it again, and never ceases until he brings it home. For it grieves him that a man should remain in sin, fear and tremble; and he cannot endure it, that he remains there and perishes. But he calls to thee with his Gospel in the most friendly manner, that you should only come to him, and be taken up and carried on his shoulders, and remain his dear sheep.

[50] But that multitude must not be called the lost sheep, which lives securely and riotously, and do not concern themselves whether God above is angry or laughs, for it is a wild goat that will not be either led or protected. But those are called the stray, lost sheep, whose sins oppress them and who struggle in the conflict of faith, where there is no danger of losing Moses but Christ and his chief article of faith, that is, where the conscience is in anxiety and worry as to whether God is merciful to him. This is the true sheep which sighs and cries for its Shepherd, and would be glad for help, as David says, Psalm 119:176: "I am gone astray like a lost sheep, seek thy servant," etc. To those the sugar and this friendly sweet refreshment tastes good, by which the heart is revived that it may not despair, but that it may raise itself up again by such consolation, not through Moses but in Christ; not in order to make Moses his friend or be able to quiet his voice, but because he has a gracious God in his Lord and Christ. God grant it. Let Moses abide with his comfort where he can.

[51] Although it is also a fine thing and should be so, that a man should not live contrary to the law, rob, steal, murder, or do his neighbor wrong and cause him pain; yet such a life does not give the heart true comfort, but only tickles the skin, which does not enter the heart nor lasts. For when the

devil comes and seizes the heart, he takes away all such comfort, and although you have even done right, yet he of course prefers tenfold against it, where you did the contrary. Yea, in the very best works he can easily find much uncleanness, and turn everything to sin. Therefore nothing can be built on such comfort, but only courageously cast it away, and say: God grant, whether I be good or not, this I will reserve for its proper place, when we come to teach and treat of works; but in this circle in which I now stand, it avails nothing to treat of my works and goodness, but of Christ and his works which he has done for me as his lost sheep. If now you ask whether I am good, I will simply answer: no, and I do not want to be in this circle of good people.

[52] But if you ask whether Christ is good, then without hesitation I can say yes, and present him as my righteousness, and defiantly appeal to him. For in him I have been baptized, and I have the seal and document here in the Gospel, that I am his dear sheep, and he is my good and pious Shepherd who seeks his lost sheep, and deals with it entirely without the law, demands nothing of me, neither drives, threats nor frightens, but shows me pure sweet grace, and humbles himself beneath me and takes me upon himself, that I may only lie on his back and be carried. Why should I then fear the terrors and thunderings of Moses, or the devil besides, because I am in the protection of that man who gives me his holiness and everything he has, to possess it as my own, and who carries and holds me so that I cannot be lost, because I remain a sheep and do not deny the Shepherd or maliciously fall from him.

[53] Thus you have this picture presented in the most lovely manner it is possible to present it. But all this is done only on account of faith. For the picture is indeed fine and full of comfort, and is the truth itself. But it is wanting in this, that it is not felt in experience as it should be. For while the sheep runs astray, that is, when man feels his sins and they oppress him, and he does not know where to stand, and the devil terrifies him; then only the contrary takes place, and he cannot grasp that it is true, for all that he has here heard entirely departs through his present feelings and experience. For the devil has so perverted his vision that he sees nothing but God's wrath and indignation, by which his heart is so burdened that he cannot raise himself above it or turn his eyes from it, for he has so deeply sunk into it that he sees nothing else even in Christ than an angry Judge, as he has been

hitherto described and forced into all hearts by the scandalous Papists as sitting alone on the rainbow with a sword in his mouth.

[54] For the real art and roguery of the devil, which he practices on the poor wandering sheep, are that he perverts this picture and makes a continual bawling in his presence, that he can no more recognize his Shepherd, so that in Christ's name he might lead the man subject to Moses, as he disputes about Christ just as he did before about Moses, so that he indeed needs a strong faith that it is true, and a man first of all must contend against himself on this account. For his own feeling is powerful in itself, and the devil magnifies sin and terror so greatly, that nerve and bone, and the heart in the body, could fail.

[55] Therefore it is not so easily learned as some imagine. When all is peace it is easily believed that Christ is sweet and amiable, but when anxiety and terror break forth and overwhelm the heart, then man is blind and wandering, and will judge only according to his heart and feelings, to which he clings and confirms himself in his error, for he is held captive in it, and cannot think otherwise but that it is as he feels it, and yet it is not true.

[56] Now this would be an art, were he able to say to his own heart: If you acknowledge yourself to be a lost sheep, you speak the truth; but that you would on this account flee from Christ, and imagine him to be a man who would hunt you down and frighten you, this is the work of the sorry devil himself. For if you rightly behold and confess him as your true Shepherd, you would neither be afraid nor frightened at him, but you would run up to him with joy and confidence. For he is not present here to condemn thee, but he comes to seek thee, to carry you on his back, to help and deliver you from sin, error, the power of the devil and every misfortune. If you now feel that you are a sinner and have deserved the wrath of God, then you should just on this account the more earnestly cry and run to your dear Shepherd, that he might deliver you, and you should not imagine him to be anything else than the sheep does its shepherd, which cannot fear him, but is glad and happy as soon as it sees and hears him, although it has strayed away from him, and deserved on this account to fear him. But it knows full well that he bears no anger or indignation against such a sheep, and can expect nothing of him but love and every good thing.

[57] Hence everything here depends only upon this, that you rightly learn to look upon Christ according to the Word, and not according to your own thoughts and feelings, for human thoughts are frauds and lies, but his Word is true and cannot lie. For he has even proved it by living deeds and examples, and daily proves it still throughout the whole of Christendom. Wherefore we must only press the Word close to our hearts and knit ourselves into it, and learn the art to reprove our own heart with its lies, and set this article of faith against it. For this alone must remain true, and everything opposed to it, must be false and a pack of lies. But this is an art which I cannot master, and much less can other vain spirits, who boast so much of it, as though they knew it all, if they have only heard it but once, and yet they never taste or experience anything of it. For it is an easy matter to speak and preach about it; but how difficult it is to prove it in reality, which those thoroughly experience, who are earnestly concerned about it.

[58] Now this is the first description of the lovely Christ, set forth by himself in this Gospel, that he pours out all his heart and is so anxious for the sheep, that he goes after it alone, leaving the ninety and nine; not to frighten or strike it, but to help it and bring it home again, and to rejoice the wretched and sorrowful heart and conscience by his sweet and friendly voice, so that on both sides there is nothing but hearty love and joy for each other, that you can see what great love and pleasure you thereby afford him, when you cleave to him with the whole heart and look to him for every good thing.

[59] You see in the second place how he pours out his joy and unspeakable goodness by external signs and gestures of every kind, and how, when he has found the sheep, he shows himself so friendly, for he does not deal with it at all according to his own law or force, to which indeed he has a right, to drive it before him like the other sheep, and leave it go alone. On the contrary he lays hold and puts it on his shoulders and carries it himself the whole way through the wilderness, takes all the labor and trouble upon himself only in order that the sheep may have rest and a home, and he does it gladly and heartily, for he is full of pure joy, only because he once more has it in his care. And observe also how well it is with the sheep, how it lies in all peace and safety upon the shoulders of its Shepherd, and how well pleased it is that it lies so softly and does not need to travel, is safe and without care, both from dogs and wolves, that is, from

all error and lies, danger and destruction. This is indeed a friendly painting, excellent, lovely and refreshing to behold.

[60] For just so Christ our Lord does when he delivers us, which he once did bodily by his sufferings and death, but now he continually does in power and spirit by his Word. In this way he lays us on his shoulders, carries and defends us, that we may be safe from all danger of sin, of death and the devil; although they even terrify us, and act as if they would tear us away and devour us. For being thus carried is our salvation, and we remain safe from every peril and need fear nothing; just like the precious lamb that lays on the shoulders of the Shepherd will not let itself be disturbed, although the dogs already like fiends bark, and the wolf lurks about, while it hangs its head without any care and sweetly sleeps. So we do also, if we stand and abide in this article of faith: I believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who suffered, died and rose again for us, etc., then we need not worry about being lost, or that the devil can devour us, though he even opens his jaws ever so wide. For we are not then on our own way nor do we walk with our own feet, but hang about the neck of our dear Shepherd and lay upon his back, where we are entirely safe. For although sin, death and hell appear ever so wicked and terrible, they cannot devour him; otherwise we poor sheep would too soon be lost and destroyed.

[61] For even as the sheep cannot protect or provide for itself that it go not astray, unless the shepherd continually directs and leads it in the way; and when it has strayed and is lost, it cannot of itself find the right way or come to its shepherd, but the shepherd himself must go after it, and seek it until he find it, and when he has found it, he holds and bears it upon his back, that it may no more be frightened away from him, hunted or seized by the wolf. So we too cannot either help or advise ourselves, that we may obtain rest and peace of conscience, and escape the devil, death and hell, unless Christ himself brings us again and calls us to himself by his Word. And when we come to him and are in a state of faith, even then we are not able to keep ourselves in faith or be steadfast, unless he himself by his Word and power holds and carries us, because the devil every way and without ceasing watches for us, and lurks round about us like a roaring lion, as St. Peter in 1 Peter 5:8 says, to devour us. So that here it avails nothing whatever to boast of our free will and strength, either to begin or continue

our return to the Shepherd, and to abide with him, but Christ alone, our Shepherd, must do everything.

[62] But now we are certain of this, that as long as we lie around the neck of Christ, we shall be safe from all terror and misfortune. For he will certainly not permit us to be torn from his neck, nor will he cast us off, because he is so happy and of good cheer that he once again has his sheep, and can bring it back to the rest of the flock. In short, there is nothing here of terror, driving and commanding, but a simple friendly carrying and a mere life of grace, by which he cares for his sheep in the tenderest manner. On the contrary, Moses, not like a shepherd of poor, weak sheep, but of rough, strong cattle, with his staff and rod drives his herd before him a three days' journey into the wilderness, Exodus 3:1, until they become weary; for such treatment is proper for hardened and proud people.

[63] Even we also, when we come under Moses, namely, according to the flesh and the external life, must then go ourselves and do what the law demands. But according to our faith we must not suffer any work to be forced upon us or required of us, but only permit ourselves to be carried and raised up most tenderly, not on horse and chariot, but on his own back and shoulders. Which, as I said, is done when he permits his Word to be preached unto us, that he died for us, and bore our sins in his own body on the cross, and put the devil with death and sin under his feet, and has led us unto eternal life, and always carries us as long as we live, so that we need not look to our life, how good and strong we are, but only lie upon his shoulders. For in this circle or article of faith we need not be troubled about any sin, death or life, but we have all things in Christ who carries and defends us.

[64] Now he is not satisfied with the two parts, that he so lovingly seeks the lost sheep, and carries it so gently and with joy; but also when he brings it home he appoints a special feast and season of joy, and calls together his friends and neighbors that they may rejoice with him. Yea, he makes such a great jubilee, that God in heaven together with all the heavenly hosts and all creatures rejoice over one sinner that repenteth. By this he shows and explains who it is that is called a lost sheep, namely, the sinner who repents, that is, who feels his sins and is heartily sorry on account of them, and would gladly be free from them and come to Christ and amend his life, which is called having a miserable, sorrowful heart and an afflicted

conscience, which the devil attacks, that it might perish with sorrow and sadness. For Christ is such a man who seeks and carries no sheep except that which is lost and knows no refuge or help of its own.

[65] And now consider, how could he preach still more friendly and comfortingly, or what more should he do to make the heart joyful, and awaken a strong confidence in him? Since we see such a Shepherd, we miserable sinners are painted forth by him, who so unwillingly loses his sheep and so anxiously seeks it, and when he has found it carries it with all joy, and spreads forth such joy that all the angels and saints in heaven, yea, and all creatures rejoice and smile over us so friendly, that even the sun must shine much more lovely. For as it is natural that when a man is sorrowful, the sun and everything looks dark to him; and again when the heart is happy, then man appears twice as joyful, and everything looks to him lighter and brighter.

[66] Now he who can firmly believe this, shall also receive true consolation and joy in and through Christ the Lord, because he has here the certain promise, that if he cleave thus unto Christ, and permit himself to be carried on his shoulders, that he is a dear guest in the kingdom of heaven, and will be received with great joy.

[67] But we have altogether a different feeling in the sorrow and melancholy of the conscience, when the heart cannot think otherwise than that every angel stands behind us with a drawn sword, so that we can have no good cheer either from God or angels, that even some cannot behold any creature with joy, and fear the friendly sun itself, yea, every leaf that stirs. All which arises from tormenting and consuming themselves with their own thoughts, from which they would gladly disentangle themselves, and labor so much and feel so good that they need not fear; but by this they only make the evil worse.

[68] But if you desire to possess true comfort and joy in your soul, then only learn to impress this lovely picture and word of this Gospel in your heart, that you may seek it where it is to be found, namely, in Christ, and nowhere else. For in this man you will find all things, if you only remain under his protection and lie still upon his shoulders. But whatever joy may be sought outside of him, never enters the heart, even if you took to your

aid all creatures, and had in one place the joy and pleasure of the whole world.

Fourth Sunday after Trinity. A Lesson in Mercy – The Mote and the Beam.

Text: Luke 6:36-42.

36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

37 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

38 Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

39 And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?

40 The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.

41 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

42 Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. Luke 6:36-42

[1] This Gospel describes the works of love to our neighbor in temporal things. The Lord here describes these in few words, for he had just said, we should love our enemies, do good to them that hate us, bless them that curse us, pray for them that despitefully use us; if they smite us on one cheek, we

should offer also the other; and from him that taketh away thy cloak withhold not thy coat also. All this he here condemns in a short conclusion, and in summing up all, says: “Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” Here you see described as in a nutshell all the good works we are to do to one another, as our heavenly Father has done to us and still does without ceasing.

[2] You have often heard that we need not do good works to God, but to our neighbor. We cannot make God stronger nor richer by our works, but we can make our neighbor stronger and richer with them; he is in need of them, and hence they should be directed to him and not to God. This you have often heard and you have it now in your ears; I would to God, that it might come also into your hands and feet.

[3] Therefore observe here what a perversion it is for man to exercise himself in doing works to God, which should be done to his neighbor; and then centers his faith in men and saints, which he should center alone in God. Turn this around, and then it is right, thus: faith must belong alone to God, whoever receives the divine works, God alone does them, and the same works of God we receive alone through faith. Then we should apply ourselves to our neighbor and arrange all our affairs to the end that they serve our neighbor. Before God all should be done in pure faith alone. The reason of this is because no one can help us but God, and what we have in body and soul we have alone from God, and in him alone should we anchor our heart.

[4] Now, they turn it around thus, so that they center faith, which is due to God, upon themselves and other people and they fall down before their own devised idols, and what the great masters have invented, and place their confidence in them. Is not that very Satan and death? As God in Jeremiah 2:13f. says: “My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” Again he says in verse 35 to the people: Thou sayest, I shall turn my anger from thee, thou hast not sinned. “Behold, I will enter into judgment with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned.”

[5] First he says, that the bride has become a harlot and has turned from God; the living fountain from which flow life, salvation and all good, they

have forsaken. Secondly, they turn to their own invention, and make their own fountain, in which there is no water. Thus also the Papists build upon their own inventions, saying mass, fasting, praying and the like; they indeed appear very much as though they were a fountain, as though they would draw from it life and salvation, yet it cannot hold any water; and they forsake God, the living fountain.

[6] In this manner God says: They boldly rise up against me; I shall not be angry with them, they insist their ways and doings are right and enter into judgment with me. Behold, this is their other sin, that they are determined to defend their own doings. Therefore God says: I will enter into judgment with you and show you, how base you have become, in that you have continually gone your own way.

[7] See, thus faith belongs to God alone and it should acquire for us from God alone what we need in temporal and spiritual matters; and it should acquire all in a way that it does not think it has merited it. This same faith should later again flow forth from our heart's depths to our neighbor freely and unhindered in good works; not that we wish to rest our salvation in them; for God will not have that, but wishes the conscience to rest in himself alone. Just like a bride must cleave to the bridegroom alone, and to no one else, so does God require also from us that we confide only in him.

[8] This Luke explains when he says: "Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful." Here my conscience must be disposed toward God as a gracious, merciful father, and in harmony with this, go out to my neighbor and be also merciful to him. I must bring faith into my heart and up to God; and works out of my heart down to my neighbor. Thus Abraham did, when he went up on Mount Moriah to God, he left his servants and ass down at the foot of the mountain and took Isaac alone with him, Genesis 22:5. So should we also do: when we wish to ascend to God, we should come with Isaac alone, that is, with Christ through faith; the servants and ass, that is, our works, we should leave below.

[9] Now this has been said of faith and works as an introduction to our Gospel lesson, namely, that the motion of faith is inward and upward, of works outward and downward. For thus are we righteous before God and men, in that we honor God and look direct to him and believe according to his Word, and in love do sufficient for our neighbor. Let us now consider

the words of today's Gospel in their order. "Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

[10] Now how is God our heavenly Father merciful? Thus, in that he gives us all things, natural and spiritual, temporal and eternal, gratuitously and out of pure goodness. For should he give unto us out of and according to our merits, he would have to give us only hell-fire and eternal condemnation. Therefore what he gives us in our possessions and honor, is given out of pure mercy. He sees that we are captives of death; but he is merciful and gives us life. He sees that we are the children of hell; but he is merciful and gives us heaven. He sees that we are poor, naked and exposed, hungry and thirsty; but he is merciful, and clothes, feeds and gives us to drink, and satisfies us with all good things. Thus, whatever we have for the body or spirit, he gives us out of mercy, and pours his blessings over us and into us. Therefore Christ says here: Imitate your Father and be also merciful, as he is merciful.

[11] Now this is not a common mercy, nor one that reason teaches. For that is selfish: it gives to the great and learned and those who merit it; loves those, who are beautiful; gives to those from whom it has some benefit or advantage. That is a political, beggarly, shaggy, piecemeal mercy. For if I give to him, who merited it, or if I regard beauty and friendship, then it is duty and debt and not mercy. This is also what the Lord meant, when he just before this Gospel in Luke 6:32-34 says:

"And if ye love them that love you, what thank have ye? For even sinners love those that love them. And if ye do good to them that do good to you, what thank have ye? for even sinners do the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? even sinners lend to sinners, to receive again as much." However, Christian mercy should not seek its own; but it should be thus: it must be round, and open its eyes and look at all alike, friend and foe, as our heavenly Father does.

[12] And where this mercy is not, there is also no faith. For if your heart is in the state of faith that you know your God has revealed himself to you to be so good and merciful, without thy merit, and purely gratuitously, while you were still his enemy and a child of eternal wrath; if you believe this, you cannot refrain from showing yourself so to your neighbor; and do all out of love to God and for the welfare of your neighbor. Therefore, see

to it that you make no distinction between friend and foe, the worthy and the unworthy; for you see that all who were here mentioned, have merited from us something different than that we should love and do them good. And the Lord also teaches this, when in Luke 6:35 he says: “But love your enemies, and do good unto them, and lend, never despairing; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be sons of the Most High: for he is kind toward the unthankful and evil.” Thus we have considered the first part of this Gospel.

[13] Further one may say here: Have you not now taught that our works avail nothing before God in paying him for anything: how is it then that here the very contrary stands written, as Christ says: “Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful. And judge not, and ye shall not be judged: and condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.” All these sayings sound as though we should appear before God with our works and merit by virtue of them God’s mercy and forgiveness; although you have nevertheless heard that faith does all.

[14] Now note well, St. Paul and the holy Scriptures here and there teach this; for they emphasize that man must believe and appear before God with pure faith alone. Therefore the sayings, as they are here, are to be understood that works are only the test and confirmation of faith, so that if I believe, I must be merciful, not judge, not condemn, give and forgive my neighbor. Genesis 22:5f. is an example of this. What did Abraham, when he was called to offer his son? He was obedient to the commandment, and was about to sacrifice his son, and drew the sword to do it. What happened? The angel of Jehovah restrained him and said unto him: “Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.”

[15] Thus here also; we must first receive before we give; before we can do acts of mercy, we must receive from God mercy. We do not lay the first stone; the sheep does not seek the shepherd, but the shepherd the sheep; therefore it is also with our works, that we obtain nothing by them from God, but that we acquire all that we do acquire without any merit on our part. Thus in the prophet Isaiah 65:1, God says: “I am inquired of by them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not.” And at the end of the same chapter he says: “And it shall come to pass that, before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” For before

we seek him, he finds us; before we ask for him, he has us. The same Paul says to the Romans 3:22-26: “There is no distinction; for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; for the showing, I say, of his righteousness at this present season that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.” And in the following chapter, Romans 4:4-5. he says: “Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness.” “For if it be by grace it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace,” as Paul writes later in Romans 11:6.

[16] In the second place the works are a sure sign and like a seal stamped on a letter, by which I am assured that my faith is right. The reason is: Do I feel in my heart, that my works flow forth out of love, then I am assured that my faith is genuine. If I forgive, then my forgiving assures me that my faith is genuine, and it seals and proves my faith, that God also has forgiven me and daily forgives me; but if I do not forgive, then may I at once conclude that I am lacking in faith. So it was also with Abraham, his works made known to him his faith. God well knew that Abraham believed; but he had to know and prove it.

[17] Therefore the works are only continual spontaneous fruits and proofs of such faith. For of what use were it to me, if I had already strong faith and did not know it? As, if I had a chest full of gold and knew it not, it would be of no use to me; but when someone makes it known to me, he then does me as great a service as if he donated it to me. Just so, if I have faith, and know it not, it is of no use to me. Therefore faith must blossom forth and become known to me through the works following faith and these are then signs and seals that faith is present in my heart. St. Peter also teaches the same when in 2 Peter 1:10-11 he conclusively says of the works of love and the virtues of faith: “Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble: for thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” He

does not say, do good works that you may be called; but that you may make your calling and election sure, to your own satisfaction.

[18] Therefore the Scriptures guard you well from blundering into them and fortifying your works by such passages. For works are rejected in Scripture, that we should not think of becoming righteous through them; but they are honored and praised in Scripture in that they are needed by our neighbor and are signs and fruits of our faith.

[19] See, I had to make this explanation in order that I might not strengthen the interpretations of the Papists, all of whom err in their understanding of this Gospel. Now, therefore God often places such passages against one another, as we and reason are apt to imagine, in order to exercise us in reading the Scriptures, and that we may not think we know the whole Scriptures, when we hardly know a passage. Some passages convey the spirit and teaching, how we are to appear in God's presence, with nothing but our faith; as the passage: "Being justified freely (undeservedly, without merit, gratuitously, Ed.) by his grace." Then later in order that the body outwardly might not lie around lazy and become sluggish, we have also passages, which direct and exercise the body; as those above. "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; give, and it shall be given unto you;" and the passages in Matthew 25:42f., where our Lord Christ says, he will require works of us on the day of judgment, when he will say to the condemned: "I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not," and so on. These passages the ignorant and fickle spirits wish to cram together and murder, and construe everything to refer to works; and that is wrong. But those who are spiritual refer them only to their body and stand before God also only in spirit: that is right and also necessary; for man is made up of two parts, spirit and flesh. Therefore some passages refer to naked faith in the spirit, others to naked works done to the body; for a passage of Scripture cannot refer at the same time to the spirit and also to the body.

[20] Here we should also speak on the attitude we are to take to our neighbor with respect to our temporal possessions. With regard to his possessions one should act thus: he should part with some to others, should loan and give to his neighbor, where and when he will. And for doing this we have rigid commandments and not only words of advice, as they explain

them who teach, that whoever wishes to be perfect should do them. Consequently those wishing to live thus, have retired into monasteries and have desired to become perfect. Hence all monasteries are founded upon the filth of the devil. For there are no people more avaricious and less benevolent than just those in the monasteries. Now, if one wishes to be a Christian, he should loan to others, to the extent of his ability, freely without any writing. Again, if we see one has nothing with which to pay us back, we should freely donate it to him and cancel the debt, as Nehemiah did, as is recorded in the fifth chapter of II Esdras (Nehemiah 5). For God has given this to you, he can indeed give you more, if you believe differently. Further, if one takes anything from us, we are not to demand it to be returned; but our neighbor is to intercede for us and help to restrain injustice and to enter a complaint against the authorities, in order that we may not suffer too much.

[21] Now observe the monks and priests have entirely and completely twisted these works, that they should be only advisable. And in this way they have drawn all other persons from them, who then, having done no Christian work during their whole lives, provide for the saying of masses or leave other legacies when they are about to die, by which all is fulfilled and accomplished. But you hear now: If we wish to be Christians, we must loan, give and part with our possessions, or we will be deficient in our faith.

[22] Therefore thoroughly ponder and grasp this Gospel, in order that you may not deal with God in any other way than through naked faith and let good works gush from such faith that they may serve only your neighbor. This has been said of the first part of our Gospel text. Now let us see what follows further, since the Lord himself explains what kind of mercy he means. He says: "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: and condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you."

[23] Here the Lord divides mercy into three parts, that we may know what mercy is which we are to exercise toward our neighbor. First, we are not to judge or condemn; second, we are to forgive our neighbor, if he has offended us; third, you are to come to the help of the needy: this is what the word "mercy" means, when used in the Scriptures.

[24] And all this must flow out of an upright faith so that it be done without hypocrisy and without guile, and that we may have no respect of persons. For if you would wish them well, who wish you well; or benefit those, who benefit you; or harm those, who harm you, that would be a great error. But you should do to him as Christ here just preceding our Gospel text says: You should imitate your heavenly Father and love your enemies, do good to those who do harm to you, forgive him who offends you, loan to him who is in need, and so on, as you have heard.

[25] Now, to speak of the first part, how we should not judge nor condemn, we remark that God has appointed the sword of the state to punish public crime, only that care must be taken that it be not used contrary to God's precept and command, for example, that we do not murder one when he is innocent. For when the judge does injustice, he is at the same time as much a murderer as others. Of this judgment the Lord here does not speak; he has in mind Luke 12:14, where he said to him who wished he should say to his brother that he should divide the inheritance with him: "Who made me a judge or a divider over you." For Christ's kingdom is not concerned about outward matters.

[26] But the Lord speaks here of another judgment, namely, that one esteems another good or bad because of that which one does not see on the outside, which judgment belongs to God alone. For it can happen that you see your neighbor sin today whom God receives tomorrow. You can indeed also be pious in your own eyes and not think of your own sins. Such judging Christ has forbidden, for no love or unity can be where people thus judge and condemn. To judge or condemn one another is nothing but to have a beam in your own eye; as all hypocrites have in their eyes. For those who regard themselves righteous, take offense at their brethren; whatever they do displeases them, and they will not behold their own sins. But it so happens that you will not discover the beam in your own eye, if you behold continually the sins of others, and thus fall under the judgment of God. From this it follows then, that you, who judge another, art a greater sinner before God, than the lowest villain or the worst harlot, for God alone knows who shall be saved or condemned; all sin is nothing compared to your judging.

[27] The same hypocrites are adept in rejoicing over and taking pleasure in having an opportunity to gossip about the fall and crime of a neighbor,

and to stir up his filth. And what other persons do, they always construe in the worst light, and no one can do anything to please them; and although they themselves cannot at once do this, they nevertheless gladly hear others speak of it. If you were a godly person you should cover up and help to quiet such things, as much as it may be possible for you. And it generally happens that the worst harlots, even according to the flesh, also judge and pass sentence; yea, they judge not only human beings, but also God himself.

[28] Therefore, is thy brother a sinner, then cover his sin and pray for him. Dost thou publish his sins, then truly thou art not a child of your merciful Father; for otherwise thou wouldst be also as he, merciful. It is certainly true that we cannot show as great mercy to our neighbor, as God has to us; but it is the true work of the devil that we do the very opposite of mercy, which is a sure sign that there is not a grain of mercy in us. All this is the meaning of the text of this Gospel, when it says: "Can the blind guide the blind? shall they not both fall into a pit? "The disciple is not above his teacher: but everyone when he is perfected shall be as his teacher. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me cast out the mote that is in thy eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shall thou see clearly to cast out the mote that is in thy brother's eye."

[29] As if the Lord would say: You think thy Brother is blind and will punish him, that is, you wish to guide others and you are blind yourself. You hold him as a sinner and think you are righteous. What difference is that than that your heart is so disposed as to think you are better than he? This means nothing more nor less than that you wish to guide others, and yet you are blind yourself; and whoever follows you will fall into the ditch with you. Concerning characters who imagine they are better than others and would that the people followed them more than the Word of God, Paul says to the Romans 2:17-23: "But if thou bearest the name of a Jew, and retest upon the law, and gloriest in God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them that are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having in the law the form of knowledge and of the truth; Thou therefore that teachest

another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou rob temples? Thou who gloriest in the law, through thy transgression of the law dishonorest thou God?" Therefore he says also at the beginning of the same chapter to the hypocrites: "Wherefore thou art without excuse, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest dost practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against them that practice such things. And reckonest thou this, O man, who judgest them that practice such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"

[30] I call that telling the truth to the hypocrites who understand to show others the way, which they themselves do not know, and guide others along with themselves into the ditch. Therefore the Lord says: "The disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is perfected shall be as his teacher." It is a common proverb to say: I cannot learn more from my teacher, than he knows. Why did the Lord utter this saying? Because of two kinds of teachers: the first is blind; if I follow him, then I also will be blind; if he falls into the ditch, so will I. The other teacher is the merciful Father, from whom we should learn mercy; follow we him, then we also will be merciful, even as he is merciful; and if we were merciful all the time, then we would be perfect, even as he is perfect; but that does not fully take place while we are here in this life.

[31] The second part of mercy is that we are to forgive those who offend us. A Christian can never be so greatly offended, that he should not forgive, not only seven times, but seventy times seven, as the Lord spake to Peter in Matthew 18:22. Therefore God also forgives a Christian his sins or infirmities, so that he may forgive others their infirmities. This Christ pictured just before in a beautiful parable, which he closed with the words: "So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not everyone his brother from your hearts."

[32] And we pray for this also daily in the Lord's Prayer, when we pray the petition and say: Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Is not that something great, when I a poor sinner forgive my neighbor his sins or failings, that God will forgive me also my sins and infirmities? Had one

murdered my father, what would that be compared to my sin, with which I have offended and provoke God to anger?

[33] The third element that belongs to mercy is, that we should give to the poor and needy and come to their help. Concerning this John in his first Epistle,¹ John 3:17, says: “But whoso hath the world’s goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, doth the love of God abide in him?” For where the love of God is, it must manifest itself. To this the saying of Christ in Matthew 5:7 refers: “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” Therefore the Lord adds here in our Gospel a promise, and says: “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom.” And he further says: “For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.”

[34] This is sufficient for the present on the three parts of the mercy we are to show to our neighbor. To this end should the saying of Christ in Matthew 7:12 especially stir us. After he spoke so much about Christian love and how we should show our brother such love, he concludes and says: “All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets.” Now everyone is always so disposed, if he be sick, that he wishes the whole world would come to his help. Am I a poor sinner, steeped in shame, have I a heavy afflicted conscience: then I ought to wish for the whole world to comfort and help me, and cover my sins and my shame. Just such should my attitude be to my neighbor, not to judge and condemn, forgive his failings, help him, counsel, loan and give to him as I would that others should do to me, if I were overwhelmed with anxiety and want, with misery and poverty.

[35] And just in this way does the world take knowledge of Christians, how they live among themselves and show one another such acts of mercy. This the Lord Christ also taught his disciples in the Lord’s Supper when in John 13:34-35 he said: “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” Such is the explanation of this Gospel; let us pray to God for his grace.

Fourth Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. Right Conduct Toward One's Enemies.

Text: Luke 6:36-42.

36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

37 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

38 Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

39 And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?

40 The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.

41 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

42 Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. Luke 6:36-42

[1] Beloved Friends! Upon this Gospel a great deal might be said, but at present we will not consider it all, lest we overload ourselves and retain nothing. You have heard in the text how our dear Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, holds up to us the works of mercy, how we should be merciful; not to judge nor to condemn but gladly forgive everyone and in like manner willingly give and help all, as there is need. If we do this, he says, there

shall be given to us again good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over. But if we will not do this, with the same measure we mete to others it shall be measured to us again. By this he would earnestly forbid his Christians to condemn anyone, to judge or avenge themselves, or to take from anyone, but rather to give and forgive. For a better understanding of this Gospel, we must in the first place reply to our adversaries, who hold up this text against us as a strong, firm ground of their doctrine, that a man can by works obtain forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and boast of it as though they already had surely gained the victory. They say: Here indeed it stands clearly written:

“Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; give, and it shall be given to you again.” What can a man bring up against such clear passages? Therefore, it certainly follows from this, that a man can obtain forgiveness of sins by good works. Thus, by these and similar passages concerning works, they wish to prove that we are justified and saved by our own merit; and denounce and condemn us as heretics, because we teach that we are saved only through faith in Jesus Christ, who has been crucified and died for us, who gave his body and shed his blood for us for the forgiveness of sins. Thus they make Christ entirely unprofitable for us, and call the doctrine of faith simply an error and falsehood. Here we see how the blind lead the blind.

[2] Well, we allow them to proceed, because they want to be blind and hardened. But if they were in earnest to know the truth, they could plainly see from this Gospel to what such passages, to which they so firmly hold, properly refer, and how they should be interpreted. For this Gospel evidently and plainly says, that Christ does not speak to those who shall first obtain grace, but to his disciples, who already are children of grace and justified, and are also sent out by him, that they should preach to others such grace and salvation; from which it clearly follows that they already have forgiveness of sins, and are pious and justified, and are not first to obtain salvation through works. I say, he speaks to those, and instructs them how they shall conduct themselves toward their enemies, namely, when they are persecuted by them, that they should not persecute them in return, but should patiently suffer all these things, and do them good for evil.

[3] Hence it is not meant, that by such works as are here enumerated they should first obtain forgiveness of sins and the righteousness that avails

before God; but Christ speaks plainly and simply to his disciples whom he had chosen and called Apostles, as St. Luke shows preceding this Gospel. Christ teaches them how they shall conduct themselves when they preach, as though he would say: You dear disciples, I send you as sheep among wolves, and commend this office unto you to preach, and others shall hear your preaching, accept and believe it. And you will be so received that the world will be offended at you and regard you as enemies, and you will find just as much friendship and love in it, as sheep among wolves. For it will become wholly mad and foolish at your preaching, and will by no means tolerate it. Therefore see to it that you lead a better life and conversation than your enemies, who will practice upon you all kinds of unmerciful deeds by judging and condemning you. Moreover they will not only not forgive you any sin, but will proclaim your best works and deeds of mercy as the greatest sins. Again, they will not only not give you anything, but they will also hunt down that which is your own, and will take and keep it by violence. Thus they will treat you. But beware, that you be not like them; on the other hand where they judge, judge not; where they condemn, bless; where they take revenge, forgive; when they take, give. For immediately before, the Lord teaches the very same when he says: Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you.

[4] In this manner St. Paul also admonishes the Christians at Rome (Romans 12:18-19): “If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men. Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto the wrath of God.” Christ here teaches the very same when he says: Be merciful, judge not, condemn not, avenge not yourselves, give unto and assist everyone, in order that you may not become equally as bad as your enemies; but rather that they may be prevailed upon by your kind and friendly conversation, to give you a good testimony, and finally be compelled to say conscientiously: Behold, we judge and condemn these people, and carry out all our maliciousness against them; against this they neither defend or avenge themselves, but suffer it all patiently, and besides, they overcome evil with good, Surely, they cannot be bad people, because they have so much patience, and reward evil with good; I myself, will also hold to them, because they do no one any harm, although they have good reasons for so doing.

[5] From this one can easily see that Christ does not here teach us to become pious and just through our works, but admonishes those who were already pious and just, that they be merciful like their Father in heaven, so that the heathen may thereby become better, and that thus unbelievers may be kindly enticed to become converted and edified, not only by preaching, but also by the merciful and blameless lives and good conduct of the good and just.

[6] In the same sense St. Paul also teaches in 1 Corinthians 7:13: And the woman that hath an unbelieving husband, and he is content to dwell with her, let her not leave her husband, as long as he will permit her to remain a Christian. Because it can so happen that the man may be influenced by the virtue of his Christian wife to become converted and say: I see by my wife, that Christians are good people; therefore I also want to be a Christian. Thus we also read of St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, who had a strange and wonderful husband, who besides was also a heathen. But what did she do? She so conducted herself toward him that he did her no wrong. Other Christian wives were very much astonished at this, and went to her and complained about their husbands, that they could not do anything to please them, although they were Christians, and yet they were scolded and beaten by them; therefore they questioned her how she treated her husband, who, as everyone knew, was not only a wonderful man, but a heathen also, and yet he never beat her. Such favor they could not expect from their husbands, although they were not heathen, but Christians.

[7] Kindhearted Monica answered them and said: I fear you give your husbands cause for doing this. If you were subject to them and would not clamor back, or especially when they begin to be strangely cruel, if you would not answer back, but be patient, submit and obey them, and with friendly words appease them, you would, of course, not be beaten. For thus I am accustomed to treat my husband; when my lord scolds, I pray; is he angry, I avoid him, or return kind words; in this way I have not only put down his anger, but I have also brought him so far, that he is converted and has become a Christian. Behold, the beautiful fruit that followed this conduct, because kind Monica was merciful toward her husband, and did not condemn and judge him. Thus it can often take place, as St. Paul says,

that an unbelieving husband or wife, may become converted through the one who believes.

[8] Thus, says Christ here, should you Christians also do, because you are children of grace and peace, not of anger and discord, and are also called to inherit the blessing. Therefore you should also bring the blessing among the people, first by your preaching and public confession, and after that also by your good outward conduct, so that when the unbelievers judge and condemn you, treat you unmercifully and rob you, you will be merciful to them, and not avenge yourselves, but give and forgive, and besides help, love and bless them, and speak the best things of them before God and the world; that they may also observe by your good conduct that you are pious and blameless people, who do not only suffer evil, but also return good for evil. By this you will obtain a good name among the heathen, and be estimable and honorable in my sight, who art your Lord and God.

[9] Thus you see that this text does not at all permit us to conclude from it that forgiveness of sins is obtained by works; for Christ here speaks to those who are already children of grace, and does not instruct them how to obtain by works, as the Papists dream, the forgiveness of sins, which they already had by grace; however, he here teaches them how they are to conduct themselves, when they go forth and preach, toward the people who persecute, judge, condemn them, and afflict them with all kinds of torment and misfortune; that they immediately do the contrary, not judge, nor condemn, but forgive and give; and then they shall also be neither judged nor condemned before God or the world. And even though the world judge them, still God will not condemn them, as it is said in Psalm 37:13-40. So it shall also be forgiven and given them again.

[10] Thus Christ admonishes his disciples with these words, that they diligently perform the duties of their office and preach with courage, let it offend whom it may, and that nothing whatever may lead them astray, even though all the world revile and curse; let them only freely continue and they shall be richly rewarded; for it is already determined in heaven that there shall be given unto them full measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over.

[11] From all this it is certainly clear, that Christ does not here speak of that righteousness, of how a man becomes just before God, which takes

place alone through faith in Jesus Christ, but teaches his disciples how to lead a good life here on earth among unbelievers, by which they may be of great benefit to those who judge and condemn them. When they do such things, it shall be rewarded unto them again both here and hereafter; not that they thereby merit the forgiveness of sins; for no work, be it ever so good, is able to accomplish this; but when they on this account suffer or lose anything, it shall be returned to them even here in this life an hundred fold, as is written in Mark 10:30, and in the life to come they will be more gloriously arrayed and adorned than other saints. Why? Because they have suffered and done more for Christ's sake than others. For Daniel the prophet says, Daniel 12:3, that the teachers shall shine as the brightness of the firmament after the resurrection of the dead, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever. And St. Paul in Corinthians 15:41 says: "For one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead."

[12] The Lord further says: When you fail to do thus, but return evil for evil, it shall be measured to you again, "for with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again." For by thus judging and condemning those who judge and condemn you, you sufficiently show that you are not my true disciples, and have not yet the forgiveness of sins, or else you would do what I have commanded you. From which it follows further that your faith is not right. So with you it will be changed, and you will hear from me that you have no faith and are false Christians.

[13] This is sufficiently proved, because you still judge one another, and one does not assist the other. This my Christians will not do. Therefore your sins will remain upon you, and will only become greater, as is shown in the parable of the wicked servant who owed his Lord ten thousand talents and could not pay it; the Lord forgave him the debt out of pure grace. But as he would not forgive his fellow servant the very little debt, he again fell into his own former debt, which was forgiven him and brought down upon himself the great wrath of his Lord, who delivered him over to the tormentors. Matthew 18:34.

[14] Thus our dear Lord would here kindly and lovingly invite us to do good works and lead a Christian life also among our enemies. But when we fail to do this he threatens us, that he would not regard us as Christians. For such works are as a sign or confession that we are true Christians. In

addition to this, other people will be made better by such works, and so will we ourselves who do them, as St. Peter says, we make our calling and election sure thereby, and become richer in faith.

[15] To this friendly admonition of Christ our Lord we Christians and especially we ministers should diligently give due heed, for we also have at the present day adversaries of our faith and doctrine, who are great and powerful, kings, princes, lords, Pope and bishops. To these our enemies according to this doctrine of Christ we show all mercy, and are not willing that a hair of their heads should be injured, or that they should be robbed of a cent. But this we wish them from our heart, that they may learn to know their errors and sins, and commit themselves to the grace of God and believe the Gospel. On this account they judge, condemn and persecute us, rob us of honor, goods, body and life, as though we were the worst rogues that tread the earth. Such things we do not to them in return, God be praised! but show them all love and kindness, and would willingly help them, if they would only permit it.

[16] Yes, they say, you revile us nevertheless, both in writing and preaching, and condemn us as heretics, and will not permit us to be the Christian Church. Is such reproof and condemnation mercy? We answer: This is quite a different matter. Christ in this Gospel speaks of those who shall suffer injustice. And it would not be right to apply this to those who by virtue of their office are required to reprove what is wrong. For those who have the office to judge and condemn, do no wrong thereby, in so doing. For as little as it agrees or is valid for a child to say to its father when he would punish it; father, be merciful, and God will then also be merciful to thee; so little is it valid against those who have the office of reproof. For it would be very inappropriate for a thief or evil doer to say to the officer of the law: Dear sir, forgive and do not judge me, and then our Lord God will again forgive thee. No, my dear fellow, the officer of the law by virtue of his office will thus answer and say: It is not necessary that I should forgive you. I do what is right, and doing right needs no forgiveness, but is praiseworthy. Thus also when father and mother punish their children, they do right, for this is called true punishment, when the office requires it. But beware, that you do not revenge yourself against him who must punish you, even if at times he treats you unjustly.

[17] Wherefore it is not appropriate to twist this text, as though the Lord speaks of those who have the authority to punish the wrong, as ministers and all persons in authority, fathers, mothers, princes, lords, and finally also the executioner, who should not say to the evil doer, to whom he must administer justice, as however they are accustomed to do: “Dear Sir, forgive me, what I do to you today,” for why should he say this? As he does right, he needs no forgiveness, which pertains alone to sin and wrong; for his office is to punish wrong. Just as it would be wrong if a father would say to his son when he would punish him: Dear son, forgive me, that I punish you. No, he does right, therefore the son should bear it, for thus God will have it.

[18] Thus St. Paul says, 2 Corinthians 5:13: “For whether we are beside ourselves, it is unto God; or whether we are of sober mind, it is unto you.” In his first Epistle, Paul severely rebuked the Corinthians, which some thought was too severe; but he does not excuse himself in the least nor asks for grace, he simply says: If we rebuke too severely, it is unto God and we serve him; but if we are sober and deal gently, we do so for your good. He will not admit that he has done any sin at all, because he so severely rebukes them, but says he serves God by it, and if he has been too indulgent, he did it for their benefit. This is quite a poor answer to such a complaint as: Dear Paul, why do you strike us so hard? But as he fills the office of an Apostle, he gives no other answer but this: I rebuke and punish sin as I wish, I do right and serve God thereby; not on account of my person, but because God has so commanded and ordered it.

[19] Thus also a judge can say, when by virtue of his office he sentences the evil doer unto death, that he serves God thereby. So also father and mother, when they punish their child as it has deserved, thus serve God; but if they, punish it somewhat milder than it deserves, it is for the good of the child.

[20] We must make a distinction however, for it is vastly different when a person punishes who has the office to punish, and when one punishes who has not this office. An office, call it what you may, is ordained to punish sin; not to tolerate wrong, but protect the right. Therefore, because I and other ministers have this office, we do right, a work of mercy for the people, when we rebuke them, let whoever will do us good or evil for it.

[21] Just as it is a great mercy not to allow young people to have their will and way, whether it be accomplished by threats or by the rod; it will still cost trouble and labor enough to oppose and prevent evil, even though we punish severely. If punishment were altogether omitted and mercy took the place of office, the country would be full of rogues, and the world become a mere den of murderers. Then one would say to another: If you steal from me, I will rob you; if you go with my wife, I will go with yours. No, this would never do; therefore the executioner is a very beneficial and even a merciful man, for he prevents the rogue from repeating his crime, and restrains others from committing crimes. He executes the one and thus threatens others that would do the like, that they may fear the sword and keep the peace. This is a magnificent grace and pure mercy.

[22] Again, it is a great sin against mercy, yes a horrible murder, when a father allows his child to go unpunished; for this is just the same as though he killed it with his own hands; hence Solomon says, Proverbs 23:13,14: "Withhold not correction from the child; for if thou beat him with the rod, he will not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell." That is, he will not die of your beating, but with the rod you cause him to live, and deliver his soul from death; for if you do not punish him, the executioner will, even unto death, by taking away his life. As Solomon would say: If you do not beat your son with the rod of life, in order that he may live, then you are a murderer; because you assist your child to become a rogue, so that the executioner must strike him with the rod of death. Therefore take in your hand the rod of life, and freely punish when necessary, that he may escape the rod of death. Then you will perform a noble work of mercy to him, whereas if you let him have his own will, you become his murderer.

[23] Therefore it is senseless for the Papists to cry: We of course teach others not to judge, nor condemn, but we ourselves do the contrary, punish, judge and condemn everyone. For as I said, what we do in this, we do by virtue of our office. Therefore our judging and punishing is of such a nature, that it only makes one better and harms no one. And we are obliged to do it on account of the command of Christ our Lord, Luke 24:47, that repentance and forgiveness of sins be preached in his name among all nations on earth; and John 16:8: "The Holy Spirit will reprove the world of sin."

[24] According to this command all the Apostles have first judged and reproved the world, and proclaimed God's wrath against it; afterwards they preached forgiveness of sins in Christ's name, as St. Paul does, Romans 1:3, and St. Peter, Acts 2:3-10, and Christ himself when he says, John 9:39: "For judgment came I into this world." Those who have accepted this preaching and permit themselves to be judged and reproved by it, have received the comfort of the Gospel, that without merit, by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus they are justified and saved, Romans 3:24. This judgment and reproof of Christ and the Apostles is not harmful, but beneficial, comfortable and wholesome. Moreover, those who have not allowed themselves to be reproved by these have remained in their sins, and have died and perished forever; and also, in time, have their cities, lands and kingdoms in which they have lived, been most woefully devastated and destroyed.

[25] As therefore the Apostles have preached according to the command of Christ, so too must we do, and say that all men are conceived and born in sin and are by nature children of wrath, and on this account condemned, and can neither by their own or any other creature's help, advice, work or merit, receive forgiveness of sins and be saved. This is to reprove, judge and condemn everybody, and yet we do this, not out of our own wantonness, or that we take pleasure in crying down men as sinners and godless; but out of Christ's order and command. With this however we do not cease, but we again encourage and comfort those whom we have rebuked, and say that Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners, so that all who believe in him, should not perish, but receive everlasting life.

[26] Therefore God-fearing people accuse us of no fault in this; for they observe that we do not preach human nonsense like monks in their hoods, but proclaim the Gospel of Christ; they are glad therefore, and heartily thank God that they have lived to see the time when they can know the precious truth, and thereby obtain comfort for their consciences, and accept this our reproof and judgment as a great mercy. Again, the great and godless crowd scold and condemn us on account of this our reproof, as heretics and traitors, who disturb both the old faith and worship and also the worldly government and peace. We must bear this; yet our conscience gives us the testimony that they wrongfully accuse us, and besides we are comforted to know that we are not the first ones who have been thus slandered. St. Paul

also had to hear from Jews and Gentiles, that he was a blasphemer and traitor. Yea, Christ himself was accused before Pilate for misleading the people and making them disobedient to the emperor, for which also he was crucified. With them we are glad to be cried down as heretics and traitors, until the time when our innocence shall come to light.

[27] If now the wretched, hardened Papists were not such bitter enemies of the truth, and of us on account of the truth, they could observe by our life that we hold firmly to this admonition of Christ, be merciful; for God be praised, we have not thus far avenged ourselves against any man who has done us injury, we have not driven anyone from house and home, wife and child, we have cast no one into prison on account of his faith, much less have we beheaded, burnt at the stake or hung anyone for their faith, as the Papists have done, the tender saints, who have for the last few years shed much innocent blood, and still do not cease. But we have complied with this doctrine and admonition of Christ, and have honored their order and government and confirmed it with our doctrine as far as they are right, we have prayed and pleaded for them, privately and publicly, and have faithfully also admonished them in writings by virtue of our office which God has committed to our charge. And for this our mercy we have received from them the reward, that they have put us under the ban, cursed and persecuted us, and driven many of our brethren from their possessions and murdered them. What more shall we do? Yet we must bear the name of being impatient, angry, spiteful, and revengeful people, who judge and condemn all the world. Well, we must bear this disgrace before the world, until our dear Lord Jesus Christ, the just Judge, shall examine us and decide the matter; in the meantime we permit them evermore to lie, slander and persecute us; but they shall learn by experience when God's time comes, whom they have slandered and persecuted in us.

[28] This much is said of the chief meaning of this Gospel, how we are to be merciful also toward our enemies. Now we should also apply it to our own lives, we who want to be Christians, and brethren should practice this among ourselves; for it is very necessary also that this admonition be preached to us. Although we are all called Evangelical, I fear that the most of us are heathen under the Christian name. Well, what shall we do about it? We must allow the name to all, although few there be who bear it in truth. For St. Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:2 says: "For all have not faith"; and Christ

himself complains, Matthew 22:14, that many are called but few are chosen. Now, those who are true Christians should with all diligence take this admonition of Christ to heart, that they may not only be friendly toward enemies, but also much more toward those called Christians.

[29] Therefore let everyone who goes to the sacrament and pretends to be a Christian take heed to himself that he deceive not himself. For one can now well see what a scraping, grabbing and scratching there is even among those who want to be Christians, from the lowest to the highest stage of society. It is a sin and a shame to hear it. Nearly everyone falls into this shameful greed, and such a state may well be called a swine's life, for as the swine in the trough, whichever one is the strongest pushes the rest away, as though she wanted to devour all herself, just so it goes in the world today, and everyone goes securely forth, gives nothing whatever and takes all he can get, whether he gets it rightfully or wrongfully, so that the word give, which stands here in the Gospel, has almost disappeared, and instead robbery and theft in homes and in the market have everywhere come to take its place. What unfaithfulness prevails even among day laborers and house servants, how shamefully they earn their bread with malicious unfaithfulness, cheating and overcharging. They do not look upon it as stealing, and yet it is just as much stealing when they labor unfaithfully, as when they steal it out of our purse. This is the way servants and laborers do, and it matters not by what they are called.

[30] But how will such people stand in that day when Christ shall ask them, whether they have done according to his admonition? For if Christians are to be merciful to their enemies as Christ here teaches, much more will it become them to show all love and friendship toward their brethren and Christian people; and as they are not to curse their enemies, much less should they curse their friends. Again, if they are not to avenge themselves on unbelievers, but give to them and do them good, much more should they show this kindness to the household of faith. Yes, turn the thing around to rob, to covet, and to take advantage of another wherever one can; this goes on yet in the world with violence. But the holy Gospel says: Give, and it shall be given unto you; if we do not hold ourselves to this rule, we shall hear the opposite: Steal and rob, and you shall be robbed and stolen from again.

[31] But our Lord God is so full of resources that he can send misfortune upon a city or a country so that even after they have gathered and hoarded for a long time, some tramp brother or fellow pilgrim comes along, to whom one must give or he will take it himself by force. For it must surely come to this that if we willfully forget that word “give,” our Lord God will make out of it “take.” After such misfortune we strive with all diligence, for wherever the Lord says “give” there we only wish to make out of it “take.” Well then take, steal and rob as long as you will, what will it avail you; things will take a turn someday so that it will be taken from you again.

[32] All history teaches us, that when a kingdom, a principality, or a city, has been exalted to the highest pitch and becomes rich, then comes a war, or some other misfortune, so that it again becomes poor. Thus it happens also to individual families and persons; when they rise suddenly and become powerful, they also immediately fall again. I have already observed several who sat amid great possessions, and yet in a short time were thoroughly ruined. Why is this? Because they did not want to give as Christ here admonishes, but much rather took from others, for this reason a change took place with them, that it was again taken from them; as also teaches experience, and the common proverb runs: Goods unjustly won, will not last to the third son, that he may enjoy it. Such things we see daily in all ranks of life; and if it does endure for a time and descends from father to son, yet it sinks with the third heir, for it is a cursed wealth, which has either been obtained by theft or greed.

[33] By such daily experience the children of the world ought to become wise and think: Why scratch and scrape so long, you cannot rightfully possess goods obtained by stinginess after all, nor will it prosper in your hands, as you have time and again experienced from one or another.

[34] But we Christians should be more influenced by what the Holy Scriptures teach about it. Thus David says, Psalm 37:16-18: “Better is a little that the righteous hath, than the abundance of many wicked,” and the reason immediately follows: “For the arm of the wicked shall be broken, and the Lord upholdeth the righteous. The Lord knoweth the days of the perfect; and their inheritance shall be forever.” As though he would say: Although a good man may have but little, if he only has it with God and honor, it will be dearer to him than all the treasures of the ungodly. For our Lord God will shower his blessings upon that little, so that it will last to

children's children to the thousandth generation. This is also apparent; for at the present time we find many old and honorable families in the cities, whose possessions have reached to several hundred generations, whereas with others it has disappeared with the third. We should learn from this and similar passages, and hold to it because it is the truth, that it is better to have thirty dollars with God and honor, than three thousand won without God and with dishonor. For God blesses the little which the righteous have (says Psalm 37:16), so that he may not only possess it with a good conscience, but will also be to his benefit and he will use it so that God may be pleased with it. But the wealth that has been unjustly obtained, may be enjoyed for a time; yet because God's blessing does not rest upon it, it wears away and loses itself, so that we cannot tell what has become of it; for it has been won by greed and wrong, and as they did not regard it as stealing for one to scrape all together and give nothing away, the rust is entered into it and eats it up, so that it cannot be seen that there ever was a penny there. As also the heathen have learned from experience and said: "By evil acquired, by evil it goes," "As it is won, so it is gone."

[35] But why say more? One will not grow wise except by his own losses; we let our Lord God promise and threat in vain, but who asks about it? Though we preach ever so much, Proverbs 11:4: "Riches profit not in the day of wrath; but righteousness delivereth from death," and Proverbs 5:28: "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall; but the righteous shall flourish as the green leaf;" everyone thinks the while: "Dear Sir, say what you will, if I had money and goods, I would be free from all distress;" they simply make our Lord God a liar. But they will experience sooner than they wish, that they are deceived. Therefore, my dear friends, let us fear and trust in God, and hereafter be merciful and kind, not only toward enemies as this Gospel teaches, but still more toward our friends and brethren; especially because we hear that our Lord is such an enemy to shameful covetousness, that he will blow upon such ill-gotten gain, so that it will vanish and fly away as the dust before the wind. The prophet Haggai 1:6, says of the miser, that he gathers into a bag with holes; as though he would say: Well, they may gather, but it will do them no good, because they want to get rich by greed even to the injury of others. And Solomon says: The godless man, when he has for a long time gathered wealth in heaps, has such a curse in his house, that he not only does not become better by his wealth, but it also disappears under his hands, as though the rust had devoured it.

[36] Now dear friends, do not despise such a warning, but take it to yourselves, and if you have already been ensnared by this covetousness, turn again and reform. Formerly when one served the devil in popedom, everyone was merciful and kind, then they gave with both hands joyfully and with great devotion, to support the false worship of God. Now, when one should justly be kind and give, and show his thankfulness to God for the holy Gospel, everyone is about to perish with hunger, no one will give anything, but will only receive. Formerly every city according to its size, liberally supported several cloisters, not to mention mass-priests and rich monasteries. Now, when only two or three persons, who preach God's Word, administer the sacraments, visit and comfort the sick in an honest and Christian manner and instruct the youth, are to be supported in one city, and that too not from their own but from property that came to us from the papacy, it is hard for everybody to give.

[37] But thus it must be, that Jesus with Mary and Joseph should have no room in the inn at Bethlehem, but after all he finds a crib, and Mary and Joseph a stall, in which they miserably help themselves as best they may. And as they are not at home in Nazareth but in a strange place at an inconvenient time, in the midst of winter, and altogether forgotten in the stall by the people of Bethlehem, yet after all they do not perish with hunger. But before they should suffer hunger among their blood relations who care nothing for them, even the heathen must come from rich Arabia and present the little child Jesus gold, frankincense and myrrh. Christians understand well enough what is meant.

[38] Therefore let everyone be diligent to comply with this admonition, that he willingly give, if he desires that it shall be given unto him again. If he will not do this, Christ will most certainly keep his Word, that it shall not be given unto him again. And though he already has something, there shall not be given him grace enough to enjoy it, as has already been shown from Scripture passages, Now God does not only show us by his Word that our covetousness is displeasing to him, and that usurers shall not enjoy their goods, but proves it also by daily examples. I will relate one as a warning which has recently occurred, although some may be offended at it: It is not far from here to Wittenberg, as has been reported to me and have also myself made proper inquiries, there was a farmer, who all his life cheated and took advantage of the people in the market, as at present nearly all are

accustomed to do, he went into his barn to look after his grain; then the devil set such a ghost before his eyes, that he found his barn empty, and could see no corn there. What happened? The miserable, stingy man becomes frightened, and thinks the corn was secretly stolen from his barn. He goes down to his wife and servants with great cries and lamentations and says all his grain has been stolen out of his barn. As the wife and servants go in to look after it, in the meantime the wretched man hangs himself for grief, and dies in the rope before they return again to him. And yet it was but the deception of the devil. For all the corn was still lying untouched on the floor. The devil by the decree of God had thus infatuated him, that he could not see even a single grain.

[39] This I say, has taken place before our very doors, to frighten and warn us. What benefit did the poor man reap from it? What help are now his goods to him, which he had scraped together so long with care and labor? The devil wanted to kill him, therefore he so blindfolded him that he could not see his own corn, and thus he gave him a cause, to hang himself for grief. This is I think a curse, which came upon ill-gotten goods, that he should not only not enjoy it, but even not behold it, and thereby lose both body and soul. More similar histories have appeared, as you at other times have heard from me; and it is good not to forget them, there may yet be some who will be reformed by them. The wretched man who so miserably hung himself will find his sentence. But we tell it you as a warning. If you will not receive it, but despise it, you do not despise me who told it you, but the Lord Christ, who tells it to you through me. But if you receive it and do better, I will give you no reward, for I cannot reward the works of a Christian. But he who here says: Give and it shall be given to you, will richly reward it. Whoever will, let him accept, and whoever will not, can let it alone. This text will not become false on that account. For although not all are punished like this man, yet everyone who despises this admonition of Christ, will find his condemnation on the last day. And it is indeed to be wondered at, that we willingly and with great care, weariness and labor, for the stingy man's stinginess becomes very hard, 1 Timothy 6:10, should bring into our own house first our own injury and curse, whereas with lighter labor and a more joyful courage, if we according to the doctrine of Christ would give and help our neighbor, could well be rich. For he who said, Give, and it will be given you, will certainly keep his Word, and give again to those who obey his admonition, and that abundantly; for he says: A

full, pressed down, shaken together, and overrunning measure shall be given to you again.

[40] Were it not better, you had but little with God and honor, and give and help the needy according to your ability, and have thereby a good conscience and the glorious comfort that God will bless and increase your humble store, than that you should, with care and restlessness and with an evil conscience, have great possessions, which you not only cannot enjoy, but cannot even be master of, for a miser is mammon's servant and a captive. And yet, you do not only know from God's Word, although you will not believe it, but also from daily experience, that it will do your children or heirs no good, but by the very consumption of it they shall become poor.

[41] What have you of it at last, O wretched man, when you have so long scraped and scratched together, except that you have made your life very toilsome in sins, and the devil, when your last hour comes, will drag you into the abyss of hell, and so you will not only shamefully lose your money and goods, which in this life you never could enjoy, but besides you also wretchedly lose both body and soul, and upon all this with your condemned treasures you bring down God's displeasure and curse upon your children and heirs, who have become no better than yourself, but fall into poverty and into all distress and misfortune. Very well, he that will hear, let him hear. For everyone must bear his own burden, as St. Paul says, Galatians 6:5: I believe it also. Therefore you who will not hear, answer for yourselves. This is enough of this Gospel for a small admonition. God grant, that in some of you it may bring forth fruit! Amen.

Fifth Sunday after Trinity. Peter's Miraculous Draught of Fish

Text: Luke 5:1-11.

1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret,

2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

4 Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

5 And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

6 And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.

7 And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:

10 And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

11 And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him. Luke 5:1-11

[1] This Gospel is easy for those to understand who believe, and it presents to us two thoughts, namely: Faith in its relation to temporal blessings, and faith in its relation to eternal blessings.

Part I. Faith in Its Relation to Temporal Blessings

[2] In the first place, Christ shows that those who believe on him will certainly have sufficient also for this present life. And this he does in that he

gives Peter and his partners such a great multitude of fishes, more than they had any reason to expect; also, in that Christ also provides for the feeding of our stomachs, if it were not only for our cursed unbelief. For behold Peter and look deep into his heart and you will find that he had no idea that he should catch so many fishes; then God came and drove the fish into the net, and more than all the disciples had desired.

[3] Therefore this is an example that all who believe will have enough for their temporal needs; but those who do not believe can never get enough and have no rest in scheming how to secure riches, by which they fall into all kinds of vice. Then comes to pass what Paul in 1 Timothy 6:6-10 says: “But godliness with contentment is great gain; for we brought nothing into the world, for neither can we carry anything out; but having food and covering we shall be therewith content. But they that are minded to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

[4] Now this passage of St. Paul shows clearly what follows our unbelief, namely, that he who strives after possessions and will become rich, must fall into the temptations and snares of the devil. These we cannot see, for they are spiritual. However if we could see the harm and ruin he does in spiritual things as he does in corporal things, then we would be good preachers. For we see publicly how an unbelieving man scrapes and does violence to everybody in order that he may scratch together something in which he may place his confidence, and say: Yea, now I have enough. Thus we see, what an avaricious, unfriendly thing unbelief is; for it is a benefit to no one, it sells no one anything unless it sees its own advantage in doing so.

[5] For it has ever been a curse that we cannot trust God even for the daily food our stomachs crave, and that we continually think we are to die from hunger; and yet, we are to have enough, as Christ in Matthew 6:25f. says: “Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment? Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more

value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto the measure of his life? And why are ye anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

[6] Here you see how God cares for the birds and flowers, and adorns them so beautifully; much more will he give us what we need; and yet we cannot trust him. So successfully has the devil taken us captive by his snares. If one comes now so far that he is not satisfied and does not trust God, then love must at once cease, so that he does no one any good, but he scratches together everything only on his own heap.

[7] And in this way the calling of the priests and monks arose; only in order that they might help themselves and feed their stomachs, and not being permitted to work they ran into the cloisters. And the proverb is true: Despair makes monks; yea, not only monks, but also priests, bishops and popes; for they do not trust God that he is able to feed and clothe them, and only think how they may fortify themselves against all want and poverty. All this is the life of unbelief. Then they go and keep strumpets or commit adultery, which are the fruits that follow unbelief; for they never trusted God, that he was able to sustain them, if they took unto themselves wives and remained out of the monasteries.

[8] Now, here is an example that excites us to trust in God, and first for the needs of the stomach; since he cares for us also in temporal things. This we see here in the case of Peter, when he thus caught a great multitude of fishes, more than filled their boats. From this it is clearly shown God will forsake no one, each must have what he needs, if he trusts in God alone; as Psalm 37:35 says’ “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.” There is no lack of

provisions, only a lack of faith; before that should take place the angels would come and minister unto us. Therefore the fact that the people suffer now such need, is caused only by unbelief.

[9] And although God is near us and will give us what we need, yet he requires on our part both work and hope, even if he delay for a time; therefore he gives Peter here a draught of fishes, and says: “Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.”

[10] As if the Lord would say: Let down the nets, and do the work that belongs to a fisherman, and let me care for the rest. The care or solicitude shall not be thine but mine, and the work thine. We however wish to turn this around for Christ: we want the care and let him have the work. Hence it is that everyone strives after usury, and hoards money so that they may never need to work.

[11] Therefore if you wish to lead a truly Christian life, let thy God see to it how the fishes come into your net, and go and enter some calling in life that you may labor. But we all wish to fill such positions, where we do not need to labor; that has ever been the trick of the devil. And because of this we became monks and priests, only in order that we might live like noblemen and would not need to work. Moved by this, mothers left their children go to school, in order that they might have good days and serve God. In this way it came so far that people did not know what good living was; and yet God commanded and took pleasure in it, that man should eat his bread in sweat; as he said to Adam: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,” Genesis 3:19. And the deeper you stick in the law, the better it is. Therefore labor and believe, and let God rule unhindered.

[12] If we speak of faith, and are to lean upon God and let him care for us, then they say: Yes, I must believe a long time before a roasted dove flies into my mouth, if I do not labor. Yes, it is true, you must toil, for you are commanded to do so: but let thy God provide for you. Believe and labor, then will not only a dove but a roasted goose fly into your mouth.

[13] But to these belong also another part, namely, that we should hope, even if God does delay for a time. Hence Christ here left them toil all the night without catching anything, and it seemed he would permit them to die of hunger. Peter might have well thought since he fished so long and caught nothing: now God will let the stomach languish. But he despairs not, he

continues to labor and stands and hopes, God would give it to him although he might delay. Then God comes and gives him such a great multitude of fishes all at once, and more than he had been able to catch in eight days.

[14] Therefore you must learn this part well, that you are to work and hope, even if God should delay a little and let you toil in your sweat, so that you imagine your labor is now lost. Then you must be wise and learn to know your God and to trust in him. Then he arrives and gives you more than you need, as he does here to Peter. Therefore if God has already delayed, only remember in the example of Peter there was also a little delay and yet it richly came. Thus it strikes in the time of his good pleasure; therefore do not despair, but hope and then thy works will be golden and pleasing to him; and then hope waits patiently, when God withdraws from us and does not do at once what we earnestly wish. Therefore he must make an appendix and hang on it a costly stone that thy works may become important. This precious stone is faith; but the works of unbelievers are stubble, for they are not built upon faith. This is the first part of our Gospel, now follows the second.

Part II. Faith in Its Relation to Eternal Blessings

[15] After the disciples caught the fishes and tasted the fruit of faith, their faith increased and grew. Now, we must first come to the point that we can commit unto God the care of our stomachs. For whoever cannot entrust that to God, can never commit unto him his soul. But this is only the faith of the child, where we learn to go to the public bank and continue to suck our mother's breast. Yet, by this we must learn to confide our soul to God for his keeping. This today's Gospel aims to do, when it says: But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was amazed, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken.

[16] Let Peter here be a figure of those who should believe in the eternal possessions, and substitute for him the conscience, that now waits and looks for temporal blessings and possessions. A sinful conscience by reason of its nature is apt to do just as Peter does here, flee from its Savior, and think: O, God, I am not worthy to be saved and sit among the saints and angels! Oh, that treasure is far too high for me. Here the narrow small conscience

cannot grasp these great treasures, but thinks: Yes, if I were as St. Peter and Paul, then I might believe it. This is foolish; for should you wish to establish yourself upon your holiness, then you would build on the sand. No, not so; but do like St. Peter. For in that he considered himself so unworthy, then he became first worthy. And just because you are a sinful person, you must trust. Here you must open wide your conscience and greatly expand your heart, in order that grace may flow freely into them.

[17] If you have now learned to know God, then refuse him nothing whatever; that is, if we behold the great treasures, then we should not despair. It is proper that we know ourselves, and the more thoroughly we do this the better; but you must not reject grace because of your sins. For if you find that your conscience struggles and would drive you to despair, then you are most comfortable and fortunate; then you will find the consolation in your conscience, and say like Micah 7:18-19: "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and casts their sins into the sea and drowns them?" All gods that do not take away sin are idols. Therefore Micah well says, that there is no God like our God; for other gods wish to discover righteousness, but our God brings it; God the Lord brings it and does not discover it. Therefore you must not despair, although your conscience struggles and feels its sins; for the more disgraced you are, the quicker God imparts grace.

[18] Now the great multitude of people go and dress themselves like the kitten does, and think God will then accept them. No, the Scriptures praise God that he takes away sins and casts them into the ocean. We cannot help our sins by our works nor become righteous by means of any power within ourselves: God, and no one else, will do that, without merit and without works, out of pure grace; as in Isaiah 43:22 he says: "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake: and I will not remember thy sins." And thus it must be, or you will never obtain a cheerful conscience. Therefore when Peter said, "I am a sinful man," he did right. It is true he had indeed cause to fear and humble himself; but he was constrained not to reject God, but to accept him.

[19] Therefore, if I feel my sins and become like St. Peter, and would run away from God; then I must first turn and approach nearer and nearer to him. For if God had fled and had not desired to take away your sins, he would not have come to you and run after you. Therefore the more you feel

that you are a sinful man and the more you wish to flee from God, the more you should press forward to him; mark that well. For as St. Peter does here, so do all consciences, that are terrified before their sins, they wish to flee from God and seek another idol. Then do not desist, but approach God with fresh confidence and hold to him. On the other hand, if we flee from him and seek work righteousness and obtain help from another God, and afterwards come to the true God; then we will find him just like the foolish virgins, to whom, while they went to buy oil, the door was closed. Matthew 25:10.

[20] But what did Christ do, when Peter humbled himself and in the face of great fear and terror he asked the Lord to depart from him? Did he let him stick in his despair? No, but he came to him, comforted him and said: “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.”

[21] These are evangelical or Gospel words, that comfort weak hearts. And just in this way God makes our work and temptation golden before our eyes. Therefore observe now, how God provides for our bodies, in that he here gives Peter a great multitude of fishes, when he would have had enough with two, and in like manner satisfies and enriches him spiritually, so that he could from his fullness impart to others, and thus he made him a natural and a spiritual fisherman; a natural fisherman in that he caught a great multitude of fishes which he could sell; a spiritual fisherman in that he should henceforth catch men; for he had now the Gospel, by which he should gather the people and enlarge the kingdom of Christ.

[22] Behold, thus it comes to pass: If one believes, God gives him so much that he is able to help all people, outwardly with his property and gifts; and from within he breaks forth, teaches others and makes them inwardly rich also, for such a person cannot keep silent, he must declare to others what he experienced; as Psalm 51:10-13 says: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.” Also in another Psalm, 116:20, David says: “I believe, for I will speak.” This comes to pass thus: If I believe, I know God and then I see what other people lack, and go and preach to them the Gospel.

[23] Thus we see in this Gospel how God cares for his own and how he sustains them temporally and spiritually both in body and soul. But where for the time there is need, it is certainly because of our unbelief or because we lately first began to believe. For when faith is still new and small, its blessings at the time are small and insignificant, to the end that we should learn to know and trust God. But if we are come to the point that we freely trust God, then we will be in want of nothing, for God then fills us with temporal and spiritual blessings, and with such superabundant treasures, so that we are able to help all people. That is called making the poor people rich and feeding the hungry. This is sufficient on today's Gospel.

Fifth Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. Faith, the Care of God, Our Daily Occupation, etc.

Text: Luke 5:1-11.

1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret,

2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

4 Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

5 And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

6 And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes:

and their net brake.

7 And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:

10 And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

11 And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him. Luke 5:1-11

[1] This Gospel brings before us two parts, in which it exhorts to faith and strengthens faith. In the first part, it shows that Christ cares for those who believe in him, so that they are abundantly supplied against temporal and bodily needs. In the second part, it shows that he will help them still more against spiritual needs, thus in reality proving the truth of what St. Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:8: "Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come." The Scriptures are everywhere full of these two kinds of promises.

[2] To faith he assures temporal and bodily help by giving to Peter and his partners so great a draught of fishes after they had vainly toiled all night and caught nothing, and now could have no expectation or hope of taking anything. But herein he adheres to the rule and order which he himself has given and taught in Matthew 6:33: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." He here acts according to this saying and shows its truth by example and experience, inasmuch as the people press upon him in crowds, first to hear his words, and to such an extent that, in order to preach to them, he sets out from land in one of the boats. But when he has taught them he proceeds further to provide for their bodily needs, inasmuch as they are in distress and want.

[3] Although it is not indeed the purpose of Christ's coming or preaching to foster and provide for the body, yet he is not unmindful of it when the

first thing sought is his kingdom. He therefore takes upon himself the distress of these poor fishermen who, through all this night, and with all their efforts and toil, have caught nothing. However, as they have lent him their boat to preach, and have listened to him, he, without any thought on their part, and before they have uttered any prayer, provides for them a draught of fishes so great that they are thereby enabled fully to learn and clearly to understand that in him they have a Master who cares for them and will not forsake them, provided they abide in his Word and remain his disciples.

[4] He would that his Church, or believing people, should be comforted by the fact that he provides for them, and that somewhere on earth they shall find bread and an abiding place, even though they are everywhere so persecuted and scattered, that their place and provision in the world must be uncertain. We find this set forth, not only in the present instance, and in others like it, but in many a beautiful passage, such as Psalm 34:10: "The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek Jehovah shall not want any good thing." And Psalm 33:18-19: "Behold, the eye of Jehovah is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his loving kindness; to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine." And Proverbs 10:3: "Jehovah will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish," etc.

[5] By this example he especially shows how it goes with those upon whom he is to bestow his gifts and assistance, and how he is accustomed to bestow these favors. It goes with them as it went with those fishermen, who labored all the night, yet had nothing for all their trouble and labor, and had nothing to hope for from human counsel or aid. Manifold tribulations, miseries and distress are the daily experience of all Christendom. If Christ is to help, there must be trials, trouble and toil, and it must come to this, that we despair of all human counsel, comfort and ability. Then he comes with his help, and shows that he still has the means of comfort, counsel, protection and deliverance, and that he is able to bestow all this when everything else has failed us, and when all that we have done or suffered, and still may be able to do, is nothing and in vain; yea, that in such need and weakness he gives and helps in richer measure than could be done by all human power, skill and aid.

[6] On the other hand, by saying to his disciples: “Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught,” Christ shows that he does not forbid work, or would have that neglected which we have been commanded to do. He thereby enjoins upon them to continue in their handicraft. The two things are thus well maintained over against each other, namely, that we must work, and that our work accomplishes nothing. For if toil and trouble could have accomplished anything, then would the disciples have accomplished it during the hours of the night; and all the more so then, as they had hopes of taking a greater number of fishes while the silence and darkness continued than when Christ, in broad daylight, commanded them to let down their nets. Nevertheless, at Christ’s word, and at one draught, they drew them in full to overflowing.

[7] From this everyone may see and learn that no man lives by his labor or exertion, however great and unhampered this may be, but must live by God’s blessing and grace. Let it remain at this, as the Germans say, that “God helps,” or “God bestows his gifts overnight,” which saying has come down to us from pious men of old who realized its truth in their experience. Daily experience still shows that many a one toils, tooth and nail, in anxiety and hard work, who yet can scarcely earn his bread or get rid of his debts and poverty; whilst to another, who takes it easy and never overexerts himself, everything comes and flows in so abundantly that we really must say: “All this comes from God’s help and not from any man’s labor.” In Psalm 127:2 we are told: “So he giveth it unto his beloved in sleep,” as if the Psalmist would say: “It is in vain that you fret and plague yourself with cares and labor, day and night, in order to provide what is needed in the home. Much may be needed there; but it does not depend upon your hands and labor at all. Nothing will come of your effort unless God himself is the “House Father” and makes it possible for you to say: ‘God bestows his gifts over night.’ Grain and all food from the earth, yea, all that a man has, or may acquire, must be given him of God.”

[8] Such favors he also bestows upon the godless and unbelieving, and upon them more than upon others. With temporal goods he fills to overflowing the house and home of many wicked men who never think of a God. And he does this, not by their exertion and labor, but by a simple act of blessing, as we are told concerning such men in Psalm 17:14: “Whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure.” It is as if the Psalmist here said:

“Deliver me from the men of this world who have their portion in this life, whose belly thou fillest with thy treasure,” that is, with such goods as are divine and hidden treasures of thine own, concerning which no man knows whence they come, and over which he has no power, — treasures which he cannot provide for himself, but must be provided and bestowed by thee alone.

[9] Hereby Christ would have Christians aroused and strengthened in faith, and protected against unbelief with its harmful fruits, such fruits, especially, as covetousness, and anxious cares for the body and the present life. These cling to man by nature like an inborn plague which, together with the lusts of unbelief, moves and rages against the Spirit, as St. Paul teaches in Galatians 5:17. Moreover, the devil seeks to hinder faith by his temptations and suggestions to mistrust and doubt God. This, too, the world does by its hatred, envy and persecution of the righteous, whose goods and honor and life it is after, and whom it would use as mats for its feet. On the other hand (I say), we here perceive both the power and advantage of the faith which holds fast to Christ’s Word and ventures thereon, as Peter does, saying: “Although we have toiled all night and taken nothing, yet at thy word I will let down the nets.” It is this faith that so enlarges the draught of fishes as to fill the two boats; for without this the nets would not have been let down, nor would any fish have been caught.

[10] Scripture, however, everywhere shows the harm that is done by the avarice and anxieties of unbelief. For unbelief can by no means obtain anything from God that would benefit, comfort or bless it, but so deprives itself of the divine benediction that it can have no satisfaction or joy in the temporal goods it desires, and can never possess a good and peaceful conscience. Hence it is that Christ, in Matthew 13:22, speaks of all anxiety, with regard to sustenance, as thorns, on account of which the Word of God cannot put forth its strength or its fruits. St. Paul expounds the meaning of the thorns in 1 Timothy 6:9-10, saying: “They that are minded to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil; which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

[11] Here compare the good things that faith brings and does, with the harm that is done by unbelief. For, in addition to this, that faith has the

divine grace and blessing, it also has the promise that it shall be sufficiently supplied with all that it needs. It fills the heart with such goodness, peace and joy that it may well be called the root of all good things. Unbelief, on the other hand, with all its cares and covetousness, shall have this as its reward, that it is not bettered thereby, but must fall into all sorts of snares through many hurtful lusts and desires; and thus it attains to nothing in the end but eternal destruction. It is therefore nothing but the root whence all misfortunes spring.

[12] These two things are clearly seen in the world. Those men are at rest and in peace who content themselves with the things that God provides. They journey onward cheerfully and courageously, whatever their calling may be. They have enough to live on, and all their necessities are so well supplied that they must say to themselves: “No evening yet have I gone hungry to sleep,” although it appears as if affliction and want are at their very doors, as, according to our text, was the case with Peter. They have this benefit from their confidence and faith in God, that they need not fret and wound themselves among the thorns (cares for the body), or be stung and injured by them, but can, so to speak, sit amid roses in a garden of pleasure. As Solomon says in Proverbs 15:15: “He that is of a cheerful heart hath a continual feast.” The others, however, who plant themselves among the thorns of avarice, and seek after great possessions, must suffer the consequences of being stung and torn and must fall, not only into manifold temptations and dangers, (which would be a mercy, if it only remained at that), but also into snares wherein they are so thoroughly caught that they sink to a temporal destruction and eternal damnation from which they can never again escape.

[13] Of this we see daily examples in those who boast of the Gospel and their Christianity. Everywhere we find robbery, oppression, assessment, usury, etc., to such an extent that even God and conscience are set aside for the sake of a miserable penny. Then, as if such a fall were not deep enough, they harden themselves, and keep on their course defiantly and sacrilegiously, until they sink so far as to become enemies of God’s Word, become blind and deaf, yea, become so unblessed and accursed that they are of no service in any station, and can do nothing that is wholesome and good or useful to the pleasure and improvement of others. All they can do is to cause and bring harm, misfortune and misery upon land and people.

[14] All comes from this, as St. Paul says, that men are bent on being rich. For such covetousness and cares do assuredly keep company with a pride that makes men aim at being something great and powerful. Covetousness would appropriate everything to itself. It begins at first by saying: "Would that I had this house, this field, this castle, this village," etc. Thus it grows greater and greater till it becomes a dragon's tail that draws everything after it. And where covetousness has once become rooted there it daily brings forth cares of a hundred different kinds, as it seeks to obtain still more goods and gold. There the human heart boils and bubbles with countless insatiable lusts, and desires, that serve no other purpose than its own destruction, and spring from no other source than man's fall from faith, and thence from one temptation and snare into another. It is a dreadful plague that has taken such thorough possession of men that, on account of it, they can do nothing good or useful in their station, and no longer can have any thought of serving God or man.

[15] When one has scraped together a great deal, he has no less trouble in retaining and protecting it. He must then try to gain favor and friendship, and in all sorts of ways seek to prevent the loss of his property. In the meantime he brings upon himself hatred and envy and troubles of many kinds, from which he cannot escape; and thus, as St. Paul shows, there is nothing left but disturbance and sorrows of conscience, and a veritable hell, into which the man has cast himself. Upon the covetous man the plague and curse have already been pronounced that he shall never be satisfied, and, furthermore, that he must endure all sorts of misfortune and heart-griefs through the very things he has coveted to his everlasting destruction and damnation.

[16] We see from daily experience what shameful and accursed vice covetousness is, and what harm it does, especially in high office, whether clerical or lay. If the money fiend has taken possession of a pastor's or preacher's heart, so that he, like the rest of the world, only aims at securing for himself great riches, then has he already, like Judas the traitor, fallen into the jaws of the devil, and is prepared, for a few pieces of silver, to betray Christ and his Word and his Church. Thus has the Pope, in order to secure and maintain his riches and dominion, introduced, in the name of God and the Church, all sorts of idolatries and abominations, and has

openly led multitudes of souls to the devil, so filling men with the false terrors of his ban that no one dares to say a word against it.

[17] How harmful it is in civil governments when lords and princes are dominated by this shameful vice, aiming to appropriate everything to themselves. Thereby they forget to exercise their princely office so as to be of help to the land and people over whom, for this purpose, they have been placed as lords, and thus they forfeit the commendation and love which, with all honor and praise, they should receive as the fathers of their people and country. They do not concern themselves about the spread of God's Word, the administration and support of churches and schools, the proper instruction of the people, or the maintenance of law and order among their subjects. They permit destitute pastors, with their children, widows and orphans, to suffer injustice, violence and want. In the meantime they go about with their tax lists, and only consider how they may collect money enough for their excessive expenditures and pomp. And when this does not suffice, they flay and tax their poor subjects to such an extent that they themselves fall into perplexities and difficulties which must bring poverty and ruin upon themselves, their land and their people. Or if, in their avarice, they have already accumulated enough to make them think they are quite rich, then, in order to carry out their undertakings, they involve themselves in manifold strange dealings and affairs that finally, to their own punishment, they bring upon themselves great burdens and ruin.

[18] What a dreadful disaster and ruin has been brought upon Germany merely by the shameful and accursed usury which has everywhere gotten the upper hand, so that there is no longer any check or restraint to it, especially as those who should check it are themselves mixed up in it. Nowadays everyone who has the power, by means of his money, impoverishes his neighbors, and thereby sets God and conscience aside. Thus, with open eyes, and with an evil, self-accusing conscience, he speeds off to hell, burdened with the curse that has been pronounced upon the abominations of covetousness, — the curse, that he shall not himself enjoy such property in peace and tranquility as has been gained by usury, but either himself shall lose it by God's visitation or it shall not descend to his heirs. Upon such unChristian doings must come the fearful wrath and punishment of God, which alas! we have long ago greatly deserved; and the time must come when he will turn us out of doors, together with the Turks

and other terrible plagues, so that, since we would not heed his Word and admonition, he himself may put a forcible end to this godless business.

[19] This the believer avoids and escapes who, with good conscience and godly fear, occupies his station in life peacefully and quietly, and is satisfied with the things that God gives him. He does not expose himself to the dangers of temptation or snares. He is in no need of troubling himself with cares and anxieties, or of engaging with others in bickering and brawling disputes, quarrels, jealousies and hatreds. He is a man of fine, blessed and useful character, one who can be of service and assistance to many. He finds grace and favor with God and man that shall benefit and honor even his children's children.

[20] The example before us in this Gospel should teach and admonish us that we may learn to believe, and thus experience through faith, that God cares for his children and provides for them to such an extent that they need not worry and condemn themselves with cares or covetousness. And yet, though cares and covetousness are forbidden, it should be borne in mind, as I have already said, that no one dare cease from labor. The world turns these two things upside down, as it usually does with all the words and ordinances of God. To care and to strive for the obtaining of gold and goods is something it is determined to do. Such care, however, concerns God alone, and for himself alone has he reserved it. And yet the world is willing enough to let God attend to the work which it has been commanded to do; yea, all the aim of its cares and covetousness is to be set free from working in the sweat of its face. God wants just the opposite. He wants us to keep the work and to leave the care with him. By doing this we shall do our part, and, with moderate labor and no care, we shall soon come into possession of all we need.

[21] When Christ wished to bestow his gift upon Peter and others he did not cause the fish to leap into the boat without labor or nets, as he very well might have done. But he commanded them to put out into the deep and let down their nets. That is, they should engage in the handicraft they understood and had learnt and were accustomed to, and should act as fishermen. Christ keeps aloof from the lazy, unfaithful idlers who will not do as they have been commanded, and will not keep their hands and feet from straying. Thus he teaches a twofold lesson, that he will not give us anything unless we work for it, and that the things we obtain do not come

from our work, but only from God's help and blessing. You are to work, but you are not to depend upon that work, as if that which resulted therefrom were of your own accomplishment.

[22] In short, our work produces and bestows nothing. Yet it is necessary as a means through which we may receive what God gives. The disciples must use their hands to let down the nets and to draw them in, if they wish to secure anything, and must be willing to do so. Yet they are obliged to acknowledge that their labor did not bring about the result, otherwise they would have succeeded, in the first place, without Christ. He therefore permits them to make a sufficient trial, and to discover by experience that the toil of this entire night has been in vain and to no purpose.

[23] This he teaches us by daily experience in all sorts of affairs and doings and governments on earth. Very often he permits us to labor long and arduously and without results, till it becomes bitterly painful to us, and we are forced to complain with Peter: "We toiled all night, and took nothing." This he does that we may not venture to depend upon our labor, but may know that he must grant it success, and that we have not secured this through our own effort, skill or diligence.

[24] What diligence, money and effort many a father and mother have bestowed in order to rear their son to honor and virtue, and that with a hope and confidence as great as if (to use a common expression) he were to become an angel. And yet he has become nothing but a notoriously willful and prodigal child. On the other hand, many a poor and forlorn orphan, upon whom very little effort and diligence have been expended, has grown up so surprisingly well-bred as to make us think that it just happened so, and did not depend upon any diligence or care of our own.

[25] Of what do all civil governments more generally complain than of fruitless labors and efforts, even where their work is carried on energetically and in earnest, and where there are men who are willing and able to rule well, — men who are not lacking in wisdom, understanding, power and might? These are obliged to learn, after a long period of governing, that thereby they have not accomplished anything. How often it happens, indeed, that the best plans, the wisest counsels, and the brightest ideas prove to be the very worst, and result in nothing but harm and ruin. The very wisest rulers have always experienced and complained of this. And thus we

may learn that God will not grant prosperity and success through human wisdom, plans and intrigues, if these are the things we depend upon.

[26] Hence, if the world be willing to receive counsel from a plain and straightforward man, namely, from the Lord our God, who certainly has had some experience and understands the art of ruling, the best counsel would be, that each one, in his administration of government, should simply direct his thoughts and plans to a faithful prosecution and believing performance of the duties enjoined upon him, not placing any dependence upon his own thoughts and plans, but casting all his cares upon God. The man who does this will at last be sure to discover that he who trusts in God accomplishes more than he who seeks to transact his affairs according to his own wisdom and thought, or in his own power and might.

[27] So it goes in the spiritual government of the Church, as specially indicated in the narrative now before us. Where I have preached and taught during the past ten or twenty years, there another could, perhaps, have done more in one year; and one sermon may bring forth more fruit than many others. Here, also, it is true that our labor, diligence and effort can accomplish nothing. These two things must go together, namely, that each one does his duty, and that he, nevertheless, acknowledges with Peter: "My labor cannot bring forth anything, if thou dost not give the increase." As Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase," etc.

[28] In short, all human nature and life are so that, until God gives the increase, we may often labor long and much, and all to no purpose. But the work is not to cease on that account, nor should any man be found without work. He must wait for the increase till God gives it, as Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 11:6: "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not which shall prosper, whether this or that," etc.

[29] However, the circumstances are especially pointed out under which work becomes useful and fruitful, namely, when Christ appears and commands to let down the nets, etc., that is, when there is a faith that takes hold of his Word and promise and then, cheerfully and bravely, does what has been commanded, waiting, with prayer and supplication, for his help

and blessing. This is to say with Peter: “Lord, I have indeed done and labored and suffered much, but I know that I shall accomplish nothing thereby, unless thou art present to give strength and increase. I will therefore depend, not upon myself or my own works, but upon thy Word, and will leave everything to thy care.” Thus shall we prosper; and experience shows that Christ, when he is present, gives more as the result of little labor and effort than anyone would have dared to hope. For there can be no failure or scanty fruits where he adds his blessing.

[30] Thus the disciples could see the experience for themselves what a difference there is between the work they had done all the previous night without faith in Christ, and the work they did when, without prospect of taking anything, they nevertheless, through faith in Christ’s word, and at one draught, drew in an overflowing multitude of fishes. Therefore, if we accomplish little or nothing through our labor and effort, we must put the blame upon our unbelief, or upon the weakness of our faith, and not upon anything else.

[31] Yet this is also true, that Christ often delays the bestowal of his help, as he did on this occasion, and on another, John 21, when he permitted the disciples to toil all the night without taking anything, and really appeared as if he would forget his own Word and promise. But this he does that he may drive us to implore his help the more earnestly, and that we may learn to strengthen and maintain our faith, so that we do not doubt, or cease to labor, but continue to wait for the bestowal of his gifts in his own good time and way. For it is his purpose to guide all Christians into a knowledge and experience of the fact that their livelihood and help do not depend on what they see or do, but upon what is invisible and hidden. This he therefore calls his “hid treasure,” as we have already said in regard to Psalm 17:14, that is, such blessing, help and deliverance as we have not perceived or laid hold of before, but are hidden in his Word and are grasped by faith.

[32] Behold, this is the first part of our Gospel, the events of which took place and were recorded that Christians might be instructed and comforted by the fact that Christ cares even for the temporal needs of his Church, so that it is fed and supported, although it should come into a distress where everything is at the point of ruin, and where it seems to have done and suffered everything in vain. Always and everywhere does it happen that the

Gospel, as it advances, brings poverty in its train, together with hunger and nakedness and want. But at last, when the storms of the devil have blown over a little, and the world's greed and appetite have been satisfied, Christ comes and declares that he, too, is a Lord of the earth. For in Psalm 24:1 it is written: "The earth is Jehovah's, and the fullness thereof," etc. Also in Psalm 8:6-8: "Thou hast put all things under thy feet; all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea." All these must obey our Lord, and must bend beneath his scepter, so that the world, after all, cannot prevent him and his from sharing in its food.

[33] But, as I have said, we must first have hunger and want, that is, Peter's empty boat and net, even where there has been long-continued labor. Yet Christ, after such a trial, makes his gifts all the more abundant, not only a tub full, with which the disciples might have been satisfied, but the entire net full and the two empty boats full. He does this that their faith in his spiritual help may thereby be strengthened, He shows this sign to Peter, and to the others whom he intends to call to be his Apostles, not only in order that they should believe that he would care for their bodies, but that he would so strengthen and help them in their apostolic calling that it should not prove to be in vain or fruitless.

Part II. The Spiritual Distress and Conflict of Conscience

[34] The second part of this Gospel presents the great doctrine of the inner distress and conflict of conscience, and what constitutes our true comfort in the midst of it. Only after Peter saw this wonderful work of Christ and the abundance it produced, did he begin to consider what sort of a Man this Wonderworker must be, and what sort of a man he himself was in comparison. Out of this great blessing there comes upon him a greater distress than he has ever experienced from any bodily want. He now becomes so thoroughly poor and destitute, that, on account of terror, he almost sinks to the earth and bids Christ depart from him. He has begun to feel his unworthiness and sins. He is forced to acknowledge and lament that he is a poor sinner.

[35] Peter is to become a different man; and a greater miracle is to be wrought in him than in the draught of fishes. The sermon which Christ had previously preached from the boat now first began to have its effect upon

him. He, with the others, had indeed listened to Christ before this, but he had given no thought to the character of his Person. He had not thought of obtaining any temporal or eternal good from him; nor had he yet begun to tremble on account of his sins. But now when Peter perceives the miracle and the blessing, and realizes, through the present event, what sort of a Man this Jesus is, he stumbles at the greatness of the blessing and of the Person on the one hand, and, on the other, at the extent of his own unworthiness. He trembles on account of his sins. His heart tells him that he does not deserve such great favor, and that he is far more deserving of God's wrath and disfavor. He is now filled with anxiety and fear, not as to temporal poverty, or as to means of support, for he has been supplied with what he needs; but as to his ability to stand before God and before this man who has shown this great favor to such an unworthy and sinful human being as he.

[36] This is the way Christ begins to make Peter spiritually rich in things that are eternally good, so that he may be able to impart them to others, yea, to the entire world. As on a previous occasion, he must first feel spiritual hunger and distress, that is, terror and anguish of conscience, before he can attain to forgiveness and to comfort. The boat and the world have become too narrow for him. He knows not whither to betake himself from Christ, whom, however, he has found to be, not terrifying, but friendly and helpful.

[37] Here you see how poor and miserable conscience is when it really begins to feel its sins. how it trembles. How it runs to escape from God when he draws nigh, as if it would run across a hundred worlds! Thus Adam in Paradise thought to hide himself when God kindly asked: "Adam, where art thou?" So shy and timorous is such a heart and conscience that it gets frightened at itself, and flees from a rustling leaf as from thunder and lightning. It cannot endure the judgment of the Law, which reveals its sins and God's eternal wrath. And here it is of no use to comfort a man by reminding him of the favors that God has shown him in the past. This only terrifies him all the more, as thereby he realizes that he deserves still greater wrath on account of his ingratitude and sins.

[38] Yea, even they have ever to contend with this temptation and fear who already have received the comfort of the grace of God through faith. For his goodness and grace are too great and overwhelming. On the other hand, our heart, in the feeling and consideration of its own unworthiness, is far too narrow and feeble to hold and comprehend such great goodness and

mercy. At this it is simply filled with amazement. God therefore shows himself merciful to us by veiling and covering these things under simple words and beneath great weakness.

[39] But such is the awful wickedness of our nature that, even when Christ comes to us with his grace and comfort, we avoid and flee from our Savior, while we rather, though naked and barefooted, should run after him to the ends of the earth. We turn and twist, and resort to our own works, and would first, by our own efforts, cleanse and make ourselves worthy enough to deserve such a gracious God and Christ. Thus Peter thinks to seek peace and to escape sin by running away from the Lord. He first looks for something in himself to make him worthy of coming to Christ, but thereby only falls all the more deeply into terror and despair, until the Savior, by his word, raises him up again.

[40] All this does, and indeed must, come to pass, where nothing but the Law is taught and understood, and where Christ is not rightly and fully known through the Gospel. A knowledge of the Law has been inscribed and implanted in every human heart by nature, as St. Paul says in Romans 2:15. The Law teaches us what we are to do, and pronounces us guilty of disobedience. It does so in many ways, not only through dreadful tokens and feelings of punishment and of God's anger, but also through the various gifts and operations of the Lord, that appear to the eyes and ears of man and point out to him the sin and divine wrath which follow upon their abuse in contempt and disobedience towards God. From this he may conclude that those who are ungrateful to God for his gifts and favors, are worthy of his wrath and condemnation.

[41] All God's benefits when they move the heart, are really living sermons unto repentance that lead a man to acknowledge his sins and make him fear them, as St. Paul, in Romans 2:1, says to the impenitent, hardened hypocrite: "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

[42] Hence, there is nothing in the juggling tricks which our Antinomians play upon this example, when they say that repentance is not to be preached and practiced through the Law, but through the Gospel, or, as they put it, through the revelation of the Son. They change the proper

order of the two parts: the revelation of grace and the revelation of wrath, as if we are first to preach comfort through grace and afterwards to terrify through wrath. This is nothing but a blind and foolish pretext on the part of these people. They have no understanding of wrath or grace or repentance, and know not how to comfort the conscience.

[43] All preaching of sin and God's wrath is a preaching of the Law, no matter how or when it may be done. On the other hand, the Gospel is such preaching as sets forth and bestows nothing but grace and forgiveness in Christ. And yet it is true that the Apostles and preachers of the Gospel sanctioned the preaching of the Law, as Christ himself did, and began with this in the case of those who had not yet acknowledged their sins and had felt no fear of God's anger. Thus our Lord says in John 16:8: "The Comforter, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin," etc. Yea, what more solemn and terrible proof and preaching of God's wrath can there be than the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, his son? It is not the preaching of the Gospel, nor is it Christ's own preaching, but the preaching of Moses and the Law to the impenitent, so long as nothing but God's wrath is preached and men are terrified. For the Gospel and Christ were neither ordained nor given in order to terrify or condemn, but to comfort and raise up such as are fearful and faint-hearted. And from this it follows that the man, whose heart has been rightly impressed by the sufferings of Christ, must, of his own accord, see and feel in these the unbearable wrath of God against sin, and thereby be so stricken with fear that the world becomes too narrow for him. St. Bernard testifies that this was his experience as soon as he gained a right insight into the sufferings of Christ. He says: "Alas, I thought I was safe! I knew nothing of the judgment and wrath that had come upon me, till I saw that the only begotten Son of God had to take my place," etc. This idea is so terrible that even the damned in hell can have no greater torment, no greater feeling of God's wrath and condemnation, than this vision of the death of the Son of God, the benefits of which they have forfeited. Thus Judas, the traitor, as he would not heed the kindly admonitions and warnings of the Lord Jesus, and would not take into consideration how he acted towards him, was finally driven into such terror by this vision that he preached the Law and damnation to himself in saying: "I have betrayed innocent blood," etc., Matthew 27:4.

[44] In like manner, Peter preaches to himself the Law concerning his sins and God's wrath, and takes as his text Christ's great kindness towards him. From this kindness he can gather nothing but wrath and terror on account of his unworthiness before God. For he has, as yet, no other understanding in his heart than that of the Law, which Law shows that God is hostile to sin and will punish it. He is still ignorant of the grace of Christ which, through the Gospel, is freely offered to all sinners. To this grace he could not have attained, but must have despaired in the midst of his terror, had not Christ delivered another sermon whereby he comforted him and raised him up. For, of himself, no man can grasp this doctrine, or arrive at an understanding of it, without the revelation of the Holy Spirit through the word of the Gospel.

[45] Hence those foolish souls are entirely wrong, who allege that the Law is not to be preached under the New Testament dispensation, or that men are to be terrified with God's wrath through the Gospel only after grace has been preached to them. For it is certain that the Gospel preaches no wrath; nor does it cause fear and anguish. When it comes, it is for the purpose of comforting consciences. The order everywhere indicated and observed by Scripture is this, that sin must always be acknowledged and fear of God's wrath be realized, through the preaching or experience of the Law, before there can be such comfort as proceeds from forgiveness, the purpose of this order being that men may be led to long for grace and be made fit to receive the comfort of the Gospel. Those, therefore, who are yet without any fear of God's wrath, who are secure and hardened and unyielding, must be strongly admonished and urged to repentance by the threats and terrors of that wrath, that is, to them no Gospel is to be preached, but only the Law and Moses.

[46] On the other hand, no law is to be preached to those in whose hearts it has wrought its purpose so that, through the realization of their sins, they have become terrified, faint-hearted and fearful. To such as these nothing is to be preached but the Gospel and its comfort. For it is really the purpose of Christ's coming, and of his command to preach the Gospel to all poor sinners, that they should believe that it abolishes and does away with all the accusations and fears and threatenings of the Law, and puts a perfect comfort in their place. This he everywhere teaches in the Gospel; and in Luke 4:18, quoted from Isaiah 61:1, he says: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon

me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor.” I have often said, therefore, that Moses must not be permitted to dominate the consciences that are agitated by the assaults of the devil and the dread of God’s wrath, but that these are straightway to dismiss Moses, together with the entire Law, and not listen to him.

[47] But besides, we must bear in mind that the doctrine of the Law is not to be entirely done away with, even in the case of those who are Christians, inasmuch as Christians must exercise themselves in daily repentance, because they still live in the flesh which is moved by sinful lusts. Hence they must be so taught and admonished, after they have received the forgiveness of sins, that they do not fall back again into a state of security, or give the flesh occasion to war against the Spirit. Galatians 5:13.

[48] Such is Peter’s experience at this time. In his terror he has not, as yet, any revelation or knowledge of grace or forgiveness of sins. The revelation of wrath is working in him, and this impels him to flee even from Christ, which he certainly would not have done, had he rightly known him. But Christ is now about to make of him a true Christian, about to make him experience the real comfort of conscience which overcomes the terror of the Law and raises man from the misery of sin to grace and blessedness, from death to life, from hell to heaven. It is necessary, therefore, that he should first have a real taste of that power of the Law which is roused and wrought, not by Christ, but by Moses through the Ten Commandments.

[49] Now, see how kindly Christ comforts the terrified heart and conscience. He says: “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.” In tones so truly loving does the Savior speak to all who are in fear and terror by reason of their sins. He will not have them to remain any longer in fear and anguish. He takes away from them all the dread of the Law, and shows them that they should not, on account of their sins, flee from him but to him, so that they may learn to know him as the loving Savior who has come into this world, not to reject poor sinners, but to allure them to himself, and to enrich and bless them with his comfort and help. He therefore says, in Luke 19:10: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” And in 1 Timothy 1:15 St. Paul says: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”

[50] Not only does Christ give comfort to poor, terror-stricken Peter by the kindly words in which he declares and offers to him his grace and absolution, but he goes on to strengthen this comfort by the great promise that he will give him something far beyond anything he has hitherto received from him; and all this in order that Peter may perceive and experience how Christ's heart and love go out to him. "From henceforth," Christ says, "thou shalt catch men." That Peter is not to be alarmed on account of his unworthiness and sins is, in itself, an abundant comfort and grace. However, he is not only to have the forgiveness of his sins, but is also to know that God intends to accomplish still greater things through him by making him a help and comfort to others. What Christ would say is this: "That which thou hast accomplished by this draught of fishes is much too little; really, it is nothing at all. Thou art henceforth to become a different kind of fisherman, in a different sea, with a different net and boat. For I am going to engage thee in a business which shall be called 'catching men'; and this means that, throughout the entire world, thou art to draw away souls from the power of the devil into the kingdom of God. Then, first, wilt thou become the sort of man that can help others, even as thou thyself hast been helped."

[51] From this Gospel let us rightly acknowledge and lay hold upon Christ and the power of his comfort, in order that we may comfort both ourselves and others, and may instruct and remind the consciences which are in distress and fear that they are by no means to run or flee away from Christ, but should much rather flee to him and wait for his comfort. Thus to run away, thus to fear, is nothing else than to drive your own salvation and happiness away from you. For Christ has not come to make you afraid, but to remove from you your sins and distress. Nor does he draw nigh and follow after you in order to drive you away, but that he may kindly allure you to himself. You must therefore not do him the dishonor of thrusting him away from you. And you must not pervert to your own fear and despair the comfort he brings you, but much rather run to him in all confidence. Then you will soon hear the cheering and comforting words: "Fear not" which he speaks to your heart, and to the hearts of all troubled consciences, and through them he pronounces absolution for all sins and removes all fear. Yea, he will grant you a still richer grace by making you such a holy, blessed and useful man in his kingdom, that you can be of comfort to

others, and can bring those to him who, like yourself, are now full of fear and in need of comfort and grace.

[52] Here you see how a man is delivered from spiritual poverty and distress, that is, how, through Christ's Word, he obtains forgiveness of sins and peace of conscience together with grace and increase of spiritual gifts, without any merit or worthiness of his own but only through the grace of Christ. It is in this respect as it was with the temporal miracle of the draught of fishes, which the disciples did not secure by reason of their toil, and which was not given to them before they had labored and striven in vain, and had despaired of taking anything. And yet, as Christ on that occasion does not forbid their laboring, but commands them to let down their nets for a draught, so now he does not abolish works. Although Peter does not deserve grace and forgiveness by what he does, but receives forgiveness and grace freely, yet the Lord will not permit him to dispense with all work and effort. Yea, he assigns to him the duty and business of bringing the same blessings to others, and, in the assignment of this duty, comforts him with the assurance that the necessary power and blessing shall be added. "For," says he, "I will make thee a fisher of men." Thus are the two parts rightly taught, namely, that faith deserves nothing by its works, and yet, that it performs all sorts of works in its station and calling, according to the word and command of God.

The Spiritual Meaning of This Draught of Fish

[53] Christ himself teaches the meaning of this history of Peter's draught of fishes when he says: "From henceforth thou shalt catch men." Herein is represented the spiritual rule of the Church, which consists in the office of preaching. The sea, or the water, represents the world, the fishes represent men, while the outward office of preaching is represented by the hand and the net by which the fishes are caught. For as the net is let down among the waves, so the sermon finds its way among men.

[54] But this office of preaching is of twofold. One seeks to win men without Christ. This is the preaching of the Law, which demands of us nothing but works, and either makes arrogant saints who, without accomplishing anything, would pursue their own free, unhampered course

through the wild and watery wastes, or only terrifies and drives away the consciences which, without works, are timid and weak.

[55] Hence the labor and effort of the entire night (of the Law) must prove vain and lost until Christ comes with the other kind of preaching, — until he brings with him the dawn and revelation of the comforting and cheering Gospel that enlightens the hearts of men with the knowledge of the grace of God, — until he commands us to let down the net for a draught. When this is done at his word and command, great and rich fruits are the result. Then men's hearts are willing and ready to come to the obedience of faith in Christ, yea, even to press forward to it, and to venture life and limb in its attainment, as Christ says in Matthew 11:12: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by storm."

[56] This draught of fishes is so great that the one boat alone (hitherto representing the Church of the Jewish people) is not able to draw it up or large enough to contain it. Those in the one boat must beckon to their partners in the other to come and help them. This other boat is the assembly and Church of the Gentiles which has been established and spread by the Apostles. Thus were the two boats filled with one and the same draught of fishes, that is, with one and the same sort of preaching, and with a corresponding faith and confession.

[57] Owing to the great draught the nets began to break, and some of the fishes fell out. These are they who are not sincere, and do not abide in the Gospel, but cast themselves out of it, preferring to continue amid their free and wild waves rather than submit themselves to Christ. So there were many, especially among the Jews, who disobeyed and gainsaid the Gospel. These, and all others who establish sects and factions of their own, may not and cannot continue with the true band of God's people in the assembly of the Church, but make themselves manifest as being good for nothing. Hence St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:19: "There must be also factions among you, that they who are approved may be made manifest among you." These sects and factions must therefore fall away, while the others are gathered together out of the net and put into the two boats, where they are so kept, in the unity of the Church and of faith in Christ, that they do not fall away again. Otherwise they would be in danger of falling away at last, together with the factions by whom they had been seduced.

[58] And as the net suffers through being let down into the water and becomes wet, so must the office of preaching suffer through all sorts of trials and persecutions in the world, even to the extent of being rent and torn. It cannot produce profitable or fruitful results in all men; yet great power and much fruit are found in those who remain steadfast and are kept to the end. It is our comfort, however, that Christ, through our preaching, will lead his own into the boat, and will keep them there, although we know that we cannot make devout men of all to whom we preach, and that we cannot escape persecution on account of our office; yea, though we know that many will fall away even among those of whom we felt sure that we had them in the net.

Sixth Sunday after Trinity. Explanation of the Fifth Commandment. The Righteousness of the Pharisees.

Text: Matthew 5:20-26.

20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

21 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. Matthew 5:20-26

[1] This Gospel teaches us the difference between true piety and dissimulation, or hypocrisy. And it is one of the best Gospels for teaching how our works cannot render us pious; something higher than anything we can do is required. For the Pharisees also led a pious life; they did what they should, externally; they did not break any of the commandments of God, abstained from property not their own, went about in fine showy clothes, and hence derived their name, being called Pharisees, meaning those set apart, or the select.

[2] In like manner he also attacks the scribes, the flower of the Jews, who were so well versed in the law of God and the Scriptures as to teach other people, lay down rules for the community and render decisions in all matters. To sum up, we here have the best, the most learned and the most pious of the Jews. These Christ attacks, whom of all men he should least have attacked. But he says of them to his disciples: "Unless your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."

[3] As though he would say, Behold the Pharisees and scribes lead such a good life that both they and other people believe they will possess the kingdom; but they are wide of the mark. Therefore he reproveth them and says: Verily, I say unto you, if you will not be more pious than the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter heaven. Here the question of those is disposed of who ask, What shall we do in order that we may be pious? For here all works that man can do are overthrown and disposed of, and the most holy of the sanctimonious are cast to the ground. Hence you cannot do

any deed by means of which one may be saved and rescued from sin. If a man now says that, he surely is a heretic.

Part I. The Occasion for This Explanation

[4] They at that time might have said, Well, you are a heretic; are you going to reject good deeds? He pays no attention to that, however, but freely concluded that their works are nought. They might now have said, Pray, if works do not make us holy, why have we the law through which we hope to be saved, if we live up to it? This now gives Christ an occasion to introduce the commandments, explaining them, telling us how they are to be understood. He says: “Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shalt say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hellfire.”

Part II. The Explanation

[5] These words are too high and too deep for anyone fully to put into practice. To this our Lord not only here testifies, but every man’s experience and his very emotions. Four points are here presented, to-wit Thoughts, demeanor, words and deeds; which no one can avoid; he must be guilty. As though he would say, You might find persons that do not kill with their hands; but to be without hatred, not to be angry, be of smiling countenance, not to snub persons — of such a nature none is to be found. Now, experience teaches this.

[6] For take a godly man or a godly woman; as long as everybody keeps his distance, peace and harmony prevail, but if one comes along that speaks harshly and possibly intrudes, even to the extent of the smallest word, he cannot keep from becoming angry; and follows this up by irritating and enraging the offender. Our reason can never come to the conclusion that we are to be considerate to the wicked. Peruse all your heathen books, enter into your own experience, and you will find it so, we cannot refrain from becoming angry, if not against our friends, then against our enemies. Now God is not satisfied with this, nor can my flesh and blood evade the question, for mark the wording closely when he says, “Thou shalt not kill.”

Who is “thou?” Your hand? No. Your tongue? No; but thou, thou and all that is in thee and with thee; thine hand, heart, and thoughts shall not kill.

[7] Thus Christ interprets the law saying with authority, “Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment.” This sentence pertains to the whole world, for I ask, Who is there on this earth that is not a debtor to this commandment? Seeing that we are to comply with it and cannot, what are we to do? For we can never remove the filth. Then despair must be ours, depend on that. So the commandments of God are but a mirror, wherein we behold our filth and wickedness; for they conclude us all under sin, we being unable to work our way out by our own efforts and free will; unless something else comes to our assistance. This is the first point.

[8] The Lord continues: “Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca,” which indicates various manifestations of wrath and hatred. But no one is free from this. For if I am told to be friendly to the person I hate, they can tell it on me that my heart is not in it. For you cannot confine the heart; it will out, and show its presence by signs or words. It does not hide itself, and it cannot be hidden. Hence we conclude that we are found guilty of saying Raca, that is, of not being kind to both friend and foe. Now go to past experiences and see this in other people and in yourselves, namely, that no one can deliver himself out of this condition, from this wicked heart, which is planted so deeply in the nature of man. You may act friendly toward your brother; but for you to give him your heart, this you cannot do though you should rend yourself to pieces. Therefore no man can here help himself.

[9] Following this he says, “Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire.” This too makes you appear as nought, without the grace of God, for nobody is so fraught with loving-kindness as never to utter an unseemly word, if not to his friends then to his enemies. Even when you are compelled to speak kindly to your neighbor, your heart is not in it, and whenever you with seeming propriety can do so, you will say, “Thou fool.” That already is contrary to this commandment, embracing, as it does, both friend and foe, since it reads, “Thy brother.” We all, you know, are brethren, descended from one common father, and Scripture brings us so closely together as to call us all one flesh. Isaiah says, 58:7, “When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from

thine own flesh.” Here the prophet is speaking of your neighbor; and the word “fool” is to embrace all manner of infamy, cursing, slandering, abuse, judging, maligning and all reviling.

[10] It clearly follows that we all are guilty of the commandment: “Thou shalt not kill,” and whoever is not born again of God cannot abstain from murder. Though he desist from the act itself, he cannot banish thoughts and inclinations, for if our enemy meet with death, we will be ready to say, This served him right! And soldiers compose a song on the enemy they have slain or put to flight. But that again conflicts with this commandment, for God does not look at the outward act, but at the heart. Hence much is contained in the words: “Thou shalt not kill,” as much as to say: You must be born again and become a new creature.

[11] So the Gospel always reverts to this question, What shall a man do that he may become pious? For, pray as long as you will; fast as long as you will; give alms as long as you will; pay for masses and build churches as many as you will; you are, nevertheless, still a murderer, for you hate your brother; you cannot give him a kind look nor a kind word. It follows that your righteousness is nought; it is of and pertains to perdition. And now we have two more points that are about as severe as the preceding. We read: “If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there remeberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art with him in the way; lest haply the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and thou be cast into prison. Verily, I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the last farthing.”

[12] Here are two things that go against our nature. The first: When I am angry, my brother is to conciliate me. The other: My feelings being hurt, I am to forgive my brother, though he offer no apology; I am to have a kind heart toward him, so he does not deliver me to the judge, as you have just heard. This last part they formerly severed from this Gospel, and I hold that Augustine did so in writing, as appears from his book, *De Spiritu et Litera*. The sense of the passage is as follows: 13. Here are two persons: the one offending is to ask pardon. The other being offended, is to forgive kindly and willingly, even though he be not asked to do so. By nature we can do neither. Our nature may prompt us to go and say, My dear friend, forgive

me! but doing this under compulsion, in fear of hell and God's wrath, hatred still remains in our heart. On the other hand, the one offended cannot forgive from his heart; and as the one acts the hypocrite in asking forgiveness, so does the other in granting it. But that certainly is of no avail before God, for thus says our text: "If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. And this reconciliation must proceed from the heart; mark well the words of the text.

[14] The passage conveys the meaning that God does not want you to come and serve him without having previously been reconciled with your brother; "then come and offer thy gift." As though he said: "Behold, man, I have created and redeemed thee; recognize this, and shape thine whole life toward serving thy neighbor. If not, do not serve me either. If thou wilt not do the one (serve thy neighbor), seeing that is needed, you had better not do the other (serve me), since that is not needed." So God would much rather be deprived of his service than of the service you owe your neighbor, and would sooner see you less stringent in your service toward himself, if you are pious at the expense of serving your neighbor. Summing up, God wishes you to see first to your neighbor's service and interests.

[15] Now, there are many ways of harming our neighbor, as for instance, when I do not protect his reputation, being well able to do so; when I am not kind to him, or fail to aid him; I am already his antagonist. So, if I want to be agreeable to God, I must, in the first place, be reconciled to my brother; if not, I cannot be pleasing to him. For God rejects the service rendered him, if the service due our neighbor is not performed.

[16] Now look at the kind of life we have led hitherto. We have been going to St. James, to Aix-la-Chapelle, to Rome, to Jerusalem, have built churches, paid for masses, and withal have forgotten our neighbor; this now is the wrong side up. The Lord, however, here says, Go and take the money with which you were about to build a church and give it to thy neighbor. Look to your neighbor how you may serve him. It is not a matter of moment to God if you never build him a church, as long as you are of service to your neighbor. But all this is now being neglected, and only the contrary is observed. Oh, the miserable, perverted life that we have learned from the Papists! This is why no one wants to enter the married state, for

nobody lends him a helping hand, nobody offers him any aid, so that he might support himself and get along. Hence it comes to pass that the one turns monk, the other nun, the third a priest, a thing we could indeed obviate if we would but show works of love. Thus they go along, forgetful of maidservants and manservants, and finally bequeath a legacy and go to perdition with their legacy.

[17] It follows that God simply wants you to serve your neighbor, doing your duty to him, so that matters are righted first of all between yourself and him and you be first reconciled to him; or God will neither see nor hear you. Furthermore, if my adversary come to me, I am to forgive him willingly; if he does not come, I am still to be conciliatory and kind to him, while I am on the way with him, in this life, so that he does not deliver me to the judge.

[18] How does that come about? He does not take me by the hand and conduct me to the judge; but when I face judgment my conscience realizes that it had been unwilling to forgive the neighbor, entertaining secret but inveterate hate even then. My conscience over against my neighbor delivers me to the judge; he delivers me to the officer; and he, in turn, casts me into prison, that is to say, into hellfire, until I pay the uttermost farthing, which means forever; for there the liquidation of the debt and deliverance are impossible. Here you see the exalted works that no one can attain, neither by work righteousness nor by the law. For works, if alone, will make hypocrites and dissemblers; the law, if alone, brings forth despair.

[19] But what am I to do? Do I hear correctly: am I to be damned? Do as follows: Flee to Christ when thus conscious of iniquity, saying: Oh, my God, thy law is now a mirror to me, whence I see how perverted and lost a being I am! Oh God, now save me for thine only begotten Son's sake. Thus, by faith God gives you the Spirit, who changes your heart, so that you will be very kind to your neighbor and will argue thus: Behold, if God has acted thus toward me, forgiving me more than I can ever hope to forgive, why should I not be willing to forgive my neighbor a little?

Part III. An Objection and an Answer

[20] Now the sword of the government seems to conflict with this, and the question arises: If I am to forgive, not to hate, not to kill, how then am I to

correct and chastise? If I am to wield the sword and with it execute, how can I help being angry? This question is in order, for the Gospel here seemingly subverts the sword of the government. But we are to bear this in mind: Christ is here a spiritual teacher, solely guiding the consciences, showing them how much hatred, envy and wrath they contain, and how to get rid of it. That is his office in which he is engaged; with the worldly sword he has nothing to do, he lets those see to it whose duty it is.

[21] Well, this doctrine does not enter all hearts; most of it remains on the surface. But those, into whose heart it falls, prostrate themselves before God and cry to him for help, are at once pious and have no need of the worldly sword, for they are being ruled by words. Now those who do not grasp this but lead an outwardly wicked life, there the worldly sword must be used. Thus you are now to understand that a secular prince or whoever he be that wields the worldly sword, must conform to what is here taught, namely, not to be angry and not to kill.

[22] How then are they to conduct themselves who wield the sword in God's stead? Thus: the fact that they wield the sword is a part of their office. In a sense, the Gospel has claims on them, and then they are to be very kind in heart; meek and compassionate; then again, when duty calls, they are to be grave, punishing with alacrity, without regard to friend, foe, beauty, riches or learning. We see this in the case of Moses. He was the meekest man that has ever lived, so much so as to fall down and ask to be blotted out of the Book of Life, Exodus 32:32, if only the multitude be saved. Behold, was he not a mild, sweet and kind man, being willing to go to perdition and be condemned in body and soul that the people might be spared? But, when placed as chief in command, he, in questions of government, took energetic measures, executing three and twenty thousand, by which he might appease the wrath of God. St. Paul acted in like manner. He too was ready to surrender his soul's salvation for the Jews, as shown by Romans 9:3. But on learning that a man at Corinth "had his father's wife," he wrote so stern and severe an epistle as he had never done before, ordering that such a one be delivered unto Satan, "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus," 1 Corinthians 5:5. Likewise David and others acted. In fact, we find a number of such in the Old Testament as would, externally, use the sword in full rigor, executing the people as they would kill chickens, and at the same time be very tender and kind at heart.

[23] Let us take a bold illustration, that you may see how a person in authority is to conduct himself. Take the coat of arms of the Elector of Saxony. It shows, two swords in a white and black field, so arranged as to have the hilt below on a white background, and the blade above on a black background. These indicate how you are to conduct yourself when in authority: below, holding the sword by the hilt, you are to be clean, white, tender-hearted and gracious, having the best of intentions; above, when on duty, you have the blade in a black field, that is to say, a determined and strict enforcement is called for, in order outwardly to stay transgressors. And the red color of the swords indicate that blood is to be shed. Moses, David and others have thus beautifully handled the sword by the hilt in the white field, being sober, mild and kind at heart; and have wielded the blade in the black field, being grave and austere in their official duties.

[24] Just so should a citizen or civil judge also do. When dealing with a wicked person that will not be controlled by words, his thoughts are to be: “Oh, my God, how gladly I would die for this man, if it could be done! He has a soul that I cannot succor; besides, he leads a wicked life, not being able to bring his flesh and blood under subjection to the spirit.” And then when comparing the two and seeing which outweighs the other, he will find that it is an easy thing for the man to die, but a grave matter for the soul to die, for the soul’s dying is eternal. Hence his thoughts and words should be: “Ah, see how your soul might enter into judgment; see, how you might enter into perdition. For that reason, in order that sin may make no further inroads, I must divest you of your body, and see to the saving of your soul, since I cannot save your body.” And then we must strike hard, resolutely take to the sword, so that we may prevent wrath and stern judgment, as did Moses with the children of Israel. In that event you are carrying your swords in a white and a black field.

[25] The design of the two swords crossing each other, as though one would stay the other, is well conceived. This is to teach that a judge should be wise and prudent, and see, where he must temper and modify a harsh sentence, where it is just and right. It is like two sentences clashing when one will annul the other. You are not always to proceed *secundum strictum jus*, strictly according to law, but see what is just and right, and where a case can be adjusted, there he should also give his attention.

[26] Take an example. The disciples of the Lord plucked ears of corn and ate, when passing through the fields. Now the Sabbath was by divine command to be observed under pain of death, Numbers 15:35; but the disciples were hungry, so one law cancelled the other. For that reason the Lord excuses them over against the Pharisees, saying: “The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day,” Matthew 12:8. Although the observance of the Sabbath was a matter of divine command, the disciples nevertheless were excused, inasmuch as the Sabbath was not to be so strictly observed as to prevent them from eating and thus to cause them to perish because of this very observance. The same holds true of David, who partook of the consecrated bread which no layman was allowed to eat, 1 Samuel 21:6. This was a case of the two swords clashing, it being necessary for one law to give room to the other. For this reason David and also the disciples were excused. For no law has been established by God for the ruin of man, but for his bodily and spiritual welfare.

[27] Hence, to sum up all, civil authorities should be severe externally, staying transgressions; but internally, they should harbor a tender, gentle, Christian, amiable spirit; withal they are to be wise and prudent, so that they may know how to temper stern justice, in accord with what is right and proper. This may suffice on this Gospel. Let us pray God for grace.

Sixth Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. The Fifth Commandment Explained.

Text: Matthew 5:20-26.

20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

21 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. Matthew 5:20-26

[1] In this Gospel the Lord takes in hand the office of extolling and explaining the law of Moses, for it would not have been becoming for him to have insisted in an unfriendly manner to make the people pious. He is not a lawgiver, but a Savior, who never takes aught from anyone, but always

gives. So he also in this instance proves his kindness in explaining the law and gently instructing; where there is need and want, he does not sternly insist, as did Moses, who without much ado wished that people were either pious or dead. For this reason Christ's action on this occasion is to be considered one of great benefit to us, in that he teaches us where we fail and come short. Here he particularly treats of the failings due to wrath, which causes so much havoc among men, as is seen on every side, yea, nearly the whole world is under its sway.

[2] Now let us examine the command, "Thou shalt not kill," in the sense the Jews took it, and how we should take it. The Jews considered those only murderers who committed the act of murder with their hands; while those who abstained from the outward act were considered by them as pious. In like manner they treated Christ. Having delivered him to Pontius Pilate for trial, they remained without, thus fancying to be innocent of his blood, and to have perfectly kept the law, John 18:28. Again, Saul acted the same way toward David; he believed himself to be godly so long as he only did not kill David with his hand, 1 Samuel 19. Thus they have interpreted the law, failing to see that its roots run into the heart. In view of this Christ here says to his Christians: "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."

[3] This is a strong, yea, a dreadful sentence, whereby all false saints and hypocrites, who go about with their own external works, are condemned.

[4] But how have we interpreted this commandment? A little better, that is to say, doubly worse is our interpretation. On this wise: it is indeed a matter of the heart that we are to be free from hatred. But a man, according to our conception, may conduct himself friendly and thus banish hatred from his heart. So we have made it a question of free will, going from bad to worse. The Jews have made it a matter of deceptive appearance; we placed the issue with free will. Thus the hypocrisy of the Jews rests in their works; ours in our thoughts. For we argue thus: Well, I will forgive him, will be good to him, and thus lay hold of the doing in the strength of our free will, then it shall be accomplished.

[5] Well, how then are we to do? We are to take the following position: There is not a man on earth, unless he be born again, who does not become

angry, and give forth evil words and evil deeds; nature cannot do otherwise. For there stands the law and says: Thou shalt be a fine, sweet-tempered man in heart, in words and in works; and no evil fiber shall be found in thee. Well, where am I to find such a man? My mother does not give him to me; he must come down from heaven. For there is not a man on earth, so far as he is flesh and blood, that can help becoming angry and giving forth evil words and actions. But if I abstain, it certainly is because I fear the sword or I seek a selfish end. If I do not curse, if I do not calumniate, either the sword or hell deters me, the fear of death or of the devil; these I have in my mind and abstain, otherwise, I could not abstain. Not alone this, but I would actually murder and massacre, wherever and whenever I could. By nature I cannot produce a single kind word or action. If I do, it certainly is hypocrisy, since the heart at least always remains full of poison. This you now hear from Christ, who so explains the law as to cause you to feel ashamed in your inner heart. He would say: Thou art not sweet in heart, thine heart is full of hatred, full of murder and blood, and so thy hands and eyes would also gladly be full of the same; nor canst thou prevent it, any more than thou canst prevent the fire from burning, for it is its nature to burn.

[6] A person might here say, What then am I to do? I feel all that within me, but I cannot change conditions. I reply, Flee to the Lord, thy God, lay thy complaint before him and say: Behold, Lord, my neighbor has injured me a little, has spoken a few words touching my honor, has caused some damage to my property, this I cannot suffer, therefore, I would cheerfully see him killed. Oh my God, how gladly would I be amiable to him, but, alas, I cannot! See how wholly cold, yea, dead I am! O Lord, I cannot help myself, I must stand back. . Make thou me different, then I will be godly; if not, I will remain like I have been. Here you must seek your help and at no other place; if you seek it in yourself, you will never find it. Your heart perpetually bubbles and boils with anger, you cannot prevent it.

[7] Now, this is the sum of the law: You are to be kind, amiable and benignant in heart, word and deed; and even though they take your life, still you are to suffer all in love, and render thanks to your Lord. Behold, thus a great deal is included in the short sentence, "Thou shalt not kill." Christ lived up to this; do the same, and you are a good Christian. When nailed to the cross, his name, which was above every name, and his honor were

profaned by the Jews, while they reviled him by words of the following and similar import: Well, what a nice God he has! If he be God's son, let him come down! Let his God come now, in whom he banked and boasted so much, and help him! Matthew 27:43, Mark 15:32, Luke 23:35. Such words pierced his very heart, hurting him more than all his other sufferings; still, he suffered all this with patience; he wept over his enemies, because they would have no part in the great benefit to be derived from his death; yea, he prayed for their sin. And in the face of this we are ready to snarl and growl over the least trifle, when asked to yield even a little to our neighbor.

[8] Here you see how far we are still from Christ. It is indeed necessary to suffer with Christ, if we would enter with him into glory. He has gone before, so we should follow, as St. Peter says, 1 Peter 2:21f.: "For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." Now see what kind of an example St. Peter places before us; truly we should emulate it, endeavoring to be and to act like him. But this we cannot do by nature; it follows that we without exception are the devil's own, there being not a man on earth that is found not guilty. Hence the sentence holds good: You must be likewise skillful, namely, good at heart, or you belong to perdition.

[9] What then must we do? You must do as follows: You must acknowledge that you are condemned by the law, and the devil's own property and that you are unable to rescue yourself by any power of your own. Therefore you must flee to God, pray him to change you, or all is lost and ruined. This was well understood and observed by those highly learned, but they argued thus: If we preach that the whole world is condemned and the devil's own, what is to become of the sanctimonious priests and monks, for then they too would be condemned? God forbid! Wait, wait, we will sharpen our tongues, bore a hole into the paper for our God, make a comment and say thus: Why, God never meant it in that sense, for who could keep it? He did not command it, but merely suggested it to such as wished to be perfect. Again, the perfect are not under obligations to be so, it suffices, if they strive after perfection. Many large books, called *Formas conscientiarum*, treatises to comfort and acquit the consciences, have been written on this subject. Thomas Aquinas was about the leading heretic in

this line. Later the same doctrine was confirmed by the Pope, and diffused throughout the world; this explains the later origin of the Orders, which aimed at perfection. Well, God be praised that we have understood the error, so that we can avoid it.

[10] We comfort consciences in a manner quite different, namely thus: Dear brother, all this is addressed not to the monks and priests only; Christ is not trifling with his words; it is a direct command, you must conform to it, or you are the devil's property. This is our way of comforting. Alas! exclaims our nature, Do you call that comforting? It is rather a transfer of souls to the devil. True, friend, but I must first take you down to hell before taking you up to heaven, you must despair in the first place, then come to Christ, behold his example, how he conducted himself toward his enemies, in that he wept over them. But the bare example alone moves you; yet, it does not help you to any extent.

[11] In view of this lay hold of his word and promise, that he will change you; this only will help you. Pray thus: Oh my God, thou hast placed Christ, thine only beloved Son, before me as an example, so that I might lead a like life; but I am not able to do this. O my God, change me, grant me thy grace! God then comes and says: Behold, since you know yourself and seek grace from me, I will change you and do as you desire. And though you are not so perfect as Christ, as indeed you should be, I shall nevertheless have my Son's life and perfection cover your imperfections. So you see we must always have something to keep us in the right humility and fear.

[12] This is true comfort that does not rest on our ability, but on the fact that we have a gracious God, who forgives our sins; on the fact that we believe in Christ and not in our own worthiness, he cleansing us from day to day; on the fact that whenever we fall short, we should always place our hope and trust in Christ. See, this is the main drift of our Gospel. Now let us briefly run over the text and consider the contents.

Concerning the Four Grades of Anger

[13] The Lord here notes four grades or degrees of anger or wrath. The first is the anger of the heart; and that is the main grade; it should be so pure that you are not sensible of it. But this cannot be in our present state. Hence when you are sensible of it, come direct to Christ and ask him graciously to

change you; ask him to extinguish the fire where it starts to burn; you cannot work a way out by your own efforts.

[14] The other grade is “Raca,” which means an angry, unfriendly expression with the eyes, with the neck and with the whole countenance, and in whatever other way it may be made. This too should by no means be. So you should at all times know when and how to obtain help.

[15] The third grade consists in saying, “Thou fool.” This implies the use of all kinds of scolding and profane words, by which our neighbor is degraded. This should also be laid aside; but we should defend and protect our neighbor with the utmost zeal, wherever we can.

[16] The fourth grade consists in gross murder with our hands. The meaning is that we are to help our neighbor with our hands, give and advance to him, so that he may be sustained. For if I behold a poor person lying in distress and fail to help, protect and give, so that he be sustained, I murder him with my own hand.

[17] Now if you want to see and know who you are, you must not judge yourselves by those whom you love. Nature teaches that we do not want those we love to meet with any ill. But judge yourself by your enemies, and you will soon see who you are. Do you find that you are not in your heart kindly disposed toward them, nor kind in conduct, but speak evil of them, failing to help them with your hands, you are a murderer.

[18] But in that our Lord says: “Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire,” he uses the language in vogue in the civil courts, when the accused is brought before the court, the question of guilty or not guilty is first discussed; afterwards the deliberations are on the penalty to be imposed; and lastly, the culprit is delivered over for punishment. The same holds true with these grades of wrath; that is to say, as they advance, the one is punished more severely than the preceding. There is indeed but one hell, but there is a variety of penalties and punishments, and of these the one is always nearer infliction than the other: just as he is nearer death concerning whom the question is being debated what death he is to die, than the man just cited before the court. The Lord himself further explains his words when he says: “If therefore thou art

offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art with him in the way; lest haply the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily, I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the last farthing.”

[19] Here you see what God demands of us, that he does not want anything done even for himself, unless it be done in love, after the proper relation has been established with one's neighbor. So you see, anger cancels all good deeds that might be done, for instance, prayers, fastings, self-mortification, giving of alms, and other like deeds. And God in the first place wants those to be reconciled who live in discord, they asking the pardon of the ones they have offended, as indeed is proper. This is the meaning he would convey when he says: “If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother,” that is, ask his forgiveness. Again: “Agree with thine adversary quickly;” and even though he does not come at once to you and beg pardon, be kindly disposed toward him nevertheless and forgive him. See how God has balanced both sides: on the one hand, when offended, we are to be kind and forgiving, on the other hand, the offender is to beg pardon, so all things may go well.

[20] Now one might ask: You tell us not to say, “Thou fool,” but how about Christ often calling his disciples “fools” and “unbelievers,” Mark 16:14, a great and strong slander for a Christian? Reply: We must judge according to the condition of the heart: that determines the nature of our actions. Christ and Paul rebuke and reprove harshly, but they have the best of intentions, hence their words are to be counted good deeds. Even as a father oftentimes calls his son a fool, yea, and adds bodily correction, yet he does all this out of love, in that he is always kind in his heart to his son; so Christ and the Apostles and all the faithful act; whatever they do, they do from a paternal and maternal heart, hence they are truly good deeds. Therefore we must judge such questions according to the heart and the person. This may suffice for the present on this Gospel.

Sixth Sunday after Trinity. Third Sermon. Anger and Its Signs.

Text: Matthew 5:20-26.

20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

21 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. Matthew 5:20-26

[1] This Gospel we have fully and sufficiently explained on other occasions, when treating of the entire sermon of Christ, which Matthew the Evangelist records in three chapters; for today we will take a part of it, where Christ expounds and explains the fifth commandment. For here we observe first, that Christ attacks a sin called anger, which is very common and powerfully rules the world. And it is not one of the gross, public vices punished also by the world, but one of those fine sins of the devil that do not want to pass for sin. For they sail under false colors, so that no one can rebuke and punish

them. For instance, pride will not be called pride, but truth and justice; envy and hatred do not want to be reprimanded, but rather extolled as being true earnestness and godly zeal against wickedness. These are really the two colors the devil carries in his realm, namely, lying and murder, which in the eyes of the world claim the honor and praise of being holiness and righteousness in the highest degree.

[2] For this reason our Lord and Savior singles out the Pharisees, who fain would be the holiest and most pious, and be so considered by everybody; he even calls their doings by the beautiful name of righteousness, but he pictures and judges it as one not leading to heaven but into the abyss of perdition, a veritable fruit of Satan. And this he does for the reason that they wanted to be called righteous and pious, defying the whole world to prove the contrary, and at the same time were filled with venomous wrath, envy and hate. The world cannot see nor judge in such matters, therefore Christ alone is the judge here who dare and can pass such a sentence of judgment. Even if this righteousness of the Pharisees be ever so beautiful and holy, yet, they shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven; for I do not desire nor will have a righteousness that stamps itself as such, and will not be called sin, but struts about in the fine coat of divine righteousness, so that we must call them Christian, pious people, holy spiritual fathers, etc.

[3] Now, on what is this righteousness of the Pharisees based and where does it derive its name? On the fact that God said, "Thou shalt not kill," etc. On these words they planted themselves and stood. The text says nothing more than "Thou shalt not kill;" hence it follows that whoever does not kill, is righteous. But when my feelings are hurt and I am wronged, I have good grounds and reasons for being wrought up and for resenting the injustice; at the same time my wrath appears doubly justified because it suffers violence and injustice without actually killing. This wrath of mine advances a step by embellishing its cause in proclaiming its innocence and parading its piety before God and the world thus: Have I not good reasons for being angry? This and that my neighbor has done to me in return for my many favors, and I would have gladly given him my life's blood; this is the thanks, the returns, with which he pays me. Am I to suffer all this and pass such malice by? And at this point a Pharisee boldly proceeds to malign and persecute his neighbor in the highest degree, wherever he can, inflicting harm and injury;

and all this is claimed to be done justly, he himself being pious and holy, yea, extolled as a martyr in the sight of God and men.

[4] In like manner, when the Pope and his followers condemn, burn and murder all who will not worship their abominations, counting them as disobedient to the Christian Church and obstinate, this of course must be called genuine service of God, and God should feel elated over becoming worthy of such saints. Our great noblemen act much in the same way, who boast so loudly they are friends of God and of the whole world, but enemies to iniquity. Indeed, what a great friendship we here have with God and with mankind! Where shall God stand before such saints in order to raise them high enough heavenward?

[5] Behold the excellent, grand and sacred anger of the cavalier or nobleman, who cannot possibly be guilty of a transgression or an injustice; and whoever is not of this opinion is evidently not a godly man. This sermon of Christ seems therefore very peculiar to the world, in fact it is unknown in use and practice, though heard often enough and well known as to its words. For the world does not consider it a sin for a man to resent a wrong, when he is innocent; and it is true that he who has a clear case against his offender can also seek redress in court, all this we must admit. But in adding his personal wrath to matters and trying to avenge himself, he overdoes it; one law now conflicts with the other, and a small right develops into a great wrong.

[6] Hence you must in this instance so tune the organ as to have the pipes sound in harmony, and so as to prevent two from clashing. For what kind of justice would you call it when one offends you by a mere word, or pilfers a penny's worth, and you go and cut off his arm or burn down his house, crying angrily the while: Well, he did me wrong, and I have good reasons, etc.! In such a case your murderous wrath, that does tenfold more violence and injustice to me, is not to be called a sin, but righteousness and holiness, while I am to be considered unrighteous and suffer wrong.

[7] This now I am not saying for the benefit of strangers, who are without, except merely for an illustration to show how this vice rules in the world; but concerning us, both teachers and scholars, who pride ourselves on being evangelical and still want the liberty of becoming angry and to rage when we please; and not permit ourselves to be punished nor reproved,

but rather than that everything may go to pieces, if only we be considered to be in the right, and pious, despite the fact that such a despicable farce of right causes a hundredfold more wrong.

[8] Therefore Christ here takes energetic action, and abolishes anger wholly and completely in the entire world, draws it to himself and says: I do not merely say, Thou shalt not kill, nor say Raca to thy brother, but thou shalt in no case be angry; the one is as solemnly and earnestly prohibited as the other. For you are not told to judge or avenge yourself, and even though you are right and have a just cause, still your wrath is of the devil; as St. James in his James 1:20, says: "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." Hence all anger is to be abolished entirely from us and the wrath of God alone is to work; otherwise it will turn out to be the devil's wrath and it certainly does not cool down without sin. Just as also these three: to judge, to avenge and to glory, have been taken from us, and no person should share in them, though they have ever so good a cause and ever so great holiness. But to God alone belong honor, judgment and vengeance, hence also wrath.

[9] Now, I fear, this will not be done by us as long as we are here in this life, and yet it would be grace, if we only became so pious as to make a beginning; for as soon as we suffer an injury, flesh and blood at once act as flesh and blood; they begin to rage and rave in anger and impatience. It is natural for us to feel hurt when suffering injustice and violence, hence it is necessary to check and restrain the feelings of anger and resist them. The feeling that you are injured will pass away; but that you in addition desire to avenge yourself in this or that way, is prohibited. Therefore see to it that one fits well into the other, that one claim does not conflict with the other nor cancel it, but let the two harmonize, so that both may continue. If you cannot secure your rights without doing greater harm, let it go. For it is not good to check or punish one wrong with another, nor is God willing to have universal justice perish because of your petty claims.

[10] Now the aim and contents of this sermon by Christ are as follows: You fancy that whoever does not inflict a blow with his arm has not acted contrary to God's command; but he is at liberty to be angry at his neighbor and to avenge himself; and to take vengeance is so far right, and no sin at all. This would nullify the commandment, leaving it without any force whatever. For it does not ask merely that you refrain from killing with your

fist, but also from doing harm or injury with your tongue or your heart. If not, how about the command that we are to do good to our enemy? If that is to hold good, we most certainly must not work against our neighbor. Otherwise in what respect would we be better than publicans and public sinners, as Christ himself says, Luke 6:32, who are friends to each other, the one not inflicting any harm on the other?

[11] But possibly you say: “Well, if wrath is to be so thoroughly rooted out of the heart of man, how is evil to be stayed and punished, which cannot be done without some severity?” But if evil is to have free course and left go unpunished, you would soon have no house and no town. I would reply: We know that God has committed the judiciary to the civil government and to that end established princes and lords, who bear the sword in God’s stead; their sword and its edge is God’s sword and edge. Aside from this they are personally exactly as other people are, having no more right to be angry than anybody else. Now the judge or executioner, in condemning and executing a man that never personally did an injury to either, does so in God’s stead, officiating in God’s place, inasmuch as the malefactor has become liable to God’s sentence and penalty. Assuredly there should be no anger nor bitterness in man’s heart, and yet God’s wrath and sword accomplish their work.

[12] The same holds good in war, when you must either defend yourself, or vigorously thrust, beat and burn: then likely wrath and revenge reign supreme, and yet it should not proceed from the heart of man, but emanate from the divine authority and command, so that the wicked be punished and peace be maintained. Even though you thereby meet with damage and harm, you must submit. Thus God suffered his wrath to come over Jerusalem through the king of Babylon; again through the Romans, until not one stone remained upon another.

[13] Hence where such wrath exists it is not to be called man’s wrath, but God’s. And when, unhappily, you commingle God’s and man’s wrath, it is the miserable doings of the devil. Wickedness, I say, must be restrained; but this duty must be performed in God’s place and stead. But when a judge and government are not godly, and they mingle their personal wrath with God’s, and grace their actions with the name and shield of the office; when they are secretly hostile to me and can do me harm, they avail themselves of opportunities to do so, and then claim to have done so officially: this I

would call diabolical malignity, but they claim to have done the right thing and to be entitled to praise.

[14] But you say: Well, the officer has done this and the other thing to me, and I cannot restrain him in any other way; if I should allow it, I would never have peace. I answer: It is indeed not right for persons to harm you, nor are you forbidden to protect yourself in a proper way; but it will never do for you to play double, using the office as a vent for your wrath, so that people will later on say: Mr. John — or Mr. Peter — did not do this, but the mayor or the judge, and you then take credit in saying that you did not do it from motives of anger or hatred, but of duty and justice.

[15] Here you see that infamous filth formed by appending human, yea, devilish wrath to divine wrath and making one cake of both, which indeed should be kept asunder farther than heaven and earth. And just as they, contrary to the second commandment, use the name of God in vain by swearing and the like, making that sacred name serve the purpose of a lie, so that it can be on the market under the label of that beautiful and glorious name: so too in this instance the office and law that are God's must serve the purposes of your envy and hatred giving them a standing so they can achieve all they purpose in the way of harming a neighbor. At the same time you parade about as if you had done the right and proper thing. Yea, you are a two-fold saint; in the first place you have been abused; in the second place, you do not avenge yourself or seek redress personally, but in the capacity of an officer or judge. In this same way our tender saints, the Papists, bishops and priests, now act everywhere, and, following in their wake, great princes and lords ill-treat and murder people, as the whim of their raving wrath and hatred may move them. And in the end all this is to be called the service of God and supreme holiness.

[16] Thus the wrath of man is at all times full of envy and hatred to his neighbor, being occasioned by the devil and planted in the heart of man, especially in the Pharisaical saints, who sin manifoldly and are more worthy of condemnation than others, since, for one thing, they interfere with God's office and law, robbing him of his own, and then want to be in the right and be considered pious.

[17] On the contrary when God's wrath is administered according to his command, it does not spring from envy or hatred, but from pure love and a

good heart. A heart that deplores the fact that man should suffer any ill, and yet, for his own sake and the sake of his office, God must punish and abolish wickedness.

[18] For it is indeed plain that Adam loved his son Cain as being his firstborn flesh and blood, and he moreover wished to be holy and began to serve God with his first offering, etc; and thought his offering was far more acceptable to God than his brother's. He also insisted that he was right and his brother wrong by virtue of being the first-born, so that he had to be the true priest and the first in God's sight. On these things he depended, despised his brother, and fancied to have good reasons for being angry and for persecuting and slaying his brother; as if injustice were done him in that Jehovah had no respect unto his offering. Therefore he goes ahead, and because his father did not approve and praise him, he murders his brother. He follows this up by being insolent, for when Adam in the name and place of God calls him to account he retorts, What do I know of my brother? Am I to be his keeper? Now, dear as he was to Adam as a natural child, and after Abel's death his only child, still his father pronounces that stern and dreadful sentence, Genesis 4:10: "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now thou art cursed from the earth." Again: "A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth." Truly these are the words and actions of wrath, for by them he placed him under the gravest ban and direst anathema, expelling him from heaven and earth. And Adam forthwith proceeds to execute this stern wrath, and banished his son, so that he should nowhere have a safe dwelling place. Without doubt he did this very reluctantly, for he would by far have preferred to keep his son; but the wrath of God must take its course, assigning death and the fire of hell.

[19] The Christian Church must act on the same principles, when putting a person under the ban and "delivering such a one unto Satan," as St. Paul did at Corinth, 1 Corinthians 5:5; also when denying him the sacrament and all fellowship, so as not to participate in his sin. This indeed is a dreadful sentence and terrific wrath; still it is not the wrath of man but of God. For the Church would much rather see man converted and be saved; as she shows by her actions, for where one repents and is converted, she gladly receives him back as her dear son and rejoices over him with all the angels, as Christ says of the lost sheep and the prodigal son. Luke 15:6f.

[20] Here we must beware not to abuse this power, as the Pope has been guilty of doing against those attacking his person or rule, thus confounding his person with his office, making out that his wrath is God's wrath, thereby spoiling both and pouring poison into the wine. For thus the Pope has, under the name of divine wrath, threatened and stunned emperors and kings, and yet he accomplished nothing more than to pour out his own wrath and spite. For this reason his church is in Scripture called a church of blasphemies, Revelation 13:5,16, having the marks of blasphemies written on her forehead, in all her words and deeds.

[21] This now is the wrath we call the divine or paternal wrath. Then there is another, called the brotherly wrath, of the same nature because it proceeds from love. For instance when I am angry at a person whom I heartily love and to whom I wish all manner of good, and I am grieved because he will not forsake his sins and do better, so that I always distinguish between the person and the sin, to help the person and restrain the sin, doing all I can by exhorting, warning, threatening and correcting, in order to lead him to forsake his sins.

[22] But it is well here also to be on one's guard, lest a rogue be back of this, in the sense of one's own wrath intermingling. For our wrath should be so wholly absent that not a speck of it be found; but that God's wrath alone hold sway, which is to flow either from the office assigned, or from brotherly love, which here would mean from the wrath of God. For it is God's command that we admonish, correct, reform and help one another, so that our neighbor desists from his sins and receives our admonitions gladly and with thanks. This is the "wrath" of that common Christian love of which Christ says, Matthew 18:15: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone," and in Scripture it is called an excellent, godly jealousy. St. Paul in Corinthians 11 says, "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy." For a wrath of this nature does not seek your disgrace or disadvantage, but your honor and advantage; it would regret to see you injure the prospects of your soul's salvation.

[23] So we assert that Christ here is not preaching on the office which is God's, nor on love, but on each person's own and individual wrath, proceeding from our heart and will, and directed against the person of our neighbor: — this wrath is to be wholly done away with and be put to death, no matter if the injury and injustice done to us hurts and pains. To illustrate

that John the Baptist was so shamefully slain, that Christ was nailed to the cross, that the holy martyrs were so cruelly put to death, all this did not pass without the weeping and lamentation of pious hearts; for we do not have, nor should we have, hearts of iron but of flesh, as St. Bernhard says: Dolor est, sed contemnitur; it is painful, but must be borne and overcome. And there is quite a difference between enduring pain, weeping and lamenting, and seeking revenge, or entertaining hatred and envy.

[24] Now God wants this commandment: Thou shalt not kill, understood to mean so much that no one is to be angry. For by nature we all are liars, born in natural sin and in blindness, not knowing how to be angry, nor seeing how depraved our nature is, to wit, that it is not able either to love or be angry aright, since in both it seeks nothing but self and selfish ends. Since now by nature we are so corrupt, it is forbidden and annulled both to love and be angry as a human being, in which our nature would seek its own ends. On the other hand, divine love that “seeketh not her own” but that of one’s neighbor, is enjoined, and an anger that is zealous not for his own but for God’s sake, whom it behooves either to punish transgressions against his commandments, or out of a spirit of love, and for the good of our neighbor to help him.

[25] The Pharisaical holiness, however, does not act thus; but as it has no love for one’s neighbor but only wishes to see himself honored and praised and served; so too it cannot but rage and rave against the truly pious persons, and still pretends not to have sinned against the commandment in question. Just as Christ was treated by the Pharisees and high priests, who delivered him to the judge Pilate to be offered upon the cross, and still they did not want to be accounted guilty, but to eat the pascal lamb and remain holy.

[26] Hence the Lord strikes a fresh blow at all the Pharisaic holiness and righteousness, denying them every particle of grace and the kingdom of heaven and condemning them to hell-fire, as having an unrighteousness doubly wrong in God’s sight and corrupt to the very core. Therefore I say, says God: “Whosoever is angry with his brother.” I do not say, He only that slays with his hand, but if you have anger in your heart, then you are already worthy to be condemned by the judgment; for such wrath originates only in man’s inborn malice, which seeks either its own revenge and wantonness, or its own honor and gain. But God does not want you to seek

your own honor and right; but let him seek and demand it who should, and to whom he has given authority, namely, the judge and executioner, who are not looking after their own but God's affairs, for otherwise they would not be permitted to execute or punish anybody. But see to it, says he, that you personally do not grow angry, but so completely control your anger that, be it in official duty or not, it does not proceed from the heart.

Part II. Concerning the Signs of Anger

[27] The other part of this text, "Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca," etc., we hold to mean all kinds of evil demeanor and bad turns done to a neighbor, which are not done by angry words. Such a man, Christ says, "is in danger of the council;" it has, as yet, not been determined what to do with him, but he has incurred the verdict of guilty; it remains merely to determine the penalty. This means that such a person cannot enter heaven, but has already merited his condemnation, the only difference between him and those in perdition is that he is a little more remote from the final punishment; but nevertheless he also belongs there.

[28] The third part is: Whosoever shall say, "Thou fool." This is also a very common vice, consisting in robbing our neighbor of his honor and reputation, be it done behind his back or to his face, which is called contumeliam and conuitium, defaming and reviling. Whoever does this, Christ says, "is in danger of hell-fire;" that is to say, there is no need of debating the question, of citing the culprit, indicting and sentencing him; he is already convicted and condemned, it but remains for the executioner to lead him off and do his duty. So God does not want you to avenge yourself out of anger in any form or manner, be it with your heart, with your fist, or with your mouth, and thus do an injury to your neighbor, show him spite, give him unkind words, etc.

[29] But I hear you say, Who then can be a preacher or a judge or a plaintiff, if no one's honor is to be questioned, or be ever called a fool? Why then preachers, judges, plaintiffs, witnesses, etc. are all to hold their peace? But here, as I have stated, this difference is to be observed. When I, as a preacher, reprove you publicly from the pulpit, or privately in confession, I do not do so, but God's Word: therefore you are not to complain that I am speaking against your honor. For a preacher cannot, in

keeping with his office, abuse or revile anybody, unless he be a rogue, who mingles his own malice and hatred with his office. And you cannot say to a judge when performing the functions of his office: You are speaking against my honor in calling me a thief and a murderer; for God and not the judge, has spoken thus to you. Therefore it will not do to say it is touching your honor, when being reprov'd or corrected. True, such words do not promote your honor; however, not man, but God did it; should he not have the right and authority to speak on this subject?

[30] But when God through the office has already rendered a verdict, both I and others may speak of that; for anyone may speak of God's public works and judgments; it is then a matter of history, discussed everywhere. Therefore we must nevertheless not enjoin silence on everybody to the extent of forbidding him to say, "This man is a thief or a rogue," after the judge has pronounced him such. For more honor you can neither take from nor give to a man than God has taken or given. Now since God has declared the sentence and published it publicly through the judge or preacher, everyone may with a good conscience speak of it. I recur to this because we are always inclined to go the wrong road. When preaching, there is always an inclination so to turn and twist everything as not to be bound by the Word of God. Likewise, when with Christ we say that no one should be angry or at variance with his brother or speak evil of him, everybody would like to silence the preacher to the extent that he is not to touch upon or punish public sins and vices.

[31] Finally this is the sense of our Gospel lesson: When you, as a man, for personal reasons speak against the honor of your neighbor, feeling elated over his sins, this is wicked and wrong. But when it has come so far that God himself makes anything public, then it will not do for me to praise a public, scoundrel, whom God himself has publicly proved to be such; for that would be the same as defending and abetting rascality. So our whole conduct should be guided by this, that we do not contemplate or attempt anything of ourselves; but see what God enjoins, or does through his servants; this then God himself has done and all is good and proper. So it will not do to be silenced in such cases, but to stand on the side of truth and justice, and contribute your influence in upholding and lauding God's judgment, in order to terrify and warn others. Let this suffice for the present on this Gospel text.

Seventh Sunday after Trinity. Concerning Faith and Love. Jesus Feeds the Multitude.

Text: Mark 8:1-9.

1 In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them,

2 I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat:

3 And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far.

4 And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?

5 And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven.

6 And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people.

7 And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them.

8 So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets.

9 And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away.

Mark 8:1-9

[1] Beloved friends, I hope you thoroughly understand this Gospel; for you are now sufficiently established in the truth to know what we should expect in the Gospel and what is presented to us there, namely, the true nature and life of faith. Because of this Christ is pictured and represented so lovingly in all the Gospel lessons. Although his history and works are ever changing, yet the plain, simple faith remains ever the same. Today's Gospel paints to

us the Lord in a way that we may fully know how we should esteem him, namely, that he is merciful, meek and loving; that he gladly helps everybody and freely associates and deals with all people. And such a picture as this faith really craves.

[2] Therefore the Scriptures present to us a double picture; one is that of fear or the overpowering picture of the severe wrath of God, before which no one can stand; but must despair unless he has faith. In contrast with this the picture of grace is presented to us in order that faith may behold it and obtain for itself an agreeable and comforting refuge in God, with the hope that man cannot expect so much from God, that there is not still much more to be had from him.

[3] You have often heard that there are also two kinds of possessions, spiritual and temporal. Today's Gospel treats of the temporal and bodily blessings, teaches us the faith of the child, and it is a picture for the weak, in that they should look to God for everything good, and that they might thus later learn to trust God and depend upon him for spiritual blessings. For if we are instructed in the Gospel, how Christ feeds our stomachs, we can then conclude that he will also feed and clothe our souls. For if I cannot trust him to sustain my body, much less can I trust him to sustain my soul forever. For example, if I cannot trust a person that he will give me one dollar, how can I trust him that he will give me ten? If I cannot expect from a person that he will give me a piece of bread; much less could I have any hope, that he would give me a house and yard, and the whole earth.

[4] Now, he who cannot, like the babe on its mother's breast, have a child faith, will hardly hope that God will forgive him his sins and save his soul forever; for the soul is inexpressibly more than the stomach, for which also Christ has compassion as the Gospel today proves. Therefore St. Peter said correctly in 1 Peter 2:1-3: "Beloved brethren: Putting away therefore all wickedness, and all guile, and all hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto Salvation; if ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." For it is not enough that a babe should imbibe milk, but it must also grow large and strong, that it may learn later to eat bread and hard food.

[5] But “to feed on milk” means, to taste the favor and the kind grace of God. “To taste the goodness of God” means, to experience it in one’s life. For should I preach a hundred years of God, how kind, sweet and good he is, that he condescends to help man, and I have not yet myself tasted it through experience; thus all is still in vain and no one is in this way taught to trust God rightly. From this you can conclude what a rare person a true Christian is. For there are many who say they trust in God for their daily bread; but that floats only upon the tongue and hangs in the ears; it never enters the heart where it belongs.

[6] Now let us observe in this example, what the life and nature of faith are. The apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews 11:1, writes thus: “Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen.” That is as much as to say, faith is the means by which one trusts in possessions he does not see, namely, that I should expect temporal things which I can neither see nor hear, but I must only hope for them; as is the case in today’s Gospel. There were many people together, about four thousand, who with their wives and children had had nothing to eat for the space of three days (I judge that can be called fasting), but were extremely hungry, far from home, without any provisions on which the body lives. Now the apostle says, faith is that through which I hope for things I cannot see. Such a faith the great multitude of people here has; they see no food and yet they hope that God will nourish them.

[7] Now, what does Christ do in this case? What attitude does he take to this transaction? He must not have had much tact, for he goes to the disciples and asks, how shall one feed all these? They reply, Oh, who will be able to feed such a great multitude of people with bread in the wilderness? But here you see how little human thoughts and faith harmonize; here you see, the wiser reason is, the less it accomplishes in the works of God. Therefore Christ asked his disciples that everyone might learn to know by experience what reason is, and acknowledge how reason and faith in no way agree. Here we learn to blindfold reason, when we begin to believe, and then give reason a permanent furlough.

[8] Take an example: If I were a man who had a wife and children, and had nothing for them and no one gave me anything; then I should believe and hope that God would sustain me. But if I see that it amounts to nothing and I am not helped with food and clothing, what takes place? Then, as an

unbelieving fool, I begin to doubt, and go and take whatever is at hand, steal, deceive, cheat the people and make my way the best I can and may. See this is what shameless unbelief does. But if I am a believer then I close my eyes and say: O God, I am thy creature and thy handiwork and thou hast from the beginning created me. I will depend entirely upon you who cares more for me, how I shall be sustained, than I do myself; thou wilt indeed nourish me, feed, clothe and help me, where and when you know best.

[9] Thus faith is a sure foundation, through which I expect that which I see not. Therefore faith must always have sufficient, for before it should fail the angels would have to come from heaven and dig bread out of the earth in order that believing persons should be fed. Yes, the heavens and the earth would have to pass away before God would let his believers lack clothing and the other necessities of life. The comforting and powerful Word of the divine promise requires and demands this. David boasts of this in Psalm 37:25: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." And in the verses just preceding in Psalm 37:18-19 he says: "Jehovah knoweth the days of the perfect; and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be put to shame in the time of evil; and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied."

[10] But when one inquires of reason for counsel it soon says: It is not possible. Yes, you must wait a long time until roasted ducks fly into your mouth, for reason sees nothing, grasps nothing, and nothing is present. Just so the apostles do also here who thought: Yes, who will provide food for so many, no one is able to do that; but had they seen a great pile of money and in addition tables laden with bread and meat, they would soon have discovered good counsel and been able to give good consolation; that would have gone according to their thinking very reasonably. However, since they saw nothing they could find no counsel, but held it to be impossible that one should thus feed so many people, and especially since no provisions were at hand.

[11] We have said enough concerning faith through which we entrust the stomach to God for his care, and believe that he will not allow us to come to distress because of the lack of temporal things. Now concerning spiritual blessings, when we are about to die, I wish also to say: then we will find and see before our eyes very death, and yet we would gladly wish to live; then we will see before us very hell, and yet we would gladly wish to

possess heaven; then we will see God's judgment, and yet we would gladly see his grace. In brief, we will not see a single one of the things we would like to have. No created thing can help us in the presence of death, hell and the judgment of God; and if I believe, I will say: Yes, faith is the fundamental principle by which I secure what I do not see; hence, if I believe, nothing can harm me. Although I see nothing now but death, hell and the judgment of God before my eyes, yet I must not look at them; but fully trust that God, by virtue of the power of his promise, not because of my worthiness, will give me life, salvation and grace. That is cleaving to God by faith in the right way.

[12] This is here beautifully painted in the visible picture of the four thousand men who hang on God alone through the faith that says: yes, God will indeed feed us. Had they judged according to reason, they would have said, "Oh, we are so many, we are here in the desert, we have empty and hungry stomachs; nothing can help our condition." There was nothing of which they could speak; but they had a good refuge without any human disputing with God, they commended themselves to him and freely laid all their need upon him. Then Christ comes, before they have any care and before they ask him to come, and takes all more to heart than they do themselves, and says to his disciples: "I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away fasting to their homes, they will faint on the way."

[13] Behold, what a sympathetic Christ we have, who even provides food for our poor stomachs. Here new hope is awakened and man is comforted through the words of Christ; as he says: They lie there and wait for me until the third day. I must give them also what they need. Here you see that all who thus faithfully cling to the Word of God will be fed by God himself; for that is the nature and the power of faith, which flows alone out of the Word of God.

[14] Therefore, beloved friends, let us once make a beginning to believe; for unbelief is the cause of all sin and vice, which now have taken the upper hand in all stations of life. How does it come to pass that everywhere there are so many foolish women and rogues, so many rank imposters, thieves, robbers, usurers, murderers and sellers of indulgences? It all comes from unbelief. For such men judge alone according to human reason, and the reason judges only according to that which it sees; but what it does not see,

it does not wish to lay hold of. Therefore, if it does not place its confidence in God through faith, then it must despair in itself and develop rogues and rascals. Observe, thus it comes to pass wherever men permit their reason to govern them, and are not ruled by faith.

Part II. Concerning Love

[15] Now just as you have learned faith, so should we learn love; for Christ wishes to set before us a twofold picture, namely, a picture of faith, that we should not be over-anxious; also a picture of love, that, as he does to us, is anxious about our welfare, feeds us and gives us to drink and clothes us, only out of free love, not for the sake of his own advantage or because of our worthiness; so should we also do good unto our neighbor, freely and gratuitously, out of pure love, by which, as he is a Christ to you, you should thus also be a Christ to your neighbor.

[16] Therefore you see that all the works of the priests, monks and nuns are vain and cursed; for they are not directed to the end to serve their neighbors; but only that they may merit much before God through their works. For true Christian works must be directed entirely and freely to the end that they be done for the good of our neighbor, only freely given and scattered broadcast among the masses; as Christ also did who cast his good deeds away freely for the people to scramble after, and gave his doctrine, word and life for the Church. Blessed are they who accept this giving with thanksgiving.

[17] I say this only for the reason that you may see how all parts of the Gospel lessons tend in the direction and will have nothing more, and God also requires nothing more from us, than that we surrender ourselves to the service of our neighbor, and accordingly sustain him in the name of God and in the place of God, do him good and show him a service; for God does not need our good works, as Psalm 50:7-13 says: "Bear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify unto thee: I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices; and thy burnt offerings are continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is

mine, and the fullness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?”

[18] Just so he says to us also; behold, Israel, that is thou believing one, I am thy God and thou art not my God; I will give to you and not you to me. Hear, Israel, I will not be angry with thee that thou dost not offer me any sacrifices; for what thou hast in thy barn, house and yard, that was all mine before it was thine; for I have stored it away there, Here he spoke very pointedly to the Jews who prided themselves highly on their sacrifices. Now, since he rejects our offering, what will he then have? The Psalmist in the verses immediately following says: “Offer unto God the sacrifice of thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High; and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” That means, I wish to have thy heart, rest thou in me and believe me to be a kind and gracious God, that I am thy God: then you will have enough. Therefore he says also in the following Psalm 51:14-19: “Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise. For thou delightest not in sacrifice; else would I give it: thou hast no pleasure in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

[19] In this confidence and hope let thy faith run its course, to acknowledge God as thy friend, to cleave to him and in the greatest need to flee to him, and to no one else. Believe it and expect it, then he will help thee, this thou shouldst not doubt; therefore in harmony with this, thou shouldst serve thy neighbor freely and gratuitously. These two thoughts are presented to us in this Gospel.

Seventh Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. An Admonition and a Consolation.

Text: Mark 8:1-9.

1 In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them,

2 I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat:

3 And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far.

4 And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?

5 And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven.

6 And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people.

7 And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them.

8 So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets.

9 And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away.
Mark 8:1-9

[1] Today's Gospel presents to us again both the doctrine and the consolation against the temptation in caring for the necessities of this life, or the temporal support and maintenance of the Church upon the earth. And faith belongs here since Christ came not for the purpose of establishing a government that may be called a political or a domestic kingdom, which were long ago established by God and given for the purpose of meeting our bodily needs. And reason itself here teaches how and from what source we can bring it to pass that everyone in his station may enjoy a livelihood, peace and protection, so that one may see before his eyes and have in his hands all the necessities of life that he needs to maintain the temporal government. Therefore this did not claim the attention of Christ since it was not a part of his calling and office; but as his kingdom was to be a different government, in which all persons in all callings and offices, high and low, as sinners condemned before God to everlasting death, should be helped to

the divine, eternal kingdom and life; the spiritual kingdom had to engage his attention while he passed by the other two, the civil, and the domestic.

[2] Therefore it had to follow that his disciples, preachers and servants would have to suffer poverty because they could not outside of their service and office seek their livelihood as the rest of the world does, nor hope to become rich from their calling; in addition, that they, aside from this, would be persecuted by the world, which would oppose their preaching because it would not be in harmony with their understanding and prejudices. And thus the Christians in the world could not depend upon any sure guarantee for their peaceful life and protection; but had to live continually in uncertainty because of the world, and felt in danger and as restless as the waves of the sea because of that which they already had or might have. But should they have enough to eat and to drink and a place and a room where to live, they could not expect it from any other one than alone from Christ.

[3] Now Christ knows this very well, therefore he arms and comforts his disciples with these and like examples and sayings in order that they might not despair. Although his kingdom has nothing to do with eating and drinking, building and caring for the needs of the body; yet they should not die from hunger. And this he again confirms in the passage of Matthew 6:33. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." For by today's Gospel he proves that they, who followed him to hear his preaching, and followed him so faithfully that they continued with him three days in the desert, could not now very well return out of the desert without fainting and coming to poverty, need and distress on account of his Word. Yet since they sought first the kingdom of God and Christ had previously preached, prayed and accomplished that which pertains to the righteousness of God, there must follow also that which pertains to the body in order that they may learn to believe that they would not come to want and that they should expect from him all his Church needs for the maintenance of her bodily or external existence upon the earth.

[4] It is true that in all ages of the Church two things have done and are doing great harm, namely, poverty and riches. For in the first place, we see the apostles and true bishops and preachers in such straitened circumstances, that no one gave them anything and they themselves were not able to acquire anything; hence everybody felt shy of such an office and

no one wished to enter it. In the second place, when the church became extremely wealthy through great endowments and stipends and sat in all luxury, the ministers themselves neglected the office of preaching and the care of souls, and themselves became lords.

[5] Just so it is also at present: Where true pastors and preachers are so poorly supported that no one donates anything to them, and moreover what they have is snatched out of their mouths by a shameless and unthankful world, by princes, noblemen, townsmen and farmers, so that they with their poor wives and children must suffer need, and when they die leave behind them pitiable, rejected widows and orphans. By this very many good-hearted and very clever people are more and more discouraged from becoming pastors and preachers. For all arts, trades and callings in life serve to the end that we may through them fortify ourselves against hunger and poverty; but with the office of the ministry the contrary is the case, whoever will per, form its duties faithfully, must expose himself to danger and poverty.

[6] From this then will follow the ruin of the Church, in that the parishes will stand vacant, the pulpits be neglected and again preachers arrive who seek not faithfully God's Word nor the kingdom of Christ; but who think, as they preach, what the people will gladly hear, so that they may continue in that direction and again become rich; and in this manner things will again go to ruin. Therefore also at present the great and powerful, especially the nobility, plan to keep their pastors and preachers under their feet in order that they may not again become rich, and lord it over them as they formerly experienced and are now overcautious. But they will not be able to bring it about as they plan.

[7] How shall we now act in this matter and from what source shall we obtain preachers and pastors in order that the kingdom of Christ may be perpetuated? For neither poverty nor riches is good for the Church; mere poverty, hunger and anxiety the preachers cannot suffer; great possessions and riches they cannot stand. Poverty hinders the development of their personality; riches are in the way of them performing the duties of their work and office. But wherever it thus happens that support is not given, and the pulpit and the office of the pastor are left vacant, then will the world also see what it will have to enjoy because of such action. For if each will consider the welfare only of his own house and seek how he may maintain

himself and no one inquires how the Word of God and the office of the ministry are to be perpetuated, then will God also say as he said in the prophecy of Haggai 1:4-11, where the people also left the house of the Lord desolate, neglected God's Word and the service of the temple, so that the priests and servants of the temple had to resort to work as farmers and learn to do other things, by which they could support themselves because nothing was given for their office and service. Therefore he speaks thus: "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your cieled¹ houses, while this house lieth waste? Now therefore thus saith Jehovah of hosts: Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith Jehovah. Ye looked for much, and lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith Jehovah of hosts. Because of my house that lieth waste, while ye run every man to his own house. Therefore for your sake the heavens withhold the dew, and the earth withholdeth its fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and I paneled upon the grain, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands."

[8] Behold, this is the punishment for despising the office of the ministry, when such punishment was the most gracious as it has been still in our day, and I would to God, that it might continue so. But when we esteem the Word of God so lightly and the ministers and preachers are so poorly supported that they are compelled to forsake their office and seek their bread through other occupations, and thereby also discourage others from entering this office, who otherwise are gifted for it and inclined to it; God not only sends famine and other great national calamities as now appear before our eyes, in order that no one's purse may retain anything and no blessing and no provisions remain. But he takes the Word and the true doctrine entirely away, and in their stead permits fanatical spirits and false teachers to enter among them, by whom they are led astray and deceived before they are aware of it both as to their souls and property, and for their neglect they must contribute richly and most bountifully.

[9] Therefore the world should be advised, if it will take advice, that the lords, the princes, the countries, the cities and all in general make efforts to provide a little for the necessities of the house of God and the kingdom of God, as they must do for other offices and arts, in order that they may give their whole attention to them and obtain their daily bread from them, which are needed much more than other offices and arts. While one officer or judge is sufficient, likewise one jurist or physician can meet the needs of one city or more, and for a time of the entire country; we must have thousands of preachers for the various countries since the parishes and districts are so many; for children are daily born who must be baptized and educated, learn God's Word and become Christians. From what source can ministers be had, if they are not reared and educated? Then the churches must either stand vacant and the people scatter and go astray, or the people receive and suffer from coarse mule like characters and corrupters of the Word.

[10] But woe unto all who contributed to bring about such a state or have not tried to prevent it, that God's house had to become desolate; much more, however, those who have discouraged and hindered others from entering the ministry, or continuing in it; for such characters are worse than the Jews or Turks. However they are not to be excused because they allowed themselves to be discouraged from entering the ministry on account of poverty, for their greatest lack was in faith that Christ would notwithstanding give them their daily bread or nourishment for their bodies, which, although at times may be scanty and bitter, yet, you are to remember on the other hand how very much greater treasure it is that one receives a piece of bread into his hands in an exceptional way and through the special blessing of God, than all the riches and fullness of the world.

[11] Therefore the civil government should especially try to do something here and to be helpful to our children and posterity, and not withdraw its hand and by its example hinder and deter others, and do Christendom an irreparable damage. How will you give an answer to God if you through your cursed avarice retard or hinder a single soul in its salvation; I will say nothing about hindering a whole city or country by your example, so that they may no longer possess the Word of God and the preaching of it? And he must indeed be a cruel, unmerciful and cursed person who does not help his own children in this way, much more if he

hinders it. For if we wish to be Christians we should positively know that we are called to do this, and it is the command of God that we all do it with both our hands and with all our powers, that the house of God may not become desolate nor the pulpits stand vacant and his kingdom cease, and that both we ourselves and the young people be not robbed of their salvation.

[12] To be sure, in the Old Testament it was obligatory on everybody, and commanded by Moses, that the tenth part or the tithe be given for this purpose from all their income, Leviticus 27:30f. How much more should we Christians do for this cause, which is the most necessary, and without which no one upon the earth gives and does anything that Christ's kingdom may continue built up, so that we allow his servants to eat with us in order that we may remain in the same kingdom of God, and give such grace and salvation to our children as an inheritance. If we do not do this then he will, as a reward of our ingratitude, put an end to our avarice and devouring spirit, so that we ourselves will soon perish; because such great possessions and provisions we have not, but that God can permit rust to enter among them through famine, Turkish war and other national plagues and everything be consumed, ravished or otherwise destroyed in a single year.

[13] Thus will Christ warn us first of all here through his own example that everyone is required to help the kingdom of God and his Word with temporal provisions for the body; in case he himself cannot or will not become a minister of the Gospel.

[14] Following this he also comforts those who are in the ministerial office, that they become not distressed or alarmed through their present want or poverty; but that they may know that Christ cares for them and will nourish them even in their poverty and will never permit them to suffer need and want, but will finally provide the richer bounty for them; yea, he has already thought of all things before and provided for them before they thought from what source they should obtain what they need.

[15] For he shows indeed forcibly in this example that he is a rich and powerful lord and provider; yea, he is a rich miller and baker, better than any other upon the earth that has learned his trade perfectly. Yes, he does indeed very much work instantly and aside from and without any human help. He plows, harvests, threshes, grinds and bakes in a twinkling of the

eye. For it is indeed a miracle and beyond the comprehension of reason that so many thousand men, not counting the women and children, were fed with seven loaves, that they all were satisfied, and yet some were left over; but he did it so quickly by one word, when he only touched the bread and gave to his disciples to distribute; there is at once ground to flour, baked and everything prepared for so many thousand persons and even more. He must be a fine king (as the five thousand said whom he also fed in a like manner, John 6:14), him we would also wish to have as our king, who should lead a multitude of people to the field and care for them, so that one could at all times reach into the basket or into the pocket, and richly feed and pay a whole multitude.

[16] Now he can do that and in him we have such a king. Where he reaches there all is full, and where he gives there all must be sufficient and overflowing. Thus in Matthew 17:27 he told Peter to go and take a shekel out of the mouth of a fish. Who prepared or minted the silver there or who would seek there in the water and even in the mouth of the fish for money? But he can create it and take it when and where and as he wishes; yea, can also bring bread and water out of the rock with which to feed the whole world; for we see everywhere he does so daily and everything that the world has comes about only by such miracles which are not less miraculous, as St. Augustine says, than this miracle.

[17] We are, to be sure, thus familiar with the fact that corn grows yearly out of the earth, and through this familiarity we are so blinded that we do not esteem such work. For what we see daily and hear, that we do not regard as miraculous; and yet it is even as great; yea, if one should speak correctly, it is a greater miracle that God should give us corn out of the sand and the stone, than that he should here feed a multitude with seven loaves. For what is the dry sand but crushed stones, or a stone other than sand and earth welded together; but how can bread which we eat come out of stones, and yet it grows only out of the sand of the earth? In like manner everything that grows, and all the animals give to us, each according to his own nature; whence does it come but out of the earth and dust?

[18] These are even the miracles which have been established from the beginning of the world and daily continue, so that we are entirely overwhelmed by them, without our eyes and senses feeling them, since they are so common that God must at times, as he does here, perform not a

greater, but a special miracle, which is extraordinary by which he awakens us and through such an individual and special miracle he shows us and leads us into the daily miracles of the whole world.

[19] No farmer can deny that his corn grows out of mere stones, as also Moses in Deuteronomy 32:13 says: “He made him ride on the high places of the earth, and he did eat the increase of the field; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.” What does that mean? How can honey and oil grow out of rock and stone? Now it does happen that both corn and trees which bear the sweetest fruits are rooted in stones and sand, and out of that they grow and from nowhere else do they receive their sap and strength. If it should take place before our eyes now that oil and honey should flow out of a column of rock, then the whole world would speak of this as the miracle of miracles; but since we daily walk over the fields and land where they grow before our eyes, there we see nothing and appreciate nothing.

[20] Since we now cast to the winds the daily works of God, which are nothing but miracles, he must cause us to gape at these special and like miracles, and let them be proclaimed as special miracles in order that a Christian may let such miracles be to him a writing and a book, from which he learns to behold all the works of God, and satisfies his heart with them, and thinks thus: Why shall I be worried with anxiety and care on account of temporal need and provision? From what source does God give us the corn in the field and all fruits, since the world with all her wisdom is not able to create a straw, a leaf or a little flower? Since Christ, my Lord and God, does such things daily, why then shall I be worried, or doubt as to whether he can or will sustain my bodily existence?

[21] Here you may reply: Yes, how does it then come about since he is such a king who feeds the whole world so bountifully, that he permits his Christians so often to suffer from want and poverty in the world? For he should indeed care for his own people bountifully above all others. Answer: Here one must understand how the kingdom of Christ is constituted; for he will by this show us, as I said at the beginning, that his kingdom upon the earth is preeminently not a temporal kingdom, which consists in how we here upon the earth may eat, drink, keep house, care for the body, and moreover where all the necessaries of this life must be regulated and provided for. But he has founded a spiritual kingdom, in which one should

seek and find divine and eternal possessions, and so constituted the same that it would be richly provided for and perpetuated by the Word of God, the sacraments, the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, and that it would not lack in anything that serves us in securing and maintaining our eternal life. Therefore he lets the world in its government have and take the necessaries and provisions of life, and thereby provides richly for it. But Christ exhorts his Christians to place their hope and consolation not in temporal things, but to seek the kingdom of God, in which they shall have sufficient forever and shall be truly rich. That is the first.

[22] In the second place Christ desires to teach his Christians to exercise faith in the things which pertain to the temporal life and to their temporal possessions, in a way that they see him here even in their hands and expect from him also the necessaries of this life; for since the Church upon the earth is his Church and shall remain so, he must provide for her, for her body, for her food, her drink, her clothing, her buildings, her locations and other necessary things. Yea, he has indeed created all that the world contains and produces for the sake of pious Christians; he gives and maintains all still only for their sake, as long as the world stands, in order that they should richly enjoy these things in this life, and have no need. But since the devil rules in the world and he is the enemy of Christ and of his Church, and since they themselves do not seek the things of this world, they must suffer that to be taken out of their mouths, and robbed of, which belongs to them. Here now Christ must help his Church and give where she suffers need and want, that she may continue to exist, that it may be called miraculous giving; and the Christians acknowledge that it is given by him and that he shows forth continually in his Christendom such special miracles, so that they notwithstanding will have something to eat, drink, etc., even if the world gives nothing and grants no favors; but takes from her, and is jealous and hateful because of what God gives her.

[23] Behold, we should now also learn to believe that we have a Lord in the person of Christ, who provides for our stomachs and for our temporal lives, and thereby thrusts aside and conquers the cares of unbelief. For he excites us through many examples to faith, as it is his earnest wish that we should be a people, who have no care for our own person as pertains to both the spiritual and bodily, or the temporal and eternal (for here he is not speaking concerning the cares of the office or of the labor which is

commanded everyone by God and laid upon him, in which he is to be true and faithful); in order that we may do with cheerful hearts and with confidence in him what is commanded us, especially that which belongs to the kingdom of God, and if need and want stare us in the face, that we permit such things to be commanded us. And a Christian should comfort and strengthen himself thus: I know, and have learned from the Gospel that I have a Lord who can make out of one loaf as many loaves as he will, and he does not need in order to do it either a farmer or a miller or a baker, and he gives to me when and as much as I require, although I do not at once know or understand, yea, do not even think about it, how or when and whence he shall come to my help.

[24] The text of this gospel also now shows how Christ feels and speaks when he sees the people who follow him and cannot return home without fainting, when he calls the disciples to himself and has a little counsel with them, he begins and says: "I have compassion on the multitude." And he adds the cause when he says: "Because they continue with me now three days and have nothing to eat," etc.

Part II. The Doctrines.

A. The Chief Doctrines

[25] Here tell me, if the multitude had sent an embassy to Christ to report on their need, could they have formulated their report as well as Christ himself here thinks it out and holds it before his disciples? For how would they or could they paint it better or allege stronger reasons to move him, than to have said: Oh, beloved Lord, have compassion on the poor multitude of people, men, women and children, who have followed thee so far in order to hear thee? In the second place, consider that they have now remained and continued with thee for three days. In the third place, remember that they have nothing to eat and are in the desert. In the fourth place, if you send them away fasting they must faint on the way before they arrive home, especially the weak men and the women and children. In the fifth place, consider also that some have come far, etc. Behold, Christ reflected upon all this himself before anyone speaks with him and has himself formed the prayer so beautifully in his own heart. Yes, he is distressed on their account before they think of praying to him, and

earnestly discussed with the disciples their need and gave counsel what to do in their behalf.

[26] What then is all this but a purely living sermon, proving and witnessing that Christ is so earnestly and heartily concerned about us, and before we can propose anything to him, he looks into our hearts better than we ourselves can, so that no mortal person could speak with another more heartily. For he does not wait until someone says to him: Oh, Lord, have compassion on the multitude, think how they have held out, how far they are from home, etc. Yes, he says, I have compassion on them already and have thought over it all before. But listen, he says to the disciples, what counsel do you give, what shall we do for them in order that the multitude may be fed?

[27] Now this counseling and consulting with the disciples took place, first, in order that he should thus reveal his own heart and thoughts. For it must not remain hid in his heart only, that he had compassion and anxiety for the people; but it should come to light so that it could be heard and seen, and we might learn to believe that we have the same Christ who is ever concerned about our bodily needs, and in whose heart are ever written in living letters the words, “I have compassion on my poor people,” and he shows it in his acts and works, so that he earnestly wishes that we only acknowledge it and hear this Word of the Gospel, as if he spoke it yet this hour and daily whenever we feel our need, yea, much sooner than we ourselves begin to complain about it. For he is ever and remains forever, the same Christ and has the very same heart, thoughts and words concerning us as he had at that time, and has neither yesterday nor at any other time been different, and will not today nor tomorrow become a different Christ. Now here we have a very beautiful picture and tablet which paint to us the very depths of the Savior’s heart, that he is a faithful, merciful Lord, to whom our needs appeal to the very quick, and he sees deeper into our wants than we are able to pray and present to him. Shame on our abominable unbelief, for we hear and see this, and yet in spite of it, we cannot fully trust in Christ.

[28] Yes, that is just the reason he began this interview and asked the disciples for counsel, namely, that we might see our own unbelief and foolishness and chastise ourselves. For here you see how he considers their need much better and more fully, and gives counsel concerning it, than we

ourselves are able to do, and no person in his own danger or need can give Christ counsel how he might be rescued out of his distress. And although Christ had already deliberated and concluded what he would do, yet he asks them for their advice through which they see how he cares for them and what they themselves are able to advise him. Here it is revealed what the counsel of men can do when men undertake to be the counsellors of God and of Christ. Here they all stand like the musicians who have ruined the dance, they have gone in their human wisdom and considered it with their financiers. Here are four thousand men and indeed as many women and children. Where should one receive sufficient for them to eat, especially here in the desert, unless they eat grass and hay?

[29] Thus you hear the answer of human wisdom when appealed to for counsel and how different it is from faith; for it does not know anything to say to this, than to conclude in a common and dry manner, there is no way to help the situation. That is what nature and reason at all times propose where need and want reign; when they should trust in God and expect from him counsel and help, they fall instantly upon the blasphemous words: Why, it is impossible, it is a lost cause, etc. When the peril of death and danger visit us, then reason thinks and concludes instantly, it is not possible to live; when there is no bread in the house, it is impossible to ward off hunger; and nothing but mere doubt is where reason cannot see at once before its eyes and grasp that with which the situation can be helped. Reason is not so wise as to think that Christ knows yet of some counsel and help, since he himself takes interest in our distress and does not doubt, but speaks as he does here, as one who will counsel and help, and not permit his people to go from him fasting, and faint on the way.

[30] Yes, reason is not pious enough to give Christ this honor, and believe that he knows how to counsel and help more than it realizes, and to confess its lack of understanding and ability, and thus bring the matter home to him and covet his counsel and help. This is why we have so many fools and wish, in case God should deal with us, to reckon and measure in an ordinary way according to our own ability and powers. Therefore where he fails, we must indeed doubt; as here the apostles calculate and measure by their reason their food and provisions over against the great multitude, and their need compared with their ability. Then the only result will be that they are compelled to say: Here there is no other advice to give than that we let

them go where they decide, where they may buy and find food; they may do in this matter as they are able, either faint or continue to live.

[31] Thus you see also in the disciples and apostles of Christ our great and deep rooted unbelief, what great ignorant fools we are, compared with the counsel and works of God. And we believe nothing at all unless it goes according to our thoughts and ideas, and think he knows no counsel and does nothing for us where we are not able first to see and calculate how it is possible. Yet he deals with us thus for the very purpose of showing us where our counsel, wisdom and ability end, so that he does a much higher order of work for us than we are able to think and esteem as possible, or can pray for and wish; so that if he should not deal with us in any other way than according to our thoughts and counsels, he would never be able to do any divine work or be able to prove anything divine to us, and every minute we would have to doubt, sink and perish without God.

[32] Therefore it is also much better that he, without our counsel, yea, contrary to it, should go ahead and do, as the Lord and God of all creatures should do; for we still would not counsel or say anything more on the subject than the apostles here said in this case, that it is impossible and a lost cause, to feed so great a multitude. Yet however he thus shows himself friendly in that he asks them for counsel and lets them advise on the subject and can have patience with them, lets them begin thus in order that they themselves might be forced to see later how foolish they acted and be ashamed of their unbelief since they experienced and saw before their eyes his miracle.

[33] From this we should also learn to become an enemy of our unbelief and oppose it, which continually bestirs itself in times of need and danger, and at once despairs of all consolation and help, where it does not see before its eyes help and counsel in our own human strength. But we should accustom ourselves to think that Christ is able to do, and does do, more and greater things than we can understand or believe; for our hands and strength are not indeed created to the end that they should help us to corn and bread in time of famine and want, to life in time of death, and make something out of nothing. But he is the Lord who can do this and does do it as work that comes natural to him. Therefore he says, turn thine eyes and thoughts from your hands and your ability upon me; my fingers are adapted to the end that they should do it. You are only to believe, and where it is not possible

according to your counsel, then let it be possible according to my counsel and my power.

[34] This Christ teaches everywhere in all his miracles and still today in his wonderful works which he does in his Church. And yet he cannot exalt himself in our estimation to the degree that we in strong confidence and sure courage commit our need to his counsel and power and let it be commended to him; through which we are helped both out of our need and want, and become free from all anxious care and fear, by which we make our need greater and severer than it is in itself. And we have in this a twofold benefit and gain: A peaceful, quiet heart and conscience and in addition consolation and help, and moreover, that we thus render to him the best sacrifice and divine service. On the other hand, if we do not do this, it cannot be agreeable or pleasing to him, and the blame is no one's but our own that we worry and plague ourselves and yet accomplish nothing by such worry; for we must nevertheless let it remain in his power, since no one of us is able even to change a little smallpox mark on his body although he should worry himself to death over it.

[35] However, it is still well for us that Christ permits us to be tested and disciplined in this way, and through our vain counsels and suggestions, our struggling and doubting, he teaches us to acknowledge our exigency; otherwise we would never realize that we were in need and would never learn either to believe or to pray. Therefore he shows and reveals here to his disciples their present want and extremity before they themselves think of it.

[36] In like manner also for a time God sends us temptation, terror, misfortune and suffering in order that we may feel our need and become conscious how utterly unable we are either to counsel or help ourselves; but he does so that we may learn not to go ahead heedlessly according to our feelings, and say: Ah, whither now? Here all is lost. Where shall we get something? That "whither?" and "where?" take out of thy mouth and heart, and instead, run here to Christ and expect what he will say and give to thee. For the fact that you feel your need will not hurt you; he lets you feel it in order that you may experience and feel also his help, his beneficence and his rescuing power, and that you learn thus to believe and to trust him.

B. Other Doctrines

[37] We have said enough now concerning the summary and central doctrine of today's Gospel. Further there are also given in the history of this Gospel many good points. First, that Christ asks, how many loaves have ye, and he takes the same along with the few fishes, for which he thanks God and says grace, and gives them to his disciples to divide and set before the people. Here he teaches, first, that we should use that which God bestows upon us, however small it may be, and accept it with thanksgiving, and know that Christ will also bless it that it may be efficient and sufficient, yea, even multiply it in our hands; for it is pleasing to God when we acknowledge his gifts and thank him for them, and he adds his blessing so that it becomes better and reaches farther than the great riches and superfluous possessions of the unbelievers; as the Scriptures say in Psalm 37:16, "Better is a little that the righteous hath than the abundance of many wicked." Thus also Proverbs 10:22, "The blessing of Jehovah, it maketh rich." That is, what is given by God and received with a good conscience. And St. Paul also explains this in 1 Timothy 6:6, "But godliness with contentment is great gain," etc.

[38] For what do they have who hold such great possessions without faith and without Christ, and what do they gain, except that they rob themselves of God and his blessings? And besides they are idolators and captives of mammon, so that they dare not touch their own possessions; and they neither let others use them nor do they use them with a good conscience themselves, so that they cannot enjoy the little they eat, because of their avarice and wicked conscience, in which they only think of how to scratch together more and more through their cruel business and trickery; and yet they must ever live in danger and worry, so that they have no peace, neither before God nor before man. They must see and hear, and experience so much with their great wealth and among their own children and in other ways, that their heart sickens; and thus they throw themselves into the snares and pains of the devil, as he also says, out of which they cannot be delivered.

[39] On the other hand St. Paul says: He is truly a rich man who fears God and lives in faith, and is contented in this blessedness with that which God gives him, and he possesses it with God and in honor without injustice or damage to anyone; for he has a very great treasure, called God's blessing, even in his poverty, so that he must still have enough; for he knows that we

all have no more out of life than what we eat and drink, and as we say, to our fill and satisfaction. And yet it does not depend upon our anxious care where God does not give success; as Psalm 127:says' "It is vain for you to rise up early, to take rest late, to eat the bread of toil (German, care); for so he giveth unto his beloved sleep." And Christ himself in Luke 12:15 says' "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

[40] Therefore a Christian should think much more of a dollar that God gives him than of all the great treasures of the rich misers upon the earth; for he has this beautiful treasure in his own home that is called godliness, and he has enough or he is satisfied, that is, he has a peaceful, quiet heart in God. Thus also Psalm 112:1-3 says of such a pious and godly person' "Blessed is the man that feareth Jehovah, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his hour; and his righteousness endureth forever." What kind of riches and glory and sufficiency is that, the ungodly world says? What are two dollars in the house and on the farm of a poor Christian who has his house full of children, compared with that of a person who has ten, twenty, fifty thousand dollars in his chest? Yes, and what estimate do you put upon the fact that a pious person has the blessing from God, which you cannot buy either with your hundred thousand dollars nor can you secure it with all the possessions of the world? A dollar with a good conscience is more beautiful in the home and shines more gloriously before God and is of more value to him than all the crowns and kingdoms of empires, which do not enjoy their large possessions with great quiet and with a joyful conscience, and at last are not able to secure from them more than the poorest beggar possesses.

[41] But the world will not believe this although it sees it before its own eyes. It goes ever ahead with its raking and scraping together of riches and will let no one be satisfied with what he has, every man desires more than his fellow and seeks riches (as it must naturally follow) by robbing, stealing, oppressing the poor. It also follows from this that there is no blessing or success with such riches; but only the curse of God, misery, misfortune and heart agony.

[42] In the second place, Christ commands the disciples to set the loaves before the multitude, by which he shows he will administer his work and

gifts through the instrumentality of human agencies. He thus also teaches those who have an office or commission (especially the office of the ministry) and those who stand before others, that they should, in obedience to Christ, faithfully and conscientiously serve the people by cheerfully and meekly giving of their own and imparting to others what God entrusted and gave to them. And especially does he teach them to be of use and comfort to the poor flock of Christians by their good example of faith and of love, and thus strengthen their faith and love. For he here shows how he gives and will give rich blessings to the end that such office and service may accomplish much good and bring forth much fruit. Just as it takes place here, when they received from Christ not more than seven loaves and a few fishes, and they began to distribute them, he multiplies them more and more in their hands, and it more than reaches, so that there is an abundance left over.

[43] Let us also learn that the gifts and good things, which God gives, are not profaned, if they are thus used in helping the poor in acts of charity, as Christ in Luke 6:38 also promises and says: "Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom." And the experiences of many pious people everywhere have shown those who liberally instituted and gave before our time charitable gifts for the ministerial office, schools, the support of the poor, etc. And God gave them for doing so good times, peace and quiet; hence the proverb arose among the people and was confirmed: One loses no time by going to church; giving alms does not impoverish; possessions received unjustly do not increase, etc.

[44] Hence one sees in the world today the very opposite; since such insatiable avarice and robbery reign, no one gives anything either to his God or to his neighbor; and everyone only scratches to himself what is given by others, and they even drain the poor people of their very sweat and blood; and God gives us in return as a reward famine, discontent and all kinds of misfortune until at last we devour ourselves among one another, or we all, the rich and the poor, the great and the small, are devoured by others.

[45] Let us also notice the last part of this Gospel, what the gathering and the preserving of the broken pieces that remained over, teach us; for it is God's pleasure that we do not squander his gifts uselessly; but be

economical and prudent with them, and use the abundance which he gives faithfully for our benefit and needs, and preserve them for the future when we may further have use for them. That is honoring the precious food and not permitting the crumbs to lay under the table; just as our fathers taught their children from this example and added the proverb: “He who saves when he has will find something when he needs it,” etc.

[46] For it is a malignant, shameless vice and great contempt of the gifts of God, that the world is now over-flooded everywhere with cloisters, pomp and expenditure of money for everything far beyond its ability to pay. From this then must indeed follow such robbing, stealing, usury, hoarding and pinching by which the country and the people, rulers and subjects, are ruined as a punishment. For in this no one will be less than another, and neither will the lords allow themselves to be checked, nor are they able to check others; for since they mass together one vice upon another, so must we be visited with one punishment after another.

[47] St. Paul says, 1 Timothy 6:17, “The living God giveth us richly all things to enjoy.” That is certainly true if we use them as given to enjoy, and we should not shamefully expend and destroy that which we have in abundance and cannot enjoy either in our need or in our pleasure, and even if such is expended, ravished and destroyed in an unchristian manner, and later the poor have their little tort, from their teeth by our greed, gluttony and avarice. In this way we merit that God does not permit us to enjoy that which we have raked together, extorted and saved by pinching in great superabundance. For all this is hardly enough with which we can fill the open jaws of hell. No lord has so much land and so many people, no land so much money, that they are able to support one prince more; for a prince must have much more for banking, for sports, for display in dress, etc., than his people and country can afford. The jaws of avarice can devour property of a prince more than a whole city can give him, and yet no person is happy or better because of it. And all is devoured in a heap while there is lack everywhere in those things we need for the church and the school, for the government and the common advantage of all, for our own honor, nourishment and necessities.

[48] Summary. It cannot be called any more enjoying the gifts of God, since he gives them so richly and overabundantly to the end for us to enjoy, even if the Elbe and the Rhine flowed with nothing but gold, and all the

lords and princes could make their country nothing but mountains of silver. For man will not use them in the praise of God and enjoy them for himself, but only for the dishonor of God and for the destruction of the blessings given. No one has any thought about advising the saving of anything for posterity, but all live as if they would gladly destroy everything at once. In all this work of destruction he will also help us, since we wish nothing different. The explanation of this history is sufficiently treated in the Postil sermon for the Sunday Laetare, where you may review it.

Eighth Sunday after Trinity. Christ's Warning Concerning False Prophets.

Text: Matthew 7:15-23.

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done

many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Matthew 7:15-23

[1] As the Lord in the three previous chapters, the 5th, 6th and 7th, explains the commandments of God, he finally concludes with these words: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them,” 5:12. This is a Christian doctrine, and the sum total of all Christianity. Immediately follows this Gospel lesson, in which the Lord exercises the office of a good shepherd and teacher, and warns us to beware of false prophets. As though he would say: Now you have heard the truth, from henceforth therefore beware of other doctrines. For it is certain that false teachers and false prophets will arise wherever this Word is preached.

[2] We must boldly consider the two kinds of doctrine, the true and good, and the false and erroneous, and that they will always accompany each other, for thus it has been from the beginning, and thus it will continue to the end of the world. Hence it will not do for us to creep along in silence, and resort to a safe and secure manner of life. The evil teachings of men and the doctrines of devils, and all our enemies oppose us without ceasing, and hence we dare not think that the issue is settled. We are not yet across the river. Therefore the Lord diligently warns us and says: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”

[3] We should well consider this passage, for Christ our Lord here commands and gives all Christians the power to be judges of all doctrine, and he gives them power to judge what is right and what is not right. It is now well on a thousand years that this passage has been perverted by false Christians, so that we have had no power to judge, but had to accept what the Pope and the councils determined, without any judgment of our own.

[4] Now this Gospel here overthrows the very foundation of popery and of all councils, for we are not bound to keep what the Pope commands and men decree. Therefore I say again, firmly grasp what this Gospel teaches, for the authority has never been given either to the Pope or councils, or anyone else, to sit and determine what is faith. For Christ says: “Beware of

false prophets.” Either the Gospel lies, or the Pope and the councils do. Christ says we have the right to judge all doctrines, and whatever is proposed for us to keep or to reject. Here the Lord does not speak to the Pope, but to all Christians. And as the doctrine is proclaimed to all: “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do even so to them;” so likewise the words exclude no one: “Beware of false prophets.” From which it clearly follows that I may indeed judge of the doctrine.

[5] Hence I can say: Pope, you together with the councils have resolved, and now I have to decide whether I may accept it or not. Why? Because you will not stand and answer for me when I die, but I must see to it myself how I stand before God, so that I may be certain of my fate.

[6] For you must be so certain in regard to the matter, that it is God’s Word, as certain and more certain than you are that you are living, for on this alone your conscience must rest. Even though all men should come, yea, even the angels and all the world, and pass a resolution, if you cannot grasp it and decide for yourself, you are lost; for you dare not base your decision on the Pope or anyone else; you must yourself be prepared so that you can say: this God says, and that he does not say; this is right, and that is wrong, otherwise it is not possible for you to stand.

[7] For when you are about to die, and you rely on the Pope and the councils and say: The Pope said this, the councils have resolved that, the holy fathers Augustine and Ambrose have thus determined, then the devil can easily put a hole in your drum and insinuate: What if this were false? What if they had erred? And when such a temptation enters your mind, you are already overcome. For this reason you must act conscientiously, so that you can boldly and defiantly say: This is God’s Word, on this I will risk body and life, and a thousand necks, if I had so many. This St. Peter also means when he says in his first Epistle 1 Peter 4:11: “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.” And St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:3-5: “And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling; and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

[8] Then they began to say: Yes, but how can we know what is God’s Word, and what is right or wrong? This we must learn from the Pope and

the councils. Very well then, let them conclude and say what they please, yet I will reply, you cannot put your confidence in that nor thus satisfy your conscience, for you must determine this matter yourself, for your very life depends upon it. Therefore God must speak to your heart: This is God's Word; otherwise you are undecided.

[9] But our bishops, Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod insist upon it and rage so terribly, that a person must think them insane. They bring forth St. Augustine's declaration: I would not believe the Gospel, if the honor of the church did not move me; and think they have already won. Then you answer: What does it concern us whether St. Augustine or Jerome, St. Peter or St. Paul, or even the archangel Gabriel from heaven, who is still greater, said it; yet it will profit me nothing, for I must have God's Word, I will only hear what God says.

[10] And God commands this Word to be told you through men, and especially has he permitted it to be proclaimed and written for you by the Apostles; for St. Peter and St. Paul do not preach their own word, but God's Word, as Paul himself testifies in 1 Thessalonians 2:13: "When ye receive the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." Surely, a person can preach the Word to me, but no one is able to put it into my heart except God alone, who must speak to the heart, or all is vain; for when he is silent, the Word is not spoken. Hence no one shall draw me from the Word which God teaches me. Of this I must be as certain as two and three make five, for this is so certain, that if all the councils would say otherwise, I know they lie. Again, that a yard is longer than a half a yard is certain, even though all the world denied it, I still know that it cannot be otherwise. Who shall determine this for me? No one but the truth alone, which is so entirely and wholly certain, that no one can deny it.

[11] Therefore you must come so far as to say: This is true, no man shall persuade me differently. When you hear: Thou shalt not kill; and again: Thou shalt do to others as you would have them do to you; then you must know in the face of all councils, that this is the teaching of Christ, although all men said otherwise. So also this doctrine: You cannot help yourself, but Christ is your Savior, who has obtained for you the forgiveness of your sins; this you must know and confess in your heart that it is true; and if you are

not conscious of it, then you have no faith, and the Word only hangs about your ears and swims on your tongue like foam on water, as Hosea the prophet says, Hosea 10:7: “As for Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the waters.” All this you must now believe, not as a word that Peter preached, but that God has commanded you to believe. All this I say therefore, in order that we may return to the Gospel and observe where the foundation has its source, that ye must be judges, and have the power to judge over all things that are offered you; hence I can and dare not build on any man, for I must answer for myself when death comes.

[12] Consequently do not allow yourselves to be persuaded that you must believe what the Pope says or the councils decree. When you know God, then you have the proper rule of judgment, the measure and rule by which you can judge all the doctrines of the fathers; namely, when you know that Christ is your Savior, who rules us sinners. So when one now comes and says: You must become a monk, and do so and so, if you want to be saved, for faith alone is not sufficient for salvation; then you can truly and assuredly say: You lie, your doctrine is false; for whoever believes in Christ shall be saved. Who teaches you this? Faith in your heart, which believes this alone and nothing else. Therefore no one can beware of false doctrine unless he be spiritual. For Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 2:15: “But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.” So no one can judge false doctrine, but the spiritual man.

[13] Hence it is very foolish for the councils to wish to determine and establish what a man must believe, when there is often not a single man present whoever tasted the least of the divine Spirit. So it was in the Council of Nice, when they undertook to enact laws for the spiritual orders that they should not marry, which was all false because it has no foundation in the Word of God. Then a single man arose, by the name of Paphnutius, and overthrew the whole affair and said: Not so, that is not Christian. Then the entire council, in which undoubtedly were many distinguished and learned individuals, were compelled to drop the resolution, and give way to this simple and honest man. For God is a great enemy to high titles and human wisdom, hence he allows them at times to be handled roughly, and puts them to shame in their speculations, that the truth of the proverb may appear: The learned are the most perverted.

[14] Thus we are to remain free judges, to have the power to decide and judge, to accept or reject everything that the Pope establishes and the councils determine. But when we accept anything, we should so accept it, that it harmonizes with our faith and the Scriptures; and not just because the Papists say it. This St. Paul teaches in Romans 12:7' "Whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith." For all prophecy based on works, that does not lead to Christ alone as our only comfort, precious as it may be, is not according to the proportion of faith; as for instance to rely upon the revelations of hobgoblins, the mass, pilgrimages, fastings and the merits of saints. Even here so many holy fathers have erred like Gregory, Augustine and others, in that they take from us this right of judgment, for this torment and misery began far back in history, that we must believe the Pope and the councils. Hence you must be able to say: God said this, and that God has not said. As soon as you say: A man has said this, or the councils have determined that, then you are building on sand.

[15] Hence there is no judge upon the earth in spiritual things concerning Christian doctrine, except the person who has in his heart the true faith, whether it be a man or woman, young or old, maid or servant, learned or unlearned. For God is no respecter of persons, since all are alike precious to him, who live according to his commandments, Acts 10:34, hence they alone have the right to judge.

[16] But if one should come who knew the sense of the Word better than I, then I should close my mouth and keep still, and receive knowledge from him. This is what St. Paul desires in speaking to the Corinthians, Corinthians 14:29-30: "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge. If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace." That is to say, if the hearer knows and understands more than the preacher, then the preacher should allow him the privilege to speak, and he should hold his peace. In the worldly government of course the rule holds, that the older is wiser than the younger, a learned man than a layman; but in spiritual things a child era servant, a common woman or man can have the grace of God. as well as an old person or a lord, a priest or the Pope. To sum up, let no learned person take from you the right to judge, for you have this right as well as he.

[17] Now let me tell you who the false prophets of our times are. For no one can judge or know this unless he has the Spirit. But the brief summary

is, though much may be said on the subject, it: is the Pope with his entire government; for they all have taught what is opposed to God. A lengthy proof of this is not necessary, for you can observe this nearly everywhere you turn. Yet we will give a few examples. God commands in Exodus 20:12: The child shall honor father and mother and be subject unto them. But the Pope has approved the view that a monk or a nun is no longer under their father, and says: The child is now under spiritual dominion and in the service of God; God is more than father and mother; hence it is no longer bound to serve father and mother, and the father is bound to call it a nobleman by grace.

[18] Well, when I ask, what is the service of God? they reply: Dear Sir: It is the ringing of bells; lighting of candles; putting on beautiful robes for the celebration of mass, and more such similar monkey tricks. Yes, indeed, you have surely hit the mark! But I say to honor father and mother and to keep God's commandments, that is to serve God. Therefore you must say here that Antichrist has taught such things, and boldly say and declare he lies. Do you not see here how God's commandment is opposed to the obedience of priors and abbots? God gave you father and mother that you should honor them, serve them and be subject unto them. The Pope gives you another, whom you must honor more than the father God has given you. If this is keeping God's commandment, I do not know what it is.

[19] And so it is further with the other commandments of God. Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not hate or be angry. This God has commanded. But the Pope teaches thus: A man must defend the property of the clergy and the treasures of the church, and if he cannot do it, he shall call to his aid the sword of the civil government to protect the papal chair and St. Peter's inheritance. Behold, thus these commandments are opposed to each other, which I hope everyone easily understands. So also in regard to the married state.

[20] God commanded, Genesis 2:24, that man and wife should be one flesh, and that no man should put them asunder. Now the Pope has given many commandments contrary to this. For instance, when a woman takes a husband who is not baptized, the marriage is to be dissolved.

[21] Then again when those in spiritual orders marry, they are to dissolve their marriage, according to the demands of their order. Again, if

anyone falls into the sin of incest and marries either her friend or any of his friends, the Pope commands that they must stay together, yet both must live chaste together. Here he lets the two sexes lie naked in bed together, and neither shall have the right to require of the other the duties of married life. This is nothing else than putting straw and fire together, and then forbidding them to burn.

[22] God says further: Thou shalt not steal. But who steals more than the Pope and his servants? They are the greatest thieves, because they appropriate unto themselves daily all the treasures of the world.

[23] Again, look at the first commandment, which says that we should trust in God alone, and call upon him alone. But their entire doctrine is nothing else than to lead us to trust in human works, and to command us to call upon the saints. Do you not see that such people are the real false prophets, of whom we must beware? For they abolish the commandment which God has given. Now follows the other part of this Gospel where Christ speaks thus: “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

[24] As I said before, no one knows others by their fruits, except he who is spiritually born again. Therefore, he who has not the Spirit, cannot have this knowledge. Let no one think that he can know this from the fruits unless he be spiritual. The fruit by which we are to know them is unbelief. One can know them to some extent by open sins, yet this judgment is deceptive, for Christians also fall.

[25] Hence, the true fruit by which they are known is an inner fruit, here I must have the Holy Spirit and judge according to his guidance. The fleshly eye and reason are not sufficient. You may see two persons go to the Lord's Supper, the one is a believer, the other not, and yet their external work is the same. What then makes the difference? Faith in the heart and unbelief, because the one regards it as a good work, the other not. In short, from external works you can decide nothing. Tauler also acknowledged that believers and unbelievers were often so similar in external appearance, that

no one could distinguish them, nor is reason able to judge unless we have the Spirit of God. Yea, the unbelievers often appear far more excellent in their works than believers, as it is written in Job 39:13: “Givest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich?” Yet the peacock can fly and the ostrich cannot. So also the believer and unbeliever are indeed similar to each other in their external appearance, but in their hearts they are quite different.

[26] However, by the fruits of the Spirit true prophets are known, which fruits St. Paul mentions to the Galatians 5:20: “Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” Yet these fruits no one can see or know without the Holy Spirit. For this reason the decision and judgment of spiritual things should not be based on external things, as on the work and person, but on the inner condition of the heart. One knows another indeed by his fruits, but only in the Spirit. The fruits and good works do not make anyone good or pious; but he must first be good and pious at heart. As the apples do not make the tree, for the tree must first be there before the fruit.

[27] If I understand this, then I notice there is no work so bad that it will necessarily condemn a man, nor none so good that it will save him. But faith alone saves us and unbelief alone condemns us. For one to commit adultery, the deed does not condemn him, for the adultery only shows that he has fallen from the faith, this condemns him, otherwise it could not be possible. Nor does anything make one good but faith, and nothing makes one wicked but unbelief. Therefore our Lord also says, that the tree shall be cut down. He does not say that the fruit shall be cut down. Thus the works of love do not make me good, but faith alone, in which I do these works and bear this fruit.

[28] Thus we must begin with faith. But the Pope begins with works, and commands persons to do good works that they may become good. Just as if I should say to the tree: If you want to be a good tree, then begin and bear apples. Just as though I could bear apples before I was an apple tree. But I must say: If you want to bear apples, then begin and be an apple tree. Hence the tree must be there before it can produce fruit.

[29] From all this it follows now that there is no sin on earth except unbelief, as Christ says in John 16:8-9: “And the Holy Ghost, when he is

come, will convict the world in respect of sin; because they believe not on me.”

Eighth Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. Beware of False Prophets.

Text: Matthew 7:15-23.

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Matthew 7:15-23

[1] Christ our Lord preached this part of the Gospel in concluding his long sermon on the mount. After teaching his disciples all things necessary for them to know, he concludes by warning them against false prophets, as all good ministers are accustomed to do in closing their sermons, exhorting the people to abide in the true doctrine, and to beware of false teachers. As Paul also did when he departed from Ephesus, saying among other things: “Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord, which he hath purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Wherefore watch ye, remembering, that by the space of three years, I ceased not to admonish everyone night and day with tears.” Acts 20:28-31

[2] Thus time and again, in all his Epistles, he adds an admonition, that they should beware of false teachers and false apostles, as Peter also warns us in his second Epistle, 2:1-3: “But there arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also, there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their lascivious doings, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And in covetousness shall they with reigned words make merchandise of you: whose sentence now from of old lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.” So there shall at all times be false prophets and teachers.

[3] In this manner also Christ here proceeds. Having finished his sermon he warns and admonishes his disciples and the people, ever to hold fast to what he told them, and watch that they be not misled by false teachers, and says: “Beware of false prophets.”

[4] In the first place we perceive from this that we must be prepared, because it will always happen, that after the true ministers come the false ones; yea, they will indeed even enter alongside of them and mingle with them. What other need was there that Christ should so faithfully warn us, saying: Beware, take care; if he had known that the doctrine would always remain pure? Therefore he warns us to be assured that we will have false prophets, and does this especially in closing this sermon. We have a similar example in the book of Judges 2:10, when they had died, whom God gave

the people as teachers and judges, who knew what the will of God was, what was acceptable and not acceptable to him, then immediately the people of Israel began to turn from God and his Word. One worshiped this idol, another that, and they were divided into factions so that they fell from the true doctrine, and departed from the ways of their fathers.

[5] So it happened in the days of the Apostles. Then the church was still pure, but as soon as they died who held fast to the pure doctrine, then came the false prophets and the evil spirit, who desired to change everything, as the Epistles of St. Paul sufficiently show. And inasmuch as this is so, and as we can expect nothing else, Christ our Lord warns us here as a faithful shepherd and bishop should, that we beware, so that when the Gospel comes, that we hold firmly to it and not depart from it, though it cost our life and our treasures. For it cannot be otherwise, as the time passes than that there will be changes.

[6] Thus it will also happen with us. God be praised; we, as well as other cities, now have the Gospel in all its richness and purity, as men have never had it since the times of the Apostles. But as soon as we and others, who now assist in preaching it, are no longer with you, you will have other and false preachers, for they already begin to make their appearance. May the Lord consume them with the Spirit of his mouth. 2 Thessalonians 2:8. And blessed are they, who in accordance with our Gospel lesson will be diligently on their guard and will not believe every wind of doctrine, but will remain constantly firm in what they have learned. This Christ teaches first by the word, "Beware," be warned, as though he would say: You certainly are now in possession of it.

[7] Here you may say: Why does the Lord do this? Why does he permit false prophets to come among the faithful, and follow the true ministers? Is he not strong and powerful enough to prevent it, so that the Gospel might remain pure and in all its force? Verily, he could indeed do this; but he does not, and for this reason, that he might prove those who are his, and punish the unthankful. For St. Paul says, 1 Corinthians 11:19: "For there must be also factions among you, that they that are approved may be made manifest among you;" that is, in order that those whose faith has been proved may become known, so that their spirit and word may appear and find a field of influence.

[8] Since God gives us his Word, his Spirit and his gifts, he does not want us to be lazy, sleepy or idle. For if you have the true Word and the right understanding of it, the world will rise to oppose you. Then, on the other hand, the devil will labor to tear you from it, so that not only the tyrants of the world will persecute it with the sword, but also our own reason and the wisest heads in the world, in order that God may exercise you in his Word, and give work to the Spirit whom he has bestowed upon you, that you may learn that God's wisdom is more excellent than the wisdom of this world, and that God's strength is stronger than the strength and power of this world, which you will not be able to learn without a struggle like this.

[9] When God permits a faction to oppose thee, he would thereby stir thee up, saying: Defend yourself, grasp firm hold of the Word and test God's wisdom and the powers of his Word, and learn how great is the folly of this world. Thus the power and wisdom of God's Word will become manifest, that you may learn that it cannot be conquered by human power and wisdom; but that it will conquer all power, and put to shame all knowledge and wisdom, in order to awaken the truth and to show forth what is right, that the people may experience it. This is one reason God sends divisions and sects among us, who crowd in edgewise, as though they were useful and served to make the Word, the truth and spirit better and clearer; however in other respects, divisions and sects do harm.

[10] Another reason is to punish the unthankful, who will not accept the Word, lest they be converted and saved, as Christ says to the Jews in John 5:43: "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." And as St. Paul says, 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11: "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

[11] Thus severely God punishes this sin, which we regard so lightly, for he punishes it with blindness and error, which are the greatest sins on earth. Men regard it as a small matter, that we now again have the Gospel by God's grace. For how many are there who ever thank God for it? We forget it, cast it to the winds and become lazy and careless. It is approved by none; no one tastes it; no one lifts up his hands in thankfulness to God for it. We

are so very richly overloaded with the Gospel that we become satiated with it, and St. Paul has rightly prophesied, 2 Timothy 4:3-4: “For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts and will draw away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables.”

[12] Here and there throughout the whole Scriptures we see how greatly it offends God, who regards it as the greatest sin when his Word is despised; which is so dear and precious, that it cost him the blood of his own dear Son, and we cast it to the wind as though it were of little importance. For this reason he sends us the severest calamities, which cannot be compared to the present calamity now going on in the world, that during and after the peasants’ war so many have been slain, of which there seems to be no end, for who knows when it will cease? Yet all this is but playwork in comparison to the misfortune when men are hardened, blinded and misled by false prophets, by which heaven is closed against them and hell opens to receive them, and everlasting life is lost forever. What does it matter, as die we must at any rate, if we are killed by the sword? But that the soul should be forever given to the devil, this is an eternal calamity, an everlasting misfortune and torment.

[13] I would gladly prevent it, if I could, by preaching, praying and writing. Now God has begun to visit us with the temporal and bodily calamity of the sword, but a far greater plague will come when the Holy Gospel is taken away from Germany. Then false teachers will be sent and will come to us. One will teach this, the other that. Then the kingdom of heaven will be locked up, and the false preachers will not allow it to be opened. On this account it would indeed be well worthwhile for us to pray earnestly. But our hearts are cold, for our walls are not yet on fire. Nevertheless, the devil intends to drown all Germany in blood and take away the Gospel, unless he be prevented and hindered by the prayers of pious Christians.

[14] When the devil saw he could not accomplish anything by the Pope and his false apostles, he now begins to rage through the peasants and the rebels, and will entirely take the Gospel from us and make us its enemies, and afterwards cut off our heads and cast our souls into hell. For this reason I give warning, that we should not think so little of this matter but open our eyes, not regarding it merely as the word of a man. It is a precious Word,

and if we sleep and snore and do not keep awake to hear it, we need not be angry when he strikes us on the head by sending us false prophets, but remember that we have richly deserved it.

[15] Already there are but few who stand steadfastly. Sectarianism is rampant, and few there be who contend against it and preserve the true doctrine; their names could all be written on a little card. What shall come to pass when once it breaks out with force? Therefore let no one consider it child's play, for the Word is not an insignificant Word. It stands for something. The words of Christ leave an impression; they are meant for the whole world, when he says: Beware, be warned! that we receive the Word with fear and trembling hearts. So you have now heard why divisions and sects arise, namely, that those who are tempted and tried may become the more glorious, and that the others, the unthankful ones who despise the Word, may be punished. The Gospel lesson further says: "Who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves."

[16] No one sends them. They come of themselves. This is the true description of false prophets, that they force themselves into the ministry. Some, in order to find their bread and butter, which I do not consider of much importance, for even there they will not find a paradise. For those who intrude into this office with the pretension that they do so on account of Christian love, for the sake of the truth, and because the Holy Spirit urges them, and that they do it for the sake of love and the salvation of souls, and that they seek nothing else but their salvation; beware of all such people, for the devil has most certainly sent them, and not God. For those whom God sends are called or compelled to it. They do not boast greatly of themselves. Yet, when they do boast, they prove it by miracles. Hence beware, because the Lord says, they will come, not being sent or called, but they come and the devil calls them.

[17] But do they not boast they have the Holy Spirit? I answer: Whoever would persuade you that the Holy Spirit moves him, and that he does it from a Christian suggestion, say to him: As you boast so much of the Spirit, give me a proof. You bear witness of yourself, and the Scriptures have forbidden me to believe you on your own testimony alone, for even Christ, the living Son of God would not bear witness of himself, as we read in the Gospel of John 5:31f. But when he did so he also did miracles besides, so that men might know that his Word and doctrine were true. And inasmuch

as you say you have the Holy Spirit, give me a proof of your Spirit; prove it by real signs that a man may believe you, for here a divine witness is necessary to prove the Spirit of God, so that there may be two of you, yourself and God. This is a divine call, and unless it is forthcoming, cast the other away and let it go to pieces.

[18] And even though I grant that such a one is really a true spirit, and has the Holy Spirit; even then you must not hear him. Nor will God be greatly angered at you for this, as he has commanded you to keep his ordinances, to ask for two witnesses, and to call for a miracle. For if he sends you one with a true spirit, he does it to test you, to see whether you will keep his ordinances, receiving no one unless he gives you a proof beforehand. Therefore say: I do not want you, even though you have the right Spirit. For God desires thus to prove me, whether I will abide by his order. Hence he is also satisfied and well pleased, when you do not accept his Spirit. For he tests us by offering us the contrary, to see whether you on this account would depart from his Word. He acts like a father who plays with his child, whom he has given an apple and takes it away again, in order to see whether the child loves him or not.

[19] Then give heed here, whether he be right or wrong, and say: I will not go with you, I care not what you preach, I only ask whether you have been sent, or whether you came of yourself? If you came of yourself I will not hear you, even though you have the Holy Spirit. For the devil in the Gospel can also say: Let us alone; hold, "what have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Nazarene? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." Mark 1:24. Thus the common crowd also cries out: Here is the true and faithful Word of God, which this man preaches, let us hear him. But see thou first whence he cometh. The devil also can preach, but he does it to provide himself an opportunity to win adherents. Then he comes forth and sows his poisonous seed, so that the condition becomes worse than in the beginning. Hence these are nothing but warnings, by which Christ warns us against those who come of themselves. Therefore wait, until they are sent or called. For he drives and urges those whom he wants, so that in short they must come whether they will or not.

[20] The other call is the request of the congregation or of the government to go. This is a call of love, which does not come down from heaven nor out of faith, but flows from love. For you and I owe it to each

other to love our neighbor as ourselves. For when he needs my assistance and asks for it, I am in duty bound to come to his help, for the Word of God commands that I should serve my neighbor. Then this call does not require a miracle, because they themselves desire it, and the Word of God urges me thereto. This is to be in demand, to be called and to be driven. That which comes from heaven is called a sending, when the Holy Ghost comes and performs miracles. To the others, whether they boast of the Spirit or the flesh, reply “I care nothing for that” As our fanatics at present boast, that they have devoured the Holy Spirit, feathers and all, and are thoroughly filled with the Spirit and say, that the Holy Ghost has spoken to them from heaven, and has revealed something special to them, and the like. I myself cannot boast very much of the Spirit. They become Spirit all too soon for me. I boast of the Spirit of love, otherwise I am nothing but a poor, carnal sinner. I too ought to know something of the Spirit of which they boast. But alas, they are all too highly spiritualized for me.

[21] However, what is this Christ says: They come in sheep’s clothing? These sheep’s clothing are, that they make an external exhibition of all things the true Christians and ministers teach. For we, who are the lambs of Christ, wear the sheep’s wool. This is not only the works, the showy hypocritical life they lead, praying a great deal and wearing gray gowns, walking with downcast countenances, carrying a pater noster about their necks, fasting often and going to church a great deal; but the worst of all is that they make use of God’s Word and the Holy Scriptures, which in the prophets are called God’s wool and linen. For preaching together with admonition and Scripture passages are the true clothing with which they would adorn and array themselves, saying: Here is Christ, here is Baptism, here is the name of God, here is he who quotes the Scriptures, which is the Word of God, and immediately they add to all this God’s name, God’s Spirit and Christ.

[22] This then, is coming in sheep’s clothing, namely, so to preach and to quote the Scriptures that it may appear as the true doctrine; for it is not said that they come in wolves’ clothing, or with teeth and spears. They do not publicly preach anything destructive or without Scripture, otherwise people might recognize them, as for instance when they preached Aristotle in the high schools, and common law or the law of the emperor and said, “There is no God in Christianity.” Now, however, they do not only adorn

themselves with external works, but also with the Holy Scriptures, with which God clothes and covers our souls; for if they would not do this, the unthankful would not be thus blinded, and we would not be so wretchedly deceived.

[23] Therefore it is true as men say, the holy Bible is a book for heretics, that is, it is a book that heretics dare to claim for themselves most of all. For there is no other book which they so wickedly misuse, than just this very book. And there never was a heresy so bad or gross, that they did not try to patch up or cover with the Scriptures. Just as men say, God is the God of rogues, because they, who are the largest crowd in the world, claim for themselves the name of God, not that God is to blame, but the rogues, who thus take the holy name of God in vain. Thus the holy Bible must be a book for heretics, not that the holy Bible is to blame, but the rogues, who so shamefully misuse it. Should I for this reason neglect the Bible and not read it? By no means! As men are accustomed to say in the proverb: "In God's name all misfortune begins," which is true. Well then, I will not use the name of God at all, and guard myself against misfortune. But what talk is this? What blame can attach to a name, which is given us in order that we might be saved? God will surely punish such rogues and knaves. Thus the Bible is a book for heretics, but I will not for this reason cast it away, but so much the more study and learn it, because these rogues oppose it.

[24] Therefore let now every person be thus well prepared and thoroughly equipped, that he may not so easily be led astray by their showy life, although they even attempt to quote Scripture to you, for ravening wolves are most certainly back of it. And although they think they feed and satisfy you, they actually rend you, destroy and devour you. However, without spiritual eyes no one will be able so soon to decide or judge of this matter. The crowd and common people will not do it; the largest crowd despises the Gospel and are unthankful, while only the smallest flock accept it and can appreciate it. I have often said, and will always say it, that the greatest and most difficult contest is, for a person to contend with the Scriptures against the Scriptures; to strike aside another man's sword and wrench it out of his fist, to slay him with his own sword; to take from him his weapon, and with it strike him again. This no one can accomplish, except he who is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, so as to be able to recognize these rogues.

[25] You have often heard from me the safest doctrine and rule, by which to prove the spirits, as John tells us in his first Epistle 1 John 4:1-3. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. And every spirit that confesseth not Jesus, is not of God: and this is the spirit of the Antichrist." The other rule is given by Paul in Romans 12:6: "Whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith." That is, all teaching must harmonize and agree with faith alone, so that nothing else be taught but faith. It follows that he, who has not faith, does not know Christ, and cannot judge of doctrine, for to do this the carnal minded are not required, who are worldly wise and smart, but pious, spiritual hearts. Many say: Christ is a man who is the Son of God, born of a pure, chaste virgin, became man, died, and rose again from the dead, and so forth; all this is nothing. But that he is Christ, that is, that he was given for us, without any of our works; that he without any of our merit has earned for us God's Spirit, and made us children of God, so that we might have a gracious God, and with him become lords over all things in heaven and on earth, and have eternal life besides through Christ: this is the faith, and this means rightly to know Jesus Christ. This is the touchstone, the level and the scales, by which all doctrine must be weighed, tried and judged. The others also know what to call Christ, that he is the Son of God, died, rose again from the dead, with what follows. For this is the real sheep's clothing.

[26] But pay attention to their dilemma: If they say Christ died for us, was buried and rose again and the like, then they must also conclude: therefore our works are of no avail. This point they will not touch, but flee from it, like the devil flees from incense or the cross, as it is said; although he does not really run away from it so very much. He permits them to preach that Christ was born, died and rose again, and sitteth at the right hand of his heavenly Father; but when in addition they also preach: thus and thus you must do, this and that you must omit; this is the devil who mingles his poison with the truth. As the Pope writes and puts on the sheep's clothing in his bulls, namely, that Christ by his death and shedding his blood has merited for us that we are the children of God and are saved, and have eternal life; but to all this he adds: Whoever is not obedient to the Roman church, is a child of perdition; but he, who is obedient and does

what the church of Rome commands and appoints, shall be saved, his soul shall rise straight up to heaven. Does not the Pope require his rules to be more strictly observed than the Gospel? Only compare them and see. If the death of Christ does this, then my works cannot do it. It would be quite another matter if he would preach: You must obey me out of Christian love, but not to be saved thereby, for this the blood of Christ alone can do. But this nut he never tries to crack.

[27] Therefore I warn you once again, to think of this when I am no longer with you in the flesh, and closely observe their doctrine whether they preach Christ correctly, that is, whether they boast of their own works before God: then you will be able to judge. I often said and repeat it, that you will find them always requiring some good little deed, not thereby to serve the people, but in order to merit salvation, that whoever does and keeps this shall be saved, but he who does not observe and do this, shall be damned. Thus they force you to trust in works, as the fanatics drove the mob to break up images by saying: Whoever breaks an image or tears down a painting does a good work, and proves himself a Christian. Soon the crowd rushed forth, thrust and broke to pieces by the wholesale, for they all wanted to be Christians, just as though the Jews, the heathen and the Turks, and the worst rogues could not do the same things.

[28] Such fanatics do not destroy confidence in works, but rather give more value to works and permit confidence in them to be retained. Work there, work here, only cut out of it all confidence and trust, and do not put your trust in works as in a god, but let them only serve your neighbor, that confidence in your works may be in your neighbor, that is, that he feels certain you will do him every kindness, and that you have like confidence in him. Your confidence for your salvation must rest alone in Christ, for which you dare not trust in your works a hair's breadth. When they preach thus, it agrees with faith. If it is according to the proportion of faith, then Christ is not annihilated nor broken to pieces, but remains whole in knowledge as he really is. And although the devil also pretends that he preaches Christ through his own apostles, do not believe him, he only seeks to win your soul through deceit and cunning, and will deceive you. Well, let this warning be sufficient; but it does not help any [among those who will not hear it]; [he who shall be lost, will be lost]. Yet it aids those who are to

be reformed. Here follows the third proof and way of knowing the spirits, and reads: “Ye shall know them by their fruits.”

[29] These fruits are their works and behavior. Yet spiritual eyes are needed to see this, that one may learn well to know the really good works, which Paul mentions to the Galatians 5:22, where he says: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control.” These are the true fruits of the Spirit. But the works of the flesh are “fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revelings, and such like.” Galatians 5:19-21.

[30] Now, take heed rightly to distinguish works from one another. In all their works you will not find a single spark of love. You will indeed find that they are friendly within their own sect, calling one another Christians and brethren; but there is nothing in them but the very poison of the devil. They have neither mercy nor patience, nor friendship for anyone who is not of their sect. For if they could destroy us body and soul in an hour or a moment they would do it. This fruit flesh and blood do not see, but in the meantime, they wear gray gowns and belong to a quiet order, and observe the same rule and habit.

[31] These are not works of love; for works of love are such as are exercised toward the needy, and toward our enemies, when we are merciful to sinners, instruct and teach the ignorant, and serve the poor bodily with our goods and honor, as Christ teaches in Matthew 25:35f. You will not find these works in any false prophet. Anyone may indeed conduct himself like a spiritual man by his extraordinary behavior, like barefooted and Carthusian monks do. But what benefit is all this to me? And that others break down cloisters and images, what good does that do their neighbor? All this merely makes a show and when you view it superficially there seems something in it; but there is no benefit in it. Love, however, requires works that will do some good.

[32] Now watch and see if the false prophets give anything to the poor. To be sure, they accept gifts, being greedy and stingy. But I have not yet seen any who give cheerfully, for they only want to have, and that we should give to them. Dear me, ye golden friends, who would not like this?

You speak much of good works and a good life, and do not know what it is, namely, to be of use and benefit to your neighbor. From these fruits you may know them. Again, they do not only not assist anyone, nor help the poor, but rejoice and are glad at their neighbor's misfortunes. When one is in disgrace they will not protect him with their honor, nor help him out of his trouble, but plunge him still deeper down, spread the news and sing doggerels about him and laugh at him secretly besides.

[33] Again, when one falls into sin, they have no tender heart for him; their heart being hardened they enjoy their neighbor's fall and use it to set off their own goodness. What shall we say to sum up this matter? They have rough, bitter, poisonous hearts; they have a black, poisonous tongue, and can cut up everybody on their slaughter bench, give everyone a black mark and leave no one without blame; they judge, condemn and decry everyone, and think little of anyone's injury. Alas, what pious spirits we have here!

[34] Therefore open your eyes and see whether they do the works that are beneficial to men, and you will find out that you cannot gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles. A good grape on the vine does not devour itself nor us, but is eaten; it is useful only and harms no one. But no one enjoys the thorns; they prick, and scratch and injure everyone. Mark then, whether they do such works which benefit others. That they wear gray gowns and shirts of haircloth, that they lie on woolen cloth, creep into a corner; for all this let the devil thank them! If, however, they would lend me money in my distress and open their purses, and lend corn to those who have neither flour nor bread, into whose homes the sun enters before bread; here they are not found. Give me a coat, something to eat and drink; visit me when I am sick; comfort me in my sins; this might help me. Yes, you may wait until you find such a person, or come again in the morning!

[35] But to stand in the choir and howl and chant vociferously, to enjoy good easy days without work, to sleep, to feast and get drunk, all this they are willing to do. Oh! my dear, who could not do this? It would be easy to put a cap even on a donkey, girdle him with a rope, shave him a tonsure and stand him in a corner and make him fast and feast to the glory of the saints, so that in all things he may behave similarly to you and all your false works! So likewise, when I fall into disgrace, and become guilty of murder or adultery, there is no grace for me, and no one is so merciful as to help me

quiet and better my conscience, but they laugh at me, and all the world must know it, and have grand books written about it.

[36] So in their whole body and soul, you will be unable to find one single good work. They are hateful, envious, stingy; such fruits of the flesh will ye observe in them. Let them quote the Scriptures and pretend to be holy as much as they please, only observe whether their doctrine harmonizes with the proof of faith; and see to it that Christ be not dethroned, that his knowledge remain entire and undisturbed, and in the third place see whether they exercise good works toward their neighbor or not. This they will doubtless omit, for the devil can do no good work. This is what Christ the Lord means when he adds: “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.”

[37] Here we must notice what he says: “By their fruits ye shall know them.” He does not say: Ye shall make them out of their fruits. For whoever made a pear tree out of a pear, or a cherry tree out of a cherry? It is, however, the law of nature that the tree should make the fruit, an apple tree the apple, and so forth. The tree is known by its fruits, but is not made by its fruits. Just as Abraham when he offered his son Isaac was previously good and obedient, yet, it was said to him, Genesis 22:12: “Now I know that thou fearest God.” He does not say: Now you have become God-fearing; but by this work it is revealed and made known that you fear God.

[38] Hence these are two distinct things, to be or become something, and that something be made known, or revealed. There are many things that are known to God alone, but when it is revealed it also becomes known to man. Here Christ teaches that the fruits shall serve the purpose to know the tree, whether the tree be good or evil. Abraham became known by his works, as one who feared God and was pious and righteous. Therefore, before the fruits come they must be good, since they do nothing else but show forth the nature of the tree. To reveal a thing is by far a different matter from the existence of the thing itself. So my external works aid nothing to the end, that I am or become good, but make known and reveal the good treasure, and the heart in which it lies concealed. For this treasure that lies concealed in the heart, God desires to make known, and not to be left concealed.

[39] Thus in so far the works make us good, pure and holy externally before the people, but not internally before God. For this Christ and faith alone must do. Speaking in this manner, you will speak correctly and distinctly. However, if anyone is so stiff-necked and stubborn that he will not allow himself to be instructed, let him go, for we cannot give good advice to such people, nor is such preaching meant for them; but we seek hearts gone astray, who eagerly desire to be good and to understand it correctly; they also accept our instruction, and to them we preach. Hence he further says: “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”

[40] The work righteous are corrupt trees. But do they not perform many good works? Indeed, what is a good work? Here let me ask, whether their hands, pockets, cellars and farms are at the service of mankind to help them in body and soul? But they cannot. Again, a good tree bringeth not forth evil fruit, that is, a Christian, be he ever so weak and helpless, he will do his neighbor no harm. Do not understand me to say that he cannot fall; for David also was a good tree, and yet he fell, 2 Samuel 12, but he did not become a corrupt tree. As long as a Christian is true and remains in the faith, you must not expect he will do anything to harm his neighbor, but much rather to help him. And if at times things should occur as with David, you should not be offended at them, for God permits such mishaps to occur, that his saints at times stumble and suffer, by which their faith may be strengthened and increased, and that they may learn their own weakness. So far as the tree is good, so little is the harm it does; and the more evil the tree is, the greater harm it does. We are not yet wholly good, but we labor to the end that day by day we may become better. But our consolation is that which the Lord adds, saying: “Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”

[41] Sects and factions will not last, if we are only able to await their destruction; but a faithful minister will be victorious and will endure. For the Word of God abideth forever. Isaiah 40:8. But what the devil sows runs like a mad dog, as David the prophet says in the first Psalm: “The ungodly shall not stand,” they will be driven hither and thither, and will be dispersed like dust on the threshing floor. Thus they now run and break forth, but at length they will be cut down and cast into the fire. Here he closes and says: “Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

[42] This is one kind of knowledge, as I said. Paul speaks of a different kind in Romans 12:2; and John in his first Epistle, 1 John 4:1 — that we should criticize and judge their doctrine according to the knowledge of Christ, also whether their teaching is in harmony with faith. But their works and life, of which he here speaks, we must measure and judge according to love. But whoever has not the first kind of knowledge and judgment, will easily be deceived by works.

Eighth Sunday after Trinity. Third Sermon. Instructions Concerning False Prophets.

Text: Matthew 7:15-23.

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Matthew 7:15-23

[1] Christ our Lord preached this part of the Gospel in concluding his long sermon on the mount, When he had taught his disciples all they should know, he proceeds and warns them to be ever on their guard against false

doctrine; as all good ministers try and should do at the close of their sermons, namely, warn the people to hold fast to the true doctrine and beware of false teaching. Thus St. Paul also did, Acts 20:28-31, when he was about to depart from Ephesus, among other things, he said: "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Wherefore watch ye, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not to admonish everyone night and day with tears." Thus here and there in all his Epistles Paul always adds an admonition, to guard themselves against other teachings. Just as St. Peter also gives an admonition in his second Epistle, 2 Peter 2:1f, when he says: "But there arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their lascivious doings; by reason of whom the way of the truth shall be evil spoken of. And in coveteousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you; whose sentence now from of old lingereth not, and their destruction slumbereth not."

[2] Christ here proceeds in like manner. When he finished his sermon he warns his disciples and the people and admonishes them ever to remain faithful to what he had told them, and to be very careful not to be misled by false teachers, and says: "Beware of false prophets."

[3] First from this we are to understand that we are under obligation to reflect upon this fact and that it will always be that after the true preachers depart false teachers will come; yea, they will even enter along with and mingle with them. Otherwise, why were it necessary for Christ so faithfully to admonish us when he says: "Beware," take care! if he had known that all his teachings would continue pure? Therefore he gives us this warning, that we may be certain of false prophets appearing after the true and pure doctrine is preached. For it has come to pass in all periods of the world's history that after faithful and true ministers, prophets and rulers of God's people labored, others followed who corrupted the pure doctrine, faith and worship; as the Book of Judges 2:10f, also describes. When those were

gathered to their fathers whom God had given the people as teachers and judges, who knew the will of God, what was and what was not acceptable to him, immediately the people of Israel began to turn away from God and his Word. One worshiped this idol, another that, and they were divided into factions so that they fell from the true teachings and strayed from the ways of their fathers.

[4] So it was also in the times of the Apostles. Then the doctrine was yet pure; but when they died who held to their true teachings, false apostles and factious leaders came. who perverted everything and desired radical changes in all things, as the Epistles of St. Paul sufficiently show. Now, inasmuch as this is so, and we cannot expect anything else, Christ our Lord warns us here in the spirit of a true shepherd and bishop, that we beware while we have the Gospel preached in its purity and simplicity, that we hold firmly to it and depart not from it, even at the risk of losing our life and possessions. For it cannot be otherwise than that God's Word will not continue always pure and unadulterated in all generations.

[5] Thus it will come to pass also among us. God be praised, we and others have the Gospel in greater purity and abundance than at any time since the days of the Apostles. But when we and those who now assist to promote it are gathered to our fathers, you will have false teachers enough, as many have already commenced and they already bestir themselves. And blessed are they who are diligently on their guard according to this Gospel and believe not every wind of doctrine, but remain steadfast in what they have learned. This Christ first teaches here with the words: "Beware," be warned, as if to say: you will most certainly have to contend with false teachers.

[6] Here you may ask: Why does God permit false prophets to come among his pious people and be the successors of his true ministers? Is he not powerful and strong enough to prevent it, so that the Gospel may continue pure and in its power? Of course he is. But he permits it in order to prove and preserve his own people, and to punish the unthankful. It is as St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:19 says: "For there must be also factions among you, that they that are approved may be made manifest among you." This means, that those whose faith is approved may become manifest, so that their spirit and word appear, and testify that they are true.

[7] When God gives us his Word, his gifts and Spirit, it is not his will that we should be lazy, sleepy and idle. For if you have the true Word and its true meaning, the world will attack you on one side, and the devil will attempt to tear you from it on the other, not only by means of worldly tyrants who persecute the Word with the sword; but also by means of our own reason and the wisest people in the world. Thus God desires to develop you by his Word, and to give the Holy Spirit whom he has bestowed upon you something to do, so that you may learn that God's wisdom is wiser than the world's wisdom, that God's strength is stronger than the strength and power of the world, which you will not learn unless you pass through this conflict with false teachers.

[8] Wherever he permits the devil to create factions, he would thus stir you up, and say: Defend yourself, lay hold of the Word, and learn to experience God's wisdom and power against the wisdom of the world and the lies of Satan. Thus the strength and wisdom of God's Word will appear, that you may learn that it is not to be conquered with power and wisdom; but it conquers, and puts to shame all power, cunning and wisdom opposed to it. This is one reason why God permits factions and sects among us, who enter in as it were edgewise, as though they were beneficial and served to the end that the Word, the truth and Spirit prove themselves to be better and plainer; however aside from this factions and sects serve no good purpose.

[9] The second reason is, that he may punish the unthankful, who will not accept the Word, that they may be converted and saved. As Christ also said to the Jews, John 5:43: "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." Paul also says in 2 Thessalonians 2:10: "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Thus God severely punishes these sins with blindness and error, which are also the greatest and worst sins, although we regard them to be so insignificant.

[10] We consider it a small matter, that the Gospel of God's grace is again restored to us. How many are there, who never even once thanked God for it? We forget it, cast it to the winds, become lazy and careless, no one welcomes it, no one relishes it, no one lifts up thankful hands to God

for it. Yes, we are so richly overflowed with the Gospel that we have now become tired of it, and are almost turned against it, as Paul prophesied in 2 Timothy 4:3-4: "For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables." Thus we see time and again throughout the whole Scriptures, how highly it offends God and that he considers it the greatest sin, when his Word is despised which is so dear and precious that it cost him the blood of his dear Son, while we so lightly cast it to the winds. For this reason he also visits us with the worst of all calamities, which is not to be compared with the other calamities in the world, so that the people become so hardened, blindfolded and misled by the false prophets, that heaven itself is closed against them and hell opens to receive them, and life eternal is lost forever. Even though you fall under the sword of the Turk or of tyrants, if you only die in the true knowledge of God's Word and in true faith, what is that but a blessed death, devoutly to be desired? But to deliver the soul forever to the devil, is eternal wrath, an everlasting calamity and hell itself.

[11] God has now begun to visit us with manifold temporal and bodily calamities. But a far worse calamity will await us, when the holy Gospel is banished from Germany, or other false teachers appear, when one teaches this, another that. Then heaven will be closed, and the false preachers will not permit it to be opened. Hence there is great need that we pray earnestly. But, alas, how very cold our hearts are, and the reason of this is that our walls are not yet on fire, and we do not feel the loss. Nevertheless the devil has determined to drown all Germany in blood, and to take the Gospel from us, unless he be prevented beforehand and held in check by the prayers of pious Christians. "Who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves."

[12] No one sends them. They come of themselves. And this is the real nature of false prophets, that in order to preach, they force themselves upon us. Some do this for a living, which I do not value very highly, for they will not have it quite as easy as they think. But those who force themselves upon us with the boast that they do it for the sake of Christian love, on account of the truth and that the Holy Spirit constrains them to do so; and that they seek nothing but the salvation of souls; of all such be on your guard, for the

devil has most certainly sent them, and not God. For those whom God sends are called and constrained to enter upon their work. Nor do they boast much of themselves. But of whatever they do boast, they prove by their work. Therefore, the Lord would say, beware of those you see are neither sent nor called, but come of themselves at the devil's call.

[13] Yet they ever boast they have the Holy Spirit? Answer: whoever would convince you that he is moved by the Holy Spirit and does this from Christian motives, say to him: As you boast so much of the Spirit, give me proof of it. For you testify of yourself, and the Scriptures forbid me to believe anyone who only testifies of himself. For even Christ, the Son of the living God, would not bear witness of himself, as we read in the Gospel of John 5:31 and John 8:14. However, he furnished testimony by which men might know that he was sent from God, and that his Word and doctrine were true. As you then say you have the Holy Spirit, give us evidence of your Spirit, prove it with facts that we may believe you. For here a divine testimony is necessary to prove the presence of the Spirit of God, in order that there may be two witnesses, you and God. If you will not do this, then we can neither hear nor believe you.

[14] For, if we grant it is true, that one is a true spirit and has the true Holy Spirit; even then you should not hear him. For God has commanded that you should observe his order, and ask for two witnesses, and demand the proof and record of his call. Therefore say: I will not listen to you on the ground of your pretenses and boasting, even though you should have the true Spirit, for God would thus test me, whether I wish to remain in the order he has established. Therefore God is satisfied and well pleased, if you do not receive such a spirit; for God thus acts with us to try us, to see whether we will continue in his Word; as a father who plays with his child, gives it an apple and takes it again.

[15] Therefore, when a spirit comes self-called and brings something new, then know how to guard yourself and say: I do not ask what you preach, but whether you are sent, or you come of yourself? If you come of yourself, I will not hear you, even though you have the Holy Spirit; for the devil in the Gospel can also say: "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? I know thou art the Holy One of God." Mark 1:24. So the vulgar crowd also say: Here is the real and true Word of God which this man preaches, let us hear him. Yes, look out beforehand whence he comes.

The devil can preach too, but he does it for an occasion to win adherents; then he comes forth and sows his poison among the good grain, so that it becomes worse than at the beginning. Therefore Christ so diligently warns us against those who come of themselves.

[16] Another call is when the congregation or civil authority calls one for the sake of the Church. This call proceeds out of the debt and duty of love; for when people need me for the ministry, provided I am fit for it, and they require it of me, it is then my duty to obey, for God commands me to serve my neighbor. Therefore, this call requires no proof, because the people desire it, and the Word of God constrains me. This means “brought,” “called” and “urged.” But the other call, like that of Christ and the Apostles, comes immediately from God, and is called “sent,” because it is accompanied by the testimonies of the Holy Spirit. Others, though they boast of the Spirit or of the flesh, you are not to hear. As our fanatical, erratic spirits now boast, who have devoured the Holy Spirit feathers and all, and say: the Holy Spirit has spoken to them from heaven and revealed to them many wonderful things, and so forth. I cannot boast much of the Spirit; they become spiritual entirely too soon for me. I boast of the Spirit of love, otherwise I am a poor carnal sinner. However, I ought indeed to know something also of the Spirit, of whom they boast; but they are all too highly spiritualized for me.

[17] What is meant when he says: They come in sheep’s clothing? These sheep’s clothing are, that they employ everything for an outward show that true Christians and true ministers teach. For we, who are the lambs of Christ, are covered with the sheep’s wool. These are not only works, an outward, hypocritical life they lead, in that they pray much and wear gray frocks, go about with bowed heads, fast much and lead a strict life; but the worst of all is that they make use of the Word of God and the holy Scriptures for selfish ends, which in the prophets are called God’s wool and linen. For preaching, likewise admonitions and Scripture passages, are the real clothing with which they desire to adorn and pride themselves, saying: Here is Christ, here is baptism, here is the name of God, here is he who interprets the Scriptures which are the Scriptures of God, and their whole pretense is nothing but God’s name, God’s Spirit and Christ’s Spirit.

[18] This now is meant by coming in sheep’s clothing; namely, so to preach and so to make use of the Scriptures that it may be esteemed as the

true doctrine. For he does not say: who come to you in a wolf's hide, or with spears and showing their teeth. They do not preach any poisonous doctrine publicly or without the Scriptures, for then men might know them; as for instance they have preached Aristotle in their high schools, that there is neither civil authority nor the right of the emperor, wherein they said, there was no God in Christianity. On the contrary, they adorned themselves not only with works, but also with the holy Scriptures, by which God clothes and covers our souls; For if they would not act thus, the unthankful would not be so easily blindfolded or misled by them.

[19] Hence the saying is true, the holy Scriptures are a book for heretics, that is, they are a book to which heretics most of all lay claim. For they misuse no other book so much, yea, they do not know any other worthy of praise, and no heresy was ever so wicked or gross, that did not attempt to strengthen itself and recommend itself by the use of the Scriptures. Just as a man might say: God is the God of all rogues and rascals, because the largest crowd in the world take his part. Not because their rascality comes from God or is acceptable to him, but because they thus take his holy name in vain. So then, the holy Scriptures must be a heretic's book, not that the book is to blame, but because of these rogues who so shamefully misuse it. In like manner people are accustomed to say in the proverb: All misfortune begins in God's name. This is also true. Well, you say, then I will be careful not to make use of God's name. What is that you utter? How can you blame the name, that is given in order that I might be saved? He will indeed find and punish these rogues and rascals. Well, then, the Bible is a heretic's book, but I will not throw it away on that account; on the contrary, I will study and read it much more, so that I may know how to avoid the misuse of it.

[20] Then let everyone be prepared and armed, that he may not so easily allow himself to be misled by the brilliant pretensions of false teachers, although they at the time quote the Scriptures. For within certainly lie concealed ravenous wolves. And when you think they will feed and satisfy your soul, then they rend you, murder and devour you. But no one will so readily judge or decide this matter, except with spiritual eyes. The common man and the rabble cannot, for the largest multitude despise the Gospel and are unthankful, while the smallest flock receive it and can appreciate it. And this is the greatest and severest contest, when one must contend with

Scripture against Scripture, to strike one's sword away and get the advantage of him, to pluck his weapon out of his hand and slay him with his own sword, which no one can do except he who is enlightened by the Holy Spirit so that he sees this rogue.

[21] I have often told you the surest doctrine and rule, with which to prove the spirits. It is that St. John gives in his first Epistle 1 John 4:1: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God. And every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God."

[22] Also St. Paul in Romans 12:7 says: "Whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith." That is, all doctrines must harmonize and agree with faith, so that nothing be taught but faith. He who has not this faith cannot judge of any doctrine correctly, for here the carnal minded who are smart and worldly wise are incompetent, only pious spiritual hearts can do that. Of course there are many who say: Christ is the son of God, born of a chaste virgin, died and rose again from the dead, and so forth. However, they do not believe that he is Christ, that is, that he was given for us, without any effort of ours, and has won for us the Spirit of God and makes us his children without any merit on our part, so that through him we might have a gracious God and eternal life. This is the faith that is called, to know Christ. This is the touchstone, the judgment-disk and the balance, by which all doctrine must be weighed, proved and judged. It is therefore not sufficient that a teacher or preacher should merely know the creed concerning Christ, that he is the Son of God, died and rose again from the dead and so forth. This of course is all sheep's clothing.

[23] But observe the difficulty: when they say, Christ has died, was buried and rose again, and did the like for us, then they must also conclude that we do not deserve the forgiveness of sins and eternal life and God's grace by virtue of our own merit. This point the false spirits most certainly never touch or enforce, but avoid it, as they say the devil does incense or the cross. He allows them to preach of course, how Christ was born, died and rose again, ascended to heaven and sitteth at the right hand of his heavenly Father, yet they mingle other things with it, as thus and thus you must do, this or that you must leave undone, if you want to be saved and please God. This is the devil who administers his poison in a sugar-coated form.

[24] The Pope also robes himself in such sheep's clothing, that Christ has indeed merited for us by his death and by shedding his blood, that we are saved and become God's children. He adds however to this: Whoever is not obedient to the Romish church is a child of eternal condemnation; but whoever obeys will thereby be saved and ascend straight to heaven. Does not the Pope insist on his own affairs as strongly as on the Gospel? But compare the two. If the death of Christ does it, then my works cannot do it. It would be quite a different thing if he would preach thus: You are to obey me out of Christian love, but not to be saved thereby, which takes place through the blood of Christ. But he will not bite this nut.

[25] Therefore learn well to be on your guard, and thoroughly examine all doctrines, whether they rightly teach and apply this chief and fundamental doctrine, that is, whether they preach Christ correctly and purely. For you will certainly find among all factions and sects, that they always either omit this article entirely, or bring something with it to which they lead the people as though that were particularly necessary to salvation. Thus our fanatics and image-breakers also at first drew the crowd with them by the pretense that nothing was more necessary than to break images. Whoever breaks an image or destroys a table does a good work, and proves that he is a Christian. Soon the people as a mass rushed in crowds and all wanted to be Christians; just as though the Jews, Gentiles and Turks and the worst rogues could not do the same thing.

[26] Such fanatics do not shake our confidence in works, but rather strengthen it and rest in them. Where there are true teachers their preaching agrees with faith. If it be in the proportion of faith, then Christ will not be neglected or divided, but will remain entire in his knowledge as he is. And although the devil pretends to preach Christ through his apostles, do not believe him, for he would entrap you with his cunning and deceive you. Indeed this is warning enough, but it is in vain for those who will not hear. Yet it assists those who are to be changed for the better. Now follow the third test and way to know the spirits, which reads thus: "By their fruits ye shall know them."

[27] All our outward behavior and works are fruits. But in order to learn to know thoroughly the truly good works, one must have spiritual eyes. St. Paul mentions such works to the Galatians 5:22: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

meekness, self-control.” These are the true fruits of the Spirit. But the works of the flesh are: “fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revelings and such like.” Galatians 2:19-21.

[28] When you carefully distinguish the works of the flesh from the works of the Spirit, you will not find in all the works of the false prophets a single spark of the Spirit. In the first place, you will certainly not find any true fruits of faith or works of love among them. But you will find, that they are very friendly among themselves and call each other brethren; but this is nothing but poison and the devil within them. For whatever does not belong to their faction, they have no mercy, no patience or friendliness; but if they could, they would destroy them body and soul in an hour or a moment. Flesh and blood do not see the fruits, hence in the meantime they of course wear their gray frocks, are a quiet order and observe the same customs and principles.

[29] These are not works of love. On the contrary, works of love are those we do in behalf of the suffering and toward our enemies, also in showing mercy to sinners, in instructing and teaching the ignorant, and in serving the poor with our own body, goods and honor, as Christ relates in Matthew 25:25f. You will not find these works in any false prophet. He may indeed conduct himself like a Christian in his extraordinary behavior, like the bare-footed friars and Carthusians; but what benefit is that to me? Likewise, what benefit is it to a neighbor that others destroy monasteries and pictures. This is only a show and appears as if it were something, but there is no benefit in it whatever. Love, however, requires works that are beneficial to your fellow men.

[30] Again, you will further note how proud and impudent these spirits are, who only desire to be honored and worshipped; and are full of greed and know nothing of mercy. They not only refuse to give to anyone and to help the poor; but they also rejoice and are pleased to see that their neighbors do not prosper. If a person be found in disgrace they will not help with their own honor to rescue him from his disgrace; but plunge him still deeper into it and publish it abroad, sing a song about him and laugh at him in their glee. And when one falls into sin, their hearts have no sympathy for him; but they harden their hearts and are only tickled over their neighbor's downfall and adorn themselves by it. And what more shall we say? These

are rude, bitter hearts, full of poison, which have only a black, baneful tongue, and can hew everyone to pieces upon the slaughter block. They must turn men into demons, leave no one uncensored, judge, condemn and despise everyone, and regard everyone's disgrace with scorn. Christ therefore says of them: "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit," etc.

[31] Here note, he says: "By their fruits ye shall know them." He does not say: By their fruits they become good or evil. For when was there ever a pear tree made out of a pear; or a cherry tree out of a cherry? However, it is natural, that the tree bears the fruit, an apple tree bears apples, and so on. The tree of course is known by its fruits, but it is not made by its fruits. Like Abraham when he offered his son Isaac was already God's worshiper. And yet God said to him, Genesis 22:12: "For now I know that thou fearest God." He does not say: Now you have become God-fearing. On the contrary, by your work it becomes known and public, that you fear God.

[32] Hence these are two different things; to be or become something, and that something be known or be made public. There are many things that are known to God alone; but when he makes them manifest, they become known also to men. And Christ says, the fruits serve to the end, that by them men may know the tree whether it be good or evil, as Abraham was known by his works that he feared God, and was good and righteous. Consequently, before the fruit becomes manifest it must grow out of the tree, that it may also thus become known what kind of a tree it is. However, to make a thing known is quite different from the existence of the thing itself. Consequently, the work I do, does not serve to the end that I may become good and just before God, but it only makes known and manifests the treasure and the heart, in which it is concealed. For this treasure hidden in the heart, God does not desire to leave neglected, but to make it known.

[33] So far works make us good, pure and holy externally before men; but not internally before God; for this Christ alone and faith must accomplish. Thus this matter is correctly and variously explained. But if one is so stiffnecked and stubborn, and will not allow himself to be instructed, we let him go his own way. For to such we cannot explain anything, and nothing can be preached to them. But we seek erring hearts who desire rightly to understand and to please God. These are teachable,

and to these we preach. Hence Christ says further: “Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

[34] This he repeats to teach and warn us, that we may know how to guard ourselves against such characters, and take good care to rightly know them; not by their name and self-praise, which mean the pure truth, spirit and salvation of souls, but by their fruits. For they all to be sure come adorned with the name of Christ, the Church and God’s Word, by which they blindfold the people with their continual noise and apparitions, so that the ignorant become terrified at such names, and cannot check or endure it. But Christ says, pay no attention to their pretensions and boasting. For this can deceive all, there is nothing common to them except the misuse of God’s name, Spirit, truth and Church, so that Paul is forced to declare, Galatians 1:8: “But though we (who in truth could boast that he was an Apostle sent by Christ), or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any Gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be accursed.”

[35] Now might not others misuse those precious names, or be unable to deceive and mislead, by what they present and boast of in the name of the Church? Since we are to believe no one who teaches anything else, although he came with the credentials of an Apostle, yea, even if he were an angel from heaven, not to say anything of the Church, which has not yet the high understanding and clear intelligence, nor the perfect purity and holiness of the angels in heaven.

[36] Therefore, not to be misled by such glorious names and boasting, it is necessary that Christians, as I have said, should have and know the true doctrine of Christ in the first place; and then according to Christ’s doctrine judge all other teaching, whether it agrees with and is built on the true foundation or not. For as he requires his Christians to beware of false teachers, and thus constitutes them judges, yea, commands them to prove and judge all doctrines, he also demands that they be wise and intelligent Christians, who know what the true doctrine is, and can distinguish between it and the false. For such testing and judging of doctrine must not be according to their own thoughts, or according to their own shrewdness or boast of the Spirit of holiness and the like. As the Pope with his councils falsely claims the only right to judge everything, and that everyone is bound to submit to his judgment, on the ground that they say they have the Holy

Spirit, and cannot err. On the contrary we must have a sure, clear rule by which to judge, which is called the Word of Christ. This alone must be the great standard and test, as I have said often enough.

[37] But since the multitudes of hearers are not all so intelligent and informed as to be able to make a clear distinction, and as sect spirits conceal themselves for a time among the true sheep, cover themselves with their wool and pretend to hold with the true Christians, and teach nothing but God's Word, which the true Church teaches; therefore Christ here adds another thought, by which he teaches how we are to examine and know them, namely, by their fruits. And he warns us not to act hastily and accept whatever is offered us as God's Word; but we should first well consider, inquire and investigate whether it is according to God's true Word, as the Bereans did, Acts 17:11. Again, you are to inquire as to the kind of fruit such doctrine produces; for the fruits cannot long be concealed, but must show themselves and let themselves be seen, as Christ here says: "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" And: "The corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit."

[38] But he does not speak here chiefly of fruits which are coarse and readily perceived, so that everyone, though not a Christian, can easily judge and know them, and even before the world are publicly condemned sins and vices; but especially of the fruits of false doctrine Christ here speaks, which do not publish before the world the public works of an evil or criminal life, but present a fine appearance, (otherwise no one would be deceived), and yet they are opposed to God's Word. Such fruits are not difficult for a Christian to know and to judge, when he diligently considers and judges them according to God's Word and command. For here reason alone is not sufficient to investigate these things; but a spiritual understanding is necessary, which is able to distinguish what is, and is not, in harmony with the sure and clear teachings of holy Writ, or else a man would be deceived by the beautiful show of reason and human wisdom, with which all sects chiefly adorn and sell themselves, so that the fruits and life built on false doctrine, are regarded as genuine holiness.

[39] So Popery and even Mohammed make a fine show with their mockery and worship, which they call a holy life, and hence conduct themselves in an exceptional way and manner, do not eat, drink or clothe themselves like other people, which they regard as great severity,

earnestness and discipline, and call it the service of God and the way to heaven. With this name and pretended worship, holy life, great devotion and good intentions, reason is easily blinded and taken captive, so that it cannot judge such things as evil fruit. Hence more is needed here than the understanding and judgment of reason, namely, that a person hold and estimate all life that false spirits regard good to be against God's Word and command, which is the rule of all works and life that are good and pleasing to God. This rule shows the difference between the hypocritical works and fruits of false doctrine, and the good, honest works of the true doctrine. For it will readily appear that the works and life of hypocrites and false teachers do not agree and harmonize with God's work.

[40] Christ himself notes and censures the doctrine and life of the scribes and Pharisees because of their fruits, that they forsook God's commandment and put in its place their own works and worship; yea, they verily abolished the commandments of God by their traditions. Just so has Popery also done, which did not only abolish one, but almost all God's commandments, and instead not only taught and introduced something else, so that God's command was no longer esteemed, and their own works held much higher, and they taught and practiced in their lives just the contrary, as I have abundantly demonstrated elsewhere.

[41] For this is certainly the character of all sect spirits; they cannot avoid it, they must produce something of their own and different from God's Word, and to boom it, so that it has a much greater reputation and appearance, and thus God's Word and command take a second place. This is already a sure sign that their doctrine is false. As the Pope with his own doctrine praises his own worship and holy life, that his spiritual order and monasticism are much higher and better than other lives and works in the common vocations, where they live according to God's Word. Again, they invent works which they call works of supererogation, superfluous works, which they pretend are much more costly and higher, than the works of the ten commandments of God. Thus all other religious tendencies act, aside from the true doctrine of the Scriptures, as Mohammed of the Turks, the Talmud of the Jews, as also our Anabaptists, are almost the same; all forsake and abandon the true works and life God's Word requires and urges, and instead slaves after other hypocritical holiness with special works and writings, wearing grey frocks, looking sad, abstaining from wine, afflicting

their body with remarkable fasting, repeating many and long prayers, and the like.

[42] Therefore, I say, do not allow anyone to cause you to gape in astonishment, or to make a continual noise in your presence with the false appearance and erring trash of great and excellent works, holiness, etc.; but come hither with such fruits to the true light which is God's Word, from which we must learn and know what God requires and calls a true and good life, and according to it conclude both what is a good tree and good fruit, or what is the contrary. It avails nothing, what you may think is great, beautiful and precious. But if you would not err and be deceived, you must come to God's Word, that you may not fancy but hear and know what God says is right, good and pleasing to him.

[43] This is said in general of the fruits of false teaching, which indeed appear precious, and yet are evil at heart. Besides these, however, there are other fruits that are coarse and easier to recognize. And Christians have this advantage that they can also publicly and practically discern and overthrow them, as the real and legitimate fruits of the doctrine and lies of the devil.

[44] For every sect has always had one or more particular hobbies and articles which are manifestly wrong and can easily be discerned to be of the devil, who publicly teach, urge and defend them as right, certain and necessary to believe or to keep. For the spirit of lies cannot so conceal himself, but that he must at last put forth his claws, by which you can discern and observe the ravenous wolf. Of this you have an example and testimony in all the well known fanatics and false spirits; as in our time the Anabaptists, of whom it is manifest that they are wrong in their teaching concerning Christ, faith and the sacraments. They regard baptism as a common, naked, empty sign, despise the external spoken and written Word and Scripture, pretend to have special revelations independent of the witness of God's Word. They disgrace and rend asunder holy wedlock, because they teach: a man may indeed leave his wife who is not of his faith, and take another, one or more. Again, they would make all property common, acknowledge no civil authority or government, nor approve of it, except what is of their special faith, etc.; as in former times the Manichean heretics also advocated the same theories.

[45] Therefore, it must follow that such people come forth with gross errors, by which their spirit is easily discovered. For as they taught that there can be no civil authority except that which is holy and Christian (this means that of their own faith), by which they have already withdrawn all obedience, and claim the right and power to oppose the government, and even to overthrow it with violence and put themselves in its place, as Thomas Muenzer and the Muenster prophets for this reason publicly undertook to do. And because they desire property to be generally and equally distributed; again, because they forsake their wives and take others; from this it also follows that they might grab into the goods and possessions of other people, steal and rob whatever they wish and can. Again, that as often as they desire they can abandon their wives, take others and abandon them in turn, and thus carry on among themselves all debauchery, shame and vice. Behold, here you observe both, in doctrine and in life, there is nothing but evil, rotten, bad fruit, which cannot be hid, but must finally become public, so that the tree may be known by it.

[46] Fruit like this you will surely find as the result of all doctrine and belief, not of the pure Word of God. I will not speak here of Mohammed's Koran, for he is entirely too gross with abominable, blasphemous and shameful lies, together with the permission of public murder, whoredom, debauchery, the dissolving of wedlock, without saying anything of all his other disgraceful abominations and deceptions. It would also take too long to relate the sorrowful fruits of all popery, but it is fully treated elsewhere.

[47] I will omit the papal doctrines which are somewhat subtle, that they do not correctly teach the ten commandments, and out of what these require they have formed their own decrees, which before God no one is in duty bound to do, except those who would be perfect and do something special and superfluous, etc. In like manner they have taught nothing correctly of the Gospel and faith in Christ, which first of all must be known and urged in the churches, how hearts may possess true and certain comfort; but directly contrary to the faith and comfort of Christ, they have so misled the people that, if they already believed in Christ and did everything, nevertheless, they should and must still doubt concerning grace. Again, I will not speak of what public, shameful, unchristian abomination and idolatry they carried on in their mass, the invocation of departed saints, indulgences, lies and frauds about purgatory; which are all evidently fruits by which the tree may

indeed be known, for these are no sweet grapes or figs, but are mere sour, bitter late grapes, wild plums and berries.

[48] But only observe the grossest doctrines they themselves cannot beautify with paint, how they proceed publicly and without shame against God's Word and command, when they, for instance, declare the children free from the authority and obedience of their parents as soon as they only think of becoming priests, monks or nuns; when they against the will of their parents confirm the marriage vow or again dissolve it. In like manner they forbid young people to marry, whom they have enticed to become priests or to enter a cloister, and compel them to live without hope of marriage, and thereby have filled the world with disgraceful, unutterable debauchery, shame and vice, and have plunged souls into the bonds and destruction of the devil; therefore St. Paul also in 1 Timothy 4:1-3 because of such fruit condemns those forbidding to marry, and calls it the doctrine of devils.

[49] What is still more shameful to hear in Christendom, they go to work and want to defend their shameless action with self-condemned consciences, and even at the present day they are bold to say that their public whoredom and scandalous life is not so bad that a poor priest should marry a wife so that he may not be compelled to live unchaste with an evil condemned conscience. Yes, all this they confirm besides by persecution, murder and bloodshed of poor, pious and harmless people, only because they marry, or celebrate the sacrament according to the institution of Christ, and do not all worship the lies and abominations of the Pope in opposition to God's Word. Besides, in all this they claim to be doing right, and want to pass as obedient members and leaders of the Christian Church. And those who censure or oppose them, they curse and condemn, and command to be destroyed with fire and sword as the worst heretics.

[50] Tell me, now, if these are not public, known fruits of the corrupt tree, which is the real Antichrist doctrine and government, the sediment of all the infernal poison of the devil? For what else can it be but the devil's herd, who condemn and murder the people in the name of the Church for no other reason, than because they preach or confess and obey God's Word? And yet they claim to be doing right! For God has not commanded to persecute and murder pious, harmless people; but to praise, honor and treat them well, especially those who keep God's Word and commandments.

Without any doubt the Christian Church does and observes God's Word. Wherefore it is an easy matter for every Christian to know and to judge what kind of spirits they are, and no great skill nor further questions nor disputations are needed, if one only distinguishes the boasting or the name from the fruit.

[51] We should answer for ourselves the cries and blasphemies of the Papists against our doctrine, which they desire to criticize as to its fruits from this Gospel and conclude: Because evil fruit is also seen among many of our people, therefore our doctrine is also false and wrong. But they call that evil fruit, because we will not, like they, obey the Pope, and observe all the diabolical nonsense of his decrees and the doctrines of monks, which are nothing but evil fruits of the rotten tree, mere human prattle, yes, the doctrine of devils, on account of which they persecute and would gladly murder us all; or wherever they can discover anything to show that among us also there are wicked rogues who do not live as they should, but rob, steal and commit adultery; or when some of our people who at first held to us and afterwards gave offense and produced factions and heresy.

[52] True, Papists are unworthy of an answer from us on these things. For we have proved enough against them, that both their doctrine is wrong, and their life, which they regard as holiness, is only corrupt fruit, because it is against God's Word. Besides they claim to have defended their public idolatry, lies and disgraceful life as right and virtuous. Wherefore, by this Gospel they are already condemned as a corrupt, useless tree along with their fruit. And we should not suffer them, so publicly self-condemned, to judge our doctrine or its fruits, because they are not the judges who should or are able to do it. For wherever they as it were could censure us in the highest degree, they do no more than seek for the mote in our eyes, and do not want to see the beam in their own eyes.

[53] On the contrary we can easily prove before the whole world, that our doctrine is not our own forged trifles or dreams, but the Scriptures and the plain Word of God. We also teach not to accept, believe or observe anything else as necessary unto salvation. From this the good fruits are also manifest, which harmonize with the doctrine, with our baptism and faith. For we claim and know that in baptism we are cleansed by the blood of Christ and receive the forgiveness of sins and the grace of God. Through such faith we also experience comfort and joy of conscience against the

terrors of sin and death, and, God be praised, we see with our own eyes many pious Christians joyfully leave this world in this comfort and faith, and publicly bear witness to the same by their confession and death. This is surely a fruit of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

[54] Moreover, we teach how everyone should live and behave in his earthly calling, according to the Word and commandment of God, that he should avoid sin, obey God, be chaste and patient, serve his neighbor and do good. Such a doctrine can in itself bring forth no corrupt fruit, and no one can justly be offended at it, and some are even thereby compelled to live a better life. That all do not live in harmony with it, and many among us are yet wicked, unthankful and false Christians, cannot be attributed to the Gospel; for it does not indeed allow of wickedness, but censures and opposes it. But the real cause of it is the devil, for this he has always done to the true Church and God's children, and thus sows his tares among the good wheat. But because of this the good seed and its fruit, that is, the Word of God and true Christians, do not become evil. Just as a good apple tree does not become evil, because the noxious insects and caterpillars destroy some of its fruit. Otherwise you would have to censure and condemn the doctrine of Christ and the Apostles, because even among them there was a Judas, and many of their disciples became false Apostles and factious spirits, as St. Paul before had prophesied, 2 Timothy 3:4, that among themselves there would arise false teachers; and St. John in his first Epistle, 1 John 2:19, confesses: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us."

[55] Therefore the Gospel is falsely blamed, because among some to whom it is preached factions and heresies arise, and many misuse it; and although we must endure such things among us, as even St. Paul was obliged to do in his churches, yet for all this we neither approve nor allow it; but punish and oppose it as much as possible, so as either to improve or put away from us everything that is against sound doctrine. This the Papists and other sects will not do, because they cannot. For their doctrine in itself is neither good nor honest, and for this reason can bring forth no good fruit. "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven."

[56] This is exactly what was just said, that it depends not upon boasting, and one should pay no attention to what men pretend with

beautiful sacred names, of God, of Christ, of the kingdom of God, of the honor of God, the worship of God and the like. For all this is but to say: Lord, Lord! But you should give heed to what God himself says and requires. For whoever would enter the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God, must not only use the names and words, about which people can speak and boast; but he must also do what God wants done in his kingdom.

[57] If we are to do his will, we must first know for a certainty what it is, and how to do it. This our own wisdom and thoughts do not teach, or all men, heathen anti Turks, could do it as well, and every fanatical spirit would come and pretend that whatever pleases him was God's will, just as the monks have hitherto taught us, it is God's will which brings you into the kingdom of heaven that you wear a grey cap, and worship St. Christopher, Franciscus, Barbaras or others.

[58] Therefore, we must in this case hear God's Word alone, which reveals and shows plainly unto us, what the will of God the Father is. First, that he has sent his only begotten Son into the world, to reconcile us sinners unto God by his death, and without our merits to purify and sanctify us through his blood, and this he has proclaimed to everyone by the Gospel, and requires you to believe and accept it. As Christ himself declares the same in plain words, John 6:40: "And this is the will of my Father, that everyone that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

[59] In the next place, when we have received such grace and salvation, have been baptized into Christ and believe, his will is that we should afterwards live accordingly, obey God and do what is commanded us in the ten commandments, and everyone in his calling confess God's Word, honor and support it, avoid and flee from sin, and be good, patient, chaste, modest, kind, faithful and true, etc.

[60] This he will not only have preached or spoken by the mouth, but done in the heart and in the deed. Consequently, whoever neglects this or teaches, believes and does the contrary, should also know that he has not done God's will, and is judged already, that he does not belong to the kingdom of heaven, because he is without faith and love. And it will not help him to boast of Christ as though he served him so faithfully, preached so much and did great wonders. On the other hand, if you earnestly do this

will of God, cheerfully hear and believe God's Word and live in his obedience, to honor him and benefit your neighbor; and although you should fall but rise again, and not continue impenitent, to defend your sins, to boast against God's Word or maliciously to persecute your neighbor, then you can bravely and joyfully say before God: Lord, Lord, and comfort yourself with the Kingdom of heaven which God has given you. Whether on this account the world reviles and condemns you or puts you under the ban in the name of the Christian Church, should not trouble you. For now you hear that God does not require or wish you to seek praise and a name when you say: Lord, Lord', But you are to seek the deed and fruit of him, who does the will of God. Then be directed according to this rule, and measure all doctrine and life with it which comes to you in the name and praise of God, if you desire not to be deceived.

[61] Various and many spirits have come to myself, so that I may here confess to my own experience, they really tempted me with great, excellent words, to lead me in a different course, and at times presented it so plausible that I was almost brought to a stand, and had I not been cautious, I would also have been misled. I could do nothing else in order to remain undeceived and remove such apparitions of the devil, than as the prophet David teaches, Psalm 119:105: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path." Then I went to this light which teaches me what the will of God is, and compared it to these talkers and spiritual boasters, whether it harmonizes with the clear doctrine of the ten commandments and faith in Christ. When I found this was not the case, I immediately cast it away, and bravely upon this admonition of Christ judged and condemned it as evil, useless fruit and a corrupt tree. Do thou likewise, and hold fast to the true standard by which all doctrine must be judged, which is God's Word and command, then you can neither err nor fail, and can overthrow the boast and pretensions of all false spirits. For Christ by this sentence: Not he who saith: "Lord, Lord," but he who does the will of my Father, directs and leads us alone to his Word, that we may know that those alone are good fruits who walk according to that Word.

Ninth Sunday after Trinity. Parable of the Unrighteous Steward.

Text: Luke 16:1-9.

1 And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

3 Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

5 So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?

6 And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

7 Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

8 And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

9 And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. Luke 16:1-9

[1] This is truly a Gospel for priests and monks, and will bring them money, unless we prevent it. Before entering upon the consideration of it, we must

accustom ourselves to the language used, especially the word mammon. The Jews were acquainted with this word from the Hebrew, and it has come down to us, just like other Hebrew words, as Halleluja, Amen, Kyrie eleison. In German mammon means riches, not simply riches, but a superfluity of riches, whatever is beyond our needs. However, that which is called mammon and that which is not called mammon are distinguished in a twofold way. First, if the estimate be according to that of our Lord God and of the truth, there are many who possess mammon. But if the estimate be that of the world and of man's mind, there are few who possess it. For our leaders in thought have taught in the high schools and even from the pulpit, that everyone should see to his station in life, what he needs, and adjust his possessions accordingly. If he be a man with wife and children, he needs more, for where many persons are there much will be needed. And when we reckon thus, no one has anything to spare, but everyone would rather have more. If one has two thousand guilders he says, this I need for my family, to support myself, my wife and children.

[2] In the second place they have taught that one is not bound to help, except in cases of the greatest need. Such teaching entirely overthrows the Gospel, so that no one has been helpful to another; but they have in the meantime built churches; and yet in doing so they did not even wait for the greatest need, until the arches were rent asunder and churches became roofless, but they gave to great excess, spreading their gold upon the walls. To sum up the whole matter, mammon properly means, that a man has more than he needs for his support, so that he can help others without injuring himself.

[3] Hence the Lord calls it "The mammon of unrighteousness," because it is daily made use of by the wicked; as it is said: riches develop courage, and the heathen have also called it irritamenta malorum, riches tempt to evil. Again St. Paul says, 1 Timothy 6:10: "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil," whence cometh strife, pride, war and bloodshed. Therefore it is also called here the unrighteous mammon, because it is applied to such evil uses, and is a great cause of evil to men.

[4] Nevertheless it is God's creature like wine and corn, and the creatures of God are good. Why then does he call them evil? Because they tempt us to so much evil, as Paul says to the Ephesians 5:16: "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Not that the time or days in themselves

are evil, but because great evil is done in them. He also says to the Romans 2:5: "The day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Although the day is good, but because God's wrath will be revealed on that day, the day must take its name from it. And thus, since mammon runs into the service of evil, Christ calls it mammon of unrighteousness, namely, that which we have above our needs and we will not use in helping our neighbor; for this we possess unrighteously, and before God it is stolen goods, for in the presence of God one is bound to give and lend, and suffer himself to be deprived of it. Therefore as the saying runs, the greatest owners of property are the greatest thieves; because they possess far more than they need, and give the least possible to others. So much on the meaning of the word; we now return to the Gospel.

[5] We take this parable in a common sense way, without seeking any subtleties in it, as Jerome has done, for it is not necessary to seek a subtle meaning, the pure milk is sufficient. The parable in itself teaches how the steward deprived his master of his property, and artfully, but deceitfully and falsely, appropriated it to himself. For it is not right, that he, who previously cheated his master out of his property, should also act most deceitfully to secure for himself easy days all his life; let us abide by this explanation. For the Lord concludes that the unjust steward did wisely. He does not praise the thing in itself as good, but blames him for previously squandering his master's goods, and afterwards shrewdly appropriating his property. This however the Lord commends, namely, that he did not forget himself, praising nought but his cunning and shrewdness. Just as when a flirt draws the whole world after her, and I say: she is a clever flirt, she knows her business. The Lord further concludes, that just as the steward is wise and shrewd in his transactions, so should we also be in obtaining eternal life.

[6] And that you may understand this, take the passage of St. Paul to the Romans 5:14, Adam a type of Christ. How can the Apostle compare Adam to Christ, since Adam brought upon us sin and death, and Christ brought righteousness and life? He compares Christ to Adam in regard to origin and source, but not in regard to the fruit and work. For as Adam is the source and chief of all sinners, so Christ is the source and head of all the saints. For we have inherited from Adam nothing but sin, condemnation and the eternal curse; but from Christ we have obtained righteousness and salvation. Now these two are not alike, for sin is punishable, and righteousness is

praiseworthy. But he compares them in regard to their origin; just as by Adam sin and death came upon all men, so by Christ righteousness and life come upon us.

[7] Thus he compares here the unjust to the just. As the unjust man acts shrewdly, though wrongly and like a rogue, so we also should act shrewdly but righteously in godliness. This is the proper understanding of this parable. For the Lord says: "The children of this world are wiser than the children of light." So that the children of light should learn wisdom from the children of darkness or the world. Just as they are wise in their transactions, so should also the children of light be wise in their transactions. Therefore he adds, "in their generation." Here are truly three great questions, in which our adversaries quote this Gospel against us, when the Lord says: "Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles."

[8] From this they try to conclude, that we must first of all do works to become good. For they say, here we read: "Make to yourselves friends," and this surely means to do works. Secondly, they say, that God here even desires to praise works, and not only that, but also to reward them. For here we read of work and its reward, and nothing is said of faith. In the third place, they claim that Christ here wishes to establish the comfort and help of the saints, when he says: "Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles." Thus this Gospel is made to directly oppose us, for it says: "Make to yourselves friends." That is, do good works, that they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles. This appears to mean that we should previously merit our reception by them into the eternal tabernacles. These three points the Pope and his priests have claimed strongly for their side, and he has even called his indulgences the mammon of iniquity, mammon iniquitatis, unrighteous mammon.

[9] If they thus attack us we must answer. Above all things it must be remembered that there is indeed no doubt whatever, that faith and love are the only source, as you have ever learned, that through faith we become inwardly pious, and we outwardly prove our faith by our works of love. For I have often said, that the Scriptures speak of man in a twofold manner. At one time of the inner man, and then again of the outer man. For the

Scriptures properly make distinctions, just as when I speak of a foot, I do not mean a nose. So the Scriptures at one time speak of us as of the Spirit, spiritual, how we must stand before God by faith, for this purpose he sends forth his Word to which we hold, and afterwards he follows or endows with his Spirit. Thus the tree must be good beforehand, as you have recently heard.

[10] This godliness cannot be attained by anyone without grace in his heart. If I am to make for myself friends by means of mammon, I must first be godly. For compare these two statements: A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, and again, a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. From which judge for yourself: if I am to do good and give away mammon, I must indeed be first good at heart, for God looketh upon the heart, and as he finds the heart, so he estimates our works. This I say, that men should not cram works into the heart, but let the heart first be good through faith, that the works may flow forth, otherwise you do no one any good; for if you have before given a person anything, it did not come from the heart. Hence the conclusion is, that I must first be good before I can do good. You cannot build from without inward, you do not commence at the roof, but at the foundation. Therefore faith must first be present.

[11] Hence the Scriptures speak of us as the outer man, as we in our flesh and blood live among men. Now, that I am good, you do not know, nor do I. Hence I must establish my faith to the satisfaction of myself and of the people, and I must do good to my neighbor in order to prove my faith; thus the outward works are then merely signs of the inner faith. Works do not make me good, but show that I am good, and bear witness that the faith in me is genuine. In this manner must you understand the Scriptures here also, when they say: Give of your mammon and thus make to yourselves friends; that is, do good, that your faith may become approved. So we must also distinguish what pertains to the Spirit and what is the fruit of the Spirit.

[12] Luke has described the fruit of faith thus: Give to the poor and make to yourself friends. As though he would say: I will not now speak of faith, but how you should prove your faith. Wherefore do good to your neighbor, and if you can give from the heart you may be assured that you believe. Thus the Scriptures speak at one time of fruits, at another time of faith. Again, they also speak of fruits, when they teach, Matthew 25:42, how the Lord will speak to the lost on the last day: "I was hungry, and ye

did not give me to eat; I was athirst, and ye gave me no drink,” and the like. This means, you have not believed, as I will prove to you by your own works.

[13] The Scriptures in some passages speak of the outward conduct, and in others of the inner. Now if you will apply that which is said of the outward to the heart and confuse matters, you pervert it and do wrong. Hence you must let the distinction remain, and observe it. These expressions: I have been hungry, thirsty, shelterless, naked, sick and in prison, and you have shown me no work of mercy, refer to the external conduct, and signify as much as: you have never exhibited any outward conduct by which you have shown your faith; and to prove this, I appeal to the poor as witnesses. Therefore, faith alone must be present first to make us good, after that good works must follow to prove our piety. This now is one point, namely, concerning works.

[14] The second point is far more difficult, when the Lord says: “Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles.” You say, our adversaries cry: you say a person shall not do good works to obtain eternal life; behold, here it reads differently. Now, what shall we answer? There are many passages here and there, showing how we wish to have merit on our part. By quoting these passages they intend to disprove to us God’s mercy, and to lead us to satisfy God’s righteousness by our good works. By all means beware of this, and insist that it is nothing but pure grace and mercy alone, and say: I am a poor sinner, O God, forgive me my sins, gladly will I say nothing about my merit, only say thou nothing of thy judgment! Thus David said: “Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight no man living is righteous,” Psalm 143:2. And just for this reason Christ is given to us as our Mediator. If we wish to enter into judgment before God with our good works, we cast Christ aside as our Mediator, and cannot stand before God. Therefore let him remain our Mediator and abide thou under the shadow of his wings, as Psalm 91:4 reads: “He will cover thee with his pinions, and under his wings shalt thou take refuge.” Therefore speak thus: O God, I would not merit anything before thee by my own works, but will employ them only to serve my neighbor, and I will depend only upon thy mercy.

[15] You must hence remember that eternal life consists of two things, faith and what follows faith. If you go and believe and do good to your neighbor, everlasting life must follow, although you never think about it. Just as when you take a good drink, the taste will follow as soon as you drink, even though you do not seek it. So it is also with hell, the damned do not seek it, but it follows unsought and undesired, and he must inherit it whether he will or no. This St. Paul also says, 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16, of the persecuters of the Gospel: They “drove out us, and pleased not God, and are contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved; to fill up their sins always, but the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.” As though he would say: They only persecute us to fill the measure of their sins and fairly to deserve hell, and ever urge their sins more and more until they become entirely hardened, and finally have no regard for either God or man.

[16] Thus the Scriptures declare here, that we should do good, so that we may be saved; and this is not meant to say, that we must first earn salvation by our works, but that we must believe, and it will follow of itself. Therefore mark well, that you do not take what follows for what goes before, and keep yourself free from the merit of works. Should God give us heaven for our works? No, no, he has already given us heaven freely, out of mere mercy. Therefore give unto the poor, in order that the eternal tabernacles may follow, and not that you may merit them by your works.

[17] Observe then that these passages are explained in two different ways. First, that a man should seek salvation by works, which is false. Second, as a consequence of faith, which is right. Therefore, you are not to seek heaven with any kind of works, but only to do the works freely, then the result, eternal life, will follow of itself without your seeking. For if I should see heaven standing open and could merit it by picking up a straw, I would not do it, lest I might say: Behold, I have earned it! No, no, not to my deservings, but to God be the glory, who has given me his Son to abolish sin and hell for me.

[18] In the third place, you should faithfully hold fast to the following words: “That they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles.” Behold, they say, here it stands written that they receive us into heaven, how then can you say that we dare not place the saints as mediators before God, and that they cannot help us to heaven? Here observe, that we have but one

Redeemer before God, and he is Christ. For thus St. Paul speaks, Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God, one Mediator also between God and man, himself man, Christ Jesus." Again, Christ himself in John 14:6 says: "I am the way, no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Therefore we must not seek our consolation in any of the saints, but in Christ alone, through whose merits alone we and all saints are saved. Therefore I will not give a penny for St. Peter's merits, that he should help me. He cannot help himself, but whatever he has, he has from God by faith in Christ. Now then, if he cannot help himself, how then can he do anything for me? Consequently I must have another, who is Christ, God and man in one.

[19] But how can he say: "Make to yourselves friends, that they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles?" This passage we understand from Matthew 25:37-40, where Christ tells us how the King will answer them who will say on the last day: "Lord, when saw we thee hungry, athirst, homeless, naked, sick and in prison? Verily I say unto you," he will say, "inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, ye did it unto me." Here the Lord shows who those friends are, namely, the poor and needy. As though to say: when you make them your friends, then you have me as your friend also, for they are my members.

[20] Now one thought remains: How will they receive us into the eternal tabernacles, as the text here says? Will they lead us in by the hand? No, but when we come before the judgment seat of God, poor persons whom we have assisted here, will stand in heaven and say: he has washed my feet, he gave me drink, food, clothing and the like. He will certainly be my friend and a witness of my faith, whatever words he may use to declare it. Then a beggar will be more useful to me than St. Peter or St. Paul, for there none of these can help. But when a beggar comes and says: My God, this he has done unto me as thy child! that will help me, for God will say: Whatsoever you have done unto these, you have done unto me. Therefore these poor people will not be our helpers but our witnesses so that God shall receive us. By this I would not object to your honoring St. Peter and other saints, for he is a member of Christ and of God. But you do better by giving your neighbor a penny, than by building a church of gold for St. Peter. For to help your neighbor is commanded, but it is not commanded to build a church to St. Peter. Now everything is twisted the wrong way, one goes to a certain passage in St. James, another to Aix-la-Chapelle, another to Rome,

to seek help from the departed saints. But the poor people, who are the real sainthood, are left behind lying in the streets. Let this be sufficient on this Gospel.

Ninth Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. Defense of the True Doctrine of Faith, Works, etc.

Text: Luke 16:1-9.

1 And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

3 Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

5 So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?

6 And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

7 Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

8 And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

9 And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. Luke 16:1-9

[1] Although in my Postils hitherto, and in my little book, Christian Liberty and Good Works, I have taught very extensively, how faith alone without works justifies, and good works are done first after we believe, that it seems I should henceforth politely keep quiet, and give every mind and heart an opportunity to understand and explain all the gospel lessons for themselves; yet I perceive that the Gospel abides and prospers only among the few; the people are constantly dispirited and terrified by the passages that treat of good works; so that I see plainly how necessary it is, either to write Postils on each gospel lesson, or to appoint sensible ministers in all places who can orally explain and teach these things.

[2] If this Gospel be considered without the Spirit by mere reason, it truly favors the priests and monks, and could be made to serve covetousness and to establish one's own works. For when Christ says: "Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles;" they force from it three points against our doctrine of faith, namely: first, against that we teach faith alone justifies and saves from sin; second, that all good works ought to be gratuitously done to our neighbors out of free love; third, that we should not put any value in the merits of saints or of others.

[3] Against our first proposition they claim the Lord says here: "Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness," just as though works should make us friends, who previously were enemies. Against the second is what he says: "That they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles;" just as though we should do the work for our own sakes and benefit. And against the third they quote: "The friends may receive us into the eternal tabernacles;" just as though we should serve the saints and trust in them to get to heaven. For the sake of the weak we reply to these:

Part I. Faith Alone Makes Us Good and Friends with God.

[4] The foundation must be maintained without wavering, that faith without any works, without any merit, reconciles man to God and makes him good, as Paul says to the Romans 3:21-22: “But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe.” Paul at another place, Romans 4:9, says: “To Abraham, his faith was reckoned for righteousness;” so also with us. Again, 5: “Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Again, 10:10: “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” These, and many more similar passages, we must firmly hold and trust in them immovably, so that to faith alone without any assistance of works, is attributed the forgiveness of sins and our justification.

[5] Take for an illustration the parable of Christ in Matthew 7:17: “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.” Here you see that the fruit does not make the tree good, but without any fruit and before any fruit the tree must be first good, or made good, before it can bear good fruit. As he also says, Matthew 12:33-34: “Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by its fruit. Ye offspring of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things?” Thus it is the naked truth, that a man must be good without good works, and before he does any good works. And it is clear how impossible it is that a man should become good by works, when he is not good before he does the good works. For Christ stands firm when he says: “How can ye, being evil, speak good things?” And hence follows: How can ye, being evil, do good things?

[6] Therefore the powerful conclusion follows, there must be something far greater and more precious than all good works, by which a man becomes pious and good, before he does good; just as he must first be in bodily health before he can labor and do hard work. This great and precious something is the noble Word of God, which offers us in the Gospel the grace of God in Christ. He who hears and believes this, thereby becomes good and righteous. Wherefore it is called the Word of life, a Word of grace, a Word of forgiveness. But he who neither hears nor believes it, can in no way become good. For St. Peter says in the Acts 15:9: “And he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.” For as the

Word is, so will the heart be, which believes and cleaves firmly to it. The Word is a living, righteous, truthful, pure and good Word, so also the heart which cleaves to it, must be living, just, truthful, pure and good.

[7] What now shall we say of those passages which so strongly insist on good works, as when the Lord says: “Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness?” And in Matthew 25:42: “For I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat.” And many other similar passages, which sound altogether as though we had to become good by works. We answer thus:

[8] There are some who hear and read the Gospel and what is said by faith, and immediately conclude they have formed a correct notion of what faith is. They do not think that faith is anything else than something which is altogether in their own power to have or not to have, as any other natural human work. Hence, when in their hearts they begin to think and say: “Verily, the doctrine is right, and I believe it is true,” then they immediately think faith is present. But as soon as they see and feel in themselves and others that no change has taken place, and that the works do not follow and they remain as before in their old ways, then they conclude that faith is not sufficient, that they must have something more and greater than faith. Behold, how they then seize the opportunity, and cry and say: Oh, faith alone does not do it. Why? Oh, because there are so many who believe, and are no better than before, and have not changed their minds at all. Such people are those whom Jude in his Epistle calls dreamers, verse 8, who deceive themselves with their own dreams. For what are such thoughts of theirs which they call faith, but a dream, a dark shadow of faith, which they themselves have created in their own thoughts, by their own strength without the grace of God? They become worse than they were before. For it happens with them as the Lord says in Matthew 9:17 “Neither do men put new wine into old wine-skins; else the skins burst, and the wine is spilled.” That is, they hear God’s Word and do not lay hold of it, therefore they burst and become worse.

[9] But true faith, of which we speak, cannot be manufactured by our own thoughts, for it is solely a work of God in us, without any assistance on our part. As Paul says to the Romans 5:15, it is God’s gift and grace, obtained by one man, Christ. Therefore, faith is something very powerful, active, restless, effective, which at once renews a person and again

regenerates him, and leads him altogether into a new manner and character of life, so that it is impossible not to do good without ceasing. For just as natural as it is for the tree to produce fruit, so natural is it for faith to produce good works. And just as it is quite unnecessary to command the tree to bear fruit, so there is no command given to the believer, as Paul says, nor is urging necessary for him to do good, for he does it of himself, freely and unconstrained; just as he of himself without command sleeps, eats, drinks, puts on his clothes, hears, speaks, goes and comes. Whoever has not this faith talks but vainly about faith and works, and does not himself know what he says or whither it tends. For he has not received it; he juggles with lies and applies the Scriptures where they speak of faith and works to his own dreams and false thoughts, which is purely a human work. Whereas the Scriptures attribute both faith and good works not to ourselves, but to God alone.

[10] Is not this a perverted and blind people? They teach we cannot do a good deed of ourselves, and then in their presumption go to work and arrogate to themselves the highest of all the works of God, namely faith, to manufacture it themselves out of their own perverted thoughts. Wherefore I have said that we should despair of ourselves and pray to God for faith as the Apostle did. Luke 17:5. When we have faith we need nothing more, for it brings with it the Holy Spirit, who then teaches us not only all things, but also establishes us firmly in it, and leads us through death and hell to heaven.

[11] Now observe, we have given these answers, that the Scriptures have such passages concerning works, on account of such dreamers and self-invented faith; not that man should become good by works, but that man should thereby prove and see the difference between false and true faith. For wherever faith is right it does good. If it does no good, it is then certainly a dream and a false idea of faith. So, just as the fruit on the tree does not make the tree good, but nevertheless outwardly proves and testifies that the tree is good, as Christ says, Matthew 7:16: “By their fruits ye shall know them” – thus we should also learn to know faith by its fruits.

[12] From this you see, there is a great difference between being good, and to be known as good; or to become good and to prove and show that you are good. Faith makes good, but works prove the faith and goodness to be right. Thus the Scriptures speak in the plain way, which prevails among

the common people, as when a father says unto his son: “Go and be merciful, good and friendly to this or to that poor person.” By which he does not command him to be merciful, good and friendly, but because he is already good and merciful, he requires that he should also show and prove it outwardly toward the poor by his act, in order that the goodness which he has in himself may also be known to others and be helpful to them.

[13] So you should explain all passages of Scripture referring to works, that God thereby desires to let the goodness received in faith express and prove itself, and become a benefit to others, so that false faith may become known and rooted out of the heart. For God gives no one his grace that it may remain inactive and accomplish nothing good, but in order that it may bear interest, and by being publicly known and proved externally draw everyone to God; as Christ says, Matthew 5:16: “Even so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Otherwise it would be but a buried treasure and a hidden light. But what profit is there in either? Yea, goodness does not only thereby become known to others, but we ourselves also become certain that we are honest, as St. Peter in 2 Peter 1:10 says: “Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure.” For where works do not follow a man cannot know whether his faith is right; yea, he may be certain that his faith is a dream, and not right as it should be. Thus Abraham became certain of his faith and that he feared God, when he offered up his son. As God by the angel said to Abraham, Genesis 22:12: “Now I know, that is, it is manifest, that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.”

[14] Then abide by the truth, that man is internally, in spirit before God, justified by faith alone without works, but externally and publicly before men and himself, he is justified by works, that he is at heart an honest believer and pious. The one you may call a public or outward justification, the other an inner justification, yet in the sense that the public or external justification is only the fruit, the result and proof of the justification in the heart, that a man does not become just thereby before God, but must previously be just before him. So you may call the fruit of the tree the public or outward good of the tree, which is only the result and proof of its inner and natural goodness. This is what St. James means when he says in his Epistle, James 2:26: “Faith without works is dead.” That is, as the works

do not follow, it is a sure sign that there is no faith there; but only an empty thought and dream, which they falsely call faith. Now we understand the word of Christ: “Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness.” That is, prove your faith publicly by your outward gifts, by which you win friends, that the poor may be witnesses of your public work, that your faith is genuine. For mere external giving in itself can never make friends, unless it proceed from faith, as Christ rejects the alms of the Pharisees in Matthew 6:2, that they thereby make no friends because their heart is false. Thus no heart can ever be right without faith, so that even nature forces the confession that no work makes one good, but that the heart must first be good and upright.

Part II. All Works Must Be Done Freely and Gratuitously, Without Seeking Gain by Them.

[15] Christ means this when, in Matthew 10:8, he says: “Freely ye receive, freely give.” For just as Christ with all his works did not merit heaven for himself, because it was his before; but he served us thereby, not regarding or seeking his own, but these two things, namely, our benefit and the glory of God his Father; so also should we never seek our own in our good works, either temporal or eternal, but glorify God by freely and gratuitously doing good to our neighbor. This St. Paul teaches the Philippians 2:5: “Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.” That is, for himself he had enough, since in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and yet he served us and became our servant.

[16] And this is the cause; for since faith justifies and destroys sin before God, so it gives life and salvation. And now it would be a lasting shame and disgrace, and injurious to faith, if anyone by his life and works would desire to obtain what faith already possesses and brings with it. Just as Christ would have only disgraced himself had he done good in order to become the Son of God and Lord over all things, which he already was before. So faith makes us God’s children as John 1:says: “But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become the children of God, even to them

that believe on his name.” But if they are children, then they are heirs, as St. Paul says, Romans 8:17, and Galatians 4:7. How then can we do anything to obtain the inheritance, which we already have by faith?

[17] But what shall we say of passages that insist on a good life for the sake of an external reward as this one does: “Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness?” And in Matthew 19:17: “But if thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments.” And Matthew 6:20: “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” We will say this: that those who do not know faith, only speak and think of the reward, as of works. For they think that the same rule obtains here as in human affairs, that they must earn the Kingdom of heaven by their works. These, too, are dreams and false views, of which Malachi 1:10, speaks: “Oh, that there were one among you that would shut the doors, that ye might not kindle fire on mine altar in vain!” They are slaves and greedy self-enjoying hirelings and day laborers, who receive their reward here on earth, like the Pharisees with their praying and fasting, as Christ says, Matthew 6:2. However, in regard to the eternal reward it is thus: inasmuch as works naturally follow faith, as I said, it is not necessary to command them, for it is impossible for faith not to do them without being commanded, in order that we may learn to distinguish the false from the true faith. Hence the eternal reward also follows true faith, naturally, without any seeking, so that it is impossible that it should not, although it may never be desired or sought, yet it is appropriated and promised in order that true and false believers may be known, and that everyone may understand that a good life follows naturally of itself.

[18] As an illustration of this take a rude comparison: behold, hell and death are also threatened to the sinner, and naturally follow sin without any seeking; for no one does wickedly because he wants to be damned, but would much rather escape it. Yet, the result is there, and it is not necessary to declare it, for it will come of itself. Yet, it is declared that man might know what follows a wicked life. So here, a wicked life has its own reward without seeking it. Hence a good life will find its reward without any seeking it. When you drink good or poor wine, although you do not drink it for the taste, yet the taste naturally follows of itself.

[19] Now when Christ says: make to yourselves friends, lay up for yourselves treasures, and the like, you see that he means: do good, and it will follow of itself without your seeking, that you will have friends, find

treasures in heaven, and receive a reward. But your eyes must simply be directed to a good life, and care nothing about the reward, but be satisfied to know and be assured that it will follow, and let God see to that. For those who look for a reward, become lazy and unwilling laborers, and love the reward more than the work, yea, they become enemies of work. In this way God's will also becomes hateful, who has commanded us to work, and hence God's command and will must finally become burdensome to such a heart.

Part III. It Is Not the Saints, But God Only Who Receives Us into the Eternal Tabernacles, and Bestows His Reward.

[20] This is so clear that it needs no proof. For how can the saints receive us into heaven, as everyone himself must depend on God alone to receive him into heaven, and every saint scarcely has enough for himself? This the wise virgins prove, who did not wish to give of their oil to the foolish virgins, Matthew 25:9, and St. Peter, 1 Peter 4:18, says: "The righteous is scarcely saved." And Christ in John 3:13: "And no one hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of Man, who is in heaven."

[21] What then shall we reply to: "Make to yourselves friends out of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles?" We say this: that this passage says nothing about the saints in heaven, but of the poor and needy on earth, who live among us. As though he would say: why do you build churches, make saints and serve my mother, St. Peter, St. Paul and other departed saints? They do not need this or any other service of yours, they are not your friends, but friends of those who lived in their days and to whom they did good; but do service to your friends, that is, the poor who live in your time and among you, your nearest neighbors who need your help, make them your friends with your mammon.

[22] Again, we must not understand this reception into the eternal tabernacles as being done by man; however, men will be an instrument and witness to our faith, exercised and shown in their behalf, on account of which God receives us into the eternal tabernacles. For thus the Scriptures are accustomed to speak when they say: sin condemns, faith saves, that

means, sin is the cause why God condemns, and faith is the cause why he saves. As man also is at all times accustomed to say: your wickedness will bring you misfortune, which means, your wickedness is the cause and source of your misfortune. Thus our friends receive us into heaven, when they are the cause, through our faith shown to them, of entering heaven. This is enough on these three points.

[23] In this connection we will explain three questions, that we may better understand this Gospel. What is mammon? Why is it unrighteous? And why Christ commands us to imitate the unjust steward, who worked for his own gain at his master's expense, which without doubt is unjust and a sin?

[24] First, mammon is a Hebrew word meaning riches or temporal goods, namely, whatever anyone owns over and above what his needs require, and with which he can benefit others without injuring himself. For Hamon in Hebrew means multitude, or a great crowd or many, from which Mahamon or Mammon, that is, multitude of riches or goods, is derived.

[25] Second, it is called unrighteous, not because obtained by injustice and usury, for with unrighteous possessions no good can be done, for it must be returned as Isaiah 61:8, says: "For I, Jehovah, love justice, I hate robbery with iniquity." And Solomon, Proverbs 3:27, says: "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thy hand to do it." But it is called unrighteous because it stands in the service of unrighteousness, as St. Paul says to the Ephesians 5:16, that the days are evil, although God made them and they are good, but they are evil because wicked men misuse them, in which they do many sins, offend and endanger souls. Therefore, riches are unrighteous, because the people misuse and abuse them. For we know that wherever riches are the saying holds good: money rules the world, men creep for it, they lie for it, they act the hypocrite for it, and do all manner of wickedness against their neighbor to obtain it, to keep it, and increase it to possess the friendship of the rich.

[26] But it is especially before God an unrighteous mammon because man does not serve his neighbor with it; for where my neighbor is in need and I do not help him when I have the means to do so, I unjustly keep what is his, as I am indebted to give to him according to the law of nature: "Whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to

them.” Matthew 7:12. And Christ says in Matthew 5:42: “Give to him that asketh thee.” And John in his first Epistle, 1 John 3:17: “But whoso hath the world’s goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?” And few see this unrighteousness in mammon because it is spiritual, and is found also in those possessions which are obtained by the fairest means, which deceive them that they think they do no one any harm, because they do no coarse outward injustice, by robbing, stealing and usury.

[27] In the third place it has been a matter of very great concern to many to know who the unjust steward is whom Christ so highly recommends? This, in short, is the simple answer: Christ does not commend unto us the steward on account of his unrighteousness, but on account of his wisdom and his shrewdness, that with all his unrighteousness, he so wisely helps himself. As though I would urge someone to watch, pray and study, and would say: Look here, murderers and thieves wake at night to rob and steal, why then do you not wake to pray and study? By this I do not praise murderers and thieves for their crimes, but for their wisdom and foresight, that they so wisely obtain the goods of unrighteousness. Again. as though I would say: An unchaste woman adorns herself with gold and silk to tempt young boys; why will you not also adorn yourself with faith to please Christ? By this I do not praise fornication, but the diligence employed.

[28] In this way Paul compares Adam and Christ saying: “Adam was a figure of him that was to come.” Romans 5:14. Although from Adam we have nothing but sin, and from Christ nothing but grace, yet these are greatly opposed to each other. But the comparison and type consist only in the consequence or birth, not in virtue or vice. As to birth, Adam is the father of all sinners, so Christ is the father of all the righteous. And as all sinners come from one Adam, so all the righteous come from one Christ. Thus the unjust steward is here typified to us only in his cunning and wisdom, who knows so well how to help himself, that we should also consider in the right way the welfare of our souls as he did in the wrong way that of his body and life. With this we will let it suffice, and pray God for grace.

Tenth Sunday after Trinity. Prophecy of the Destruction of Jerusalem.

Text: Luke 19:41-48.

41 And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,
42 Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the
things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.
43 For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench
about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side,
44 And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee;
and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou
knewest not the time of thy visitation.
45 And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold
therein, and them that bought;
46 Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye
have made it a den of thieves.
47 And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes
and the chief of the people sought to destroy him,
48 And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very
attentive to hear him. Luke 19:41-48

[1] This Gospel presents that which took place on Palm Sunday, when Christ rode into Jerusalem. On this occasion, he preached two or three days in the temple, which was more than he ever did before at one time. The sum and substance of this Gospel is, that Christ grieves and laments over the afflictions of those who despise God's Word.

[2] Now you have often heard what the Word of God is, what it brings us, and what kind of scholars it has. Of all this nothing is said here. Only the punishment and distress which shall come upon the Jews because they

would not recognize the time of their visitation, are here described. And let us well consider this, because the time of their visitation also deeply concerns us. If they are punished who do not know the time of their visitation, what will be done to those who maliciously persecute, blaspheme and disgrace the Gospel and the Word of God? However, here he only speaks of those who do not know it.

[3] There are two methods of preaching against the despisers of God's Word. The first is by threats, as Christ threatens them in Matthew 11:21-24: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum (which was his own city, where he performed most of his mighty works), shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? Thou shalt go down unto hell; for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in thee, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee." With these threatening words he would frighten them to their senses, and not to cast to the winds the Word which God sends them.

[4] The other method the Lord gives here when he weeps, and shows his sympathy for the poor blinded people, and rebukes and threatens them, not as the hardened and stubbornly blind; but when he melts in love and compassion over his enemies, and with great heart-rending pity and cries, he tells them what shall befall them, which he would gladly prevent, but all is in vain. In the passage just quoted, Matthew 11:21-24, where he rebukes them, he does not treat them in love, but in the severity of faith. However here, it is all sincere love and mercy. This is worthy of our consideration.

[5] First, as he approached the city they went before and followed him with songs of great joy, saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" and spread their garments in the way and cut branches from the trees and strewed them in the way; the whole scene was most glorious. But in the midst of all this joy he begins to weep. He permits all the world to be joyful, while he himself was bowed with grief, when he beheld the city and said: "If thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things that belong unto peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

[6] As though he would say: Oh, if you only knew what belongs to your peace, that you might not be destroyed, but be preserved with both temporal and eternal peace, you would yet this day consider, and redeem the time! And now it is high time for you to know what is for your highest welfare. But you are blind, and will neglect the opportunity, until there shall be neither help nor counsel. As though to say: Here you stand, firmly built, and within you are strong and mighty men, who, secure and happy, think there is no danger! Yet, about forty years more, and you shall be utterly destroyed. The Lord plainly says this in these words: “For the days shall come upon thee, when thy enemies shall cast up a bank about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side and shall dash thee to the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; but thou knowest not the time of thy visitation.”

[7] But the Jews were stubborn, and depended on God’s promises, which they thought meant nothing else than that they should continue forever. They were secure, and vainly thought: God will not do such things to us. We own the temple; here God himself dwells; besides we have mighty men, money and treasures enough to defy all our enemies! For even the Romans, and the emperor after he had conquered the city, confessed that the city was so well and firmly built, that it would have been impossible to take it, had God not especially willed it. Therefore they trusted in their own glory, and built their confidence on a false delusion, which finally deceived them.

[8] The Lord, however, saw deeper into the future than they when he said: O, Jerusalem! if thou hadst known what I know, thou wouldst seek thy peace. Peace in the Scriptures means, when all things go well with us. You now think you have pleasant days, but if you knew how your enemies will encamp round about you, compass you about and hedge you in on every side, crush you to the ground and demolish all your beautiful buildings, and leave not one stone upon another; you would eagerly accept the Word, which brings to you solid peace and every blessing. [The woeful history of the destruction of Jerusalem you can read in books, from which those who wish will easily understand this Gospel.]

[9] God caused his threats to be executed even thus, that the city was besieged at the time of the Easter festival, when the Jews were assembled within the walls of Jerusalem from every land, and as the historian Josephus writes, there were together at that time about three million people. This was

an enormous multitude. Only one hundred thousand people would have been enough to crowd the city. But all this great multitude God in his wrath intended to bake, melt and weld together into one mass of ruin. Yet, the Apostles and Christians were all out of the city, they had withdrawn into the land of Herod, Samaria, Galilee, and were scattered among the heathen. Thus God separated and saved the good grain and poured the chaff into one place. There was such an immense multitude of Jews present, that they were sufficient to devour a whole kingdom, to say nothing of only one city. They also fell into such distress and famine, that they devoured everything and had nothing left, until they were at last compelled to eat their leather bow-strings, shoe latches and shoe leather; and finally mothers moved by their distress butchered their own children, which the soldiers snatched from them, for they smelt the odor of the boiling meat through the squares of the city. They used dove's dung for salt, which commanded a high price. In short, there was distress and bloodshed enough to melt a rock to tears; so that no one could have believed that God's wrath could be so horrible and that he would so unmercifully martyr a people. The buildings and the streets were piled full of the dead, who perished from starvation, and yet the Jews were so raging that they defied God and refused to yield, until the emperor was compelled to use force and capture the city, when they could no longer maintain their ground.

Application to Germany

[11] Here let us learn a lesson, for this concerns us, not us alone who are here present, but the whole country of Germany. It is not a mere jest, nor should we think that it will go different with us. The Jews would not believe until they experienced it and became conscious of it. God has now also visited us, and has opened the precious treasures of his holy Gospel unto us, by which we can learn God's will, and see how we were held by the power of the devil. Yet no one will earnestly believe it, yea, we much more despise it and make light of it. No city, no officer of the government is thankful for the Gospel; and what is still worse the great majority persecute and blaspheme it. God has great patience; he waits to see how we will deal with his Gospel; but when we once let the opportunity slip, he will take his Word from us, and then the wrath which consumed the Jews will also consume us. For it is one and the selfsame Word, the very same God, and the identical

Christ, the Jews themselves had; therefore the punishment in body and soul will also most certainly be the same. [We, of course, regard it as mockery, and care nothing for it. This is only an evidence of our own blindness. We ought to perceive that God is hardening us; for there is not a single city that is concerned about it; no officer of the law shows any zeal in its favor. It is most deplorable.] And I fear the time will yet come when Germany will lay in a heap of ruins. The evil winds have already begun to blow destruction in our peasant war. We have already lost many people. Nearly one hundred thousand men, only between Easter and Pentecost! It is an awful work of God, and I fear it will not stop at this. It is only a foretaste of a threat to frighten us, that we may prepare ourselves for the coming ordeal. So far it is but a fox's tail, but God will soon come with a terrible scourge, and lash us to pieces.

[12] But we will act just like the Jews, and care nothing for it, until all help and counsel are lost forever. Now we might check it, for now it is high time for us to know what is best for us, and accept the Gospel in peace, while grace is brought, and peace is offered unto us. But we permit one day after another, one year after another to pass, and do even less than formerly. No one prays now, no one is in earnest. When the time is past, prayers will be of no avail. We do not lay it to heart, and think we are safe, and do not see the awful calamity which has already begun, and are not aware that God so dreadfully punishes us with false prophets and sects, which he sends us everywhere, and who preach so securely as though they had swallowed the Holy Spirit whole. Those whom we had thought were the very best among us, go to work and lead the people astray, until they scarcely know what to do or leave undone.

[13] But this is only a beginning, although it is frightful and terrible enough. For there is no greater distress and calamity than when God sends us sects and false spirits, because they are so impudent and daringly bold, that they are really to be pitied. On the other hand the Word of God is such a great treasure, that no one can sufficiently comprehend its worth. For God himself considers his treasure immensely great, and when he visits us with his grace, he earnestly desires that we should gladly and freely accept it, and does not compel us as he is able to do, but it is his will that we should gladly obey it from choice and love. For he does not wait until we come to him, but he comes first to us. He comes into the world, becomes man,

serves us, dies for us, rises again from the dead, sends us his Holy Spirit, gives us his Word, and opens heaven so wide that all men can enter; besides he gives us rich promises and assurances that he will care for us in time and in eternity, here and there, and pours out into our bosoms all the fullness of his grace. Therefore the acceptable time of grace is now at hand. Yet we neglect it, and cast it to the winds, so that he will not and cannot give it to us.

[14] For when we fall and sin in other ways, he can better spare us and be lenient, he of course will spare us and forgive; but when we despise his Word, it calls for punishment, and he will also punish us, even if he delays a hundred years. But he will not wait that long. And the clearer the Word is preached the greater the punishment will be. I fear it will be the destruction of all Germany. Would to God I were a false prophet in this matter. Yet it will most certainly take place. God cannot permit this shameful disregard of his Word to go unpunished, nor will he wait long, for the Gospel is so abundantly proclaimed that it has never been as plainly and clearly taught since the days of the Apostles, as it is at present. God be praised! Hence it applies to Germany, as I fear it will be destroyed, unless we act differently.

[15] We, who have heard the Gospel for a long time, ought earnestly to pray God that he continue to grant us peace. The princes and officers want to settle everything with the sword, and too impudently interfere with God's office, until God himself shall smite them down. So it is high time faithfully to beseech God to permit his Gospel to be further spread through Germany, to those who have not yet heard it. For if the punishment came suddenly upon us, all will be lost, and many souls will be taken before the Gospel comes to them. Therefore I wish that we would not so terribly despise the Gospel, the costly treasure, not only for our own sakes, but also for the sake of those who have not yet heard it. It has become a little quiet, God grant that it may so continue, and that both the princes and the citizens may become more sane; for if it should begin afresh, I fear it would have no end.

[16] But we act just like the Jews, who cared more for the belly than for God. They were more concerned how to fill their stomachs than how to be saved. For this reason they have lost both, and have been served just right. Because they would not accept eternal life and peace, God took their bodily life, so that they have lost both body and soul. They also immediately put forth the excuse, just as our own people do today. We would of course

gladly accept the Gospel, if it would not place our bodies and property in jeopardy, and if thereby we would not hazard the loss of our wives and children. For the Jews said, if we believe in him, the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation, John 11:48. As nothing will happen sooner than what the wicked fear, as Solomon says, Proverbs 10:24: “The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him.” This prevented the Jews to believe God, and they did not consider the great and rich promises God bestowed upon them. So we also pass them by, and are not aware of the all-powerful and comfortable promises Christ gives when he says, Matthew 19:29: Ye shall receive a hundredfold here, and there ye shall inherit eternal life. Let wife and child go, I will care for them, and restore them again to you. Only courageously trust in me. [Do you not think that I can build you another house? Do you regard me as being a hard man? Yet I will give you heaven; will you not risk it on my Word?] If you are robbed of your treasures, blessed are ye, heaven and earth are mine, I will reward you a hundredfold.

[17] We pass over these and many like passages, and besides despise them, and depend only on what we have in our banks, and how we may keep our purses filled, and do not consider that God has also given us what we have, and will still give us more; nor do we consider that when we lose God, the stomach will also be lost. Therefore we are served just right in losing both the creator and the creature besides.

[18] But believers in God risk all in him and transfer all things into his care, for him to do according to his pleasure, and think thus: God has given you your home and wife, you have not produced them yourself; now because they are God’s, I will entrust them all to his care, he will keep them from all harm. I must otherwise leave all at any rate, therefore I will bravely trust him with them, and for his sake give up all I have. If God wants me here, he will give me other treasures, for he has promised to give enough for this life and for the life to come. If he does not want me here, I owe him a death, which will bring me into eternal life; when he calls me, I will go trusting in his Word.

[19] Whoever is not thus disposed, denies God, and must at the same time lose both, the present and the eternal life. The belly with its foul odors is our God, and prevents us from clinging to God’s Word. First, I will be certain how I shall feed, and where my supplies are. The Gospel says: Trust

in God; and your stomach shall most certainly be provided for, and have enough [without believing or trusting in it]. But if I have only five dollars they give me so much courage to think I have anyhow enough food for ten days, that I trust in such limited provisions, and do not trust God who fed me hitherto, that he will care for me tomorrow.

[20] Is it not a shameful vexation or calamity that I trust in a penny that I will have something to eat tomorrow? How contemptible this carcass! Shall a penny have more weight in my heart and give me more courage than God himself, who holds heaven and earth in his power, who gives us the air we breathe and the water we drink, who makes our corn to grow and gives us all things? It is so scandalous that it cannot be uttered, that God should not amount to as much with us as a hundred guilders. Why not think that God, who has created me, will surely feed me, if he wants me to live? If he does not want this, very well, I shall be satisfied.

[21] Yes, says the stomach, I find no God in my chest! You silly donkey, who assures you that you will live tomorrow? You are not certain whether you will have a belly tomorrow, and you want to know where to find the bread and the food! Yes, you have a fine assurance! When our hearts are thus prompted, we see what a government of hell there would be on earth; yes, it would be the devil himself. Is it not a thing most abominable, that God who feeds so many mouths, should be held in such low esteem by me, that I will not trust him to feed me? Yea, that a guilder, thirty-eight cents, should be valued more highly than God, who pours out his treasures everywhere in rich profusion. For the world is full of God and his works, He is everywhere present with his gifts, and yet we will not trust in him, nor accept his visitation. Shame on thee, thou cursed world! What kind of a child is that, who cannot trust in God for a single day, but trusts in a guilder?

[22] Now, I think, we see what the world is. how on account of the belly the world despises God, and yet must lose the belly together with body and soul. Oh, what godless people we are, and yet we are to spit upon or despise the world. If one would consider that he is such a godless wretch, that he cannot trust in God, he would not wish to live. Only choke away; for as captives we stick too deeply in the old Adam. The world is hell in prospect, yea, the real kingdom of Satan, a court yard in hell, except that the body is still here, otherwise it is true hell.

[23] For this reason, Christ admonishes us with tears to know our salvation and accept his visitation, that the calamity may not follow, which will surely come upon those who do not accept it, who are secure, until swift and sudden destruction comes upon them. May God give us grace, that we may know ourselves! The Gospel further reads: “And he entered into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold, saying unto them: It is written, And my house shall be a house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of robbers.”

Part II. The Cleansing of the Temple

[24] This is the second part of our Gospel, where the Lord takes hold of matters in earnest with his powerful hand, when he goes into the temple and casts out those who bought and sold there. For the first part was nothing but an admonition and incentive unto faith. Here the Lord now tells us what the temple of God is, and quotes passages from the Scriptures, and especially from the prophet Isaiah, 56:7, where God says: “For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” You, however, have made it a house of merchandise. This is a strong passage which the prophet utters: “for all peoples, for all Gentiles,” is against the Jews, who trusted in the temple of God at Jerusalem, and thought that this material house in Jerusalem would stand forever, and that it was impossible for God to demolish this temple or destroy this city. The Word of God does not lie. For this reason they also murdered Stephen, because he spoke against that holy place and said, Acts 6:14: “Jesus shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us.” And they said: have not the prophets praised this house, and Christ himself says here, that it is a house of prayer, and you Apostles say, he will destroy it.

[25] But we must rightly understand this expression, that the city of Jerusalem, the temple and the people, should remain until the time of Christ. With this agree all the prophets, who have given all things into the hands of Christ; as he would then dispose of it, so it should be and remain. Hence the passage in Isaiah goes no further than unto the times of Christ, as also all the prophets say, that after that there shall come a kingdom extending over the whole world, as in Malachi 1:10-11 we read: “For from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto

my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the Gentiles, saith Jehovah of hosts.” Here the prophet speaks of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, who shall build himself a house of prayer as extensive as the whole world.

[26] It is true that God himself has established the temple at Jerusalem, not because it consisted of beautiful stones and costly buildings, or because it was consecrated by bishops, as at present men employ such foolery and juggling tricks; but God himself had consecrated and sanctified it with his Word, when he said: This house is my house: for his Word was preached in it. Now, wherever God’s Word is preached, there is God’s own true house, there God most certainly dwells with his grace. Wherever his Gospel is, there is a house of prayer, there men shall and may truly pray, and God will also hear their prayer, as Christ in John 16:23-24 says: “If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be made full.” Here again, where the Word is not found, there the devil has full sway.

[27] That we have imitated the Jews and built so many churches, would be well enough, if we had done it in order that the Word of God might be preached there; for where the Word goes, there God is present, and looks down from heaven and pours out his grace. Therefore he says to the Jews here: I will not that you should make out of my house a den of robbers. For there were money changers in it who sold sheep and oxen, that strangers might buy them for their offerings in divine service. Why then does he call it a den of robbers? Surely, he gives it a scandalous name. He does it however because they no longer appreciate the house as the house of God, but as a market house; that is, the priests did not inquire how the Word of God was preached in it, although they sang, they babbled and read the prophets and Moses; but God cares nothing for such a murmuring of Psalms; that belongs to children.

[28] They did just as our priests and monks do now, who have also made dens of robbers of our churches and cloisters, and have preached poison, and held masses only that the people might give them money and presents for holding them that they might thus fill their stomachs. They made the church a market house, in which they carried on their idle talk, corrupted and destroyed the sheep of God’s pastures by their scandalous false

doctrine, that it may well be called a robber's den for the soul. This title we should write on all churches in which the Gospel is not preached, for there they mock God, destroy souls, banish the pure Word and establish dens of murder; for he who listens to their words must die. Oh, how shamefully we have been deceived! Now, however, we should praise God, that this Word again brings us life, drives out the murderers, and teaches us how to pray aright; for an honest heart must pray, not with the mouth, but with the heart.

The Conclusion

[29] Thus we have heard the second part of our Gospel, how Christ drove out the merchants that pandered to base appetites, and made room for his Word. It would be a good thing, in this same way to cleanse our cloisters, and turn them into schools or preaching places; if this is not done they will be and continue to be nothing but dens of robbers; for if Christ calls his own house a den of robbers, how much more will our churches and temples, not consecrated by God, be called dens of robbers?

[30] I have often requested you to pray God to turn his wrath and restrain the devil now in the world. For you have undoubtedly heard of the great calamity, how many have been slain in the insurrection. We fear they have all been lost, for God requires obedience, and has himself pronounced the sentence, Matthew 26:52: "For all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." The devil has taken possession of the world, who knows when our turn will come. Therefore let us pray that God's kingdom may come and Christians may be multiplied, that he send wise and intelligent ministers to care for the people and listen to their wants, he who knows the gift of God prays for others who have not yet heard the Word, it is high time to do so. [Pray the Lord's Prayer.]

[31] Well, wherever this calamity begins and prevails, that the people maliciously despise the day God visits us with his Word and grace, for the sake of the belly and a little temporal benefit and advantage; there must follow as a consequence of such treatment the final punishment and wrath of God, who will utterly destroy them, remove the foundation of their trust, and overthrow the country and the people, so that both temporal and eternal interests go down together. For how shall he otherwise treat us, because of our scandalous ingratitude for his great love and mercy which he publicly

declared unto us by his gracious visitation? How shall or can he do more for us, while we with wantonness and defiance spurn his help, and ever struggle and strive after wrath and destruction? For if those are not free of punishment who transgress the law and sin against the ten commandments; how much less will he permit those to go unpunished, who blaspheme and despise the Gospel of his grace, seeing the law by far does not bring as many good things as the Gospel?

[32] If we will not wish to enjoy this happy day which he gives us unto grace and our salvation, he can also instead permit us to see and experience nothing but the dark and terrible night of all affliction and misfortune. And since we will not hear this precious Word and the proclamation of peace, we will be forced to hear the devil's cry of murder ring in our ears from every direction. Now is the time for us to know the day, and well employ the rich and golden year, while the annual fair is before our very doors, and acknowledge that he has severely punished us. If we neglect it and allow it to pass, we can never hope for a better day or expect any peace; for the Lord, who is the Lord of peace, will be with us no longer.

[33] But if Christ be no longer with us, our hope will vanish; and wherever this beloved guest is rejected, and his Christians no longer tolerated, government, peace and everything shall perish, for he too desires to eat with us, to rule and to provide bountifully. However, he desires also to be known as such a Lord, in order that we may be thankful to him, and also permit this guest and his Christians to eat with us, and give him his due tribute; if not, we will then be forced to give it to another, who will so thank and reward us for it, that we shall not be able to retain a bite of bread or a penny in peace. But the world will not believe this, just as the Jews also would not believe it, until they experienced it, and faith came to their assistance. For God has ordained, that this Christ shall be Lord and King upon the earth, under whose feet he has put all things, and whoever would have peace and good days, must be kind and obedient to him, or he will be dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel. Psalm 2:9.

The Second Part of This Gospel

“And he entered into the temple, and began to cast out those that sold, saying unto them: It is written, And my house shall be a house of prayer,

but ye have made it a den of robbers.”

[34] Here he shows the aim of his great activity, and what concerns him most of all, which was also the cause of his weeping. It is indeed a terrible history, that he who so recently wept out of great sympathy and compassion, so soon can change and come forth in great anger, (for our beloved Lord burns with great devotion and zeal), and goes into the temple as in a storm, and strikes with his uplifted arm as the Lord of the temple, of course with an excellent and warm spirit by which he is moved, beholding the chief cause of distress and the destruction, of which he spoke and over which he wept; namely, that the chief government, which should be God's own and be called his temple, is all perverted and desolate, God's Word and true worship entirely suppressed and corrupted, even by those who would be leaders and teachers of the people, on account of their disgraceful greed and their own glory. He would say by this: Yes, it is this, that . will completely bring on the calamity, and make an end of everything among this people.

[35] Therefore, as merciful and compassionate as he showed himself to be to the poor multitude of people who are so wretchedly misled to their destruction; so great was the anger he showed against those who are the cause of this destruction. Otherwise he did not often resort to physical force and cause an uproar, as he does here, so that it is a strange act for an excellent and kind man, so full of love. But the cause of it is the great and powerful zeal and fervency of Spirit, which sees whence all affliction and sorrow come, namely, because the true worship of God is abolished and the name of God is so blasphemed that it is used merely for a show.

[36] For the temple and the whole priesthood were ordained for the purpose of enforcing God's Word, to praise his grace and mercy, etc.; and to testify to this and thank him for his Word by an external worship of offerings. However, they did not teach praise and thanksgiving to God, but instead they perverted it into the doctrine of monks and works, so that with such offerings one merited the grace of God, and if they only offered a great deal, God would give them heaven and every good thing on earth. And hence they built their hopes for everything, which they ought to look for out of pure grace and mercy of God, on their own works and merits. And besides they were misled so far in the devil's name, that their avarice set up there in the temple tables for bankers and counters for traders in doves and

all kinds of cattle used for offerings, so that those coming from distant lands and cities could find enough there to purchase, or if they had no money, they might barter for or borrow it, so that there might by all means be as many and as great offerings as possible. Thus under the name of divine worship the true worship of God was overthrown and rooted out; and they substituted for God's grace and goodness their own merits, and for his free gift their own works, which he was obliged to accept from us and thank us for them, and allow himself to be treated as an idol, compelled to do what pleases us, be angry or laugh, just as we wish it; and besides satiate their outrageous greed, by such idolatrous doings, and without any sense of shame carry on a public annual fair.

[37] Just as our Pope's crowd, priests and monks, also did, who taught nothing but to trust in human works, and on this doctrine constructed everything in their church government, so that the people are compelled to purchase these things from them, who thus established a daily public fair over the whole world. And nothing was omitted that could be made to serve their greed, and for money they sold God, Christ, the Sacrament of the mass, absolution, and forgiveness of sins, the losing and binding key. And to this must be added their own invented human nonsense, which they pretend is divine worship, such as the brotherhood of monks, and their own superfluous merits; yea, even to put upon the dead a monk's hood and cords; likewise the bishop's and priest's nasty oil, all kinds of bones of the dead which they call holy, letters of indulgence to eat butter, married women, children of priests and the like. All this had to bring and yield them money daily.

[38] And especially the great rat king at Rome with his Judas purse, which is the great money gulch that in the name of Christ and the church has appropriated to itself all the possessions of the world. For he has reserved unto himself the power to forbid whatever he pleased and again to allow it for money, even to take and give kingdoms, whenever and as often as he pleased, and taxed lords and kings as it suited him. This is a much more infamous and barefaced perversion of the temple of God into a house of merchandise than was perpetrated by the Jews at Jerusalem. For it belonged to Antichrist, as is prophesied of him, to levy and collect for himself the treasures of the world; and St. Peter, speaking of such a hoard in 2 Peter 2:3 says: "And in covetousness shall they with feigned words make

merchandise of you: whose sentence now from of old lingereth not, and their destruction slumbereth not.”

[39] Therefore Christ is justly angry at such desecration of his temple by these bloated misers, who do not only despise and forsake the true worship of God, but also pervert it and trample it under their feet. And thus they truly make out of the temple which God ordained for the purpose of teaching the people the Word of God and guiding them to heaven, nothing but a den of robbers, where nothing but the destruction and the murder of immortal souls take place, because they silence God’s Word, through which alone souls can be saved, and instead they are fed on the devil’s lies, etc. This is truly the chief sin and principal cause, why the Jews with their temple and all they had, deserved to go to destruction and ruin. For, as they destroyed the kingdom of God itself, he will no longer build up their kingdom for them. Wherefore he says: Because you go to work, and instead of my kingdom you build the kingdom of Satan, so will I also work against you, and will destroy everything utterly, that I have built for you. This is an example he began to do on that very day when he rushed among them in the temple, as his last public act before his death, which after his departure the Romans would effectually complete; namely, they with all they had would be totally swept away, as he cleanses his temple of them, that they may no more possess either their worship, temple nor priesthood, country or people.

[40] He has, God be praised, even commenced to overthrow our idols and spectres, and Popery’s abominable merchandise of perfidy, and to purify his churches through the Gospel, also as a prelude, that it may be seen that he will also make an end of them, as before our eyes they have already begun to fall, and they must daily fall more and more, and they will be much more horribly dashed to the earth and everlastingly destroyed, than the Jews were destroyed and exterminated, because theirs is still a much more shameful abomination. This shall first properly begin when the Gospel has departed on account of their disgraceful, horrible blasphemy; but it will finally come to an end on the last day and be completely and forever destroyed.

[41] Let Germany, which, praise to God, now has the Gospel, beware, that she may not meet the same fate, as it already so strongly everywhere indicates she will. For we dare not think that the contempt and unthankfulness, which are gaining control among us as great as among the

Jews, will remain unpunished. After that he will let the godless world complain and cry: If the Gospel had not come, such things would not have come upon us; just like the Jews at Jerusalem blamed all their calamities to the preaching of the Gospel, and they themselves at the risk of their own necks prophesied that if Christ with his Gospel should continue, the Romans would come and take away their place and nation. And afterward also, even the Romans blamed their destruction to this new God and new doctrine. Just as it is said at present, since the Gospel has appeared things have never been right.

[42] And thus it will also go with the world; as its people despise and persecute God's Word, and become so hardened and blinded, they will blame no one as the cause and merit of their destruction but the precious Gospel itself; which nevertheless alone preserves, thank God, what is still preserved; otherwise all things would long since lay in one common heap of ruins. And yet it must bear the blame for everything that the devil and his clans transact. Because people continue to blaspheme and will not recognize what our sins deserve and the grace and mercy which we have in the Gospel, God must thus repay such blasphemers, so that they become their own prophets, and for a double wickedness receive a double reward. This premonition has already gone forth, except that it is yet withheld on account of the faithful few; just as he beforehand admonished the Jews by this example when he cast those that sold and bought out of the temple, and afterwards went into the temple himself and finally taught until the day of his death, and yet for a time withheld as long as he could, and afterwards by his Apostles until they would no longer tolerate them; so now we, who cleave to Christ, restrain punishment as long as we live; but when these too shall lay down their heads, then the world will realize what it once had.

Eleventh Sunday after Trinity. A Picture and an Example of a True Saint.

Luke 18:9-14.

9 And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?

10 And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

12 Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

13 They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

14 And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. Luke 8:9-14

[1] Here again we have a picture and an example of the divine judgment on saints and good people. Two extraordinary persons are presented to us in this Gospel; one thoroughly good and truly pious; and one hypocritically pious. But before we take up the example and consider the terrible sentence, we must first notice that Luke here makes the impression as though righteousness came by works. For Luke is most accustomed to do this, as when we at present preach that faith alone saves, he observes that people are led to desire only to believe, and to neglect the power and fruit of faith. This John also does in his Epistle and James, where they show that faith cannot exist without works. Thus Luke, in the beginning of his introduction, would speak as follows: I see indeed that many have preached how faith alone saves, by which they have brought the people to strive for a fictitious faith; hence I must also speak of works by which they can be assured of their faith, and prove it to the people by their acts. Consequently it sounds as though Luke everywhere taught that righteousness came by works; as you have recently heard: Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; and, make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. And here it appears as though the publican had obtained his goodness by praying and smiting

his breast. So this Gospel appears as though we should become good or pious by our works.

[2] Now you have heard that a man, before he can do anything good, must by all means first be good. For the truth must always stand: “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit;” and again, “An evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit.” Thus a man must first be good, before he can do good. So he also firmly concludes that the publican smote his breast, which proves the conclusion, that he had been good.

[3] This has taken place and has been written to the end that we should open our eyes and not judge the people according to their outward appearance. To do this in this instance it is necessary to examine the hearts of both, and not judge according to mere external works. For when the heart is good, the whole man is good. For if I judged the publican according to his works, my judgment would soon be false. For nothing appears in him but sin. Again, if I judge the hypocrite or Pharisee according to his works, I will also miss the mark. For he stands at the holy place, makes the best prayer imaginable, for he praises and thanks God with grand works, he fasts, gives the tenth of all his goods, harms no one; in short, everything, both outwardly and inwardly, appears well with him.

[4] As he judges, all men judge; no one can condemn such an upright and virtuous life. Who dare say that fasting is not good; or that to praise God and give everyone what we owe them is evil? When I see a priest, monk, or nun with such apparent noble conduct, I regard them as pious. Who can say otherwise? Hence if I am to judge whether this one is good and the other evil, I must be able to look into the hearts of both. But I cannot see into the heart, and must make the proper distinction from their works, as Christ says: “By their fruits ye shall know them.” Matthew 7:20.

[5] He speaks of the publican as though he must have previously heard a word from God that touched his heart so that he believed it and thus became pious, as St. Paul says, Romans 10:17: “So faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” When the Word falls into the heart, then man becomes pure and good. But the Evangelist does not indicate that he now first heard the Gospel here, but that he heard it somewhere, it matters not where. For he says: “God be merciful to me a sinner.” This knowledge is above the powers of reason. And yet it must previously have been known

to him that God is merciful, gracious and friendly to all those who confess their sins, who call upon him and long for grace. As he heard that God is gracious by virtue of his very nature, to all those who humble themselves and seek comfort in him. But to preach thus is always the pure Gospel.

[6] Hence the beginning of goodness or godliness is not in us, but in the Word of God. God must first let his Word sound in our hearts by which we learn to know and to believe him, and afterwards do good works. So we must believe from this that the publican had learned God's Word. If not, it would certainly have been impossible for him to acknowledge himself to be a poor sinner, as this Gospel reports. Indeed, it has a different appearance here, because St. Luke seems to insist more strongly on external works and appearances than on faith, and lays the emphasis more on the outward character and conduct than on the root and on the faith of the heart within. Nevertheless we must conclude that the publican had previously heard the Gospel. Otherwise his smiting his breast and his humble confession would not have occurred, had he not previously had faith in his heart.

[7] This is also proper fruit, since it promotes God's honor; as God desires nothing but the offering of praise, as Psalm 50:23, says: "Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth me, and to him that ordereth his way aright, will I show the salvation of God." In this way the publican also proceeds, gives God the offering of thanksgiving and secures to himself the forgiveness of sin, and praises God, puts himself to shame and exalts the truth above himself. Therefore we must praise and commend his work, because he gives God the highest honor and true worship. For he says: "God, be thou merciful to me a sinner." As though he would say: I am a rogue, this I confess, as you yourself know. Here you see that he confesses the truth, and is willing that God should reprove and revile him; yea, he does this himself, and casts himself down the very lowest, and with God he again rises upward, gives glory to God that he is gracious, kind and merciful. But in himself he finds nothing but sin. Wherefore these are the true fruits of faith.

[8] Thus we have learned from his fruits the publican's faith. But how shall we understand what Christ says: "This man went down to his house justified," as he had already been just through faith, before he smote his breast? He certainly must have been just before. Why then does Christ say here: "He went down to his house justified?" This is what I have often said,

if faith be true, it will break forth and bear fruit. If the tree is green and good, it will not cease to blossom forth in leaves and fruit. It does this by nature. I need not first command it and say: Look here, tree, bear apples. For if the tree is there and is good, the fruit will follow unbidden. If faith is present works must follow. If I confess that I am a sinner, it must follow that I will say: Alas God! I am a rogue, do thou cause me to be good. So this publican cares for nothing and speaks freely, though he puts himself to shame before all people, he does not care for that, as Psalm 116:10 says: "I believe, for I will speak. I was greatly afflicted," and says: "God, be thou merciful to me a sinner!" As though he would say: I now see that I am lost, for I am a bad man, and acknowledge my sins. Unless I believe and hold to God's mercy, and take the cup of the Savior and call upon God's grace, I will be ruined.

[9] Thus faith casts itself on God, and breaks forth and becomes certain through its works. When this takes place a person becomes known to me and to other people. For when I thus break forth I spare neither man nor devil, I cast myself down, and will have nothing to do with lofty affairs, and will regard myself as the poorest sinner on earth. This assures me of my faith. For this is what it says: "This man went down to his house justified." Thus we attribute salvation as the principal thing to faith, and works as the witnesses of faith. They make one so certain that he concludes from the outward life that the faith is genuine.

[10] We find this also in Abraham when he offers his son Isaac. Then God said: "For now I know that thou fearest God," Genesis 22:12. Surely, if he had not feared God, he would not have offered his son; and by this we know the fruit to be thoroughly good. Let us now heartily apply this to ourselves.

[11] This is why St. Luke and St. James have so much to say about works, so that one says: Yes, I will now believe, and then he goes and fabricates for himself a fictitious delusion, which hovers only on the lips as the foam on the water. No, no; faith is a living and an essential thing, which makes a new creature of man, changes his spirit and wholly and completely converts him. It goes to the foundation and there accomplishes a renewal of the entire man; so, if I have previously seen a sinner, I now see in his changed conduct, manner and life, that he believes. So high and great a thing is faith. For this reason the Holy Spirit urges works, that they may be

witnesses of faith. In those therefore in whom we cannot realize good works, we can immediately say and conclude: they heard of faith, but it did not sink into good soil. For if you continue in pride and lewdness, in greed and anger, and yet talk much of faith, St. Paul will come and say, 1 Corinthians 4:20, look here my dear sir, “the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.” It requires life and action, and is not brought about by mere talk.

[12] Thus we err on both sides in saying, a person must only believe, then he will neglect to do good works and bring forth good fruits. Again, if you preach works, the people immediately comfort themselves and trust in works. Therefore we must walk upon the common path. Faith alone must make us good and save us. But to know whether faith is right and true, you must show it by your works. God cannot endure your dissembling, for this reason he has appointed you a sermon which praises works, which are only witnesses that you believe, and must be performed not thereby to merit anything, but they should be done freely and gratuitously toward our neighbor.

[13] This must be practiced until it becomes a second nature with us. For thus God has also introduced works, as though he would say: if you believe, then you have the kingdom of heaven; and yet, in order that you may not deceive yourselves, do the works. To this the Lord refers in John 15:17, when he says to his disciples: “These things I command you, that ye may love one another.” And previous to this at the supper he said, John 13:34-35: “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another: even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” And shortly before this he said, 5:5: “For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you.” As though he would say: Ye are my friends, but this the people will not know by your faith, but when you show the fruits of faith, and break forth in love, then they will know you. The fruits will not save you nor make you any friends, but they must show and prove that you are saved and are my friends. Therefore mark this well, that faith alone makes us good; but as faith lies concealed within me, and is a great life, a great treasure, therefore the works must come forth and bear witness of the faith, to praise God’s grace and condemn the works of men. You must cast your eyes to the earth and humiliate yourself before

everyone, that you may also win your neighbor by your services; for this reason God lets you live, otherwise nothing would be better for you than to die and go to heaven. This you now also observe clearly in the good publican.

[14] So you find two judgments: one according to faith, the other according to outward works. The foundation you have in that faith is concealed; this he feels, who believes; but that is not enough, it must express itself as you see above in the publican, who breaks forth in humility, so much as not to lift his eyes to heaven, smites on his breast and praises God, by which he helps me to say when my sins oppress me: Behold, the publican also was a sinner and said: "God, be thou merciful to me a sinner;" thus too, I will do. By this will I also be strengthened so that when I see my sins I will think of his example, and with it comfort and strengthen myself, so that I can say: Oh God, I see in the publican that thou art gracious to poor sinners. Faith the believer keeps for himself, but externally he communicates its fruits to other people.

[15] The publican is on the right road and is twice justified; once through faith before God, and again by his works to me. Here he gives unto God his glory, and by faith repays him with praise. Also toward me he performs the duty of love, and puts words into my mouth and teaches me how to pray. Now he has paid all his debts toward God and man. So faith urges him to do; without however requiring anything from God as a reward of faith.

[16] This is one character of the publican, who, according to faith which is the spiritual judgment, is acknowledged justified, while according to the flesh he is unprofitable. For the Pharisee passes and does not notice him, sees not his faith, lets him stand way back, and sees him alone in his sins, and knows not that God has been gracious to him, and converted and reformed him. So when a carnally minded man would condemn a sinner according to his sins, it is otherwise impossible, he must fail.

[17] Let us now consider the fool, the Pharisee. Here are most beautiful works. In the first place he thanks God, fasts twice in the week, and all this to honor God, not St. Nicholas or St. Barnabas, he gives the tenth of all his goods, nor has he at any time committed adultery, has never done anyone violence or robbed him of his goods. Thus he has conducted himself in an

exemplary manner. This is a beautiful honest life, and excites our wonder and surprise. Truly, after the fashion of the world no one could find fault with him, yea, one must praise him. Yes, to be sure he does this himself.

[18] But God is the first to come and say, that all the work of the Pharisee is blasphemy. God help us, what an awful sentence this is! Priests and nuns may well be terrified by it, and all their bones quake, as you scarcely ever find one of them as pious as this Pharisee. Would to God we could have many such hypocrites and Pharisees; for then they could be taught better things.

[19] Well, what is the matter with the good man? Only this, he does not know his own heart. Here you see that we are our own greatest enemies, who close our eyes and hearts, and think we are as we feel. For if I should ask any such hypocrite: Sir, do you mean just what you say? he would take an oath, that it is not otherwise. But behold, see how deep God's sword cuts, and pierces through all the recesses of the soul, Hebrews 4:12. Here everything must go to ruin, or fall to the earth in humiliation, otherwise nothing can stand before God. Thus a pious woman must here fall down and kiss the vilest harlot's feet, yea, her footprints.

[20] Now let us better see and hear what the Lord says to this. There stands the publican and humbles himself, says nothing of fasting, nothing of his good works, nor of anything. Yet the Lord says that his sins are not so great as the sins of the hypocrite; even in spite of anyone now exalting himself above the lowest sinner. If I exalt myself a finger's breadth above my neighbor, or the vilest sinner, then am I cast down. For the publican during his whole life did not do as many and as great sins as this Pharisee does here when he says: I thank thee God that I am not as other men are; and lies enough to burst all heaven. From him you hear no word like: "God, be thou merciful to me a sinner?" God's mercy, sympathy, patience and love are all forgotten by him, while God is nothing but pure mercy, and he who does not know this, thinks there is no God, as in Psalm 14:1: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." So it is with an unbeliever who does not know himself. Therefore I say one thing more, if he had committed the vilest sin and deflowered virgins, it would not have been as bad as when he says: "I thank thee God, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." Yes, yes, do I hear you have no need of God and despise his goodness, mercy, love and everything that God

is? Behold, these are thy sins. Hence the public gross sins that break out are insignificant; but unbelief which is in the heart and we cannot see, this is the real sin in which monks and priests strut forth; these lost and corrupt ones are sunk head and ears in this sin, and pretend to be entirely free from it.

[21] Further, since he has now blasphemed God and lied to him, because he is unwilling to confess his sins, he falls further and sins against love to his neighbor, in that he says: “Even as this publican.” He could not bear his presence without blaming and condemning him. Here all commandments are abolished and transgressed, for he denies God and does his neighbor no good. In this way he goes to ruin, because he has not obeyed a letter of the law. For if he had said: Oh God, we are all sinners, this poor sinner is also like myself and all the rest: and had he joined the congregation and said: Oh God, be merciful unto us! Then he would have fulfilled God’s commandment, namely, the first, in that he gave God the honor and the praise, and had he afterwards said: Oh God, I see this one is a sinner, in the jaws of the devil; dear Lord, help him and had he thus brought him to God and prayed to God for him, he would then also have obeyed the other commandment of Christian love as Paul says, Galatians 6:2, and teaches: “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

[22] Now he comes and praises himself that he is just. He has a poisonous, wicked heart, who praises himself most gloriously on account of his pretended good works, how he fasted and gave the tenth of all he had. Hence he is so full of hatred to his neighbor, if God allowed him to judge, he would plunge the poor publican down into the deepest hell. Behold, is not this a wicked heart and terrible to hear, that I would all men should go to ruin, if only I be praised? Yet all this is so finely decorated and adorned by external conduct, that no one can censure it. Here we see how we are to know the tree from its fruits. For when I view his heart with spiritual eyes, I recognize it is full of blasphemy and hatred to his neighbor. From these fruits I know that the tree is evil. For works would not be evil in themselves, but the evil root in the heart makes them evil. This is set before us that we may beware and guard ourselves against it.

[23] Again, on the other hand, examine the heart also of the publican. Here we find that he believes. Hence his works are good and of service to the whole world, for he teaches that a man should humble himself and

praise God. On the contrary the other with his works makes saints who are puffed up and proud of heart; for he is entrapped in sins, his soul is condemned, and is fast in the jaws of the devil, and the high-minded knave steps forth and praises himself, because his neighbor over there is a sinner. To sum up all, he misleads the whole world with his hypocritical life. Thus we must judge the fruits with spiritual eyes as we have now judged these two; then we will know the tree whether it be good or evil.

[24] Now, where did I obtain this judgment? Here: God has given me his law like a mirror, in which I see what is good and evil. It says: Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself,” Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37. ‘Now the works of the publican praise God and benefit the whole world, because they teach us to know, and show us the way of God our Savior. Therefore, they are good because they praise God and benefit our neighbor. On the other hand, the hypocrite struts forth and blasphemes God, and with his corrupt life misleads the whole world.

[25] I should also speak of the great and shameful vice of slander, when one belies another, exposes him and speaks evil of him; while we are all alike after all, and no one has a reason to exalt himself above another. But that the government judges and punishes crime, it does by virtue of its office. For it wields the sword to make the transgressor fear. For God will not tolerate sin, and desires that the wicked have no rest, as the prophet Isaiah says, Isaiah 48:22: “There is no peace, saith Jehovah, to the wicked.” Therefore, where God does not internally disturb sinners, he will wipe out sin by fire and water, which they can have no peace from without. When such sins are to be punished, the officers, judges and people should think thus: Oh God! although I myself am a poor sinner and a much greater one than this person, and a much greater thief and adulterer than this one; still I will execute my office and leave him no rest in his sins and belabor him; for this is thy divine command. Concerning this I have said more on other occasions, especially in my book on the Civil Government, which you can read yourself; for the present let this suffice, and pray God for grace.

Eleventh Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. The Pharisee and the Publican.

Text: Luke 8:9-14.

9 And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?

10 And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

12 Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

13 They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

14 And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. Luke 8:9-14

[1] This Gospel brings two extraordinary persons to our notice, or two kinds of people from the multitude called the people of God, who would be God's servants and come before him seeking righteousness. And the two kinds of righteousness, which are found on earth, are also represented; the one, which makes a great show before all the world and in the eyes of men, and yet before God it amounts to nothing, and is therefore condemned; the other, which is not known among men, and yet before God it is called righteousness and is pleasing in his sight. The one is that of the beautiful,

proud saint, the Pharisee; the other, that of the poor, humble, sorrowing sinner, the publican.

[2] We also hear two wonderful, strange sentences of judgment, wholly and entirely opposed to human wisdom and the whims of reason, hard and terrible to all the world, which condemns the great saints as unjust, and declares the poor sinners acceptable, righteous and holy. But, as the text itself shows, he speaks of such saints who trusted in themselves to find a righteousness in their own lives and works, which God was bound to respect; and again of such sinners, who from their hearts desired to become free from their sins, and long for forgiveness and the grace of God. For nothing is said here of that other great multitude in the world, who are like neither this publican nor this Pharisee, who care nothing at all, either for sin or grace, but continue in security and wickedness, without inquiring after any God, heaven or hell.

[3] Of the two kinds of persons among the Jews, the Pharisees and publicans, we have sufficiently heard in another place, namely, that the name Pharisee means the very first, most upright and pious people, who with all earnestness endeavored to serve God, and to keep the law, as St. Paul also boasts of himself, that before his conversion he was one of them, Philippians 3:5.

[4] Again, the name “publican” among them meant a man living in open sin and vice, and served neither God nor man, and was only busy to rob, to oppress and harm his neighbor, as they were forced to do in their occupation which they bought from the Romans for great sums of money, if they desired fully to take advantage of it. In short, they were people who were regarded as no better than public, godless heathen, even though they were Jews by birth, as Christ also compares them to Gentiles, Matthew 18:17: “And if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican.”

[5] It is indeed wonderful that Christ brings two such persons together, who are so entirely different and the farthest removed from each other; and still more wonderful, and even offensive, that he expresses such weighty judgments, wholly condemning the Pharisee and declaring the publican just. Although he plainly speaks thus of both, nevertheless he shows that he does not reject, nor desire to have rejected such works of which the Pharisee here

boasts; for he represents and sets him forth as a beautiful saint, with works that are neither to be rebuked nor punished, but that are good and worthy of praise, On the other hand he can neither boast of nor praise the publican for his life and works, for he is himself forced to confess before God, and to condemn himself as a sinner, and can think of no good he has done. And yet Christ thus searches, proves and examines both, and finds nothing good in the holy Pharisee, although he did many costly works, not on account of the works, which in themselves are not wrong; but because the person was not good but full of iniquity. While on the other hand in the publican who hitherto had been a public, condemned sinner, he now finds a real good tree and good fruit, although he does not shine forth with the great works of the Pharisee. Wherefore let us in brief consider both persons.

[6] First of all you must properly magnify and adorn the Pharisee, as Christ presents him with his beautiful life; for here you have a man who dares to stand before God, and praise his life in the divine presence. This can never be intended as a false praise, but is meant in all earnestness and truth. He appeals to himself as a witness, and is willing to announce himself before God and be found in the true worship, and give an account of his entire life, that it is spent in obedience to God. He begins with the highest and first commandment, and shows himself as one who worships the true and only God, and seeks first of all his kingdom and his will; he confesses that he has everything from God, what he is and lives, he brings all back to him and thanks him for all he has given him, especially for this particular grace and kindness that he preserves him from sin and shame, that he is not like the public sinners and publicans, and prays that God may preserve him in this, and further grant unto him his grace and goodness. Here you see nothing but beautiful works of the first table of the law, of all three commandments; for hereby he also observes the Sabbath, because he goes into the temple only to seek God and to pray.

[7] He later goes further into the second table, and purifies his conscience before God and the world, in that he is not unjust, a robber, adulterer, like the great majority of people. Here the other five commandments are taken together, so that he is a man who can boast of himself before all the world, that he has done no one wrong, violence or pain, nor oppressed or offended against the fifth, sixth and eighth commandments, and in this connection, he dares to defy everyone to prove

anything different against him. Besides he has strictly kept the sixth commandment, he has not committed adultery or led an unchaste life, but kept his body in subjection and discipline, and also fasted twice every week, which was not a false fasting, as that of our priests and monks chiefly is, but a real fasting as the Jews observed from morning until evening, to the going down of the sun. Above all this, that he was not only not unjust, nor an extortioner of his neighbor's goods and honor, but gave the tenth of all he had honestly and fairly earned, and by this also yields his obedience to God, and gives for the support of divine worship and the priestly office of all that God gave him, and does not lay up anything in a niggardly or miserly spirit.

[8] Here you view all the commandments together, and he appears to the world a paragon of godliness, a fine, pious, God-fearing and holy man, who is to be applauded as a mirror and an example for the whole world, that they might well desire, and it would indeed be well to desire, and the world would be very lovely if it had many such people.

[9] Now contrast the publican with this picture, and you will see there is no resemblance to the holy Pharisee; for even his name at once indicates that little virtue or honor can be found in him, and no one could regard him as inquiring much after God or his commandments; and he does not only fail to give any of his goods for the service of God, but even publicly robs and steals from his neighbor; and in short he is a man who with his sinful life is a public and known example; as the Pharisee also informs him, that he is depraved and godless, his conscience is depraved, and there is no good to hope from him.

[10] Now how does it happen so contrary, that the Pharisee is condemned of God and the publican is justified? Will God now speak and decide against his own law, which justly prefers those who live according to it, to those who live opposed to it in open sin? Or does God delight in those who do no good and are nothing but robbers, adulterers and unjust? By no means, but we have here quite another and higher law than the world or flesh and blood understand, which looks deeper into the hearts of both these persons, and finds in the Pharisee a great evil principle which destroys all that otherwise might be called good, which the Evangelist calls, to trust in self and despise others.

[11] Such is the reproach of this fine man and rogue, who is great before the world. Would to God that this one were the only one, and he had not left so many children and heirs. For the whole world with the best there is in it, is altogether drowned in this vice; it will not and cannot forsake it. Where it knows of any good it possesses, it exalts itself, and despises others who have it not, and exalts itself above God and man; and even though they pretend to keep God's commandments they transgress them, as St. Paul says of his Jews, Romans 9:31, that they truly, in striving after the law of righteousness, have not attained to righteousness. What a wonderful thing it is, that those who diligently hold to the law, and worship God to a great extent, are not those who keep the law, as Paul in Galatians 6:13 says: "For not even they who receive circumcision do themselves keep the law," etc. Those are strange saints indeed, who even in doing according to the law, do not keep it but violate it. Who then are those who keep it?

[12] This Pharisee and those like him, with their fine discipline and honor, which is truly an excellent, glorious and beautiful gift, which must be praised and esteemed in the world above everything else as the greatest gift of God, more beautiful than all other beauty and ornament, gold and silver, yea, than even the light of the sun. Of him, I say, the sentence is spoken, that before God he is worse than a robber, a murderer and an adulterer. Whither shall we now go with this doctrine among the great multitude of this world, whom we ourselves condemn on account of their public contempt of God and all wickedness against God and the people, which also cries to heaven and drowns everything that the earth can scarcely bear it?

[13] Well, I said before, that the Pharisee is neither censured nor condemned because he does the works of the law, or else we would have to condemn God's gift and his law, and praise the contrary. Yet this I say, that here the person is placed before the judgment seat of God, and finds it different there than before the judgment of this world, that although he has indeed some beautiful, praiseworthy gifts, yet a great blot of shame cleaves to them, because he misuses these gifts, and in God's sight is entirely destroyed by them. For with these gifts he is here accused of transgressing against both God and man, against both tables of the law. For in the first commandment especially and in the highest terms, presumption is forbidden, that a man should not trust in himself or in his own gifts, or take

pleasure in himself; as this work righteous person does, who struts forth and is tickled with the gifts he has received from God, and makes an idol of them and worships himself, as though he were the excellent holy man, whom alone God is bound to respect and honor.

[14] This is already the great sin and vice where he runs counter against God himself, of course blind and hardened, like an unbelieving heathen or Turk, who knows nothing of God, is without repentance, and on account of his great holiness will know nothing of sin, and fears not the wrath of God. He presumes to stand firm by his own works, and does not see that he and all men, even the true saints themselves with all their own righteousness and life, cannot stand before God; but are guilty of his wrath and condemnation, as David testifies in Psalm 130:3: "If thou, Jehovah, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" And Psalm 143:2: "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight no man living is righteous." Therefore he does not seek either grace or forgiveness of sins, nor does it occur to him that he stands in need of them.

[15] Now since he sins so monstrously against the first and highest commandment, in shameful and horrible idolatry, presumption and defiance, depending on his own holiness, and as there is here no fear of God, neither trust nor love, but he seeks only his own honor and praise, we must conclude that he does not honestly and from the heart observe any of the other commandments, and all is false and lies that he pretends with his prayers and worship, and thereby in the highest degree misuses and disgraces the name of God to adorn his lies, and thereby only brings down upon himself God's wrath and severe condemnation; as God has declared that whoever taketh his name in vain shall not go unpunished. For what else is it, but to blaspheme and defy the lofty majesty of God, when he prays and says: I thank thee, God, that I am so holy and good, that I never need thy grace; but I find so much in myself, that I have kept the law, and you cannot accuse me of anything, and I have deserved so much, that you are bound to repay and reward me again for it in time and in eternity, if you would keep your own honor, and be a just and truthful God.

[16] In like manner see how he rumbles and blusters also in the second table of the law against his neighbor; for neither is there here any Christian love or faithfulness by which one could trace that he sought and favored his neighbor's honor and salvation; but he basely goes to work and tramples

him under his feet by his shameful contempt, and does not consider him worthy to be regarded as a human being; yea, when he should help and serve his neighbor, so that no wrong or harm be done him, he himself does him the greatest wrong. For when he sees and knows that his neighbor sins against God, he does not think how he can convert and save him from the wrath of God and condemnation, that he may reform; he has no mercy or sympathy in his heart for the distress and affliction of a poor sinner, and thinks that he is rightly and justly served, in that he is left in his condemnation and destruction, and withdraws from him all the duties of love and service God has commanded him to perform, that above all things he might bring his neighbor from his sins and condemnation into the kingdom of God by teaching, admonition, rebuke and reformation, etc.; and what is the worst of all, he is glad and of good courage, because his neighbor is under the power of sin and the wrath of God. Thus one can indeed trace what desire and love he has for God's law, and how much of an enemy he is to vice.

[17] For of what use can such a man be in the kingdom of God, who can still rejoice, yea, laugh and be heartily pleased at the sins and disobedience of the whole world against God; and who would be sorry if anyone were good at heart and observed God's commandments, and even if able he would be unwilling to help him in the least to this, or prevent the evil and condemnation of his neighbor? What good should we seek or hope for in him who is so wicked as not to desire the salvation of his neighbor? The heathen themselves know of no greater wickedness, or how to paint a more wicked man, than he who is so hateful and envious, as only to delight and rejoice when his neighbor meets adversity. Like some who are so wicked that they willingly suffer harm themselves, if only another thereby suffer greater injury. Such devilish, hellish wickedness cannot be greater in anyone than in such false saints, who alone want all honor before God and the world and wish to be pure and holy, and all others to be obnoxious and filthy.

[18] If in bodily ills it be said of a physician who claims to be an honorable and good man, who when he visits a person sick unto death, instead of giving him good advice and helping to restore him to health, does nothing but laugh and make fun of the wretched man; who would not take him for the most desperate villain that walks the earth, in that he not only

withdraws his assistance from an unfortunate person in his greatest distress, but even laughs at his sufferings and wreaks out his anger upon him? How much greater villainy is that of a false saint, who sees his neighbor's soul in danger and in the fear of eternal condemnation, whose duty it would be to risk his body and life to save him; but he refuses not only to do this when he could save him only with one word or a sigh of sympathy, but instead casts it up against him and as much as he is able gladly plunges him still deeper into condemnation.

[19] What should such a man do or wish to him who is his enemy, or who has done him some wrong, whom nevertheless he is in duty bound to love and assist as far as he permits him. How would he in this case burst out with anger, curses, blows, so that he would not consider murder as a sin but as holiness, especially in him who would not admit that he was good and holy, like the good brother murderer Cain did with his brother Abel, and his children at all times still do, as Christ himself says of such, John 16:2: "The hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service unto God."

[20] Just as little will you find that such a person observes in his heart any other commandment; for just as little would he try to prevent the disgrace of his neighbor's wife or child, or assist to preserve their honor; yea, when it is lost he would be glad of it and laugh in his sleeves, or had he an opportunity he would do it himself, or even lend a hand. That he avoids such public evil work, is not out of his love to virtue or to obedience to God; for if he does not try to prevent the loss and distress of his neighbor's soul, how can you expect him to protect his honor or the honor of his family? Much less would he lament or think to prevent harm to his neighbor's goods, that they be not robbed, stolen, or otherwise destroyed, but would rather rejoice over it and say: It served him right. I will say nothing of his duty to help him in his poverty with his own property, or gratuitously aid him with money. He will neither guard his neighbor's good name when he hears it slandered and belied, nor try with his own honor to cover and adorn his dishonor; but will rather rejoice and help to belie him and make him out the worst, as such saints especially are accustomed to do, as this one here before God and other people belie this poor publican, whom he in truth cannot accuse of anything.

[21] Now see, what a disgraceful, monstrous devil is in such a beautiful saint, who can cover himself with a thin appearance of a few works which he performs before the eyes of the people, and what he does in his worship, thanks and prayers, whereby he blasphemes and dishonors the high majesty with outrage and defiance in the open public, that he dares to boast before God of such scandalous vices, and be so brave as though God were bound to treat him as a model saint, and as a debt and duty give him heaven and everything he might ask. Or if he knew that God would not do it, and accept the poor publican in preference to himself, he would be so enraged with anger and hatred against God, as to publicly take the word out of God's mouth and say, that he is not God but the devil from hell, and would gladly if he could, thrust him down from his throne and usurp his seat. And in all this he will not suffer himself to be punished by anyone and will claim he did just right; whereas he deserves more than all other blasphemers, that God should at once open the earth and devour him alive.

[22] Here you see what a man is and does, who is moved by his own free will or by the power of nature. For this Pharisee is set up by Christ as the highest example of what a man can do by his own strength according to the law. And it is certain that all men are by nature and from Adam no better, and just such vices manifest themselves in them, when before God they want to be holy and better than other people; and that there is nothing but a mischievous contempt for God and all mankind, and are filled with joy and pleasure when men sin against God. Such are twofold: yea, manifold worse than the publican and open sinners like him, because they do not only not keep God's law, but they do not want anyone else to keep it; they do not only not help anyone or do good, but rejoice over their destruction and condemnation; and above all this they adorn themselves and pretend to be exceedingly holy, and with a condemned conscience dare to blaspheme and lie before God's majesty, that they are not like other men, and have kept God's law, so that heaven itself might fall to pieces before them.

[23] But now see in contrast this publican, who also comes into the temple to pray, but with quite other thoughts and with a different prayer than those of the Pharisee. For in the first place he has the advantage in that he confesses himself a poor sinner, convinced by his own conscience and condemned, in that he has nothing of which he can boast or be proud before God or the world, but must be ashamed of himself; for the law has so

smitten his heart that he feels his misery and distress, and is terrified and filled with anguish at the judgment and wrath of God, and sighs from his heart to be delivered, but finds no comfort anywhere for his evil plight, and can bring nothing before God but mere sin and shame. With this he is so burdened and oppressed that he dare not even lift up his eyes; for he understands and feels that he has deserved nothing else than hell and eternal death, and must condemn himself before God, as he shows and confesses this before God by smiting his breast. In short, there is truly nothing here but sins and condemnation, as much so before God as those of the Pharisee; except that the Pharisee does not confess his filthiness, but will make purity out of it, while the publican so feels his sins that he cannot stand before them, but must confess that he daily offends God with his disgraceful unthankfulness, contempt and disobedience for all his mercies and goodness, and that he has permitted him to live to this hour. Therefore he cannot trust in himself for comfort himself in his own works, but must wholly and entirely despair in himself, if he find not grace and mercy with God.

[24] Nor can he despise anyone or exalt himself above his fellow; for he feels that he alone is most deeply condemned, and regards all others as happier and better, especially this Pharisee, who in spite of this is full of pollution before God. To sum up all, you see here already the beginning of true repentance in such a person, who is heartily penitent and sorrowful over his sins, and heartily desires deliverance from them, and seeks grace and mercy from God, and besides resolves in his heart to lead a better life.

[25] But mark how the publican's word and prayer harmonize when he says: "God, be thou merciful to me a sinner!" Where did he learn to speak thus to God, or how dare he conceive, arrange and express such words? For according to reason and human judgment they do not agree, and no man can force such a prayer out of his own heart and thoughts, short as it is. The words of the Pharisee: "God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust," etc., are what a pious man can truly say, and should say. For no one dare be such a liar that his conscience does not accuse him of being a robber, adulterer, etc.; but must say the truth, and not allow the reputation of a good conscience to be taken from him, and he must be a pious man, who says this in truth. On the other hand, a villain can of course also speak these words: "God, be thou merciful to me a sinner!" as they are

oftener spoken by rogues than by the truly penitent, pious people. Yet, who else would speak them but a sinful and condemned person? Nevertheless the sentence here changes and threatens to become false on both sides, you may turn and shift it as you please.

[26] But taken in a fundamental sense it is a speech and example that belongs to the schools and to the theology of Christians, which the world calls heretical. For as I said, no reason can harmonize it, nor can any man, be he as high, wise and learned as he may, harmonize what this publican has here put together, to form and construct a prayer from words entirely opposed to each other: “God, be thou merciful to me a sinner!” Yes, surely, this is the art of a great master, which is wholly and entirely foreign, high and far above human understanding.

[27] For there never were such words uttered since God in the beginning permitted his voice to be heard, and he spoke unto man. The Scriptures say that in Paradise God said to man, Genesis 2:17: “For in the day thou eatest thereof (of the forbidden fruit, that is, the day in which you sin against my commandment), thou shalt surely die.” On Mount Sinai when God gave the law it read as follows, Exodus 20:5: “I Jehovah thy God am a jealous God,” that is, an angry God, “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate me.” In short that man should know that sin is condemned, and God’s wrath and punishment are declared against it. With this it does not at all agree or harmonize that such a sinner and condemned person dare come before God and pray: “Be thou merciful to me a sinner?” For these two, sin and mercy, are opposed to each other, like fire and water. Mercy does not belong where sin abounds, but wrath and punishment. How then does this man discover the art to unite the two and harmonize them, and how dare he desire and call for grace to cover his sins? To this belongs more than to know the law and ten commandments, which the Pharisee also knew, and it is a different art, of which the Pharisee knew nothing at all, and all men of themselves know nothing.

[28] This is preaching the precious Gospel of God’s grace and mercy in Christ, which is published and offered to condemned sinners without any merit of their own. This publican must have heard of this also, and the Holy Spirit must have touched and moved his heart with it, as he feels his sins through the law, that he comes before God and offers this prayer, that he

certainly believes and holds as he has heard from the Word of God, that God will forgive sins and be merciful, that is, turn away from them his wrath and eternal death for the sake of his Son, the promised Messiah. Such faith united and bound together in this prayer these two contrary elements.

[29] Now, this preaching the Gospel is indeed heard by many, and it appears an easy matter to say this; but it is not as common as men think, that everyone knows it; and no one better understands how difficult it is, than the few who study and exercise themselves in it, that they also might believe and pray like the publican. The reason of this is, because the pious rogue and hypocrite, the Pharisee, is still within us, who hinders and prevents us from thus uniting them.

[30] Yea, this must also not be according to our external, worldly nature and its piety, for here we must say and teach nothing else than that grace is not for a sinner, but wrath and punishment, etc., otherwise no one could live on earth; and God could not defend his majesty, if he would not insist that sin must be punished and good works rewarded; for then everyone would soon say: let us only boldly commit sin, for then we will receive more grace! But here in his spiritual kingdom it is altogether different, so that he who is a rogue receives grace and is declared righteous, and he who is called good is a rogue and is condemned.

[31] This takes place here since God's judgment and the judgment of the world are different, and as far apart as heaven and earth. Before the world it must be thus: If you are good, you shall enjoy it; are you a thief, you are hanged on the gallows; if you commit murder, you are beheaded. Upon this government God himself must insist, otherwise there would be no peace on the earth. But in his own government where he alone is Lord and Judge without any mediating agents, he is merciful only to poor sinners; for here there is nothing except sin, and before him no one is innocent, as the Scriptures say.

[32] Yet it is also true, that sinners are not all alike, so that we must here further distinguish and picture forth those under judgment, and those under grace. For there are some gross and bold sinners, robbers, murderers, thieves, knaves, whoremongers, who act so grossly and are drunk with sin, always rush ahead and never think or ask how they may obtain mercy with God, and go about without any care, as though they were in no danger. To

these St. Paul preaches, 1 Corinthians 6:9: “Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” And Christ says, Luke 13:3-5: “I tell you nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish.” For such are not like this publican, because they are entirely without repentance and live wickedly, and do not yet belong to God’s gracious government, but to the government of this world.

[33] Besides there are other rogues who try to imitate this publican, and who use the Lord’s Prayer; they have heard the words that God will be merciful to poor sinners, and have learned to repeat these words and smite their breasts, and can present themselves so humble and penitent in words and questions, that a man could swear, and they themselves would swear, that they are just like this publican, and yet it is all false and a delusion. For they are no better than the Pharisee, and God will be as merciful to them as to him, so that they do not feel his wrath, and he does not strike with his rod among them to punish them, but lets them continue in their wicked state. These are false Christians and disturbers, false brethren, of whom there is also a great multitude in our communion, who can say the words, and can greatly praise the Gospel and God’s grace, and confess they are poor sinners; but when it comes to the test and they are attacked and rebuked, they will neither hear nor suffer it, but begin to be angry and say: their honor is offended and their conscience is troubled, or if they can do no more they will practice all kinds of bad tricks against the Gospel.

[34] In words and show these may pretend to be like the publican, but in reality they are like the wicked rogue and hypocrite. For they speak and present themselves thus for the reason alone, that men may be obliged to regard them as pious, and that no one dare call them anything else, until God lays hold of them only a little either by the devil, the world, or by his Word; then they are so tender that they cannot stand anything at all, and cry out against violence and injustice. And in brief, as they were previously poor sinners, they are now perfect saints, and so proud, that no one can get along with their sanctity.

[35] Of such the world everywhere is today full, especially of the great and powerful noblemen, and the learned sophists. Even the common citizen and the farmer who learned this from our Gospel, that they wish to accept

and comfort themselves with the thought that God is merciful to sinners, and yet they refuse to be rebuked and censured as sinners; while they still insist that God's Word cannot remain silent about sin; they apply the Word of God which rebukes sin to others, and say just like this Pharisee: I am not like the rest, and whoever says so is unkind to me. And when one begins to remind them of the wrong they do, they pretend that he speaks against the government, and gives occasion to great dissension. And in brief, one must preach only what they like to hear; if not, it shall no longer be called preaching the Gospel. And such people are like all the false, hypocritical saints, who can indeed say they are poor sinners, but do not want anyone to regard it as true; for when others say it, they are offended.

[36] Only these two factions can, and that very easily, harmonize these two utterances; I am a sinner, and, God be merciful unto me. But there is still a third class, who should and gladly would say it in truth, for whom it is the most difficult of all to say these two sentences at the same time from the heart and unite together such a confession and such an absolution. For, they find in themselves two great hindrances. On the one hand there is still too much in us, as I have said, of the old rogue, the Pharisee, that before God we are anxious to be good and righteous, and better than others; this would sooth the heart and be the sweetest joy for him who can bring it to pass. We all would like to have God approve what we have done and be pleased with it; and in words also thank him and confess that this is his divine gift. But there is a hindrance introduced that blocks the way, like the angel with the fiery sword at the entrance of paradise, that no one may come near and boast before God.

[37] On the other hand, where the publican must come before God with only sin and shame, stripped of all his praise and full of nothing but corruption, here is anxiety and worry, so that he grasps hold and appropriates the words to himself: "Be thou merciful to me!" But here again both his own modesty and all human wisdom prevents and hinders him still more; yea, the devil himself by the law of God on which he here insists and enforces, as he ought not, to bring mankind into distress and despair.

[38] Hence it is indeed an art above all human art, yea, the most wonderful thing on earth, that a man may have the grace truly to know himself as a sinner, and yet again turn round and cast away all thoughts of God's wrath and hold to mere grace. For the heart that truly feels sin,

cannot otherwise think or conclude, that God is unmerciful and angry at him. As Judas when he saw that he had betrayed Jesus unto death, immediately began to censure himself, and with heart and reason convicted himself worthy of God's eternal wrath and condemnation. No human heart is able to escape this, for God's command and law stand in the way, which condemn to death, while the devil drives and chases you to perdition. How is it possible to unite such words of the publican in the face of the law, of your own reason and feelings, which represent nothing else to your heart but wrath and shame. Nor can it enter any heart to confess sin, unless the ten commandments show it what sin is and why it is sin. Hence there are these two parts and they are at the same time opposed to each other; namely, to hear the ten commandments which condemn to death and to hell, and then again to lose them and struggle free from their grasp, and thus ascend from hell to heaven.

[39] Therefore let him who can, learn by this high wisdom, and become a scholar of this publican, in order that he too may be able to distinguish these two parts from each other, so that wrath may not abide and cleave to sin, but lay hold of reconciliation and forgiveness; that is, that he judge not of this according to human reason or the law, but grasp by faith the comfort and doctrine of the Gospel of Christ, who alone teaches this wonderful unity, so that man can unite the two opposing words, that are farther apart than heaven and hell. For what else do the words, I am a sinner, mean than that God is my enemy and condemns me, and I have merited nothing but eternal wrath, the curse and condemnation.

[40] When therefore you feel that, which you cannot force out of you by smiting on the breast and with your own good works, for it will come of itself if the law really does its work in you, this will indeed teach you how to smite the breast and to humiliate yourself. When you can do nothing else but say: O, I am a sinner! then you are lost, for the ten commandments force and plunge you straight into perdition, that your heart must say: you belong to the devil and God does not want you, and you begin to flee from him, and if you could you would run through a hundred worlds, only to escape. Then it is time in such a flight and terror to stop in your career, turn and say: My precious Gospel teaches me and the good publican, that before God the highest wisdom is to know and believe that God is so minded, and has founded such a kingdom through Christ, that he will be gracious to help

poor, condemned sinners. And thus you can unite the two in one word and confession: I am indeed a sinner, but still God is gracious to me; I am God's enemy, but he is now my friend; I should justly be condemned, yet I know that he does not desire to condemn me, but to save me as an heir of heaven. This is his will, which he has had preached to me, and commanded me to believe for the sake of his dear Son, whom he has given for me.

[41] See, thus you have in this publican a beautiful example of true Christian repentance and faith, and an excellent masterpiece of high spiritual wisdom or theology, of which the Pharisee and those like him have never received a taste or smell. Besides you see here the proper fruits that follow faith, that he is now a different man, with a different mind, thoughts, words and works than formerly; he gives honor and praise to God alone for his divine grace; he calls and prays to him from the heart and in true confidence in his Word and promise; otherwise he could not have either thought or prayed these words; and thus he performs unto God the true and acceptable worship, and observes the true Sabbath. And now he also has a heart which is an enemy to sin and disobedience. He does not rejoice but is sorry that he has lived in violation of God's commandments, and now he earnestly and from his whole heart seeks to forsake his evil ways, not to offend, deceive, belie, nor treat anyone unjustly or with violence, and anxiously desires that even thus everyone should live in the same way.

[42] This is the picture of today's Gospel, of the two kinds of persons among those called God's people. One kind is the great faction of the false church, who nevertheless bear the appearance and the name as though they alone were the most pious and sanctified servants of God; the other, the little flock of those who are true members of the church and true children of God, although they have not praise and great reputation before the world. The difference between them is, that each party is known by its characteristics and fruits, by which the appearance and name should be distinguished from their true nature, of which you have sufficiently heard.

[43] Therefore see to it, that you properly follow this publican, and become like him. Namely, in the first place, that you be not a false but a real sinner; not only in words but in reality and from the heart acknowledge yourself worthy before God of his wrath and eternal punishment, and bring before him in truth these words, "me a poor sinner;" but in the same flight lay hold of the other words: "Be thou merciful to me," by which words you

take away the point and edge of the law and thus cast and turn from you the judgment and condemnation the law seeks to force upon you.

[44] From this distinction in the two kinds of sinners you are able to form a correct estimate of both sides. God is indeed unmerciful and an enemy to sinners, to those who do not want to be sinners, that is, those who do not fear the wrath of God, but who yet continue in their security and do not wish to be punished. Again, God will be merciful to poor sinners, who feel their sins, and confess that they are condemned before the judgment of God. Thus here all is turned about according to the word and judgment of God, just as the persons are; so that the ten commandments gain this interpretation, and they pass sentence upon those who wish to be holy, or do not want to be accused as sinners, and never think that such judgment strikes them. But the Gospel and sentence of grace and comfort pass upon those lying in the terror and fear of death.

[45] Again, you must be like the publican in this, that you henceforth forsake sin, for it is not said of him that he continued as he was before, but went forth and applied grace to his own heart, so that God declared him righteous, as the text says: "This man went down to his house justified." These words do not conclude that he remained in his sin, as he did not go into the temple and pray for that; for whoever desires to continue in sin cannot pray for grace and forgiveness, but he who prays thus thinks, wishes and desires to be just and entirely free from sin. This you must know so that you do not deceive yourself. For there are many who only consider that the publican as a sinner receives grace and forgiveness, and do not think that God requires that they should forsake sin, and let the grace received be henceforth powerful in their lives. But some want to understand it as though God saves sinners in a way that they may still remain in sin and unrighteousness.

[46] Hence it is necessary that Christians contend on both sides against the devil and their own flesh. For when they begin to repent and would gladly become different people, then they first feel the devil's influence, how he excites, hinders and controls them, so that they make no progress, but remain in their old state, etc. Again, if they cannot prevent this, and in spite of the devil turn to God and call upon him, he will attack them with weak courage and cowardice. First, he makes sin so very small, and puts them so far beyond the reach of the eyes and hearts of men, that men may

despise them and not desire grace, or they put off repentance. Then on the contrary, he makes sin really too great, as he can blow a fire from a spark greater than heaven and earth, so that it will again be difficult to lay hold of forgiveness, or to bring into his heart the words: “God be thou merciful to me”” Thus indeed it is and will continue to be a great art, and we may well take this publican as our example, our teacher and doctor, and learn of him, and call upon God that we may also obtain the end of our faith.

Twelfth Sunday after Trinity. Concerning Faith and Love

Text: Mark 7:31-37.

31 And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis.

32 And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him.

33 And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue;

34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.

35 And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.

36 And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it;

37 And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak. Mark 7:31-37

[1] Dearly Beloved: I hope you thoroughly understand this Gospel, for it is plain. However, as we have but one old story to preach, and since it is so precious and cannot be sufficiently considered, we will apply our text also

to this old story, and briefly speak of faith and love. In the first place, we will look at the simple story of the text itself; then, if time permit, we will also speak a little of its spiritual meaning.

[2] First, the story or example before us is good in itself, for here we see that many persons received the poor man, as though his distress were their own, bringing him to Jesus to be helped. By this, both faith and love are shown to us. Faith, in that they had heard of the Lord before, that he was kind and compassionate, and helped all those who came to him. For the Word must first have been heard, and must first have entered the human heart, showing us the mercy of God in such a way that we depend upon it. Therefore the Word of Christ must here also have taught these people this; otherwise, where it does not come, there faith and works are all in vain.

[3] And though this gospel lesson, like the preceding one, does not state that they had previously heard the tidings of the Gospel, yet we must nevertheless conclude, and the fact proves it, that they must have previously heard the good tidings and Gospel of Christ the Lord, through which they believed. For that is properly the Gospel which is called good tidings, a good report, not that which is written on paper, but that which is proclaimed in the world and becomes known by the living voice. Thus doubtless they had heard that Christ was kind, friendly, and helpful, willing to aid everybody; this was the beginning of their faith. Thus you must earnestly search the Gospel, and you will always find, that the tidings must first go forth and lead us to God, in order that he may lay the first stone; otherwise, all is lost. In the next place, you will learn that because they have clung to the tidings and trusted them for their comfort, they went thither, and hoped to receive of him what they had heard.

[4] Now you here observe the nature of faith which grows out of the Word. For the Word first sets forth to us the mercy and goodness of God; then faith causes us to cleave unto it with a firm confidence, and to obey the Word. For we are now conscious of this in our hearts, and are satisfied; for as soon as we believe, we are already with Christ in this inheritance, and are justified.

[5] In the third place, this Gospel lesson describes the works of love in this, that these people go and care for the poor man, just as Christ, without their merit, and without their doing, sends forth his Word, and spreads

abroad his goodness and mercy. Thus as they have laid hold and drank from the fountain, they again flow forth freely, and also impart themselves to their neighbor freely and without any merit. Thus love should do its work, not as though it needs it, but devotes itself solely to the benefit of its neighbor, as Paul, among other things, speaks to the Corinthians about love, Corinthians 13:5: “Love seeketh not its own”; and to the Philippians he says, Philippians 2:4: “Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others.”

[6] This we may also learn here in these good people. They do not need this work themselves, nor do they look to themselves, but to the poor man, and think how they may help him; they seek no reward, but act independently and freely. Thus you should by right do likewise; if not, you are no Christians. Therefore consider carefully how love is here described, that it takes upon itself the care of others. If we accept this lesson, it will be well for us; but if not, then God will punish us with blindness, as he has been doing, to our grief, for nearly four hundred years. This much we say briefly concerning faith and love. Furthermore, we must now, in the fourth place, treat of the faith of other persons.

[7] You know the fundamental truth is, that man cannot be just and acceptable before God, save alone by faith. So that they have lied and spoken falsely who have taught heretofore that we may deal with God through our works. Moreover it was much more foolish that they taught us to rely upon the works and faith of other persons, pretending that nuns, monks and priests can help other persons by their wailing which they perform in their cloisters at night, and that in this manner they can help other people and distribute their treasures. Therefore, let everyone here remember, that no one dare undertake to be saved by the faith, or by the work of another person; in truth, it cannot be done by the faith or work of Mary, or of any saint, yea, not even by Christ's work and faith, but through your own personal faith. For God will not permit Mary, or any other saint, not even Christ himself, to take your place, in order that you might be godly and righteous, unless you believe for your own self. If Christ's faith and work will not do it, you will much less accomplish it by the work or faith of all the monks and priests. Hence our Gospel lesson gives us an occasion to speak of the faith of others. For here we read that they led this person to

Christ in their own faith and work; the man did nothing toward it, but merely suffered it to be done.

[8] Therefore let everybody mark well, that he can never be saved through another person's faith. But it of course may happen, that by the faith of other persons you may be brought to a faith of your own. Likewise the good works of other persons may be of service to me to obtain works of my own. Therefore those lie, who declare that we may be saved through the works or faith of other persons, whether we ourselves believe or not. No, this is not so! Unless you yourself draw out from God's kindness and mercy a faith of your own, you will not be saved. Thus it must be; otherwise no other person's faith or works avail, not even Christ, though he is the Savior of all the world; his kindness, his help will do you no good whatever, unless you believe in it, and are enlightened by it.

[9] Therefore, by all means beware of the preachers whom you have often heard among the monks, who approach a dying person and say: "Behold, my brave fellow, do not despair; if you have committed sins, be sorry for them; but in order that you may fare so much the better, I will make you a present of my righteous life and my good works." If now, the dying person accept such a gift, he is as much a fool as the other, and with all these works, he will go to the devil. Therefore, beware of such consolation, and say: If you are willing to serve me with your good works, approach God and speak thus: O heavenly Father, by thy grace I am now believing; therefore, I pray thee, my God, give also unto this poor man a faith of his own. This might help me; but that you would give me your own faith, this you cannot do, neither would it help me. You will have enough to do to be saved by your own faith.

[10] This you may see in the case of the foolish virgins, who, when their lamps went out, said unto the wise virgins: "Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out." Then did the wise ones answer and say: "Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you." Matthew 25:8-9. In that case I am in need even of more faith for myself; how then could I share it with another? For my own faith must stand before God's judgment, and must fight so hard and cleave so firmly to God's mercy, that the sweat will run down its face, if it is to prevail. That is the true meaning of St. Peter's words, 1 Peter 4-18: "The righteous is scarcely saved, where then shall the ungodly appear?" For when death makes its onslaught, then such fear and

agony will seize him, that he can scarcely with all his strength, stand for himself and be kept in faith. Hence it is greatly to be deplored that they have established so much deception, putting monks' cowls upon the dead, and inventing other foolish things, by which they led poor souls straightway to perdition. Beware of them.

[11] Now this I say, that you may know how far the faith of others may be of use to us, and how your own faith can help you. Other people's merits will help you to attain a merit of your own, and nothing more. And though all the angels, yea, the mercy of God itself, were ready to stand for you, it would avail you nothing, unless you cleave unto it with a faith of your own. But it may effect this, that it will assist you to obtain a faith of your own, which will help you. Furthermore, even if Christ did die for us, and pledged and gave his body and life, blood and flesh for us, and became our advocate; yet it would avail nothing, unless we believe in him. But he can assist us in this way, that he appears before the Father and says: "O Father, this have I done for mankind; do thou give them faith, in order that they may enjoy it." This then, will help us, if we feel assured that his works and merit are our own. In the same manner one should also speak of the other saints, that no saint's intercession and merit avail unless we ourselves believe. You observe this also in our lesson. There lies the poor man, unable either to speak or to hear. They who bring him to the Lord can speak and hear. But they cannot make him speak by their hearing and speaking, and even though they all had come near him and said: "We will speak and hear for you"; yet he would, in spite of this, have remained speechless and deaf continually, and would never have been able to speak.

[12] Likewise, if I were to give you a written declaration saying: "Go forth, this is my work; this shall be yours"; yet it will not help you a whit, but it will carry you into hell. In what way, then, will it help you? If I do, as these men do, who come to Christ and say: "O Lord, help this poor man, that he may receive his speech?" They do not say: "We will hear and speak in your stead," but they pray that Christ himself would give him speech. Likewise, if you take my part, and use your faith in such a way that it may help me to a faith of my own, this might help me; thus! thus it must be! God be thanked! Otherwise, no work nor any brotherhood, will avail.

[13] Therefore say: I must neither rely upon your works nor you upon mine; but I will, by my own faith, pray God to give you a faith of your own.

This is what is said, that we all are priests and kings, that we, like Christ himself, may intercede for one another before God, praying for personal faith. Thus, if I happen to notice that you have no faith of your own, or a weak faith, I go and ask God to help you to obtain faith, not by giving you my faith and my works, but your own faith and your own works; so that Christ may give him all his works and salvation through faith, as he hath given them to us by faith.

[14] That is the meaning of the saying of Christ, John 16:26-27: "I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father." This is a beautiful addition, as though he would say: I have prayed for you, and have entreated God that he would give you what is mine. Therefore know my name. For through my prayer he has accepted you and has given you faith, so that henceforth you may pray for yourselves, and I need not do it; provided that you do it in my name. Here he has crowned us, dedicated and anointed us with the Holy Spirit, so that we all are priests in Christ, and may exercise the priest's office, go before God and pray for one another. This is what St. Peter means in writing thus in his First Epistle, 1 Peter 2:9-10: "Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may shew forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light, which in time past were no people, but now are the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."

[15] Hence we may all say: Christ was my priest, who prayed for me and purchased faith and the Spirit for me; therefore I am also a priest, and must go on praying in the world, that God may give faith also to this and that person. So we conclude, that we shall obtain whatever we earnestly pray for in the true faith, as the Lord says, John 16:24: "Ask, and ye shall receive."

[16] But to pray powerfully is not within our strength; for the Spirit does not always vouchsafe to us to pray with power. Paul prayed that all Israel might be saved, Romans 9:1f; why did it not come to pass? The difference lies in the faith, for the Spirit did not give it to him; had he been able to add this faith, it would surely have come to pass. For if Paul had said, "I pray for all Israel," and had believed and said: "Lord, I am certain that thou wilt do it," then it would certainly have come to pass. But though he often prayed for them from his heart, the Spirit did not vouchsafe to him that he

should confidently believe it. Therefore it is not within our power to pray in strong confidence; the Holy Spirit does it. Whenever we pray for anyone and are able to add, "It will be done," then it will certainly be done; but whenever we pray, we must add, "Thy will be done." If, then, I must let it go according to his will, I cannot suggest to him either the person, or the time, or the manner, but must freely leave it all to him; then, indeed, I am sure of it. In this manner Christ acted also, who himself prayed thus: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me," but at once added: "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Matthew 26:39.

[17] Therefore, when I am to pray for an entire city or community, I ought to say: "O Father, I pray for all of them." Nevertheless, however, I must give honor to his name or will, and say: "Dear Father, I pray for these; I know it is thy will, that I should pray, that I should not despise prayer; but thy will shall be done always; for I might ask something for someone who is not worthy of it before thee; or again, I might possibly cast aside someone who is worthy; therefore do thou act according to thy divine will, for thou wilt certainly do better than I could ever conceive." Thus you see that we cannot always add these words: It will be so. But if we are certain in our hearts that we may add: "It will be certainly so," then it will come to pass.

[18] This we see in our text. These people approach the Lord in strong confidence, praying for the poor man, and their prayer is also heard. In the same manner, when baptism is performed we see this take place in the children's faith. There are the infants, bare and naked in body and soul, having neither faith nor works. Then the Christian Church comes forward and prays, that God would pour faith into the child; not that our faith should help the child, but that it may obtain a faith of its own. If it has faith, then after that whatever it does is well done, whether it suckle its mother's breast, or whether it soil itself, or whatever it may please to do. But if it does not obtain faith, our faith is of no value to the child.

[19] Therefore my faith can help you in no way except that it may assist you to obtain a faith of your own. Hence, to sum up all, everything depends upon personal faith, as strong as it is, so much does it need the faith and prayer of other people in order to increase in strength. Now you can easily judge, that those people were the greatest fools, who held masses and vigils with the brotherhoods; for the wise virgins have sufficient oil only for

themselves, and scarcely have enough. This is a simple explanation of the story of the Gospel lesson. Now let us briefly consider the meaning which our Lord puts into it.

Part II. The Spiritual Meaning

[20] The people bring the poor man to the Lord, the Lord takes him to a special place, lays his fingers into the man's ears, spits, and touches his tongue with the spittle, looks up toward heaven, and sighing, says, Ephphata, that is, Be opened! This is a lovely picture, and its meaning is good. For by those who here bring the deafmute to the Lord, the office of the ministry is meant. Ministers and the Apostles lead the poor consciences of men to God. This is done in three ways, by preaching, by a godly life, and by intercession. With the Word and preaching, they are brought to God; a godly life serves to show the Word so much the mightier in its power. But the Word itself leads to Christ, though it be preached by a sinner. Yet, a good life serves as an emphasis and a furtherance of the Gospel; while a wicked life dulls its edge. Their third duty, to pray for the people, likewise leads them on the road both to faith and to works.

[21] Now if the Word go on its way in this threefold manner, it cannot fail to bring forth fruit, as God says, Isaiah 55:11: "My Word, that goeth forth out of my mouth, shall not return to me void." This is indicated by the action of the pious persons who carry the mute into Christ's presence; this signifies the ministers, who bring forward the sinner; then God appears, giving growth and increase, as Paul says, 1 Corinthians 3:7, He opens the sinner's eyes, ears, and mouth. This happens in a wink of the eye, for God's Word is like lightning, which in a moment passes from sunrise to the ends of the earth. Thus when such persons are brought to God, he gives them grace to believe.

[22] This is signified by the act of laying his fingers into the man's ears; through the Word he breathes the Holy Spirit into him, making the heart believing, decent, chaste, and holy; for the finger signifies the Holy Spirit.

[23] Again, the spittle that is laid on the man's tongue, typifies the Word of God; this is put into his mouth in order that he may be able to speak it. And this spittle, the Word of God, is a noble thing, but very bitter to the Old Adam.

[24] Then they praise God, saying: “He hath done all things well, he has made the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.” For wherever there is true faith, there the Spirit will not allow you any rest; you will break forth, become a priest, teach other people also, as we read Psalm 116:10: “I believe, for I will speak.” There the heart is full, and the mouth must run over. Then when they are persecuted, they will not care.

[25] But the part of the story, that Christ took the man apart from the others, looks up to heaven, has this meaning: If God do not take me alone to a separate place, and give me the Holy Spirit, so that I cling to the Word which I have heard, then all preaching is in vain. But why does this require so much that he looks up to heaven and makes use of divine power, calling upon God’s grace to come and to act? By this he teaches us that such power must come from heaven, working in the heart of man by divine strength; then help comes to him. Again the spittle which is the Word of God is a noble thing for the Old Adam. Then they go forth to praise and glorify God.

[26] Thus have you learned, from the story and from its spiritual or secret meaning, that we must first hear the Word of God and thus, through the intercession of Christ, obtain a faith of our own, and then we come out, confessing this and praising God forever. May this be sufficient on this Gospel lesson. Let us pray to God for grace.

Twelfth Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. Christ Heals the Deaf Mute.

Text: Mark 7:31-37.

31 And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis.

32 And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in

his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him.

33 And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue;

34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.

35 And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.

36 And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it;

37 And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak. Mark 7:31-37

[1] As the Gospel everywhere shows Christ our Lord to be a merciful and gracious man, ready to help everyone by word and deed, in body and soul, so does this Gospel lesson picture to us how willingly he helped this poor man, who was deaf and dumb, in order that we might be invited to believe, trusting to obtain from him all that is good, and also thereby to show unto us an example and a pattern, which every Christian ought to follow, helping his neighbor in the same manner.

[2] For a Christian life consists entirely in the following: First, that we believe and trust in Christ our Savior, being fully assured that we are not deserted by him, whatever need or danger may betide us. Secondly, that every Christian person also conducts himself toward friend or foe in the same way, as he sees Christ does, who is so willing to help everyone. Whoever does this, is a Christian; but he who does it not, is no Christian, though he calls himself one. For these two cannot be separated; faith must be followed by its fruits, or it is not true faith. That is the sum of this Gospel lesson.

[3] Now some have been agitated over the fact that in this miracle Christ first takes the poor man and leads him apart from the people, performs particular ceremonies, places his fingers in the man's ears, and spits, and touches his tongue, looks up to heaven, sighs and uses peculiar language; whereas he had before helped other mutes and many not mutes without any such ceremonies, merely by a word. All this, I say, has set some to thinking, and they have explained it that Christ in this case called to mind how this

same man, whom he was now helping would afterward sin with his tongue and ears; therefore he had pity on him who would commit such sins after this great work was done, and that this deed of mercy would be so little appreciated, in that a speechless tongue should become a blaspheming tongue, which would not only defame his neighbors, but even dishonor God in heaven; and the ears, which were opened in order to hear God's Word, would rather hear all manner of erroneous and false doctrine, than the Word of God. This, they say was the reason Christ sighed and looked up to heaven.

[4] I will not reject this opinion; [so that it may not be said, that we are never pleased with anything, but want to have everything new and changed.] But, we must not, as it were, confine Christ too narrowly as though he had regard to one person only; we must regard him more highly than that he would help only this man. For all the Holy Scriptures, and particularly the prophets and psalms, declare, that he was sent to have deep compassion on all the misery and need of the whole human race, and that Christ was the person, chosen particularly above all saints, to be so minded toward us as surely to take upon himself all our need and sorrow as though they were his own, as in Psalm 40:12 he says of our sins, "Mine iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up," and in Psalm 41:4, "O Lord, have mercy upon me, heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee." Here our merciful Lord speaks in our person, bearing our sins as though they were his own, and as though he had committed them himself. And again, Psalm 69:5: "O God, thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from thee"; again, Isaiah 53:6' "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"; and vs. 4-5: "He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; the chastisement of our peace was upon him," etc. And other passages of Scripture bear witness to this.

[5] For the Lord Christ must be painted in such a manner that he is the only person who takes upon himself the misfortune, not of one country, or of one city, but of the whole world; even as St. John names him, John 1:29: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." But if he bears the sins, it follows that he must also have borne whatever belongs to sin, and what follows sin, as the devil, death and hell.

[6] That is the reason he sighs so here, as the person who was to do it, of whom the prophets had long before announced that he would have deep

compassion upon all the evils of the whole human race. He was not alone concerned about the tongue and the ears of only this poor man; but it was a common sigh over all tongues and ears in general, yea, over all hearts, bodies, and souls, and all men, from Adam to the last human being, who is yet to be born. Hence he does not chiefly sigh because this man would in the future commit many sins; but the chief reason is that he, Christ the Lord, viewed the entire mass of flesh and blood which the devil afflicted with a fatal hurt in Paradise, making mankind deaf and dumb, and thus thrust them into death and hell fire. This view being before the eyes of Christ, he looked far about him, seeing how great the damage was, inflicted in Paradise by the devil through the fall of one man. He looks not upon those two ears, but upon the whole number of men who had come from Adam, and were yet to come. Therefore this Gospel lesson sets forth Christ as being the man who is concerned about you and me, and about us all in a way that we ought to be concerned about ourselves, as though he were sunk in those sins and afflictions in which we are sunk, and that he sighs over the fact, that the very devil has brought about this ruin.

[7] This surely is why he shows such great earnestness in this case, and makes use of special ways and means. As though he would say: "Your deplorable condition, your bondage in sin and death, affects me so deeply, that moved by nothing but by my own thoughts, I must act in a special manner." For so extraordinary are his actions in this case, compared to his other works, that it is truly astonishing. He often healed others, or casted out devils, with a single word; indeed, he actually helped some whom he never visited, as for instance the centurion's servant, Matthew 8:13; here, however, on account of two diseased organs, the tongue and the ear, his actions are very peculiar, as though he were especially concerned. By this he shows us that at this time he had a special view and special thoughts of the human race.

[8] For as we admit that Christ, our Lord and God, had all other human traits, sin excepted, we must also concede, that he did not always have the same thoughts, was not always equally disposed, nor always equally fervent; but was variously actuated, just as other saints. Therefore, as his emotions and thoughts were peculiar in this case, his actions were also peculiar, so that we must see how truly human he was in body and soul, whose mind was not at all times alike disposed, just as little as he was

always hungry and sleepy at the same time. As these conditions are variable in men, so they were variable in him, as St. Paul says, Philippians 2:7: “He took upon himself the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man,” etc. This must not be understood merely of external appearances, but of his soul and the thoughts of his heart, that, being ardent at one time, he was more ardent at another time, etc. This, then, is one reason why Christ here acted thus, namely, because he is a real man; but at the same time a person who stood in the place of all men and took upon himself at the same time the diseases of this man, and of all men.

[9] The other thought is also true, that he was deeply grieved by the knowledge that this man, if he would heal him, might sin greatly after he was healed. But it is too narrow to explain it as referring only to the future sins of this man. For it was the task of Christ, our Lord God, to concern himself, and to suffer, not only for one man’s sin but, as we read in Revelation 13:8, for all sins that would be committed from the beginning of the world, from Adam to our time, even unto the last man to be born before the day of judgment. Therefore their view is too narrow who explain it only of those sins which this man would yet do in the future. Although he showed in other instances that he took account of the future life of certain persons, as he said to the paralytic, John 9:14: “Thou art made whole, sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee.”

[10] For Christ, our dear Lord, has so kind a heart that he grieves to think of a person sinning. For he is well aware that sins cannot remain unpunished; therefore, he even wept over the city of Jerusalem, because he saw that her sins had to be punished. So kind and loving is his heart that he has by no means pleasure where sin is committed.

[11] He addresses here particularly two organs of the body, the ear and the tongue; for you know the Kingdom of Christ is founded upon the Word, which cannot be apprehended or understood except by these two organs, the ear and the tongue, and he rules in the hearts of men alone by the Word and by faith. The ears apprehend the Word, the heart believes it; the tongue, however, speaks or confesses that which the heart believes. Hence, barring the tongue and ears, there is no perceptible difference between the Kingdom of Christ and that of the world.

[12] For in regard to the outward life a Christian has duties like an unbeliever; he tills the ground, works his fields, and plows just like others, and he undertakes no peculiar work or deed, either in eating, drinking, working, sleeping, or anything else. But these two organs of the body make a difference between a Christian and an unbeliever; a Christian speaks and hears differently; he has a tongue which praises the grace of God and preaches Christ the Lord as being the only Savior, etc. This the world does not do; it speaks of avarice and other vices, preaches and praises its own glory.

[13] In like manner the ears of both differ. A Christian's ears have the same Word which the tongue preaches, and the heart believes; but the world prefers to hear one speak of her wisdom, understanding, honor and glory. The ears and tongues of Christians are thus different from the ears and tongues of the world, or of unbelievers, caring naught for silver or gold, but only for that which is said of Christ, and how to speak and preach Christ.

[14] Surely our dear Lord foresaw how much harm and misery would yet be caused by tongues and ears. It does great harm that Christians are persecuted, drowned, burned, and hanged, and that the world sets itself forcibly against the Word; but this harm does not penetrate all, nor will it win. For when it becomes known that persons are dealt with so very unjustly, they only grow bold and fearless thereby and despise such torture and suffering. Hence that is not the greatest injury with which tyrants afflict Christendom; but that piece of flesh which lurks behind the teeth, offers the greatest harm to the Kingdom of Christ. I am not now referring to people lying about and defaming one another; I am speaking of the higher things, that the tongue after Christ has loosed it and has given it the Gospel, should thenceforth inflict such notorious injury. It is true, the injury is not so glaring, and it appears to be much worse if a person's head is struck off, than if a false prophet or writer comes forward; but a false sermon, yea even a false word, which comes whirling along in God's name, will cut off a great number of souls, so that an entire city or country may fall under it.

[15] This now is one of the afflictions which caused Christ to sigh; as though he would say: Be watchful! Beware of deceitful tongues which meddle with the Scriptures, more than of those which hold forth in the wine-house or in the grocery store; though the latter are not harmless, yet when those tongues begin to speak which I have made loose so that they

can boast of Christ, beware of them, etc. And in very deed, it is worthwhile to deplore the fact that those who have the Word and can talk much about it, should nevertheless persecute the Word with tongue and fist. The Turk also is a menace to Christendom, but his harm is inflicted only by the sword, and is in no way equal to the harm done by sectarians. There is need even now that one should sigh because such tongues which mislead so many people and still claim to be Christians, and to have improved the Christian Church. This is the first point, namely, that the devil, after the tongue is loosed and people know what Christ is, still inflicts injury by subverting the doctrine.

[16] Hence Christ says, one will find corrupt ears which, though I have opened them, wish to hear nothing else but what such false, evil tongues say. As Paul says, 2 Timothy 4:3' "The time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine, but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts, and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside unto fables," etc. Preachers who teach thus, are rogues and apostles of the devil. Now the others ought to be so godly as to say, I will not listen to their tongues. Aye, says St. Paul, they do not wish to hear the blessed tongue, but seek another; and in truth they find it, as it now happens among the sectarians of our day. Therefore, says St. Paul, as their ears itch, so will he send them preachers who will forcibly lead them into error. Just as we saw, while under the Pope, that no one was able to withstand the slightest error, but their fictitious purgatory, indulgences, haunting spirits, and whatever was only new, was immediately held to be an article of faith. Thus did the devil rub their ears, so that they were much more willing to listen to such deceit than to the Word of God.

[17] It is so even now. Our Lord God opens the ears so that the true Gospel is heard; yet wherever a sectarian turns up, the people immediately accept him, becoming so frenzied and so hostile to the true preachers that I am greatly perplexed how such excellent hearts to whom I would have entrusted body and soul, can grow so spitefully hostile to us, as though they were full of Satan and sin much more grievously with tongues and ears than before they had the Gospel, so that it were much better that Christ had never made them whole, and that they had not heard his Word at all.

[18] The meaning of Christ's sighs then is, not only that he reviewed in his mind all afflictions from the beginning of the world, but that he deplored the certainty that after the revelation of the Gospel, his Kingdom should

suffer so much harm through the very persons whom he would help, and that his Kingdom should be so buffeted and rent, which would not have happened, if men had not first been rescued by him. To be sure, he must bear it, and we must also bear it; but nevertheless, he will not on that account have sighed in vain.

[19] And though the nature of his sighs is not fully stated here—for it cannot be written, as St. Paul says, Romans 8:26, that such sighs cannot be expressed in written or spoken words — yet for all that, woe betide those who do such injury and make so little of this sighing, and go forth as though they had done well. For Christ was troubled by this with many and various harassing thoughts, such as these: Behold, so much does it cost me, so much fear and torture I must bear, until I bring it about that these people hear my Word and preach it; and yet they will so shamelessly falsify and subvert it, and will do to me and my kingdom, such great injury’ This ingratitude toward the Word must hurt every Christian soul; hence it is not astonishing that it also moved Christ the lord so greatly, that he here uses special ways and ceremonies, because this thought struck him forcibly at that time.

[20] We should learn now from these ceremonies and demonstrative actions, which Christ uses here, how earnestly Christ our Lord cares for us; we should diligently be on our guard to keep our ears and tongues in the condition in which he gave them to us, and fortify ourselves against the devil and against men, lest they change our ears and tongues to the contrary. Secondly, we should also, everyone in his calling, show our gratitude toward his Word for this blessing in such a manner that a ruler in his country, a preacher in the pulpit, father and mother in the home, rightly fulfill the duties of their calling, while the others should hear it, keeping open their ears as Christ has opened them, and diligently see to it, as Christ acted in the case of this man, that they may also be as serious, and thank God for it.

[21] Among us, God be praised, the tongue has been so developed that we speak purely, and that the ears gladly hear it; for there still are many pious people everywhere who take delight in hearing God’s Word. But side by side with this there is great ingratitude also among us, and frightful contempt for the Word of God, perhaps, indeed, a secret persecution and suffering. Other princes persecute it openly; but we here sit under shelter, as

in a garden of roses, and yet secretly there are so many, citizens and peasants, and the noblemen with their golden chains, who would gladly hound all pastors and preachers out of the country, if only they could do it. This shows that they despise the Word and hate it secretly; as we see it is the case that, where the Word is persecuted openly, there only it would live, and where it is unhindered and public, there they do not want it.

[22] But our Lord God will surely not have sighed in vain. Some think, indeed, that it will always remain so, because he keeps so silent about it; but it happens very quickly that a pulpit changes its character. Therefore our Lord God wants us here to take warning, as it was also predicted by St. Paul, in order that we should beware. Tongues will change their speech, and the ears of the people will itch after false preachers, even as it came to pass under the Pope's rule, where people were so willing and eager to hear and to do, whenever anyone came along who had something new to say, no matter how unreasonable and foolish it might be. At that time, if anyone had risen to preach that a church should be built in the river Elbe, they would have done it. But now that the Word is being taught and preached from the pulpit, to trust in God and to serve our neighbor, the lives of the people nowhere are conformed to it. That is the doings of the very devil, but this does not excuse us.

[23] For since the doctrine has been brought into such shape and form that the articles of faith are preached in their purity, and since the tongues are now loosed and the ears are opened, we should also apply ourselves that this doctrine may show itself in our daily lives. But I fear it will not be done before lightning and thunder strike down upon us, as St. Paul says. God has already made a beginning with the Pope, striking the Antichrist with the lightning of the Gospel, which is the Spirit of his mouth, which is now opened and speaks, and is still striking among the wicked; but I fear the teaching will not be followed by right living, until he will come and strike everything to the ground completely, making an end of ungodliness by the manifestation of his glorious coming, 2 Thessalonians 2:8.

[24] Now since righteous works and living do not seem to follow the doctrine so perfectly among us as they indeed ought, I fear that our Lord God, unless the day of judgment should break in upon us, will not let his punishment be deferred; for our lives are not at all in agreement with the doctrine, not even in the least thing, as that we should serve our neighbor,

which truly is not a great requirement. For there is no need to run to Rome nor to St. James, nor to give money or anything valuable to obtain it; all you need is to give your will to do it. But since we are such desperate people who, after having done only too much under the Pope, do nothing now so either the day of judgment must strike in our midst, or our Lord God will send heresies and then we will be compelled again to do unnecessary works. It is a matter of great concern to Christ, the Lord, that his Word should thus be despised and per secured; therefore those who are the cause of it will not go unpunished. Let this suffice concerning this text. [Let us pray to our Lord God to give us his grace, that we may so act and live as he has enabled us to speak and hear. Amen.

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity. The Two Greatest Commandments and the Good Samaritan.

Text: Luke 10:23-37.

23 And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see:

24 For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. Luke 10:23-37

[1] I hope you thoroughly understand this Gospel lesson, inasmuch as it recurs every year. And since it annually returns in the Pericopes we are required to consider it; and this we will now gladly and briefly do. In the first place, the Evangelist relates how Christ our Lord led his disciples aside, and being alone with them rejoiced in his spirit, and earnestly and directly said to them: "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see; for I say unto you, that many prophets and kings desired to see the things that ye see, and saw them not: and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not."

[2] This hearing and seeing must be understood simply and plainly as external seeing and hearing, namely, that they saw Christ and his office, heard his preaching, and witnessed the miracles he performed among the Jews. The Jews also beheld these things with their natural eyes and some of them indeed experienced them in part in their hearts. But in fact they did not recognize him as the Christ, like the Apostles did, and like Peter, who representing all the others, confessed and said in Matthew 16:16: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." We indeed admit, that even some of the Jews like the Apostles recognized him as the Christ; but since they were but few who did, Christ therefore, takes his Apostles here to himself apart.

[3] However, in spirit, many prophets and kings saw Christ, as Christ himself says to the Jews concerning Abraham in John 8:56: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad." Then the Jews thought he spoke of natural seeing, but Christ spoke of spiritual

seeing, as all pious Christian hearts saw him before he was born, and still daily see him. For if Abraham saw him, without doubt many more prophets in whom the Holy Spirit dwelt saw him. And although this seeing made the holy fathers and prophets blessed, yet they had a real heartfelt longing and desire to behold Christ the Lord in the flesh, as is intimated time and again in the prophets.

[4] Therefore, the Lord here says to his disciples who saw both with their natural and their spiritual eyes: “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see.” As though he would say: This is a blessed time, an acceptable year, a special season of grace. That which is now at hand is so precious that the eyes which see it are truly called blessed. For in the past ages the Gospel was never preached so publicly and clearly unto all men as at present; the Holy Spirit was not yet publicly poured out: but was still concealed, and had as yet accomplished little. But Christ began the office of the Holy Spirit, and afterwards the Apostles continued it in full earnest. Therefore, he calls all those blessed, who see and hear such grace. Now when the Lord said this and was rejoicing in spirit, one presents himself, a lawyer, who acting as though he also amounted to something, tempted the Lord and said: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

[5] This lawyer was perhaps a wise man and well acquainted with the Scriptures, as his answer also suggests; yet here he becomes a fool, and must first begin to learn from the Lord, when he is put to shame and disgrace. For Christ teaches him a good lesson, and with one word takes out of him all his self-conceit. For he was in the delusion that he had kept the law wholly and perfectly, and was therefore, something extra, above others, which undoubtedly he was, and imagined, because he was so pious and learned, that he was of course worthy to talk with the Lord. But now what does the Lord do to ensnare him in a masterly manner? He does this: he permits him to judge himself. For the Evangelist proceeds thus: “And he said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.”

[6] I think the Lord gave this pious man a good lecture. Alas, it was not right, he should have spared him a little, he puts him to shame before all the

world. For what good does it do him? Christ shows him that he has as yet done nothing, when he allowed himself to think he had done everything. He asks what he should do. I contend that he has enough to do now, if he is only able to do great things.

[7] Now much might be said on these two commandments, and it is also really needed, had we the time, for these are the highest and greatest themes on which Moses wrote; yea, on these hang all the law and the prophets, as Christ himself says in Matthew 22:40. Nevertheless, we will briefly consider some phases of them.

[8] When we examine the laws of Moses, we find they all treat of love. For the commandment: "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me," I cannot explain or interpret otherwise than: Thou shalt love God alone. Thus, Moses himself interprets it in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, where he says: "Hear, O Israel; Jehovah our God is one Jehovah; and thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." From this passage the lawyer has taken his answer. But the Jews understand this law to mean no more than that they should not set up idols and images to worship, and when they could say and confess with their lips that they have only one God and honor no other gods, they think they have kept this commandment. Thus, this lawyer also understood it, but it was a false, erroneous knowledge of the law.

[9] Now we must have high regard for the law. It says: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Thou, thou, it says, thou, and everything thou art; and especially does it mean the heart, the soul and all thy powers. It does not speak of the tongue, or the hands, or the knees; but it speaks of the whole body, and of all thou hast and art. If I am to have no other God, then I must surely possess the only true God with my heart, that is, I must in my heart be affectionate to him, evermore cleave to him, depend upon him, trust him, have my desire, love and joy in him, and always think of him. Just as we say at other times when we delight in something, that it tastes good in our very heart. And when one speaks or laughs and is not in earnest, and does not mean it from his heart, we say: You laugh, and your heart is not in it. The heart is quite a different thing than the lips. Therefore, in the Scriptures the heart signifies the great and ardent love we should have for God. Those who serve God only with their lips, with their hands or with

their knees, are hypocrites, and God cares nothing for them. For God does not want only a part, on the contrary he wants the whole man.

[10] The Jews abstained outwardly from idolatry, and served God only with their lips; but their hearts were far from him, full of mistrust and unbelief. Outwardly they appeared beautiful, as though they meant it in all sincerity, but within they were full of idolatry. Therefore, the Lord said unto them in Matthew 23:27-28: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cumin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faith. For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men’s bones and of all uncleanness. Even as ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”

[11] They are really wicked people who become proud in external things, who desire to justify and make themselves pious by their works, as this lawyer here does. Behold, what a proud character he is, he presents himself in his own name, and thinks Christ will not rebuke him; yea, he allows himself to think that the Lord will extol and praise his life in the presence of all the people, and does not think of learning anything from the Lord, but only seeks his own praise. The ignorant pretender would have gladly heard a psalm of praise from the man whom the people esteemed, and at whom all men wondered. Thus, all hypocrites do, who outwardly parade their excellent, great and noble works. They well say that they do not seek honor and praise, but inwardly in their hearts they are full of ambition, and desire all the world to know of their holiness, and smile very nicely when they hear men speak of it.

[12] Yet the Lord does not serve this lawyer thus, but puts him to shame. This Christ is an unfriendly, ungracious man, he tells the people the truth, and well deserves that they should hate him. The pious, holy lawyer still does his utmost, and knows nothing but how to harvest great honors and obtain high renown for his precious life; he thinks he has perfectly fulfilled this commandment, and hopes for a favorable answer, that the Lord will say: Dear Sir, you have done it all. But Christ goes to work and first tells him: “Do this!” That is to say in good German: You are a rogue in the hide, you have not done this during your whole life; yea, you have not kept a single letter of the law; and thus, shows him his wickedness. The poor

fellow thinks he should sit in the first seat, that he is really pure and beautiful, and by rights should sit among the angels, rather than here among the people. What a wonderful Christ is this! The people regard this lawyer as pious and holy; but Christ says he shall first go and begin to fulfill the law. Be consistent with thyself!

[13] Now these are the very fellows who most of all sin against the first commandment, and think no further than the words read: I must love God, and think they have fulfilled the law, while it remains hovering on their tongues and over their hearts, but never enters. This, however, is not enough, it must reach much farther, namely, that I so love God that for his sake I can forsake all creatures, and should he require it, also body and life; yea, that I should love him above all things. For God is a jealous God and cannot suffer us to love anything above himself. But to love anything beneath himself, he of course allows. Just as a husband can easily allow his wife to love the maid servants, the house and house utensils, cattle and other things; but to love with the love she should have for him, he will not suffer her to love anyone besides himself; yea, he desires her to forsake all things for his sake; and so again the wife also requires the same from her husband. Thus, God can also allow us to love his creatures; yea, they are created for this purpose and are good. The sun is an excellent creature; gold and silver and all things that are attractive and beautiful by nature cause us to love them. This God indeed permits us to do. But that I should cling to the creature and love it with the same love with which I love God the Creator, this he can and will not allow; yea, his will is that I should deny and forsake all things, should he desire and require it of me, and be satisfied should I nevermore behold the sun, my money and possessions. The love of the creature should stand far, far below our love to him; and as he is the chief good, his will is also to be loved in the highest degree, above all other good. If he will not allow me to love anything as much as I love him, much less will he allow me to love anything more than himself, though it be a creature of his own creation.

[14] Now I think you understand what it is to love God with all the heart, with all the soul and with all the mind. To love God with all the heart is to love him above all creatures; that is, although many creatures are quite lovely, as they please me and I love them, nevertheless, I am to despise and forsake all these for God's sake, whenever God my Lord desires it.

[15] To love God with all the soul is to devote your entire bodily life to him that you can say when the love of any creature, or any persecution threatens to overpower you: All this I will give up, before I will forsake my God; let men cast me away, murder or drown me, let what God's will is happen to me, I will gladly lose all, before I will forsake thee, O Lord! unto thee will I cling more than to all thy creatures, or to anything that is not thyself. I will risk all things together with what I have and am that I may not forsake thee. The soul in the Scriptures signifies the life of the body, which acts through the five senses, eating, drinking, sleeping, waking, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and everything that the soul does through the body.

[16] To love God with all our strength is to devote all our members and whatever we may be able to do through our bodies to the love of God, and sacrifice all rather than do anything contrary to his will.

[17] To love God with all the mind is to take to nothing except that which is pleasing to God. By which is meant the self-conceit which man has that the same be directed to God and that all things be pleasing to him.

[18] Thus, you see what the commandment requires: "Thou shalt love God." Thou, thou wholly and fully, not thy hands, not thy lips, not thy knees. Those who do this, fulfill the commandment in the right sense. But there is not a man on earth who thus, fulfils the law; yea, we all do just the opposite. Thus, this law here makes us all sinners so that not the least letter of this commandment is fulfilled, even by the most holy persons in the world. For no one clings so firmly to God with all the heart, that he could forsake all things for God's sake. We have, God be praised, become so competent that we can almost not suffer the least word, yea, we will not let go of a nickel for the sake of God. How is it possible for us to love God, as long as his will displeases us? For if I love God I love also his will. Now, when God sends us sickness, poverty, shame and disgrace, that is his will. But what do we do under such circumstances? We thunder, scold and growl, and bear it with great impatience. And this is the least part, for what would we do if we had to forsake body and life for God and Christ's sake? Then we would act quite differently. Yet in the meantime I act like this Pharisee and lawyer does, I lead a fine outward life, honor and serve God, fast, pray, and appear very pious and holy. But God does not want this. He wants us to accept his will with joy and love, and this we are too tardy in doing.

[19] Therefore, what the Lord here says to this lawyer, he says to us all, namely, that we have not yet fulfilled the law, and still he requires us to do it. On this account all men are guilty of death, and are the devil's own property. "All men are liars," Psalm 116:11, vain and offensive. What they pretend does not avail before God. In our own affairs we are shrewd; how to scrape together money and goods, how to speak well of God before the people, and how to push ourselves ahead in a masterly manner. But what does God care for this? His will is that we should love him with all our hearts. This no man can do, and the conclusion is that we are all sinners, and especially those who walk in a beautiful outward show. Therefore, it is safer that we go and confess that we all are sinners, than that we have respect to our works and cling to our beautiful, glittering lives.

II. A Sermon on the Gospel in a Parable.

[20] The foregoing is the first part of our Gospel lesson, and it is a sermon on the law. The second part now follows, and it preaches the Gospel, how and whence we are to receive power to fulfill the Law. This the good Samaritan will teach us.

[21] How does this lawyer act now after the Lord had thus, turned him away? He goes ahead, the Evangelist says, and desires to justify himself and says to the Lord: "And who is my neighbor?"

[22] He does not ask: Who is my God? As though he would say: "I owe God nothing, with God I am in good standing. I am also inclined to think that I am under obligations to no man; yet, I would like to know who my neighbor is? The Lord answers and tells him a very beautiful parable, by which he shows that we are all neighbors among one another, both he who does another a kindness, as well as he who is in need of a kindness. Although the text reads as if Christ said that he is our neighbor who does another a kindness. In this, however, the Scriptures make no difference. Here they call him neighbor who does a kindness, and at other places him who receives the kindness

[23] By means of this parable the Lord concludes with the words, "Go, and do thou likewise," so that this lawyer did not only sin against God, but also against his neighbor. He not only failed to love God, but he did not love his neighbor, and never did him a favor. By this the poor man falls into

such a sweat that he is only deceived from head to foot. How could he be so mistaken, the highly learned and pious man? His mistake came in this way; he led a Pharisaical, feigned and hypocritical life. He did not look down to his neighbor to help him with his life, but only sought thereby his own vain glory and honor before the eyes of the people, and with this he stared piously toward heaven.

[24] Now you have often heard that a Christian life consists in acting before my God in faith and with a pure heart, but toward my neighbor in right living and good works; and not wait until my neighbor seeks a kindness of me, and asks me for something, but approach and meet him with kindness and freely offer it to him. Let us now see what the parable in itself teaches.

[25] This Samaritan of course is our Lord Jesus Christ himself, who has shown his love toward God and his neighbor. Toward God, in that he was obedient to him, came down from heaven and became man, and thus, fulfilled the will of his Father; toward his neighbor, in that he immediately after his baptism began to preach, to do wonders, to heal the sick. And in short, he did no work that centered in himself alone, but all his acts centered in his neighbor. And this he did with all his powers, and thus, he became our servant, who could have well remained in heaven and been equal to God, Philippians 2:6. But all this he did because he knew that this pleased God and was his Father's will.

[26] When he entered upon that high mission to prove that he loved God with all his heart, he laid down his bodily life with all he had, and said: Father, here you have all, my bodily life, my glory and honor, which I had among the people; all this I give as it is for thy sake, that the world may know how I love thee. My Father, let my wisdom perish, so that the world may look upon me as most foolish. Let me be the most despised, who was heretofore praised by all the world. Now I am the worst murderer, who before was friendly, useful and serviceable to the whole world. Dear Father, all this I despise, only that I may not be disobedient to thee.

[27] This is the Samaritan who came uninvited, and fulfilled the law with his whole heart. For only he fulfilled the law, and no one can deprive him of this honor. He alone merits it, and well maintains it all alone. Now this would be no special comfort for us; but that he has compassion on the

poor wounded man, takes him under his care, binds his wounds, takes him into the inn and waits on him, this avails for us.

[28] The man who here lies half dead, wounded and stripped of his clothing, is Adam and all mankind. The murderers are the devils who robbed and wounded us, and left us lying prostrate half dead. We still struggle a little for life; but there lies horse and man, we cannot help ourselves to our feet, and if we were left thus, lying we would have to die by reason of our great anguish and lack of nourishment; maggots would grow in our wounds, followed by great misery and distress.

[29] The parable stands in bold relief, and pictures us perfectly, what we are and can do with our boasted reason and free will. If the poor wounded man had desired to help himself, it would only have been worse for him, he would only have done harm to himself and irritated his wounds, and only prepared more misery and distress for himself. Had he remained lying quiet, he would have had as much suffering. Thus, it is when we are left to ourselves. We are always lost, we may lay hold where we will. Hitherto man has always acted thus, he has thought out many ways and methods how we might reform our lives and get to heaven. One found this way, another that, therefore, so many kinds of orders arose: in like manner the letters of indulgence and crusades originated; but they have only made evil worse. Such is the world, and it is thus, finely portrayed in this wounded man, it lies in sins over head and ears and cannot help itself.

[30] But the Samaritan who has fulfilled the law and is perfectly healthy and sound, comes and does more than both priest and Levite. He binds up the sores of the wounded man, pours in oil and wine, lifts him upon his own beast, and brings him into the inn, takes good care of him, and when he departs he carefully commends him to the host, and besides leaves him a sufficient supply of money, while neither the priest nor Levite would do one of these kind acts. The priest signifies the dear sainted fathers before Moses; the Levite the priesthood of the Old Testament. All these however have accomplished nothing by their works, and have passed by on the other side like this priest and Levite.

[31] Therefore, if I had for example all the good works of Noah, Abraham and of all the dear fathers, they would still be of no benefit to me. They have indeed beheld the wounded man lying helpless and half dead,

but they could not help it. He who lay there half dead, saw it too, but what of it, he could make it no better. The dear sainted fathers saw very well that the people lay in their sins over their ears, and also felt the anguish of sin, but what could they do to remedy it? They could make it only worse, but not better. These were the preachers of the law, and showed what the world was, namely, full of deadly sins, and it lay there half dead, and could not help itself, notwithstanding all its powers, reason and free will. Go then, thou beautifully painted rogue, and boast of thy free will, of thy merits and holiness!

[32] But Christ, the true Samaritan, takes the poor man to himself as his own, goes to him and does not require the helpless one to come to him; for here is no merit, but pure grace and mercy; and he binds up his wounds, cares for him and pours in oil and wine, this is the whole Gospel from beginning to end. He pours in oil when grace is preached, as when one says: Behold thou poor man, here is your unbelief, here is your condemnation, here you are wounded and sore. Wait! All this I will cure with the Gospel. Behold, here cling firmly to this Samaritan, to Christ the Savior, he will help you, and nothing else in heaven or on earth will. You know very well that oil softens, thus, also the sweet, loving preaching of the Gospel gives me a soft, mild heart toward God and my neighbor, so that I risk my bodily life for the sake of Christ my Lord and his Gospel, if God and necessity require it.

[33] But wine is sharp and signifies the holy cross that immediately follows. A Christian need not look for his cross, it is always on his back. For he thinks as St. Paul says, 2 Timothy 3:12: "All that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." This is the court-color in this kingdom. Whoever is ashamed of the color, does not belong to this king.

[34] Then the Samaritan lifts the wounded man on his beast. This beast is Christ the Lord himself, he carries us, we lay upon his shoulders, neck and body. There is scarcely a more lovely picture in the entire Gospel, than where Christ the Lord compares himself to a shepherd, in Luke 15:1, who carries the lost sheep on his shoulders back to the fold. He still continually carries his lost sheep thus, at the present day.

[35] The stable or inn is Christianity, here in this world, where we must remain for a short time. The host is the preacher of the Word of God and of

the Gospel, who is to nurse and care for us.

[36] Now here we have the substance of the Gospel. The kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of mercy and grace, in which there is nothing but a continual carrying of the lost. Christ carries our infirmities and sicknesses, he takes our sins upon himself and has patience when we fail. We still always lay about his neck, and yet he does not become weary of carrying us, which should be the greatest comfort for us when we are in conflict with sin.

[37] Ministers in this kingdom are to comfort the consciences, deal gently with them and feed them with the Gospel, carry the weak, heal the sick, and know how to divide the Word rightly, and administer the same to everyone according to his needs. This is the office of a true bishop and minister, and not to proceed with violence as our bishops do, who come threatening with stocks and the block, crying: “Ho! up there, up there, who will not, must!” This should not be, but a bishop or minister ought to resemble one who Waits upon the sick, who treats them very gently, gives kind words, speaks very friendly to them and exercises all diligence in their behalf. Thus, a bishop or minister should also do, and remember that his bishopric or parish is nothing but a hospital and an infirmary, where he has very many and various kinds of sick people for treatment. When Christ is thus, preached faith and life meet together and fulfill the commandment of love.

Of the Law and the Gospel.

[38] I have often told you, dearly beloved, that the entire Scriptures consist of two parts, of the law and the Gospel. It is the law that teaches what we are required to do; the Gospel teaches where we shall receive what the law demands. For it is quite a different thing to know what we should have, and to know where to get it. Just as when I am given into the hands of the physicians, where it is quite a different art to tell what my disease is than to tell what medicine I must take so as to recover. Thus, it is likewise here. The law discovers the disease, the Gospel ministers the medicine. This you clearly see in today’s Gospel. The lawyer comes desiring eternal life, ‘and inquires what he shall do to secure it! The law tells him, and says: “Thou

shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, with all thy strength and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.”

[39] He who reads this only superficially as this lawyer here does, will not understand it. One must enter into it and portray and even behold himself in it. For if I try to love God with all my heart, I will soon see how far I fail. So, with all the soul, that is, with the inner soul which I feel in the flesh, that I love and experience love in all my senses; for to love with the soul in the Scriptures means the love that a gallant youth feels towards his beloved. Again, with all thy strength, that is, with all thy members. Again, with all thy mind, that is, all thy senses, thoughts and delusions must be directed toward God. For if I am to love God with all my heart, soul, strength and mind, then my eyes dare not give one scornful glance, my tongue speak an angry word, my feet, hands, ears must all be one, and give forth no angry sign. That is to say: Thou shalt love God with all thy heart, so that thy whole body from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet, inwardly and outwardly, goes forth in love, and rejoices in God and honors him.

[40] Now find me a man who is chaste or otherwise pious with a burning passion and love; there is none such on the earth. We find ourselves much more inclined to anger, hatred, envy, worldly pleasures, than to tender heartedness and other virtues. And when I find in my inclination such a spark, it is all false, the law is not satisfied. But I find not only a spark in me, but a whole bake-oven full of the fire of evil inclinations, for there is no love in the heart, nor in any member of the body. Therefore, I here see in the law as in a mirror, that everything I have is condemned and cursed; for not one jot of the law shall pass away but all must be fulfilled, as Christ says, Matthew 5:18: “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished.”

[41] Now you do not find in yourself, that you do with all your soul and with all your heart, with joy and pleasure, what the law requires of you; therefore, you are condemned and the child of Satan; then know by this how to govern yourself in the future. Behold, you must first come to the knowledge to confess that you are the devil’s own property. But if you would know no more than how you are to treat him to be freed from him, you would have to perish. To this end the law serveth, that we may learn

that we are condemned, for this evil lust is found in us all, and yet we should not have a spark of it in us.

[42] Our sophists failed to see this, and have taught, if a man does the best he can, God then gives him grace. They are blind guides, and themselves confess that man has little desire for the good; yet still, if he go and do it, even though disorderly, unwillingly, indolently, he is nevertheless in favor with God. Christ here teaches the contrary that we should go forth with a passion and love and do the law with a joyful and happy mind. Now, whom would you rather believe, Christ or the sophists? I leave this to you. From such false knowledge the cloisters later arose, into which men entered and contended that if a man were only in a cloister, and it matters not how unwillingly he was there, then he would be saved. So they taught. But now Christ's will is that man should do good works willingly and joyfully. Hence, if they are done with a troubled conscience and a heavy heart, it is sin. Therefore, cease from all works that you do not perform with pleasure and love.

[43] They therefore, should have said: Man, do you see, you poor condemned creature, you should have delight in God's law, and you have no pleasure in it; hence show some delight and love, or you are God's enemy and the devil's friend. Thus, the people would have bravely forsaken their own presumption and come to a knowledge of themselves and would have said: O God, now I am condemned. Yes, this is right. Here everyone might soon know and conclude, that we all belong to Satan, as long as we find within us displeasure in the law of God. Therefore, boldly cast away all works from you, then you will find delight in and love for God's law in your heart. I experience indeed that God's law is holy, right and good, but it is my death. And if it could be, I would prefer that it did not exist. And thus, all people are disposed in their hearts, as St. Paul very beautifully writes in the seventh chapter of Romans.

[44] Had we now remained in this condemnation, we would have had to perish forever. Therefore, another part is added, the Gospel, which speaks of consolation and teaches salvation, and whence we are to obtain it, so that the law may be satisfied. Now when I see by the law that I am condemned, lying even among murderers, half dead, the devil has stolen my soul and taken it captive in Adam and Eve, with all faith and righteousness, and has left nothing except my bodily life which will soon be extinguished; now

here come the Levite and the priest, who render human satisfaction and teach this and that; but it does no good, they pass by.

[45] However when the Samaritan comes, he helps, that is, when Christ comes and offers us his mercy, and says: Behold, you are indebted to love God with all your heart, but you have not done it; now believe in me, I will give you my sufferings: this will help me. Here he lifts me on his beast, that is, on himself, and takes me to the inn, that is, into the Christian Church. After this he comes and pours into me his grace, which is the oil, so that I feel I am lying on his shoulders, this gives me a very joyful conscience; moreover he pours into me wine, which is to devour and drown the old Adam. But even then I am not perfectly well. Health has indeed been poured into me and there is a turn for the better, but nevertheless I am not perfectly restored to health. Meantime Christ serves and purifies me by the grace he pours into me, so that day by day I become purer, chaster, milder, gentler and more believing until I die, when I shall be entirely perfect.

[46] Thus, when we now come before God the Father and are asked: whether we have also believed and loved God, and have wholly fulfilled the law; then the Samaritan will step forth, Christ the Lord, who carries us lying on his beast, and say; Alas, Father! although they have not wholly fulfilled thy law, yet I have done so, let this be to their benefit because they believe in me. Thus, all saints must do, however holy and pious they may be, they must lay on Christ's shoulders. If even the most holy people, as priests and Levites, could not satisfy the law, how shall we undertake to do so with our reigned works, bald pates and caps? O our wretched and corrupt nature! Let this be sufficient for the present, and let us call on God for grace.

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. Christ Praises the Gospel Dispensation and Gives a Picture of His Kingdom

Text: Luke 10:23-37.

23 And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see:

24 For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. Luke 10:23-37

[1] This Pericope contains especially three lessons. First, that Christ praises the time when the Gospel was revealed and published, which is rightly and justly called the time of grace. Secondly, what truly good works are according to the command of God, which he pictures by the beautiful example or history of the Samaritan 's actions to the one wounded by robbers. In the same history he sets forth as in a loving picture the third lesson, a portrayal of the kingdom of Christ, or of grace, which the preaching of the Gospel makes known. The first lesson is given in these words: "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I say unto you, that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not."

[2] The Evangelist says Christ spoke these words especially to his disciples, and just at the time when he was greatly moved with joy in his soul or with spiritual delight, and therefore, he thanked and praised his heavenly Father from his heart for the revelation of the Gospel. Here we see that he was especially anxious to speak thus, with his disciples, since their own salvation also depended upon that revelation. And such words are nothing more than praise of the Gospel, that they lived in the time (and now hear and see) of the revelation of the Gospel, which brings to the world deliverance and salvation from sin and all misery. And of this time or revelation the beloved prophets formerly prophesied in a glorious manner, and they longed and cried for it beyond measure in their very souls, as is manifest especially in the Psalms and in the Prophecy of Isaiah. Therefore, you are blessed and more than blessed; for you enjoy now the truly golden year, the pure kingdom of grace and the blessed time; therefore, only see to it that you retain it and make good use of it.

[3] For such praise is true admonition, yea, an earnest discourse of lamentation; for he exhorts to thanksgiving for such grace. And on the other hand he laments over the great ingratitude of the world, that there are so few people who know and receive this, while so many despise it, therefore, he says Christ turned especially to the disciples and praised them; as if he wished to say: Yes, your eyes and ears are indeed blessed, which see and hear this; for, alas! on the other hand there are many eyes and ears that do not wish to see or hear it, although they have it right before their eyes and ears. Christ thus, shows however great and superabundant the treasure is,

and however comforting the preaching of it may be, yet among the great mass of people it is only despised and persecuted.

[4] And now the times are changing, since the beloved fathers and prophets in their day would have given their body and life had they been able to live to see it, and had they experienced it their hearts would have blossomed to fruit in their bodies because of joy, and they would have thought they were walking where there were only roses. As the pious, aged Simeon, Luke 2:28f., embraced in his arms the Savior while he as an infant could not yet speak nor walk, and with all joy entrusted his life to him, and no longer cared for this life nor for anything in it. Dear mother Eve also, Genesis 4:1, earnestly prayed and longed for this salvation, and was glad when God gave her a firstborn son; for she thought he would be the Savior; but when her hope in him failed, she longed still more for it. And later the hearts of all the fathers clung to and sighed for the same deliverer until he came and permitted himself to be seen and heard. Then the whole world should have received him at once with all joy and gloried in being saved; just as he himself praises this grace.

[5] Joyfully and with his whole heart aglow, pious David thanks God when he heard the first time from the Prophet Nathan God's promise, Samuel 7:12f., that he would establish not only a dynasty and a permanent kingdom with his descendants; but also that he would let Christ be born of his body, and thus, he would found an eternal kingdom of his grace and mercy. And because of this his great joy, he did not know what he should say before God and how he should thank him, and hence he composed so many beautiful Psalms about it, especially the 89th, and besides, in his last words and testament, he praises this kindness in the highest manner and says: "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant; ordered in all things and sure: for it is all my salvation and all my desire," etc. Samuel 23:1. But now the dear, blessed time has come, and there is a change, I say, so that people live and appear who wish neither to see nor to hear, neither to know nor to tolerate this rich grace and this highest favor of God bestowed so gratuitously.

[6] Just as we also see at present and easily understand how those who wish to be the Church and to be called Christians, the Pope and bishops with their followers, who should lift their hands to heaven and thank God for their deliverance from darkness and blindness, that they have again the

pure light of the Gospel; these bring fire and water, wet their sword and polish their weapons to exterminate from the earth those who teach and confess the pure Gospel, and there are so many unthankful, false Christians among us just like them, who despise this salvation in the most defiant manner. Formerly, when we were captives under the Pope's tyranny, burdened with the preaching of lies, relating to indulgences, purgatory and all the dreams of the monks, what a sighing and longing there was then in all the world for the true preaching of the Gospel. How gladly would one then have given, labored and suffered all things possible to secure true instruction and comfort, and to be delivered with a good conscience from the fearful martyrdom of the confessional and other oppressive burdens imposed by the Pope! And how happy were many pious people at first because of this deliverance who learned it and thanked God for it! But now, how many are there who rejoice from their hearts and acknowledge how blessed they are in that they can see and hear this? How soon they took offense at this blessed treasure and then sought something else, when they forgot all they had received, and the world became again filled with fanaticism and false teachings.

[7] Indeed it really depends upon seeing and hearing; it is fully revealed and it stands forth clearly in the light before our eyes and ears; but the great mass of the world cannot see nor understand it, even if it were stuck in their eyes and continually rung and hammered into their ears. For if they could hear and see a little of it, then it would accomplish something among them and improve them, so that they would become more reasonable and would not thus, oppose the truth.

[8] What did it help all the Pharisees that Christ himself preached the Gospel to them? And what would it help all the fanatics and critics even if it were preached twice as clearly, how we obtain the forgiveness of sins and true consolation of the conscience, likewise how a Christian should live in every calling of life and should know that he pleases God. Of all this they heretofore knew and heard nothing, so that they themselves acknowledged that the teaching was indeed excellent, but at the same time they remained stone-blind and it never entered their hearts that they could walk and live in harmony with it, all is strange to them that they hear, read or they themselves speak concerning it For they are too completely chilled and choked with other thoughts of their own self-conceit and pleasure about

things dear to them, so that aside from these they can neither see nor hear anything. Thus, among them it is fulfilled as the prophets and Christ spoke before to the Jewish people and all like them, that with eyes to see they shall not see and with ears to hear they shall not hear, in order that they may change and be saved. This is the highest, the most horrible and the most fearful punishment they can bring upon themselves, and in addition be tormented in that they must daily see and hear the word and work of God, that is offered to all men for their salvation; and yet they have not the grace to receive it, Matthew 13:14; but only hear and see in it their vexation and thus, become so bitter against it that they would rather hear and see the devil from hell.

[9] On the other hand it is great grace and a precious treasure for him who receives this teaching that he sees and hears it aright, so that we should indeed declare such a one saved. For the seeing and hearing that enter the heart bring and give a fullness and richness of possessions in understanding, enlightenment, comfort, strength and growth of spirit, joy and life, that we can never hear and see enough of it and prefer to hear, to learn and to know this above everything else that may be preached, taught, sung or said, that it should help to our salvation. Yea, it lets all other things pass as if it heard and saw them not, although in civil government and life it must see and hear much, yet it clings alone to this light and knowledge, which is so great that it completely fills the eyes and heart, and darkens and blinds everything else.

[10] In like manner the sun at its rising so completely fills the world with light that the moon and stars are no longer seen or thought of, although they give their light every night. Just so let those, who can, give light also here, be they learned, wise, holy people, even Moses, the Prophets, the fathers, or St. John the Baptist himself; yet they all should yield to Christ, yea, bear witness that he alone is the light, by whom all men are to be enlightened and that they themselves must become partakers of that light, and that in Christendom all light, wisdom and teaching aside from Christ must cease, or be found alone in him.

[11] In the same manner should the beautiful sound and the lovely music of the Gospel of Christ so engage and fill our ears, that we may hear nothing else, as when a great bell or a kettledrum and trumpet sound and resound, the air is so full that whatever else is spoken, sung or cried cannot

be heard. So should Christ's words constantly in all our lives and actions have the upper hand in our hearts through faith, and know of comfort, righteousness and salvation from none other. These would indeed be blessed eyes and ears that could thus, make use of the blessed time or dispensation of the Gospel, and know what God has given them in it; for such eyes and ears God himself esteems as an excellent and precious treasure and a sacred and holy possession, which could not be purchased by the whole world even if it had many more and brighter lights and suns.

II. The Sermon of Christ on Truly Good Works.

[12] This is an admonition of Christ to his dear disciples, yea, a consolation and encouragement heartily to stand by the Gospel, since he esteems and praises it to be so precious.

[13] But how it is esteemed by others who are not true disciples of Christ, but are much smarter and holier themselves than that they should need his teaching, the lawyer shows, who stands by (as they were all together with Christ wherever he came, and they heard whatever he spoke); he had heard that Christ speaks earnestly to his disciples that they hear and see what was never seen nor heard before. This lawyer could no longer retain his great skill and wisdom, he had to step forward and let himself be heard, and try if he could not put him to shame, and carry off the glory, that Christ was nothing, but he was the highly educated Rabbi, in that he propounds to him a much higher theme, Hence he steps forward and proposes to him this question: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

[14] That these are not the eyes and ears of one who hears and sees what Christ is, he himself makes manifest by his own words, as all must do, if they in the most perfect way prove themselves to be such. For he hereby confesses he knows nothing more nor higher than the doctrine that treats of our own doings and works; of God's grace, Christ's office and work he knows nothing, he has as yet never understood anything about them, although he had heard Christ speak of them; he at once imagines he knows much better than Christ can teach him; he wished to say like our fanatics and critics: that which I have hitherto heard from you, is common; you must ascend much higher to interest us. Dear sir, teach the people once to do

something, by which man is saved. But Christ lets such a tempter rush ahead and gives him a good handle by which he in a masterly manner ensnares himself in his own words, bids him to report and answer himself, since he wishes to be so learned and clever, and says: "What is written in the law? How readest thou?"

[15] As if he would say: I hear indeed that you profess to have higher wisdom than I. Come, deliver yourself, I will be a pupil of your discourse and consider you a teacher. In his answer Christ however forces him into the Scriptures, when he says: "How readest thou?" For it is not Christ's pleasure for people to propound and preach their own arrogance; and hereby he shows this lawyer (as he later draws from him through his own confession with the question, who is his neighbor etc.), that he does not understand the Scriptures, even in that part where they speak of our own works; therefore, much less does he understand the other higher teachings. Here he must not and cannot answer differently than as Moses in Deuteronomy 6:5 comprehended in the shortest form the summary of all God's commandments, how we should live in our relations both to God and men. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."

[16] That is teaching truly of high order; yea, the greatest thing that can be required of a man; as Christ himself confesses and confirms, when he says: "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." But it is nevertheless a teaching that is common, that is well known to all the Jews as to the words, although they did not rightly understand them, and the disciples of Christ had also certainly heard them. Hence this critic should have indeed known that Christ spoke of another, a higher theme, since he said his disciples were especially blessed in that they see and hear what others did not. But all such hypocrites and fanatics must prove that they esteem Christ and his Gospel as nothing, and let themselves imagine they know everything much better.

[17] Now, this commandment has often been explained and there is still much to be said about it; for it is indeed the highest art and wisdom, it is never learned perfectly, much less perfectly fulfilled and lived; so that God's Son had therefore, to come from heaven, shed his blood and give us the Gospel, so that this commandment might be kept. Although here in this

life it makes only a little beginning among Christians; yet in the life beyond we will constantly and forever have it in our eyes and hearts, and live it. In short, it is far too high above the mind, heart and sense of all mortals what the words mean, to love God with all thy heart, with all thy strength, with all thy soul and with all thy mind. For as yet no one experiences it, except those a little, who have the Gospel and embrace Christ by faith, and receive the comfort and power of it in times of need, temptation and prayer, and thus, experience a taste of it; yet these persons themselves feel and lament, like all the saints and Paul himself, that they are still far from it and their flesh and blood feel nothing but sin and death; which of course would not be the case if this commandment had gone fully into practice and life.

[18] Therefore, such proud, godless spirits are shameless and troublesome, as this latter who went forward so boldly, that they esteem nothing at all, neither the high and earnest command of God nor do they wish to hear and know the doctrine of the Gospel: they imagine, it is enough if they have heard and can say the words: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself.” They do not perceive that God wants such doctrines not only heard and spoken, but put into practice, and where one does not esteem this, it will bring upon him higher and unbearable condemnation, as Christ says in Luke 12:47: “And that servant, who knew his Lord’s will, and made not ready nor did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes,” etc. Therefore, Christ gave this lawyer no other reply than this: “Thou hast answered right; this do and thou shalt live.”

[19] That means, preaching the law aright and delivering a good strong lecture, yea, snaring him with his own words and taking hold of him at the right place, to show him where he was lacking. The doctrine he says is precious and true; but, dear sir, do it also; I would gladly see the doer of the law, then be a master and let your work of art be exhibited; for you all have spoken, written and known it; and you need nothing more; but just here you and others are lacking, that you do not do what you profess, but imagine it is enough to speak and think the words. No, in this way no one will live or be saved. The commandments must be kept and done, or the wrath of God and eternal death instead of life will abide upon you.

[20] Such is the judgment upon the critics, who wish to know so much and teach everybody the way of salvation, yet they know nothing more than

their own doings and works, and despise the teaching of the Gospel; so that such talk is nothing but mere empty, wicked and vain nonsense, since nothing follows from it; as St. Paul says of these doctrines of the law and of works in Galatians 6:13: "For not even they who receive circumcision do themselves keep the law." Hence one may justly say to them, as Christ here says to this lawyer: Dear Teacher! Do yourself what you tell and teach others; and also as St. Paul, Romans 2:19-23, says: "Thou art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind," etc. "Thou therefore, that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" "Thou who gloriest in the law, through thy transgression of the law dishonorest thou God?"

[21] Thus, one sees in the papal sophists, fanatics and all who are not of the pure Gospel teaching, what great and excellent works they profess and how they adorn themselves in the highest degree with them, as the saintly monks do; and yet they accomplish nothing. Yea, they only transgress God's law and oppose it; as is proved in their case and Christ shows in the following parable that no persons are more unmerciful, more unpleasant and of course more unloving to their neighbor, more destitute of love to God, than such hypocrites.

[22] Yea, "this do" are the words of Christ, the eternal lesson and sermon that is here spoken and preached to all men, also to the saints, and it accuses them, that they cannot and dare not glory before God on account of their works, merits and sanctity. But they must, if they would know themselves aright and stand before God, condemn themselves and their manner of life; so that here no saint has ever been able to stand upon this foundation, neither in the Old nor in the New Testament. They must all be mirrored in these words, "this do," which mean nothing more than: See, you have not yet done this, nor fulfilled it. Like Moses himself, who had the honor of being faithful in all the things of God, and God called him his friend, with whom he spake by word of mouth and face to face; yet he had to say to God, Exodus 34:6-7: "Oh, Lord God of all spirits and of all flesh! Thou art merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, thou forgivest iniquity, transgression and sin, and before thee none is guiltless. Here he casts away both his own holiness and that of all men and pleads guilty before God."

[23] In like manner the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah 6:5-6, when he stands before God and sees his glory confesses that he is unclean, and must be

comforted by an angel that his sins are forgiven him, etc. And Jeremiah, when he prayed before God and gloried in opposing his persecutors, Jeremiah 17:16-17: “Lord, thou knowest: That which came out of my lips was before thy face”; here he is holy and happy; and yet soon after he turns and says: “Be not a terror unto me; thou art my refuge in the day of evil.” Likewise, Jeremiah 10:24: “Oh, Jehovah, correct me, but with measure”, that is, with grace; “not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.” Where is here the pious and holy man with whom the Lord is never angry? Why then does he fear that he will bring him to naught?

[24] Thus, also Daniel confessed his own sin and the sin of all his people and said in Daniel 9:18: “We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies’ sake.” And David himself, when he received the forgiveness of his sins and sure consolation, that he had a gracious God, often glories, especially in Psalm 119:97f., how he did what is right and pleasing to God; and God himself bears witness of this concerning him, 1 Samuel 13:14, that he had found a man after his own heart. Yet he prays and sings Psalms of the greatest fear and anxiety: “O Jehovah, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure,” etc. Psalm 6:1. Likewise, Psalm 143:2. “O Jehovah, enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight no man living is righteous.”

[25] In the same manner also St. Peter opens his mouth boldly in Acts 15:10 and says of the whole law: “Now therefore, why make ye trial of God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” This he says of all saints, fathers, prophets, apostles and he should in this manner exclude all from heaven; as must have happened on account of the law and their doings, had they not remained under the heaven of grace, as he in verse 11 further says: “But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they.” And St. Paul in Acts 13:38-39: “Through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins; and by him everyone that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

[26] Now if the saints must confess this, who still have grace and the Holy Spirit, how will or dare the other blind, poor spirits presume and imagine that they have kept the commandments of God, when they form human thoughts and dream they love God and their neighbor. And yet they

are so far from it that they do not understand nor know what God's commandment requires and how it is kept. This they prove when they are put to the test, when they are to exhibit in a becoming manner love to their God and their neighbor. As when they are required to suffer anything for God's sake, as injury and disgrace, either from men or when God himself visits them with his rod; then one sees that the thoughts springing from their own brain are really nothing, yea, they work only the opposite, they rage, murmur, curse and blaspheme against God, as if God did them an injustice, etc. In like manner they act to their neighbors. Where they know not how to enjoy a neighbor or to secure some advantage and honor from him, but should serve him gratuitously and help the poor, as this Samaritan did the wounded one by the wayside, or expect also harm and ingratitude for extending the helping hand; then there is not only no spark of love, but at once they seek revenge, turn the people over to Satan and think they do right in this and are under no obligation to love such persons.

III. A Beautiful Picture of the Kingdom of Christ.

[27] Even this blind hypocrite is of the same mind, he never thinks and speaks of what he owes his neighbor, and yet he wants to be considered saintly and holy, because he is a lawyer and knows how to speak of the law. And although he was indeed reprov'd by Christ, and he surely knows he was hit and was told he did not keep the law; yet notwithstanding he is so bold and impudent as to despise God's word, so that he beautifully adorns himself and shines brightly and begins to ask: "And who is my neighbor?"

[28] He feels that he made a mistake in speaking and that he opened his mouth too wide against himself. He is now Caught and taken captive by the Lord's answer, and he drives a pin before his tongue so that he is not able to take it back. Yet he was not so pious that he did Christ and God the honor to humble himself and confess the truth, that he did not keep these commandments etc.; but he forges ahead and desires to be viewed as having done all, especially all that is due to God. Hence he does not even think of asking if he is indebted more to God, but desires no more than that Christ shows him who his neighbor is, to whom he should still be indebted anything and he has not performed it.

[29] It is shameless presumption on the part of such saints of Satan, that they are so very certain in their knowledge when God judges them: and even when they have been moved by the law, and it is sufficiently proved to them that they did not keep the law, they are not changed by it until they once meet the judgment and the wrath of God in their severity, so that they are compelled to feel them. However the lies and shame of such hypocrites are hereby sufficiently uncovered; although they will not be ashamed; nor turn red for it, so that they must show by their own confession that they do not yet understand what Moses and the law require; because those who still wish to be masters of the Scriptures prove themselves to be guilty in that they do not know or do not appreciate who their neighbor is, as he is clearly enough set forth by Moses and in this commandment. Therefore, Christ also shows the same to this lawyer clearly and plainly enough; not from the Scriptures, but by means of a plain parable and picture, so that he himself must seize it and let fall upon him the judgment to his own shame that he did not wish to know or understand it. "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers," etc.

[30] Now the lawyer hears for the first time the appropriate text that puts him and all hypocrites like him to shame, and publicly he is convinced that he never kept the law, yea, that he did not understand it, even in the smallest point referring to his neighbor, because he still doubts and does not know, whom to consider as his neighbor, otherwise he is inclined to love his neighbor. But thus, it serves them right, who wish to master this man Christ and his word. And because they are very anxious to approach Christ with the law and plan to present it to him in a high and sharp manner, so they find also sharp opposition and they are obliged to depart in shame, and they see that he also knows something to say about the law, and that he lays hold of it and has Moses in his eye in a different way than they.

[31] In brief, Christ shows here that he will not and cannot be caught by questions and debates relating to the law, and it is hurtful to no one but to those who let themselves fall into such questions and become entangled by them so that they can never get out again. For this surely happens to all, who deal with the law independent of faith and the right understanding of the Gospel. For where Moses alone with his shining light and rays, which are the horns going forth from his countenance, strikes us in our eyes, no one can stand before him. In short, whoever allows himself to be driven to

Moses and will deal with the law, is lost; so that here even Christians must battle until they get out and are again wrapped up and enclosed in Christ, concerning which I have said more elsewhere.

[32] Now in their folly and blindness all hypocritical saints resemble this lawyer, in that they not only fail to keep an iota of the law, however high they praise it; but as to its fundamental meaning they understand nothing about it; nor do they know how to make the right use of it, unless they learn to repeat its words like crows. As St. Paul also says of them in Timothy 1:7: “Desiring to be teachers of the law, though they understand neither what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm.” Yea, verily it is true that no man on earth knows, except by the Spirit of Christ, either what God is, how he should honor and thank him, or who his neighbor is. For just as all the world make their own gods and never happen to produce the true God, but is divided into innumerable idolatries; so is the world also blind here in that it never meets its neighbor, whom it sees ever before its eyes; passes by him, lets him suffer in distress and hunger, whom it should serve and help, since it in other ways gives very much and does many great works.

[33] And especially are the Jewish hypocritical interpretations hereby reproved and rejected, which paint and polish their neighbor according to their own fancy, consider him a neighbor whom they like, that is, he who is a friend, who has well merited and is worthy of a kindness and of love, whom they have enjoyed or hope yet to enjoy; they imagine they are not indebted to serve and help the stranger, the unacquainted, the unworthy, unthankful enemies, etc.

[34] Against such hypocrisy Christ answers with the history of this poor, wounded man, who fell among robbers and was lying half dead, whom the Samaritan alone receives, serves and helps, and whom both the priest and the Levite pass by and leave lying helpless. Here the lawyer himself must answer that neither the priest nor the Levite was a neighbor to this man, but he who extended to him a kind helping hand was. The hypocrite did not dare to mention the Samaritan by name; for the Jews were bitter enemies to the Samaritans. their neighbors, considered them to be the worst people, like we look upon heretics or fallen Christians. By this, without any praise to himself, yea, against his own will, he is obliged to confess and say, who is a neighbor to another.

[35] And truly it sounds strange that he should be called a neighbor who does a good act and loves another, since otherwise (to speak after the manner of the Scriptures and of this commandment) he is called a neighbor who needs a favor or should be served and shown love; but both belong together and both are comprehended as in the predicate of relationship (*praedicamento relationis*) and they bind us all together so that everyone is a neighbor to another. However, to be such neighbors among one another is twofold: the first only in name and with words, the other in deed and with works of love.

[36] In this sense the Samaritan was neighbor to the wounded man, not the priest nor Levite, who by right should have been and were under obligation to be. For in this respect all men are debtors to one another and have the same commandment: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor”, etc. Hence there is no difference, and in brief the meaning of this example is as Christ forces this hypocrite to confess, according to the common understanding of men, that they are neighbors, who before God belong together, where one needs help and another can give it, and here no one is excused nor free, be he priest or Levite.

[37] And Christ is here especially sarcastic and vexed so that he attacks the priest and Levite, the most holy persons and the commissioned servants of God, and accuses, shames and scorns them by the example of the Samaritan, before whom they had a horror and an aversion as before a condemned criminal. But by this he shows that those who are the greatest and boast most of keeping God’s commandments and teaching others, and should go ahead with good examples, in brief, those who are considered to be the high, the wise, the influential, and the best, have the least neighbor love; especially to the poor, forsaken, persecuted Christians, who suffer for the sake of God and his Word. For with their eyes centered constantly on their own sanctity, wisdom, and great talents they imagine every person is obligated to serve them, they do not think, that which they have is given by God only for the purpose that they might let their righteousness, wisdom, honor and possessions serve the needy, ignorant, sinful and despised. Hence this Samaritan is justly praised to the everlasting shame of the priests, the Jewish saints and also this hypocrite, for he showed such kindness and love to this stranger and wounded man, who was doubtless a Jew; while his own

priest, Levite and scribes left him lying in his misery and wretchedness and as far as they were concerned, dying and perishing.

[38] But by Christ making the Samaritan a neighbor of him who had fallen among the robbers, is meant especially to prove that he himself is and desires to be neighbor, who fulfils the law in the right sense and shows his love to the poor, wretched, and before God wounded and perishing consciences and hearts of all men. And by this he also is an example that his Christians should do as he does, who is considered as a Samaritan before the whole world and especially in the eyes of the great saints, his own Jewish countrymen; that they do the same, since other people do it not, also that they take to themselves the need of the poor, forsaken and helpless, and know what they do to them they do to Christ as their neighbor.

[39] Now here in this Samaritan, Christ pictures and makes known the kindness, help and comfort, which he ministers in his kingdom through the Gospel; which is the same of which he spoke to his disciples at the beginning: “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see”, etc. He paints in the most comforting manner what faith possesses in him, and how far his Gospel differs from the doctrine of the law of the priests and Levites; concerning which I have said so much heretofore. We see in this picture how we, who have fallen in sin against God, lie under the wrath of God and must die the eternal death, are again rescued only by him, in that we receive God’s grace and comfort, and a quickening of conscience, and we begin to keep the law.

[40] This is the principal article of the doctrine of faith, that says we cannot save ourselves, neither can anything we do nor the doctrines of the law; but he must begin faith in us, who does not force the law upon our attention, when we feel our sins and misery; for that is the work of the secure spirits like this lawyer, who resent being reproved as sinners. But he has tender mercy upon us, besides is friendly and consoling through his Word, and himself binds up the sores of the wounded, places him on his own beast, nurses and looks after him. For he had to accomplish our redemption alone and take our place, bear in his own body our sins and need; he himself publishes this and gives us the comforting word, by which our wounds are bound up and healed.

[41] This is called pouring wine and oil into the wounds, both of which are good medicines for the injured. The wine preserves the flesh clean and fresh that the wounds may not corrupt or fester; likewise this balsam is especially given to the land of the Jews, namely, the noble, precious oil, that is, the best remedy known for all kinds of injuries. It is the preaching of the holy Gospel, which does both; it keeps the penitent conscience in the knowledge of its sins and wickedness, that it neither becomes secure nor ceases to long for grace, and besides he comforts the conscience by grace and forgiveness, and thus, ever makes man better until he is again well and begins again to do the work of a healthy man.

[42] And to this end he now makes use of the office and service of the Church, as Christ commands her to expect and take care of such by means of the same office and spirit, which he bestows, and asks her to be faithful in everything that ministers to their strength and improvement, to comfort, admonish, restrain, chastise, etc.; and assures her what she does and sacrifices in such cases, he will reward.

[43] Behold, this is the doctrine and the power of the Gospel and the treasure by which we are saved; which brings us to the point that we also begin to fulfill the law. For where the great unfathomable love and favor of Christ are known and believed, thence flows forth also love both to God and to our neighbor. For by means of such knowledge and consolation the Holy Spirit moves the heart to love God, and gladly does what it should to his praise and thanks, guards against sin and disobedience and willingly offers itself to serve and help everybody, and where it still feels its weakness it battles against the flesh and Satan by calling upon God, etc. And thus, while ever rising in faith it holds to Christ, where it does not do enough in keeping the law, its comfort is that Christ fulfills the law and bestows and imparts his fullness and strength, and thus, he remains always our righteousness, salvation, sanctification, etc.

[44] This is the right way to secure the observance of the law, of which our blind critics know nothing; but Christ beautifully shows by this, that one must hear the Gospel and believe in Christ before he can fulfill the law; otherwise there is nothing but hypocrisy and nothing but pure boasting and talking about the law without any heart and life in it all.

[45] Here we should also answer those, who misuse today's Gospel to support their blasphemous doctrine, when Christ says of the Samaritan, he commended the sick to his host, and when he gives him the half dollar, says to him: "Whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back again, will repay thee." For the monks and sophists have invented from these words their lies about works which they call the works of supererogation, works in excess or more than are required, when one does more than God commands him, which he is otherwise not obligated to do. And such lies they confirmed by other blasphemies in making rules from the sermon of Christ in which he explained the ten commandments, Matthew 5:21f.; and later applied them to their monastic life as if the monks were the greatest saints, for whom it was too insignificant a thing to keep God's commandments. As if they did on a higher plane many and great excessive works in their orders; for which God was obliged to give much more than heaven not only to themselves, but to other people to whom they wished to impart their works of supererogation, namely, to sell their lies and blasphemies for money. Their god the pope confirmed this and canonized and exalted these his saints as those who hereby strengthened his godhead and influence also over the dead in purgatory.

[46] This blasphemy is however entirely too base and shameless, far above the blindness and presumption of this lawyer and those like him; for they do not only wish to be praised for keeping God's commandments, none of which they understand, nor think of keeping the least one in earnest. But they wish to be considered as having done much higher and many more works than all the saints whom God himself praises in the Scriptures; all of whom nevertheless confess that they have not kept the law for themselves, and must therefore, because they did not fulfill the law, seek and pray for grace and forgiveness with Christ.

[47] What a shame! that people in the Church of Christ dare speak of works and spheres of influence which should be superfluous, and they be said to have done more than God's command required; and still Christ said publicly of the lives of all men in Luke 17:10: "Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do." Thus, you hear that it is purely a debt and a duty, even if one should reach the point, which no saint on earth can, that he had done all, and he would

then have nothing of which to boast, and for which God would be obliged to thank him. Still what better and higher work will one find or name that should have been commanded by God? For although they have now for a long time drived about virginity, I ask if such work can be better than what God calls here to love God with the whole heart, yea, if independent of this command it can succeed or be done, should it be good and well pleasing to God in a different or extraordinary way? How is it then possible to have an excess of good works or do anything better than God has commanded? For what good can you do that you do not do either to God or to man out of love, which you are indebted to do by reason of your eternal condemnation. What can father and mother do more for their child, yea, what more can God himself and Christ do for us, than to love us. What does it mean then to advance such shameless lies and foolishness about certain works, which are an excess over those that are commanded when no one has as yet fully attained to the measure of the ten commandments here upon earth?

[48] It is true the Papists are now ashamed of such slabbering, with which they have poured all their books full, but yet they cannot quit their blasphemy. Since they see now that this lie will not stand, they fall upon another interpretation that is just as blasphemous as the first; they turn the words, "Whatsoever thou spendest more," from the life and works to the doctrine, and say we must do not only what the Scriptures teach, but hear also what the Church teaches and decrees concerning the same. For the Apostles and bishops are commanded to add more to the two shillings, namely, to the Old and New Testaments.

[49] Yet see how the devil juggles and distorts himself by his sophistry and blind tricks in that he adorns and colors his lies. They have heard and learned something of us that in this parable the two shillings apply to the office of the ministry in the Church. For Christ is speaking of the office that should attend and care for the sick, and is administered for their relief and recovery. Hence, the two shillings are the Holy Scriptures or rather the pound as Christ calls them in another place, that is, the understanding of the Scriptures in the measure and the gifts of the Spirit, given to each one; all which is still the one and the same understanding without one having it in a richer degree than another. These sophists wish now to cite these words to support the foundation of their lies, that in Christendom we must teach,

believe and hold as essential for salvation more than Christ has given and commanded us to teach. They are blind, mad, perverted persons who always seek something different and more, both to do and teach, than God's Word require, and yet they do not do it nor teach it, but let that be realized which they wish to have taught and practiced.

[50] Therefore, we tell you here again as before: Beloved, what can you do or what do you know that is better and more necessary to teach, than what Christ taught or commanded to teach? And what do we need more, to minister to the consciences in everything that is necessary for them, to instruct, admonish, comfort, strengthen, correct and in short to do all that is necessary for salvation, than the doctrine of the Scriptures, namely, both of the law and of the Gospel? as St. Paul also shows in 2 Timothy 3:16- 17:" Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." In these words you hear that the Scriptures richly contain and offer everything that serves to right living and good works; why will you then feign or seek something different that is to be taught above or alongside of the Scriptures? Beloved, first explain the two shillings Christ gives and practice well the doctrine they teach, then we will see later what more you are able to explain or teach.

[51] For this excess or explanation of the two shillings we may without danger and in harmony with the meaning of the Scriptures also interpret as the growth and exercise in the true doctrine and the understanding of it; as St. Paul admonishes in 1 Timothy 4:13-15: "Give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching, neglect not the gift that is in thee," etc. "Be diligent in these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy progress may be manifest unto all." For the more one practices and exercises himself in the doctrines of the Scriptures, the more learned, gifted and powerful he becomes in them, as is the case in other arts. Therefore, the explanation of this excess is, where one practices this doctrine among the people, as everyone is bound to do, and according to his faithfulness in doing it he is either weak or strong, and needs more comfort, admonition, etc., than another.

[52] But it is not the intention and the zeal of these sophists to be so faithful and diligent that they correctly explain the two shillings, that is, that

they teach diligently what Christ commanded, since they do not wish to do or to know this, for they shun the Scriptures like they shun Satan, they neither understand the teaching of the law nor of the Gospel. But they fill the Church with their prattle and human doctrines, pervert and counterfeit God's Word, as the devil advocates that this explanation of the two shillings must teach them something different than the Gospel teaches; as they do nothing but propagate another and contrary doctrine of their cursed lying prattle against the faith of Christ among the people.

[53] The summary is, since Christ himself and the Apostles everywhere forbid the introduction of other doctrines, it cannot stand the test that one should desire to confirm a different doctrine by this parable or allegory; so Christ will not expect of such sick persons anything different than he himself gives to them; and that which can be further explained must not be anything different, but be in harmony with that which Christ himself has given. However, it is possible that one should study a doctrine more and harder than another and thus, he explains more; as St. Paul says of himself in 1 Corinthians 15:10, that he labored more and accomplished more than all the other Apostles. And St. Ambrose also applies this explanation to himself and says: He did with his sermons and writings, which indeed are nothing more than Christ commanded him to teach, fill his measure to overflowing and he accomplished thereby more than others; but of himself and other preachers he says: God grant that we might make use of and compute what we have received of Christ.

Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity. The Miracle of Cleansing the Ten Lepers, a Portrayal of the Christian Life. The Thankful Leper.

Text: Luke 17:11-19.

11 And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

12 And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:

13 And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

14 And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God,

16 And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.

17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?

18 There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.

19 And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole. Luke 17:11-19

[1] St. Luke excels the other Evangelists in that he not only describes Christ's work and doctrine like they, but also observes the order of his journeys and circuits. His Gospel to the thirteenth chapter shows how Christ began at Capernaum to preach and do wonders, whither he moved from Nazareth and where he made his home, so that Capernaum is called his city in the Gospel. From there he went out everywhere, into cities and villages, preaching and working miracles. After he had accomplished all his work and had preached over the whole country, he prepared to go up to Jerusalem. This journey to Jerusalem he describes from the end of the ninth chapter to the close of his Gospel, how Christ during this journey preached and worked miracles. For this is Christ's last journey, and was finished in his last year at the close of his life. This is what he means here when he says: "And it came to pass, as they were on the way to Jerusalem, that he was passing along the borders of Samaria and Galilee." That is to say, this miracle he performed during his last journey to Jerusalem.

[2] Now this was not the direct road from Capernaum to Jerusalem. For Galilee is north of Jerusalem, and Samaria is south of Galilee, and Capernaum is in Galilee. The Evangelist with special pains desires to show that he did not journey on the usual road, as he mentions Samaria and Galilee, and adds that he went through between them, and not across their borders the nearest way. Christ journeyed from Capernaum eastward to the Jordan and southward from Galilee to Jerusalem, which was a tiresome, far and circuitous route, in doing which he took his own leisure and time. For he did not journey thus, for his own sake, but in order to preach as much as possible and be of service to many. Therefore, he journeyed on the borders of these lands to appear publicly, that people might come to him from all sides to hear him and obtain his help. For he was sent to offer his services to everyone, that all might freely enjoy his favor and grace. Thus, the Evangelist now describes the miracle and says: "And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, who stood afar off; and they lifted up their voices, saying, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."

[3] One might ask the Evangelist how these lepers could stand afar off and lift up their voices, as lepers could not as a rule speak loud, and therefore, they had to make a noise by rattling or clapping something? Of course he would answer they did not stand a mile away, only that they were not as near to him as those following him; and that all lepers are not so

entirely voiceless that they cannot be heard even at a distance. However, the Evangelist, according to the custom of Holy Writ, desires hereby to indicate the great earnestness of their desire, that the voice of their heart was great that compelled them to cry out bodily as loud as they could.

[4] This entire Gospel, however, is a plain, simple history or transaction, which requires little explanation. Yet as plain as it is, great is the example it presents to us. In the leper it teaches us faith, in Christ it teaches us love. Now, as I have often said, faith and love constitute the whole character of the Christian. Faith receives, love gives. Faith brings man to God, love brings man to his fellow. Through faith he permits God to do him good, through love he does good to his brother man. For whoever believes has everything from God, and is happy and rich. Therefore, he needs henceforth nothing more, but all he lives and does, he orders for the good and benefit of his neighbor, and through love he does to his neighbor as God did to him through faith. Thus, he reaps good from above through faith, and gives good below through love. Against this kind of life work-righteous persons with their merits and good works terribly contend for they do works only to serve themselves, they live only unto themselves, and do good without faith. These two principles, faith and love, we will now consider as they appear in the lepers and in Christ.

[5] In the first place it is a characteristic of faith to presume to trust God's grace, and it forms a bright vision and refuge in God, doubting nothing it thinks God will have regard for his faith, and not forsake it. For where there is no such vision and confidence, there is no true faith, and there is also no true prayer nor any seeking after God. But where it exists it makes man bold and anxious freely to bring his troubles unto God, and earnestly to pray for help.

[6] Therefore, it is not enough for you to believe there is a God, and pray many words as the wretched custom now is. But observe here in the leper how faith is constituted, how without any teacher at all it teaches us how our prayers may be truly fruitful. You here observe how they had a good opinion of and a comforting assurance in Christ, and firmly thought he would be gracious to them. This thought made them bold and anxious to bring their troubles to him, and to cry for help with great earnestness and a loud voice. For if they had not previously possessed this fancy and expectation, they would undoubtedly have remained at home, or would not

have gone forth to meet him, nor would they with raised voices have cried to him, but their doubt would have advised them thus: What shall we do? Who knows whether he would like to have us ask him? Perhaps he will not notice us!

[7] O such wavering and doubt offer sluggish prayers, it does not raise the voice nor go forward to meet Christ! It indeed murmurs many words and chants many songs very unwillingly. But it does not pray, and only desires first to be sure it will be heard, which is nothing else than to tempt God. But true faith does not doubt the good and gracious will of God. Wherefore its prayer is strong and firm like faith itself. St. Luke does not relate three things of them in vain; first, that they went to meet him; second, they stood; third, they lifted up their voices. By these three things their strong faith is commended and presented to us as an example.

[8] The going forth to meet him is the boldness excited by comforting assurance. The standing is the firmness and sincerity against doubt. The lifting up the voice is the great earnestness in prayer, growing out of such confidence. But powerless doubt does not go forth, nor stand, nor call, but turns and twists and hangs the head, grasps it in the hands, opens the mouth wide and stammers forth perpetually: Who knows? Who knows? If it were certain? How if it would fail? and similar faint-hearted expressions. For it has no favorable conception or thought of God, expects nothing of him, and hence will receive nothing, as James says, 1:6-7: "But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting; for he that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." Afterwards they come like the foolish 5 virgins who spilt their oil, with their empty lamps, that is with their works, and think God should hear them knock and open to them. But he will not.

[9] Behold this good inclination or comforting trust, or free presumption toward God, or whatever you may call it, in the Scriptures is called Christian faith and a good conscience, which man must have if he desires to be saved. But it is not obtained by human works and precepts, as we shall see in this example, and without such a heart no work is good. Therefore, be on your guard, there are many lecturers who want to teach faith and conscience, and know less about them than a common blockhead. They think it is a sleepy, lazy thing in the soul, that it is enough for the heart to believe that God is God. But here you observe what a thoroughly living and

powerful thing faith is. It creates wholly a new heart, a new man, who expects all grace from God. Therefore, it urges to walk, to stand, makes bold to cry and pray in every time of trouble.

[10] The second characteristic of faith is that it does not desire to know, nor first to be assured whether it is worthy of grace and will be heard, like the doubters, who grasp after God and tempt him. Just as a blind man runs against a wall, so they also plunge against God, and would first gladly feel and be assured that he cannot escape out of their hands. The Epistle to the Hebrews says, 11:1: "Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen." This clearly means faith holds fast to what it does not see, feel or experience, either in body or soul, but as it has firm trust in God it commits itself to and relies upon it without any doubt but its hope will be realized. Thus, it will also certainly be realized, and the feeling and experience will come to it unsought and unsolicited, even in and through such hope or faith.

[11] For tell me, who had given these lepers a letter and seal that Christ would hear them? Where is there any experience and feeling of his grace? Where is the information, knowledge or certainty of his goodness? Nothing of the kind is here. What then is here? A free resignation and joyful venture on his imperceptible, untried and unknown goodness. Here there is no trace in which they might discover what he would do, but his mere goodness alone is kept in view, which fills them with such courage and venture to believe he would not forsake them. Whence, however, did they receive such knowledge of his goodness, for they must have known of it before, be they ever so inexperienced and insensible of it? Without doubt from the good reports and words they had heard about him, which they had never yet experienced. For God's goodness must be proclaimed through his Word, and thus, we must build upon it untried and inexperienced, as will hereafter appear.

[12] The third characteristic of faith is, that it allows of no merit, will not purchase the grace of God with works, like the doubters and hypocrites do, but brings with it pure unworthiness, clings to and depends wholly on the mere unmerited favor of God, for faith will not tolerate works and merit in its company, so entirely does it surrender, venture and raise itself into the goodness for which it hopes, that for its sake it cannot consider either good works or merit. Yea, it sees that this goodness is so great, that all good

works compared with it are nothing but sin. Therefore, it finds only unworthiness in self, that it is more worthy of wrath than of grace; and it does this without any dissimulation, for he sees how in reality and in truth it cannot be otherwise

[13] These lepers here prove this clearly, who hope for the grace of Christ without the least merit. What good had they ever done to him before? They had never seen him, how then could they have served him? Besides they were lepers, whom he could justly have avoided according to the law, Leviticus 13:1, and kept himself free from them as was just and right. For in reality and truth there was unworthiness, and reason why he should have nothing to do with them nor they with him. For this cause they also stand far off, like those who well knew their unworthiness. Thus, faith also stands far from God, and yet it goes to meet him and cries out, for it knows itself in the reality of truth to be unworthy of his goodness, and has nothing on which to depend, except his highly renowned and loudly praised goodness. And such a soul also seeks Christ's favor, while it stands far off and is empty; for it cannot in the least tolerate in its company our merit and work, and comes freely like Christ into this village to the lepers, in order that its praise may be free and pure.

[14] Observe how everything agrees perfectly that God's love gives its favor freely, does not take nor seek anything for it, and how faith also receives quite freely and pays nothing for it, and thus, the rich and the poor meet together, as the Psalms say. To this their words also testify when they say: Have mercy on us! He who seeks mercy of course neither buys nor sells anything, but seeks pure grace and mercy, as one unworthy of it, and evidently having greatly deserved the contrary.

[15] Behold, here is a good, real, living and true example of Christian faith, that sufficiently teaches us how we must be disposed if we would find grace, piety and salvation. Now, in addition to this doctrine follows the incentive or inducement to faith, that we should gladly believe as we are at present taught to believe. This incentive, however, consists in that we observe how such faith never fails, that as it believes so it comes to pass, and that it is certainly heard and answered. For Luke describes how graciously and willingly Christ beheld and heard the lepers, and says: "And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go and show yourselves unto the priests."

[16] How very friendly and lovingly the Lord invites all hearts to himself in this example, and stirs them to believe in him! For there is no doubt that he desires to do for all what he here does for these lepers, if we only freely surrender ourselves to him for all his favor and grace. Just as true faith and a Christian heart should do and delight to do; so these lepers also do and teach us to do. For how earnestly the Lord desires that we should joyfully and freely venture to build on his favor before we experience or feel it. He has here sufficiently testified that he hears them willingly, without any hesitation, that he does not first say he will do it, but as though it were already done, he did as they wished. For he does not say: Yes, I will have mercy on you, ye shall be cleansed; but merely: “Go and show yourselves unto the priests.” As though he would say: There is no use of asking, your faith has already acquired and obtained it, before you began to ask; you were already cleansed in my sight when you began to expect such things of me; it is no longer necessary, only go and show your purity to the priests; as I consider you and as you believe, so you are and shall be. For he would not have sent them to the priests, if he had not considered them clean, and so wished to deal thus, with them, as those who had become cleansed.

[17] Behold, so powerful is faith, to obtain all it wants of God, that God considers it done before the asking. Of this Isaiah says, 65:24: “And it shall come to pass that, before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” Not as though faith or we were worthy of it, but in order that he might show his unspeakable goodness and willing grace, thereby to stir us to believe in him, and 6 comfortingly look to him for every good thing, with joyful and unwavering consciences, which do not stumble after him nor tempt him. So now you also see that Christ hears these lepers before they call, and before they cry out he is prepared to do all their hearts desire. “Go,” he says, I will not add a word, for it has succeeded in your case farther, no promise or consent is necessary; take what you ask and go. Are not these strong incentives that make the heart joyful and eager? Behold, then his grace permits itself to be felt and grasped, yea it grasps and satisfies us. This has been said on the first part, namely, faith.

[18] Now we must also examine the other part of this example of the nature of Christianity, love. The lepers have instructed us how to believe; Christ teaches us to love. Love does to our neighbor as it sees Christ has

done to us, as he says in John 13:15: “For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you.” And immediately afterwards he says in verse 34: “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” What else does this mean than to say: Through me in faith you now have everything that I am and have: I am your own, you are now rich and satisfied through me; for all I do and love I do and love not for my but only for your sake, and I only think how to be useful and helpful to you, and accomplish whatever you need and should have. Therefore, consider this example, to do to each other as I have done to you, and only consider how to be useful to your neighbor, and do what is useful and necessary for him. Your faith has enough in my love and grace; so your love shall also give enough to others.

[19] Behold, this is a Christian life, and in brief it does not need much doctrine nor many books, it is wholly contained in faith and love. Thus, also says St. Paul, Galatians 6:2: “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the Law of Christ.” And to the Philippians 2:4 he says: “Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others.” And there he gives us Christ as an example, 2:6: “Who existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped.” Who, although he was true God, yet became our servant and served us, and died a scandalous death for us. This Christian, free and joyful life has the evil spirit as its enemy, who with nothing else does such great injury as with the doctrines of men, as we shall hear. For truly the manner of a Christian’s life is briefly marked out in the words, have a good heart toward God and a good will toward your fellow man, here it consists entirely within us.

[20] His good heart and faith naturally teach him how to pray. Yea, what is such faith, but pure prayer? It continually looks for divine grace, and if it looks for it, it also desires it with all the heart. And this desire is really the true prayer, that Christ teaches and God requires, which also obtains and accomplishes all things. And because it does not trust or seek comfort in self, its works or worthiness, but builds upon God’s pure grace, therefore, whatever he believes, desires, hopes and prays, also comes to pass; so that the holy Prophet Zechariah justly calls the Spirit a Spirit of grace and of prayer, where God says, Zechariah 12:10: “And I will pour upon the house

of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication.” Because faith recognizes and desires God’s favor without any intermission.

[21] Again, love naturally teaches him how to do good works. For they alone are good works which serve your neighbor and are good. Yea, what is such love but only good deeds continually shown toward your neighbor, so that our work is called love, our faith is called prayer? Thus, Christ speaks in John 15:12-13: “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” As though he would say: So completely have I done all my works for your benefit, that I also gave my life for you, which is the greatest of all love, that is, the greatest work of love. If I had known a greater love, I would have manifested it to and for you. Therefore, you should also love each other, and do all good deeds to one another. I require no more of you. I do not say you are to build for me churches, make pilgrimages, fast, sing, become monks or priests, or that you are to enter into this order or rank; but you do my will and service when you do good to each other, and no one cares for himself but for others, on this all entirely depends.

[22] And these he calls “friends.” By this he does not mean that we should not love our enemies. For he says clearly: “Who lays down his life for his friends.” “His friends” are more than mere “friends.” It may come to pass that you are my friend, and yet I am not your friend, or I may love you and receive you as a friend and offer you my friendship, and yet you may hate me and remain my enemy. Just as Christ says to Judas in the garden: “Friend, do that for which thou art come.” Matthew 27:50. Judas was his friend, but Christ was Judas’ enemy, for Judas considered him his enemy and hated him. Christ loved Judas and esteemed him as his friend. It must be a free, perfect love and kindness toward everyone.

[23] See, this is what James means when he says, 2:26: “Faith apart from works is dead.” For as the body without the soul is dead, so is faith without works. Not that faith is in man and does not work, which is impossible. For faith is a living, active thing. But in order that men may not deceive themselves and think they have faith when they have not, they are to examine their works, whether they also love their neighbors and do good to them. If they do this, it is a sign that they have the true faith. If they do not

do this, they only have the sound of faith, and it is with them as the one who sees himself in the glass and when he leaves it and sees himself no more, but sees other things, forgets the face in the glass, as James says in his first chapter, verses 23-24. [This passage in James deceivers and blind masters have spun out so far, that they have demolished faith and established only works, as though righteousness and salvation did not rest on faith, but on our works. To this great darkness they afterwards added still more, and taught only good works which are no benefit to your neighbor, as fasting, repeating many prayers, observing festival days; not to eat meat, butter, eggs and milk; to build churches, cloisters, chapels, altars; to institute masses, vigils, hours; to wear gray, white and black clothes; to be spiritual; and innumerable things of the same kind, from which no man has any benefit or enjoyment; all which God condemns, and that justly. But St. James means that a Christian life is nothing but faith and love. Love is only being kind and useful to all men, to friends and enemies. And where faith is right, it also certainly loves, and does to another in love as Christ did to him in faith. Thus, everyone should beware lest he has in his heart a dream and fancy instead of faith, and thus, deceives himself. This he will not learn anywhere as well as in doing the works of love. As Christ also gives the same sign and says: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." John 13:35. Therefore, St. James means to say: Beware, if your life is not in the service of others, and you live for yourself, and care nothing for your neighbor, then your faith is certainly nothing; for it does not do what Christ has done for him. Yea, he does not believe that Christ has done good to him, or he would not omit to do good to his 6 neighbor. This St. Paul also requires, 1 Corinthians 13:2: "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." This explains the whole matter, not that faith is insufficient to make us pious, but that a Christian life must embrace and never separate these two, faith and love. But the presumptuous undertake to separate them, they want only to believe and not to love, they despise their neighbor, and yet pretend to have Christ. This is false and must fail. Thus, we say, too, that faith is everything and it saves us, that a man needs no more for his salvation. Yet he is on this account not idle, but labors much, all however for the benefit of his neighbor, and not for himself; for he does not need it, he has enough in Christ. If, however, he does not do this, he is certainly not right. And this his work is his love. But the blind guides want to teach that

works are necessary, that the worker needs them for his salvation. This is the chief perversion, the error of all errors, for by this they destroy both faith and love, the entire Christian nature and example. They take the work from the neighbor, and give it to the person himself doing it, as though he needed it. Here faith cannot live, for he knows that his work is not necessary and helpful for himself, but only for his neighbor. Thus, they are opposed to each other; faith casts the works from itself on the neighbor through love; but the blind teachers tear them from the neighbor, and apply them to their own persons, and thus, choke and dampen both love and faith, and cause man only to love himself and to seek only his own salvation and trust in his own works. From this evil must follow dull consciences and much self-chosen work, building churches, much praying, the saints' fasting and the like, which are beneficial to no one, and all misery and misfortune must follow, as is at present evident in the cloisters, monasteries and high schools.

[24] Now let us observe the works of the love of Christ in this example of the ten lepers. But what is in Christ besides pure love? Everyone can easily find out for himself. First, why is it necessary for him to travel between Samaria and Galilee? Or who paid him anything for doing this? Or who requested him to do so? Is it not manifest, that he does all this freely, willingly, without receiving anything for it, and comes of himself uninvited, that no one can say that he deserved such a visitation or acquired it by prayer. Thus, we see here that he does nothing whatever for himself or for his own sake, but all for the sake of others, unrequested and altogether freely, out of mere grace and love.

[25] In like manner, that he had just gone into this village, why did he need to do this? Who asked him to do so? Who paid him anything for it? Is it not true that he came before any merit was possible, any prayer could be said; and offers his love and kindness freely and gratuitously, and seeks nothing of his own in it but only serves others thereby, so that he might draw all hearts unto himself to believe in him? Behold, such virtue has love, that it does only good and lives for the benefit of others, seeks nothing with selfish motives, does all freely and gratuitously, and surprises everyone. Such life and work you must observe and direct your life accordingly, if you would be a Christian, and banish all such works and power from your

view that are not of this nature, even if they be so great as to remove mountains, like the Apostle says, 1 Corinthians 13:2.

[26] Note in the second place how Christ does good without harm to others, yea, by preventing harm to others. For there are some who do good in a way that is harmful to others, as the proverb runs, they offer our lady a penny and steal her horse. So they who give alms from ill-gotten goods, as God says in Isaiah 61:8: “For I, Jehovah, love justice, I hate robbery for burnt offering.” Of this nature are nearly all monasteries and cloisters that devour the sweat and blood of the people, and then pay God with masses, vigils, rosaries, or monasteries and holidays, and at times they also give an alm. This is to love with the goods of others, and to serve God in prosperous days and in the fullness of wealth with an all sufficiency. This disgraceful well-doing is indeed a far-reaching plague. But here Christ does no one harm, but prevents injury rather, and directs the lepers to the priests, so that they may be deprived of none of their rights.

[27] Thus, he bestows his kind deeds upon the lepers, as though he went into this village for this purpose; he looks upon them graciously and willingly, and gladly helps them. Besides he thereby also prevents any disadvantage to the priests, although he is under no obligation to them. For as he cleansed the lepers in a supernatural manner without the priests doing anything, he was indeed not obliged to direct them to them, and could say: Inasmuch as you have not performed your office toward these according to the law, therefore, you should also not have the emoluments of the office, which is just and right. But love does not look on what is right nor does it contend, it is present only to do good, and so it does even more than it is obliged to do, and goes beyond what is right. Therefore, 6 St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:1, that among Christians there should be no lawsuits at court, because love does not seek or demand its rights, nor cares anything for them, but is bent only on doing good. Although he says at another place, 1 Corinthians 13:1: “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal.” Thus, are truly the learned of our day, who teach much about rights, which is only unchristian and opposed to love. I do not speak of those who are forced to contend for their rights; for as right is preferred by some unchristian people, they must be present and defend the right so that nothing worse occurs. It is not Christian, to hang or to crush under the wheel; but in order to restrain

murderers, such things must also be done. It is not Christian to eat and drink, nevertheless man is compelled to do both. These are all necessary works, which do not concern the inner nature of Christianity. Therefore, a person should not be satisfied in doing them, as though the doing of them made a Christian. The work in the married state is not distinctively Christian, yet it is necessary to avoid evil. Other examples might be given.

[28] Thirdly, Christ shows love is still greater, in that he exercises it where it is lost and receives ingratitude from the majority; ten lepers were cleansed and only one thanks him, on the nine his love is lost. If he would have made use of justice here instead of love, as men are accustomed to do and nature teaches, he would have made them all lepers again. But he lets them go and enjoy his love and kind deed, although they return to him enmity instead of thanks. Nor did he prevent the priests from enjoying their own, but gave them their honor and rights, although without any need and obligation to do so. And the priests thank Christ by alienating from him the lepers, so that they believed Christ did not cleanse them, but their offering and obedience to the law did it. And thus, they destroy the faith in the lepers, and cause Christ to be despised and hated by them, as though he had taken to himself an office that did not belong to him.

[29] That the priests had examined these lepers one may readily believe, and this the text also suggests. Therefore, they must have trumpeted into these lepers many wicked words against Christ, and highly praised the works and offerings of the law, so that they might root out of them their great and noble faith, and establish themselves in place of Christ in their heart. And the lepers accepted this, and 6 regarded Christ as the priests told them, so that they became his enemies, and ascribed their purification to God as obtained by virtue of their offerings and merit, and not by Christ and his pure grace. And while they were thus, released from bodily leprosy, they thereby fell into spiritual leprosy, which is a thousand times worse. But Christ permits both parties to go and enjoy his goodness, is silent about his rights, receives hatred and displeasure for praise and thanks; that we may hereby learn how we often pray, and that it were better for us if our prayers were not answered. It would have been better for these lepers if they had remained unclean than that by their bodily cleansing they should become diseased with a more dangerous spiritual leprosy.

[30] Now study this example and incite your life that you may do your good works not only without harm to others, but also to their advantage, and not only to friends and the good, but consider that the greater portion will be lost, and that you will receive ingratitude and hatred as your reward. Then you will walk the right road in the footprints of Christ your Lord. Until you have accomplished this, you should not regard yourself a true, perfect Christian, it matters not whether you wear ten hairy shirts and fast every day, or celebrate mass every day, and pray the psalter, make pilgrimages, and establish churches or yearly festivals. For Christ wishes to have such works done, if they are done in the right spirit. Behold, this is truly a Christian life. But now you see whither Christ's works tend. Therefore, attend to this with all diligence, and view your own life aright. If you find a work of yours, which you need or think you need for your salvation, stamp it under your feet, guard yourself as in the presence of all the devils, and never rest until you are delivered from such a spirit or work, and strive that your life may be useful and serviceable not to your, but only to your neighbor's need. Cursed be he who lives and works only for himself, for Christ did not wish to do his own will nor live for himself! For your own works will certainly lead you away from love and faith. You have no other work that is necessary and useful for thy salvation than to believe, and daily to exercise yourself in this faith, and see to it that you continue steadfast in it, and not allow the priests to deprive you of it, as they did these nine lepers, for they have slick tongues and a beautiful color. Only let all other works go in one bundle, be they lost or well applied, let that not trouble you; you remain in the faith Christ gives you, here you have many times enough; and in love, which 6 gives you to your neighbor, you will have enough to do, for which you will find yourself many times deficient. For what you do in this is nothing, even if you should possess all the works of the saints. Hear what St. Paul says, 1 Corinthians 13:3: "And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing." It is not enough to help the poor and torment yourself, you must love your enemy and cast your goods with yourself into the waste heap, and not choose one rather than another to whom to do good. Here you might say: Alas, what will now become of the spiritual orders, the priests, the monks and the nuns? Are they of service to no one, and do they perform only their own works? Answer: Why do you ask about priests and monks? Has not Christ ordered you to follow him, and

not priests and monks? If their works are not done in the sense before mentioned, that one should serve the other and cling to faith, you are never to doubt that they are opposed to Christ, and are as the foolish virgins with their empty, dark lamps. For their sake another Christ will not come. Of this St. Peter prophesies, 2 Peter 2:1: "There shall be false teachers among you, they will bring forth destructive sects," that is, spiritual orders and ranks, in which souls will only be condemned. And St. Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11: "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." In these words the spiritual orders and ranks are set forth, how they are constituted and whence they come. For they pretend to be something extraordinary and better than other callings and stations in the Christian life, while they are farther from the Christian life than any other calling or any other people on earth, and need more to bring them to the true Christian life. Some of these callings and their governments are well ordered, for there are wife and child and subject, who exercise and give occasion for love, and likewise insist that you must not live or work for yourself, but are compelled to work only for the good of others. If you only know the faith and really live according to it, you then have no work of your own and you will have so much to do that you will be obliged to forget your own work. For in that you fast, labor, eat, drink, sleep, take a wife, in short do everything for the needs of your body and estate, is all done that you may live here and support the body in order that you may serve others. Behold, this is truly a Christian life. Therefore, St. Paul says, in Romans 13:8: "Owe no man anything, save to love one another," and in love to serve each other. From this you may know why all the world is full of spiritual orders, that is, dens of hell and murder, but no one knows any longer what a Christian life is, not to mention that one should find an example of it. This is all the fault of the Pope and his cursed law, which has given us God's wrath for our masters, as St. Peter and St. Paul have declared. This is enough on the first part of our Gospel, let us now examine its second part. The Evangelist says: II. A Picture of the Human Character and Its Growth. "And it came to pass, as they went, they were cleansed."

[31] Thus, far we have learned how faith works, its nature, whence it comes, what its beginning is, what it brings, and how acceptable it is before

God. All this is said of the beginning of a Christian life. But it is not enough to begin, we must increase and continue steadfast, for Christ says, Matthew 24:13: "But he that endureth to the end shall be saved." And Luke 9:62: "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Therefore, this second part treats of the increase and perfection of faith.

[32] The faith or confidence of the heart in God is a very tender and sensitive thing indeed, and it may very easily be injured, so that it begins to tremble and despair, when it is scarcely yet exercised and established. And thus, it has countless attacks and dangers from sin, from nature, from reason and self-conceit, from human doctrine, from the examples of the saints and from devils. In short, it is attacked without intermission from all sides, in front and in the rear, so that it trembles and despairs, or falls to trusting in good works. Hence St. Peter truly says, 1 Peter 4:18: "The righteous is scarcely saved." And the Prophet Zechariah compares the righteous to a brand plucked from the fire, that he may not be entirely consumed; and Amos the Prophet to a sheep's ear that the shepherd delivered from the jaws of the wolf. So malignantly temptations rage about a believing heart. Therefore, St. Paul says to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 10:12: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." And in all places he teaches how we should walk with watchfulness and fear, and always take good care of our faith, for, as he says in 2 Corinthians 4:7: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels," which are very easily broken if God does not preserve us.

[33] Therefore, we should not be secure but stand in the fear of God and pray with Jeremiah, 17:17, that God might protect our faith, and not permit us to tremble or be frightened in the presence of our faith. This Gospel also sufficiently shows this danger by a terrible example, that among these ten lepers who believed, nine fell away, and in the end only one stands and continues steadfast. It is here as with a beautiful tree in full bloom, that we think cannot bear all its fruit; but later so many blossoms are destroyed by storms, the fruit becomes worm-eaten and falls, that scarcely one tenth of it ripens. So, there are many who receive the Word and begin to believe; but as the Lord says, Matthew 13:10-21, the soil is stony and not deep enough, or faith stands among thorns and thistles; that is, by reason of temptations and enticements they fall and continue not steadfast. For as soon as things

go wrong with them and God afflicts them, they forget his goodness and see only his anger. Hence faith vanishes, and there remains a wavering, discouraged and frightened conscience, that flees from God, not to mention that it should go to meet him, as indeed it did at first.

[34] Thus, we see here that the lepers began to believe, and expected help from Christ, who then further awakens their faith and tries it, does not immediately make them well, but speaks a word to them, to show themselves to the priests. If there had been no faith in them their reason and natural fancy would have spoken thus, and immediately murmured: What is this? we expected great kindness from him, and heartily believed in him, that he would help us; but now he does not touch us, as is his custom, and as he did to others, but only looks at us and passes on. Perhaps he despises us, besides he neither promises nor denies whether he will cleanse us or not, but leaves us in doubt, and says no more than that we should show ourselves to the priests. Why should we show ourselves to them, they already know we are lepers? We see that nature would thus, become angry and lukewarm against him, because he does not immediately do her bidding, and he does not with certainty tell what he will do. But here is faith, that strengthens itself and only increases through such temptation, and cares naught how unkind or uncertain the actions and words of Christ sound, but clings fast to his goodness, and does not permit itself to be frightened away. And of a truth, there was in them a strong, rich faith, that upon his word they promptly went forth; for had they 7 doubted they certainly would not have gone, and yet they had here no clear promise.

[35] And this is the method God employs with us all to strengthen and prove our faith, and he treats us so that we know not what he will do with us. This he does for the reason, that man is to commend himself to him and rely on his mere goodness, and not doubt that he will give what we desire or something better. So also these lepers thought: Very well, we will go as he commands, and although he does not tell us whether he will cleanse us or not, this shall not influence us to esteem him any the less than before. Yea, we will only esteem him so much the more and higher, and joyfully wait, if he will not cleanse us, he will do still better for us than if we were cleansed, and we will not on that account despair of mercy and favor. Behold, this is the true increase of faith.

[36] Such trials continue as long as we live, therefore, we must also continue to grow just as long. For when he tries us in one instance in which he makes us uncertain how he will treat us, he afterwards always takes another and continually enlarges our faith and confidence, if we only remain unmovably steadfast. Behold, this is what St. Peter calls growth in Christ when he says, Peter 2:2: “As newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation.” Again, in the latter part of 2 Peter, verse 18: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” And St. Paul in all places desires we should increase, continue and become rich in the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ. This is nothing else than in this manner to become strong in faith, when God conceals his kindness and appears as Christ does here to the lepers, so that we do not know what to expect of him. For faith must be (*argumentum non apparentium*) an argument not an appearance, and be certain and not doubt in the things that are concealed and are not experienced. Hebrews 11:1.

[37] Therefore, observe that when God appears to be farthest away, he is nearest. This word of Christ reads as though we cannot know what he will do, he does not refuse nor promise anything, so that the lepers, who previously certainly relied on his kindness for all things, might have become offended at it, and begun to doubt, and taken quite a different sense of it than Christ meant. Christ speaks it out of an overflowing kindness that he thinks it unnecessary to tell them that they have already obtained what they want. But as the sense was not clear to them they might have thought he was entirely of a different opinion, and farther from them than before.

[38] Thus, are all his superabundant kindnesses, works and words, that we may think that he was previously more kind and gracious than afterwards, when he first had anything to do with us. Thus, it also happened to the people of Israel in the desert, they thought God did not bring them out of Egypt, upon whom nevertheless they called, and they knew while in Egypt that he would help them. But all this is done that we may not remain in weakness when we first begin to believe, but grow and ever increase until we be able to take the strong nourishment and become satisfied and full of the Spirit, that we may not only despise and triumph over riches, honor and friends, but also over death and hell.

[39] Hence it is with the faithless and unbelieving as with unfortunate mine workers, who begin to prospect with great confidence, and dig extensively. But when they are about to strike the treasure, which would have taken but a little more labor, they give up, and look at what they did as in vain, and think, there is nothing in it. Then comes another worthy of the task, who had never yet made a beginning, but he strikes away boldly and finds what the former hunted and dug for him. Thus, it is also with the grace of God; he who begins to believe and will not continually grow and increase, from him grace will be taken and given to another who begins with it; if he, too, will not continue it will be taken also from him and given to another. It only wants to be believed. And here our high schools speak wholly blind, mad, and poisonous things about faith, when they teach that the beginning of faith is enough for salvation, and is only a small degree or step from it.

[40] So these words of the text, “And it came to pass, as they went, they were cleansed,” would say: It is impossible for faith to fail, it must take place as it believes. For if these lepers had not believed and remained steadfast, of course they would not have gone. Therefore, not for the sake of their going, but on account of their faith they became cleansed, because of which they also went.

[41] All this I say in order that some blind teacher may not come to this text and stick his eyes into good works without seeing the faith: and afterwards pretend that works make us acceptable and save us, because these lepers went forth and 7 thus, became cleansed. This error must be opposed, that one may rightly see the faith of these lepers, and thus, it will appear that their work of going did not obtain the cleansing, but faith did. [So also the Lord opposes the same error in that he cleanses them before they accomplish the work assigned them. For he did not only command them to go, but to show themselves to the priests. Now they evidently became cleansed before they arrived at the priests and before they had finished the work. If they had first become cleansed after they had arrived and brought the offering, the priests might have had ground for the pretense that they were cleansed by their offering and works, as they even did, and misled the poor people.]

[42] Now I have often said that works are twofold; some before and without faith, others come out of and after faith. For as little as nature

without faith can be idle and inactive, so much less also can faith be idle. And as nature's works do not precede or make nature, but nature must first be present and do the works out of and by virtue of herself; so also the works of faith do not make faith, but they follow and spring from faith. So, there must be works, but they have no merit nor saving power, but all salvation and merit must first be present in faith.

[43] This is also the reason that the works of faith are free and spontaneous, and not premeditated. For these lepers were also free, and if Christ had commanded them to do something else, they would have done it. And if they had been asked whether they went in order to be cleansed, they would have replied, no. This must have been so, if the cleansing took place because of their works. Just as if you should ask the hypocrites whether they work in order to be saved, they would say: Yes, and without works they would not want to be saved. [But these lepers would not speak thus, they hope he will cleanse them out of pure kindness, without considering their work of going, which they do only because he wills it to satisfy the law, although unnecessary. For all lepers might also go to the priests, and yet they would not on that account be cleansed, which nevertheless must be, if the work were necessary and useful for the cleansing. Just as the work-righteous persons think, that he who works will be saved; so it must also be here, he who goes will be cleansed. But now as the cleansing takes place only because of the presence of faith, so salvation comes also on account of faith alone.] But as the lepers must go not for their own sakes, but for the sake of the priests, that they 7 might be satisfied, although they were not obliged to go to them; so all believers must work, not for their own sake, but for the sake of others, to serve them. Although they owe them nothing, but freely do good as Christ has done to them, about which enough has been said above in the first part. There follows further in the text: "And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, with a loud voice glorifying God."

[44] The returning of one must have taken place after he and the others had shown themselves to the priests. But the Evangelist is silent as to how they came to the priests and what took place there. However, from the return and thankfulness of this one, he gives us to understand how it went. He without doubt very unwillingly returned alone, for as with all his heart he thanks Christ and is kind to him, the conclusion is clear how he

persevered, admonished, urged, prayed and did his utmost for the others that they should go with him and acknowledge the great kindness; and no doubt it grieved him that he could not prevail upon the nine and had to leave them with tears and grief. All these and similar things force us to think of the love he had for Christ, that leaves nothing unattempted, fears no one, regards no one, if they only worthily honor and praise Christ.

[45] What kind of a tempest visited the nine, that they so firmly separated from the one; as we have heard they all made a good beginning and grew in the faith of Christ? Of their own accord they would not have fallen so completely; someone must have first overthrown their faith, so that the honor which they previously gave Christ so freely and honestly, they now divert from him and rob him of this honor, and turn their friendship into enmity. Nor was it a weak falling away, that so severely offends and opposes the one leper with all his admonitions and regrets. Behold, the priests did this, they could not bear that the honor be given to Christ; hence they no doubt preached a strong sermon against him to root out their faith.

[46] But what might they have said to them? Because they fought against Christ and the faith it is easy to think what they said and did, namely, what is contrary to faith; that is, they heralded into these poor lepers that they should not believe that Christ cleansed them, but should thank God, who had regard to their offering and the prayers of the priests, and heard them, and on this account cleansed them; and whatever else they said to draw away the hearts of the lepers. But the one leper ⁷ did not permit himself to be drawn from Christ; he remained steadfast and overcame all the assaults of faith.

[47] Therefore, with two strong assaults their hearts were changed. First, to cleanse one from leprosy is impossible for a creature, and it is certainly only the work of God, therefore, it cannot be in any way attributed to Christ, whom they saw and regarded as a man and not as God; therefore, they should beware by no means to blaspheme God, and make a god out of a mere creature. O what a fine pretense and powerful stroke this was! What a great faith must be there to stand, when it is opposed by God himself, by his honor and work, with which one is threatened not to deny God! What heart does not think, that it would be the very best to yield to a temptation like this!

[48] The next stroke was to bring forth the law of Moses, where it was commanded to hearken unto the priests at the risk of death, what they judged according to the law, Deuteronomy 17:12. As the priests here judged the cleansing was from God and not from Christ, they powerfully caught their consciences, and crushed faith to powder in the nine, for to act against the law, is also to act against God.

[49] Here observe what a terrible opposition this was, when bodily and eternal death is placed in opposition to the conscience, together with the anger of God and man, the highest and greatest sins, with the greatest punishment. What heart would not fall before such terrors, or never tremble, especially when the law of God is offered as the signal of truth? With this these nine fell, and had sooner denied ten Christs than offend God and transgress the Law, and thought they did well by doing so.

[50] Then an ugly contention arose first of all concerning the one, who alone stood opposed to the priests; while all his companions fall and join his opponents. Then they also exercised diligence, prayed and threatened, that he should by no means offend God, believe the priests, nor despise the law of Moses, and beware that he be not put to death as a blasphemer. Here the poor child must be a fool or insensible, so good he has it, or a heretic and apostate; he has become cleansed, but he must on that account risk body and life, goods and honor, friends and companions; and besides had to allow them the name that they were pious, did good and honored God, while he must be a sinner and dishonors God. And 7 because he was a Samaritan they esteemed him perhaps the less, and thought: Let him go, he is but a Samaritan, a man lost and not of Israel; or they had mercy on him, as a man mad and possessed. See, this is the last and greatest opposition to faith. But he who continues steadfast, abides indeed forever, for here is overcome the fear of death and hell with all their terrors, in this world and in the world to come.

[51] Thus, the name of God must at all times do the greatest evil and be a cover for the greatest scandal through its misuse by the devil and wicked men. For as they know that man does not fear and honor anything so much as God's name and glory, especially among good hearted people; therefore, they take just such a one and bring him to their mind, that what they pretend is God; then the poor crowd follows that thinks nothing else than that a man must fear and accept all this, by which God's name or Word is presented.

Therefore, an extensive knowledge is necessary in such opposition, that a man may not err, although he be threatened by the name of God. For idols have even assumed the name and honor of God. Thus, the Pope always employs the name of God for every sin and shame, and all his disciples and false teachers follow him, and especially the priests who pretend that their unchristian, unbelieving orders and works are divine and Christian.

[52] But it is still harder when the evil spirit torments the conscience in the throes of death, and pretends God is angry and does not care for you; of this David says, Psalm 3:2: “Many there are that say of my soul, There is no help for him in God.” Or as the Jews spoke to Christ while on the cross, Matthew 27:43: “He trusted on God; let him deliver him now, if he desireth him: for he said, I am the Son of God.” As though they would say: It is impossible for God to help him, he is wholly lost.

[53] Or when God himself thus, tries and forsakes a man, so that he feels nothing else in his conscience than that God has forsaken him, and will never welcome him, as David says, Psalm 31:23: “I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes.” This also tempted Abraham, Genesis 15:12; and Jacob, Genesis 32:24. Here faith suffers its greatest distress, and is in the pangs of hell. Here it is necessary to hold fast and not suffer yourself to err, when God himself is pictured before you. Behold, this is the last and greatest trial of faith; he who remains firm here abides firm forever, for here is overcome the fear of death and hell with all the terrors in 7 this world and the world to come. They are the strongest Christians and the greatest spirits, who resist this temptation.

[54] All this I say that we may learn to hold fast to faith, in which we have begun, and ever remain in the same firm conviction that looks to God for every good thing, and not permit ourselves to be forced or driven from it by man, the devil, sin, the law, the name of God or God himself, which we will be able to do if we only abide in the true nature of faith, as St. Paul says, Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen;” but not the substance of things fleeing away, nor the evidence of things seen; that is, the nature of faith is, that it relies on the goodness of God and thinks of nothing else than to hope for and desire it. The contrary of this is to flee from it, which is terrible, and that is not an example of faith, but of assault and temptation; for God has not built our faith or good conscience, or confidence on wrath, but on grace, therefore,

all his promises are lovely and gracious; on the contrary his threats are terrible and bitter, which we must also believe; but on his threats Christian faith cannot build, it must have before it only that which is good.

[55] Secondly, man should possess assurance. The good for which faith looks and on which it depends, must not be seen or experienced. Therefore, everything a person feels, whether of pleasure or pain, he must know it is not that which he is to believe, but it is the opposition and temptation, over which he must leap and jump, close his eyes and all his senses, and cling only to the good which he neither sees nor hears, until the contention ceases. Just as Elijah wrapped his face in a mantle, when the great earthquake, wind and fire passed by.

[56] The blows and assaults against this leper were much greater, besides he was left alone; but he stood firm. So far is his faith greater and more perfect, and was quite ripe. Without doubt it is an example for us, that we, too, may not permit ourselves to be influenced by like priests and saints, even though the great crowd of all the world go with them. It was indeed a great sight, that the priests withstood him, whose duty it was to teach other people the right way, and who should by rights have been the most learned.

[57] And here we learn a good answer for the Pope, the priests and the wise, when they appear with their power, government, office and dignity, and pretend that we must believe them, and only hear what they say; who know well enough what it is, when Christ directs the lepers to the priests, but appear as though they could not see how this lonely man, who was not a priest but a common layman, nor was he even an Israelite, but a Samaritan, and yet he pronounces judgment on the priests' doctrine and opinion, and is more learned than they all put together; nor does he worry about being alone, and the crowd being on their side. Now, if this had been sufficient, as our Papists say, that they are the priests, the learned, the rulers and the power, and besides they have the multitude with them, and that a man should not oppose what the government, dignity, power and multitude offer, then this Samaritan did what was not right. But God preserve us! For this Gospel here teaches that scarcely no one is so accustomed to err and go astray as just these very priests, the clergy, the most learned, the rulers, the most dignified and the greatest crowd, wherefore we are scarcely to avoid anyone more than just these very ones.

[58] But since Christ directs the lepers to the priests, he gives them to understand it is not their office, but the misuse of their office that is to be avoided, and draws the line how far we are to believe and follow them, namely, when they teach according to the law we are to hear them, as Moses, Deuteronomy 17:11,12, clearly declares, that the priests shall judge according to the law, and then, whoever will not hear is to be stoned; but when they without law offer their own doctrine, we shall regard neither their office nor power, and abide alone with the Scriptures. Of course the people say, that no one writes false things except the scribe; so no one preaches false doctrine except the preachers; and again as the common saying runs: The learned are the perverted! If then the priests who are placed in their offices by divine order to teach God's Law, often and most grievously err; what shall our popes, cardinals and bishops do, who are not placed in their offices by God nor man, but by themselves, who neither preach nor study, and produce nothing but human doctrine and their own dreams? Therefore, neither their office nor doctrine is any good here, they are nothing but error from head to foot, that is only to be avoided, for little of their doctrine and character is subject to controversy; for they are not the priests referred to here, as we shall hear.

[59] But why does St. Luke say that this single person saw that he was cleansed; did not the others see it too, as all ten were surely cleansed! So the nine, as we have 8 heard, with the priests, also praised God, and held him in high esteem, so that they would not give the honor to Christ as to a creature; why then does he say that this one only greatly praised God with a loud voice?

[60] In the first place this is said by Luke according to a general custom, as when one says of the unthankful: he does not see the kindness done him; that is, he will not see it nor take it to heart, nor think that he ought to be thankful, but acts as though he knew nothing about it, he despises it and regards it not. Thus, these nine did not want to see and consider the kindness of Christ, and despised him as though he did nothing for them. On the contrary he who is thankful will and cannot forget, and does not cease to recognize and acknowledge his benefactor and kindness. With such eyes did this Samaritan see his cleansing.

[61] On the other hand, the nine also praised God, but with their tongues, and at the same time blasphemed him in Christ. It would not have been

punishable, if even at that time they had not regarded Christ as God; for he was not yet glorified, as St. John says, John 7:39. And this one also, perhaps, still held him as a mere man. But they wanted Christ to be looked upon as a sinful man and a blasphemer, and to be regarded with the utmost contempt. Such was the poison they brewed into the wine. Christ at that time sought nothing more than that they should receive him as sent to them from God, and that they should believe that God dwelt, spoke and worked in him. This they did not wish, and would not allow others to receive him thus; but he was to be looked upon as coming from the devil, and speaking and working through the devils. And such faith the nine permitted to be driven into them. But this one remained firm in spite of them, that God must be with Christ, who spoke, worked and dwelt through and in him. Therefore, his praise and thanks are mentioned and the praise of the others ignored. Through what strife and opposition he remained in his faith, we have heard above. It was a great faith that held so firmly to him who was despised, condemned and blasphemed by the priests, the learned, the rulers, the best, the greatest and the largest number among all the people. Who dare thus, hold Christ at present, when the Pope, the bishops, doctors, monks, priests, princes, with all their host, have condemned him, and issued a bull against him, as we see they publicly do?

[62] And here this Gospel teaches what works tried and experienced faith produces, and what is the true worship and honor man may give to God. Some build churches for him, some arrange masses, some ring bells for him, some light candles for him that he may see; and act no differently than as though he were a child, who is in need of our gifts and services. Although the building of churches and holding of masses at first arose from the Christians coming together to conduct the true worship; afterwards the same worship disappeared and was entirely omitted. Since then we have continued to cling to charitable foundations, buildings, singing, ringing, lighting, clothing, smoking, and as many more such preparations as there are for worship, that we have come to consider such preparations as the chief divine worship, and know nothing of any other. And we do wisely, as he who builds a house and spends all his money on the scaffolding, and during his whole life should get no further, not even to lay a single stone for the foundation. Pray tell, where will he dwell at last, when the scaffolding is torn down?

[63] But the true worship is to return and praise God with a loud voice. This is our greatest work in heaven and on earth, besides it is the only worship we may bring to God; for he needs none of the other kind, and is not capable for it: he will be only loved and praised by us. Concerning this Psalm 50:12-14 speaks: “For the world is mine and the fullness thereof. Offer unto God the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High.” Do you think God would drink the blood of goats, or eat the flesh of bulls? Thus, he might also say now to the founders of charitable institutions, smokers, singers, ringers and candle lighters: Do you think that I am blind and deaf, or that I have no house for shelter? You shall love and praise me, this is the incense you are to burn to me and the bells you are to ring for me.

[64] The returning means, to bring home again to God the grace and goods received, not to keep them, not to boast of them or exalt self above others, or praise self on their account, not to reap honor thereby nor wish to be better than others, not to be satisfied with self, not to have joy in them, but to have all such joy, pleasure, honor and praise, only in him who has given them, and stand there willing and quite composed, when he shall again take them from you, and none the less just then to love and praise him. O how few there are who thus, return, of course scarcely one among ten. If one has more beautiful hair than another, he delights in it himself because of it above others; what then will he do with the great gifts of reason, spirit, etc.? These are the ravens of Noah that flew out of the ark, and did not return, Genesis 8: 7. To sum up all: To return embraces these two thoughts: not to cling to God’s gifts, but only to himself, who gives them.

[65] Thus, the great praise of God includes two parts: The first is to esteem him highly in the heart, and to have a lovely disposition toward him, so that we taste and experience how sweet the Lord is, of which St. Peter speaks, 1 Peter 2:3, and Psalm 34:8: “O taste and see that Jehovah is good.” All this faith, that has been tried, teaches and brings us to the end of the conflict. For as long as the strife and conflict endure, faith is in labor, and all is painful and bitter, it experiences and tastes no sweetness in God. But as soon as the evil hour is past, if we persevere and remain firm, then the sweetness of God will be ours. God will become so lovely, satisfactory and sweet to the heart, that it will desire nothing more than to battle and to seek

to try his faith, and now as it were, thirsts and longs for suffering and misfortune, which all the world fears, and which he also himself previously feared, of which Psalm 26:2 speaks: "Examine me, O Jehovah, and prove me; try my heart and my mind." Out of this valiant faith comes quite a different man with a different taste, so that henceforth he does not feel well without suffering, and as it were lives contrary to all the world, so that he rejoices where the world mourns, and mourns where the world rejoices, until he becomes an enemy of this whole life and becomes eager for death.

[66] This is what St. Paul means when he says, Galatians 6:14: "Through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world." That is, my joy and life are the suffering and death of the world, and her joy and life are my suffering and death. Therefore, he says again, Philippians 1:23: "Having the desire to depart and be with Christ." To this taste and knowledge no hypocrite can come, for conflict and suffering they do not want, and so they must remain faithless and wholly unexperienced in spiritual things.

[67] The other part is to break forth with the voice, and to confess before the world what the heart within believes of God. This is nothing else than to bring down upon one's self the enmity of the world, and to send many messengers after death and the cross. For he who would praise and honor God with his voice, must condemn all the praise and honor of the world and say that all the works and 8 words of man are nothing, with all the honor they have from them, and that God's work and Word alone are worthy of praise and honor. But you see that the world cannot tolerate this, and so you must bear the brunt and be a heretic, a deceiver, a blasphemer, while you promise many good works and a spiritual life in all your divine services. Then they will command your silence, or make it hot for you. And it is not possible for them to suffer it from you, for their pet affairs they will not allow you to reject. So is it also impossible for you to cease and be still, but with loud voice like this leper you rather confess God's praise and honor alone in his works and words; and thus, you then go to pieces and become ashes. Then the Pope goes to work and enlarges his almanac with red ink, and makes them saints in heaven, and blots you out of the book of life, and casts you four thousand miles on the other side of hell, and you are now a rotten member cut off from holy Christendom, that you may not infect the holy church with the poison of your foul odor and your satanic doctrines.

[68] Christ speaks of this in Matthew 24:9: “Ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name’s sake.” Why for my name’s sake? They would and might not tolerate the name, praise and honor of God, for then they and their whole cause would be put to shame. And if God alone were wise, good, just, faithful and strong, then they would be fools, wicked, unjust, liars, false and impotent. Who would bear this great injustice, the devilish heresy, that so much divine service and godly life should for God’s sake be abolished and changed as a foolish, unjust, false and impotent thing? Not so, it must not be God, but the devil who pretends this. Behold, upon the highways all the prophets are murdered and Christ himself. The world does not want to be a fool nor to be unjust. But God will not suffer this from it, and hence he sends his messengers to punish it. And thus, the saints must then shed their blood on account of it. Therefore, it is a great act to praise God and to raise a free and loud voice before the world.

[69] However, the false saints and murderers of Christ also now praise and extol with a loud voice God and his works, yea, they preach and cry more about God than the true saints do. As we even now see every corner full of preachers, who highly extol and praise God, that he alone is worthy of praise and honor, and use the very same voice and Word which the true preachers use. Why then is it not valid? Or what is the matter with it? Without doubt nothing else than that they 8 with this leper do not fall down at the feet of Christ to thank him, but want Christ to fall down at their feet and thank them. For the Jews give all honor to God, but of Christ they will know nothing. So it is with these; as long as we leave their cause alone and do not reject it they cry and praise us very highly. But if one also judges them by their doctrine, and their own cry falls upon them, that they are nothing and their whole cause nothing but falsehood and foolishness; then their praise and cry are gone, and their false heart breaks forth and is revealed, so that they praise and honor God only with the mouth and themselves with the heart.

[70] It is not enough that you loudly call and cry that God does all things and our work is nothing; you must also suffer such things to be said of you and your affairs. You can agree that Christ’s and your enemy is nothing, and all he does is rejected, and you think it is right and well done; for his cause is not from God, but against God. But you do not wish to be rejected with him. Your cause is to be God himself and unrejected; how then is it possible

that you should tolerate the rejected Christ, not to mention falling at his feet and regarding yourself as unworthy, when with him you would be rejected? Now as God has concealed himself in the despised man Christ, and will dwell there, you must not undertake to find him anywhere else, except in contempt; yea, you must reach the point to rejoice that you are found worthy to be despised, and must also fall at his feet and thank him for the contempt, which will not suffer your cause to be anything, so that it be not words but deeds; that you say: God alone is to be praised and not man, such instruction is first to be proved by you, you suffer such things just for the sake of his doctrine, and you consider yourself unworthy of all this.

[71] Thus, Christ also taught the same and praised God's name alone; and also suffered first and most of all, that he became as nothing, so that no one can be compared to him in this. O this is a rich, great example, of which much might be said. But now it is sufficient that we may see a little how great a cause it is to prove God's praise by our actions, and fall upon our faces at the feet of Christ, the man despised; as the Apostles were glad, Acts 5:4, that they were worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name, of which it is said, Psalm 72:9, that the enemies of Christ are to bow before him, and lick the dust from his footprints. That is as St. Paul also says, they shall boast in his sufferings and cross, that shall come upon them on account of the praise of God and the punishment of men. For as Christ himself & thus, suffered, suffering has become so precious that no one is worthy of it, and it is to be regarded and esteemed as great grace.

[72] From this we see how far a Christian life is above the natural life. First, it despises self; secondly, it loves and thirsts for contempt; thirdly, it punishes everything that is unwilling to be despised, by which it resigns itself to all misfortune; fourthly it is also despised and persecuted on account of such contempt and punishment; fifthly, it does not think itself worthy to suffer such persecution. Now from the very first part the world and nature flee, when then will they come to the last? But there is still another and a greater behind it, concerning the falling at the feet of Christ, which the priests neither understand nor want; for not every faith is sufficient for it, but the faith of Christ must be there, that truly humiliates us. Of this we will treat later under the spiritual interpretation. "And he was a Samaritan."

[73] Why was it necessary for the Evangelist to write, rather than something else, that this one leper was a Samaritan? By this he opens our eyes and warns us that God has two kinds of people who serve him. One, that has the appearance and name of having a great, spiritual, holy life, is employed almost wholly in it, and yet it is all in vain. They are nothing more than ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing. Yet they have the honor of it, and are regarded by everyone as the true worshipers of God; therefore, goods, honor, friendship flow to them, and everything the world has, for God's sake; for they think he is there, and he who thinks differently is worse than a heathen, heretic and an apostate.

[74] The others are without any show and name, yea, they are of the opposite appearance, as though no one were less God's people than they, and in short, they are thorough Samaritans; a word that sounds as badly among the Jews, as if at present you should revile one as a Turk, Jew, heathen or heretic. For the Jews alone had the name of being God's people, and they alone had God and his worship for themselves in preference to all other people on the earth. And they hated the Samaritans above all nations, for they too claimed to be God's people along with the Jews; therefore, a Samaritan was to them as an apostate Christian is among us. And although it be true that the Samaritans did not rightly believe, and that the Jews had the true law of God, it was according to human custom that they boasted alone of Judaism and despised the Samaritans, who were less Jews and worse & Samaritans, than the natural Samaritans. But now, as God loves the truth and is an enemy of hypocrisy with all its boasting, he turns it round and accepts the Samaritans and lets the Jews go. Thus, it occurs that they are not his people who still have the name, the appearance and honor of his people. Again, those who are his people and have the name and appearance, are heretics, apostates and the devil's children.

[75] So it is even at the present time. The clergy, priests and monks call themselves and are regarded as the servants of God, and no one is a Christian who does not believe as they believe, whereas no one is less a Christian and God's people than just those who thus, turn up and boast themselves among them. Again, those whom they hold are heretics, many of whom they have also burned and exiled, like John Huss and his followers they dare not be Christians, although they alone are the true Christians. Here then this Gospel is so powerful that no one returns, no one exalts God

with a loud voice, no one falls on his face at the feet of Christ, except the Samaritans, the despised, the condemned, the accursed, who must be heretics, apostates, errorists and Satan's own children. Therefore, let us guard against everything that makes only a show, it certainly is deceiving; and let us not reject what does not make a display, so that we do not go and reject Christ and God, as the Jews did. This Christ also desires when he says: "And Jesus answering said, Were not the ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there none found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger?"

[76] The stranger does it, he sincerely gives God all the glory. O, what a terrible example is this! Among ten only one, and he among the least and most worthless. How entirely does God indeed overlook that which is great, wise, spiritual and honorable! And yet such people have no fear, but become hardened and petrified in their nature. It is also terrible that the Lord knows ten of them were cleansed, of this they did not think. To it he is not silent, he inquires after and seeks them: Where are the nine? O, what a frightful thing it will be when they at some future time will feel this inquiry and must answer whither they went, that they did not give God the glory. Then they will say: Well, we have nevertheless praised and thanked God, and thus, our priests have taught us! Then it will appear whether it will help us to follow the doctrines of men in the name of God, and to forsake the doctrine and will of God. We are sufficiently warned in the Gospel, therefore, no excuse will help us if we allow ourselves to be deceived. In Baptism we have all vowed to follow Christ and his doctrine; no one has vowed to follow the Pope, the bishops and clergy. Thus, Christ has thoroughly rejected and forbidden the doctrines of men.

[77] However, Christ here comforts his poor Samaritans, who for his name's sake must risk their lives with the priests and Jews, and strengthens their hope with the sentence and judgment that he demands the nine and judges them as God's thieves, who steal God's glory, and justifies the Samaritan. For this hope gives them strong courage, that their cause before God will be rightly maintained and will stand, but the opposite cause will be condemned and will not stand, it matters not how great they were and what right they had on earth.

[78] Therefore, observe, before Christ justifies the Samaritan, he judges the nine, that we should be certain not to hasten or desire revenge, but leave

it only to him, and go our way. For he is in himself so careful to defend the right and punish the wrong, that he first takes up the latter before he rewards his Samaritans.

[79] Besides, he uses many more words in this sentence than to the Samaritan; so that we see how greatly he is concerned about it, and he by no means forgets their wrongs and our rights. Nor does he wait long to have them accused before him, but of his own free will summons them, so that without doubt the cause of the unbelievers influences him more and sooner than it strikes or harms us. Of this God speaks in Moses, Deuteronomy 32:35: "Vengeance is mine, and recompense." And St. Paul says to the Romans, 12:19: "Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto wrath." Now the words which the Lord says to the Samaritan, when he adjusts his affairs, are the following: "And he said unto him, Arise, and go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole."

[80] Behold, is not this a wonderful expression, that he attributes his cleansing to faith? This is opposed to the judgment of the priests who told the nine that their offering and obedience to the law had cleansed them. But Christ's judgment stands and triumphs, that they were not cleansed because they went to the priests, nor because of their offering, but alone on account of their faith. Therefore, as said above, faith will not tolerate any work, that it should help man to be justified and saved. For this faith more than all other things must and will do it alone, and he employs his works elsewhere, namely, to help his neighbor, as Christ has helped him.

[81] And in conclusion we observe that this Gospel sufficiently teaches and represents the entire Christian life with all its events and sufferings; for the two chief things are faith and love. Faith receives the good; love gives the good. Faith offers us God as our own; love gives us to our neighbor as his own. Now when such life begins, God goes to work and improves it by trials and conflicts, through which a man increases more and more in faith and love, that through his own experience God becomes to him so heartily dear and precious, and he no longer fears anything. Then hope grows which is certain that God will not forsake her, of which St. Paul speaks, Romans 5:3-5: "We also rejoice in our tribulations: knowing that tribulation worketh steadfastness; and steadfastness, approvedness; and approvedness, hope; and hope putteth not to shame." And Paul always treats of these three principles in his Epistles. To the Colossians he speaks thus, Colossians 1:3-

5: “We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have toward all the saints, because of the hope which is laid up for you in the heavens.” And still more beautiful he says to the Thessalonians, Thessalonians 1:2, 3: “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father.”

[82] How beautifully he divides the three principles, that faith goes forth in trusting, love in laboring, and hope in patience and suffering. As though he would say: Your faith is not a dream nor a fancy, but it is life and action; and your love is not passive nor is it idle, but it serves well for your neighbor. All this takes place in prosperous days. while your hope is exercised in suffering and patience, and all this in Christ; for there is no faith, nor love, nor hope outside of Christ, as I said above. Thus, a Christian life goes through good and evil until the end, and yet it does not seek revenge, and only grows more and more in faith, love and hope.

[83] And love, which naturally follows faith, is divided into two parts: it loves God, who does so much for her through Christ in faith; it loves its neighbor, and does to him, as God does to her. Therefore, all the works of such a man go to his neighbor for God’s sake who loved him, and he does no work relating to God except to love and to praise, and he confesses this freely before the world. For God does not need other works. Thus, all worship is with the mouth; although that is also called a service of God which is done to our neighbor. But I speak now only of the service rendered to God, in which the one part man can take is to love and to praise; but in this he must resign himself wholly and entirely in all adversity. Behold, what more would you know as to how to be a Christian? Have faith and love, continue in these, then you have and can do all things; the rest will all be taught and given to you without any exertion on your part: This Gospel of the Ten Lepers is further expounded in a special book or postil, which examine for additional information. There you will also find the allegorical interpretation or the spiritual meaning of it.

Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity. God or Mammon, How Christians Should not be Anxious about their Food and Raiment God Furnishes Everything For Us.

Text: Matthew 6:24-34.

24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we

drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Matthew 6:24-34

[1] In this Gospel we see how God distinguishes Christians from heathen. For the Lord does not deliver these teachings to the heathen, for they could not receive them, but to his Christians. However, he does not consider those Christians, who only hear his Word, so as to learn it and be able to repeat it, as the nuns do the Psalter. In this way Satan also hears the Gospel and the Word of God, yea, he knows it far better than we do, and he could preach it as well as we, if he only wanted to; but the Gospel is a doctrine that should become a living power and be put into practice; it should strengthen and comfort the people, and make them courageous and aggressive.

[2] Therefore, they, who only thus, hear the Gospel, so that they may know it and be able to speak about the wisdom of God, are not worthy to be classed among Christians; but they, who do as the Gospel teaches, are true Christians. However, very few of these are found; we see many hearers, but all are not doers of the Gospel. We wish now to examine more closely what kind of doctrine the Lord teaches in this Gospel. First, he begins with a plain, natural example, so that we all must confess it is true; experience also teaches the same to everybody. He says: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other: or else he will hold to one, and despise the other."

[3] Now he, who tries to serve two masters, will do it in a way that cannot be called serving at all; for it will certainly be as the Lord here says. One can indeed compel a servant to do a certain work against his will and he may grieve while doing it; but no one can compel him to do it cheerfully, and mean it from the bottom of his heart. He of course does the work as long as his master is present, but when he is absent, he hurries away from his task, and does nothing well. Hence the Lord desires our service to be

done out of love and cheerfully, and where it is not done thus, it is no service to him: for even people are not pleased when one does anything for them unwillingly. This is natural, and we experience daily that it is so. Now, if it be the case among human beings that no one can serve two masters, how much more is it true in the service of God, that our service cannot be divided; but it must be done unto God alone, willingly and from the heart; therefore, the Lord adds: “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

[4] God cannot allow us to have another Lord besides himself. He is a jealous God, as he says, and cannot suffer us to serve him and his enemy. Only mine, he says, or not at all. Behold now how beautifully Christ here introduces the example: “No man,” he says, “can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” As if to say: as it is here in man’s relations to his fellows, so it is also before God.

[5] We find very few, who do not sin against the Gospel. The Lord passes a severe judgment and it is terrible to hear that he should say this of us, and yet no one will confess, yea, no one will suffer it to be said that we hate and despise God and that we are his enemies. There is no one, when asked if he loves God and cleaves to him would not reply, yes, I love God. But see how the text closes, that we all hate and despise God, and love mammon and cleave to it. But God suffers us to do this until his time; he watches the time and some day he will strike into our midst with all violence, before we can turn around. It is impossible for one, who loves gold and earthly possessions and cleaves to them, not to hate God. For God here contrasts these two as enemies to one another, and concludes, if you love and cleave to one of these two, then you must hate and despise the other. Therefore, however nicely and genteelly one lives here upon earth and cleaves to riches, it cannot be otherwise than that he must hate God; and on the other hand, whoever does not cleave to gold and worldly goods, loves God. This is certainly true.

[6] But who are they that love God, and cleave not to gold and worldly possessions? Take a good look at the whole world, also the Christians, and see if they despise gold and riches. It requires an effort to hear the Gospel and to live according to it. God be praised, we have the Gospel; that no one can deny, but what do we do with it? We are concerned only about learning and knowing it, and nothing more; we think it is enough to know it, and do

not care whether we ever live according to it. However, on the other hand, one is very anxious when he leaves lying in the window or in the room a dollar or two, yea, even a dime, then he worries and fears lest the money be stolen; but the same person can do without the Gospel through a whole year. And such characters still wish to be considered as Evangelical.

[7] Here we see what and who we are. If we were Christians, we would despise riches and be concerned about the Gospel, that we someday might live in it and prove it by our deeds. We see few such Christians; therefore, we must hear the judgment that we are despisers of God and hate God for the sake of riches and worldly possessions. Alas! That is fine praise. We should be ashamed of ourselves in our inmost souls; there is no hope for us! What a fine condition we are in now! That means, I think, our names are blotted out. What spoiled children we are!

[8] Now the world cannot conceal its unbelief in its coarse, outward sins, for I see it loves a dollar more than Christ; more than all the Apostles, even if they themselves were present and preached to it. I can hear the Gospel daily, but it does not profit me every day; it may indeed happen, if I have heard it a whole year, the Holy Spirit may have been given to me only one hour. Now when I enjoyed this hour I obtained not only five hundred dollars, but also the riches of the whole world; for what have I not, when I have the Gospel? I received God, who made the silver and the gold, and all that is upon the earth; for I acquired the Spirit by which I know that I will be kept by him forever; that is much more than if I had the church full of money. Examine now and see, if our heart is not a rogue, full of wickedness and unbelief. If I were a true Christian, I would say. The hour the Gospel is received, there comes to me a hundred thousand dollars, and much more. For if I possess this treasure, I have all that is in heaven and upon earth. But one must serve this treasure only, for no man can serve God and mammon. Either you must love God and hate money; or you must hate God and love money; this and nothing more.

[9] The master uses here the Hebrew, which we do not. "Mammon" means goods or riches, and such goods as one does not need, but holds as a treasure, and it is gold and possessions that one deposits as stock and storage provisions. This Christians do not do, they gather no treasures; but they ask God for their daily bread. However, others are not satisfied with this, they gather a great store upon which they may depend, in case our God

should die today or tomorrow, they might then know a way out. Therefore, St. Paul says, in Ephesians 5: 5 and Colossians 3:5, riches and covetousness are the god of this world and are idolatry, with this Christ here agrees and calls it serving mammon.

[10] Now, how does it come that the Gospel and St. Paul call especially covetousness and not other sins idolatry; since uncleanness, fornication, lust, base desires, unchastity and other vices are more opposed to God? It is done to our great shame, because gold is our god, that we serve, in that we trust and rely upon it, and it can neither sustain nor save us, yea, it can neither stand nor walk, it neither hears nor sees, it has no strength nor power, with it there is neither comfort nor help. For if one had the riches of the whole world, he would not be secure for one moment before death.

[11] Of what help are his great treasures and riches to the Emperor when the hour of death arrives and he is called to die? They are a shameful, loathsome, powerless god, that cannot cure a sore, yea, it cannot keep and take care of itself, there it lies in the chest, and lets its devotees wait, yea, one must watch it as a helpless, powerless, weak thing. The lord who has this god must watch day and night lest thieves steal it; this helpless god can aid no one. You should have contempt for this lifeless god that cannot help in the least, and is yet so scrupulous and precious; it lets its devotees wait in the grandest style and protects itself with strong chests and castles, its lord must wait and be in anxiety every hour, lest it perishes by fire or otherwise experiences some misfortune. Does this treasure or god consist in clothing, then one must be careful and on his guard against the smallest little insects, against the moth, lest they ruin or devour it.

[12] The walls of our rooms should spit upon us in contempt that we trust more in the god the moth eat and the rust corrupt, than in the God, who creates and gives all things, yea, who holds in his hand heaven and earth, and all that in them is. Is it not a foolish thing on the part of the world to turn from the true God and trust in base and low mammon, in the poor, miserable god, who cannot protect himself against rust. Oh, what a disgraceful thing this is on the part of the world! God visits gold and worldly possessions with many kinds of enemies, to bring us to see and confess our unbelief and godless character, that we thus, trust in a powerless and frail god, we who could at once so easily approach and cleave to the true, powerful and strong God, who gives us everything, money, goods,

fruit and all we need; yet we are so foolish and make gods out of his gifts. Shame on thee, thou cursed unbelief.

[13] Other sins give us a little pleasure, we receive some enjoyment from them, as in the case of eating and drinking; in unchastity one has pleasure for a little while; likewise anger satisfies its desire, and other vices more so. Only in this vice one must incessantly be in slavery, hounded and martyred, and in it no one has any pleasure or joy whatever. There the money lies on a pile and commands you to serve it; in spite of it letting anyone draw from it a thimble full of wine there comes rust and devours it, and yet he dares not attack it, lest he angers his god. And when his servants have protected their god a long time they have no more than any poor beggar. I have nothing, yet I eat and drink as heartily as anyone who has a large supply of mammon. When he dies he takes just as much along with him as I do. And it is certainly the case that these people never live as well nor as richly as the poor people often do. Who arranges this thus,? God, the Lord, does it. Here some have a certain affliction of the body that they have no appetite; there others are internally unsound and never relish what they eat; here their stomach is out of order; there their lungs and liver are diseased; here is this, and there is that sickness; here they are weak and afflicted at one point, there at another, and they never have an enjoyable hour to relish what they eat or drink.

[14] Thus, it is with those who serve this god, mammon. The true God is still of some use, he serves the people, but mammon does not, it lies quiet and lets others serve it. And for this reason the New Testament calls covetousness idolatry, since it thus, desires to be served. However, to love and not to enjoy may well vex the devil. This all now experience who love the god, mammon, and serve him. Whoever has now no sense of shame and does not turn red, has a brazen face.

[15] Thus, now it is with the word, “serve.” For it is not forbidden to have money and possessions, as we cannot get along without them. Abraham, Lot, David, Solomon and others had great possessions and much gold, and at the present day there are many wealthy persons who are pious, in spite of their riches. But it is one thing to have possessions and another to serve them; to have mammon, and to make a god out of it. Job also was wealthy, he had great possessions and was more powerful than all who lived in the East, as we read in the first part of the book of Job: yet he says, in Job

31:24-25: “If I have made gold my hope, and said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; have I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gotten much?”

[16] The sum of all is, it is God’s will that we serve not gold and riches, and that we be not overanxious for our life; but that we labor and commend our anxiety to him. Whoever possesses riches is lord of the riches. Whoever serves them, is their slave and does not possess them, but they possess him; for he dare not make use of them when he desires, and cannot serve others with them; yea, he is not bold enough to dare to touch it. However, is he lord over his riches, then they serve him, and he does not serve them; then he teaches in 1 Corinthians 7:32. Hence he aids the poor with his wealth and gives to those who have nothing. When he sees a person without a coat, he says to his money: Go out, Messrs. Dollars, there is a poor, naked man, who has no coat, you must be of service to him! There lies one sick, who has no medicine. Go forth, Squires Anneberger and Joachinesthaler, you must hasten and help him! Those, who act thus, with their riches, are their lords; and all true Christians surely do this. But those who save piles of money, and ever scheme to make their heap larger instead of smaller, are servants and slaves of mammon.

[17] He is a lord of mammon who lays hold of and uses it for the sake of those who need it and lets God rule, who says in Luke 6:38. Give, and it shall be given unto you; have you nothing more, you surely have me still, and I have still enough, yea, I have more than I have given away and more than can ever be given away. We see here and there many pious poor people only for the purpose that the wealthy may help and serve them with their riches. If you do it not, you have the sure proof that you hate God. He, whom the sentence does not terrify, that he will hear on the day of judgment, can be moved by nothing. For he will hear then from God: Behold, thou hast hated me and loved that which could not protect itself against rust and moth. Ay, how firmly you will then stand!

[18] Hence the sense is, we must own some possessions, but are not to cleave to them with our hearts; as Psalm 62:10 says: “If riches increase, set not your heart thereon.” We are to labor; but we are not to be anxious about our existence. This the Master says here in our Gospel in plain and clear words, when he thus, concludes: “Be not anxious for your life, what ye

shall eat, or what ye shall drink: nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.”

[19] And he now uses a reasonable and natural form of speech, by which to close, that they are not to be anxious for the nourishment of their lives; for reason must conclude and yield that it is as Christ says, when he gives the ground and reason of his discourse by asking: “Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment!”

[20] As if he would say: You turn it just around, the food should serve your life and not your life the food. The same is true in respect to raiment; the clothing should serve the body, thus, the body serves the clothing. The world is so blind that it cannot see this.

[21] Now we must here have a high esteem for the words of the Lord. He says, “Be not anxious;” he does not say, Labor not. Anxiety is forbidden, but not labor; yea, it is commanded and made obligatory upon us to labor until the sweat rolls down our faces. It is not God’s pleasure for man to tramp around idly; therefore, he says to Adam in Genesis 3:19: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken.” And as Psalm 104:22-23 says: “The sun ariseth. man goeth forth unto his work and to his labor until the evening.” We are not to be anxious, this is forbidden; for we have a rich God who promises us food and clothing; for he knows what we lack, before we are concerned and begin to pray.

[22] Why then does he not give us what we need without our labor? Because it is thus, pleasing to him; he tells us to labor and then he gives it; not because of our work, but out of kindness and grace. This we see before our eyes; for although we labor every year in the field, yet God gives one year more than another. Therefore, we are fools, yea, we act contrary to God’s will, when we are worried as to how to scrape together gold and riches, since God gratuitously and richly promises that he will give us all and will abundantly provide for our every want.

[23] However, one may say: Does not St. Paul tell us to be diligent, as in Romans 12:8: “He that ruleth, with diligence,” and there immediately follows verse 11, “In diligence, not slothful?” In like manner to the Philippians 2:20, he says of Timothy: “For I have no man likeminded, who will care truly for your state.” And Paul himself in 2 Corinthians 11:28

boasts that anxiety for all the churches presses upon him. Here you see how' we are nevertheless to be anxious. Answer: Our life and a Christian character consist of two parts, of faith and of love. The first points us to God, the other to our neighbor. The first, namely faith, is not visible, God alone sees that; the other is visible, and is love, that we are to manifest to our neighbor. Now the anxiety that springs from love is commanded, but that which accompanies faith is forbidden. If I believe that I have a God, then I cannot be anxious about my welfare; for if I know that God cares for me as a father for his child, why should I fear? Why need I to be anxious, I simply say: Art thou my Father, then I know that no evil will befall me, as Psalm 16:8 says: "I have set Jehovah always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." Thus, he has all things in his hand; therefore, I shall want nothing, he will care for me. If I rush ahead and try to care for myself, that is always contrary to faith; therefore, God forbids this kind of anxiety. But it is his pleasure to maintain the anxious care of love, that we may help others, and share our possessions and gifts with them. Am I a ruler, I am to care for my subjects; am I a housefather, I must take care of the members of my family, and so forth, according as each one has received his gifts from God. God cares for all, and his is the care that pertains to faith. We are also to be interested in one another and this is the care of love, namely, when something is given to me, that I be diligent so that others may also receive it.

[24] Here we must be guarded, lest we make a gloss, instead of understanding simply the words as they read: Be not anxious for your life. God says: Labor, and if you accomplish nothing, I will give what is needed; does he give - then see that you rightly distribute it. Do not be anxious to get, but see to it that your domestics and others also receive of that which God has given to you, and that your domestics labor and receive a Christian training.

[25] Am I a preacher, my anxiety should not be where to receive what I am to preach; for if I have nothing I can give nothing. Christ says in Luke 21:15: "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to gainsay." But if I have that I ought to be anxious for others to receive it from me, and that I endeavor to impart it to them in the best form possible, to teach the ignorant, to admonish and restrain those who know it, rightly to comfort the oppressed consciences, to

awaken the negligent and sleepy, and put them on their guard, and the like, as St. Paul did (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1, Titus 3:1) and commanded his disciples Timothy and Titus to do. My anxiety should be how others are to receive something from me; but I am to study and pray to God. Studying is my labor, this is the work he desires me to do, and when it is his pleasure, he will give. It can indeed happen that I may study a long time and he gives nothing, a year or more, and when it is his pleasure, he gives as long as it is pleasing to him. Then he gives copiously and to overflowing, suddenly in an hour.

[26] Thus, a housefather also does, he attends only to that which is commanded him, and lets our Lord God arrange as to how he will give. When he gives, then one is concerned how to impart it to his family, and he sees that they have no need as to the body and the soul. This is what the Lord means, when he says we are not to be anxious for our food and raiment; but he certainly requires us to labor. For thou must be a long time behind the oven until something is given to thee if thou dost not till the soil and work. True it is, God can easily nourish thee without thy work, he could easily have roasted and boiled corn and wine grow on thy table; but he does not do it, it is his will that thou shouldst labor and in doing so to use thy reason.

[27] In like manner it is with preaching and all our affairs. God gives us the wool, that he grows on the sheep; but it is not at once cloth, we must labor and make it into cloth; when it is cloth, it does not at once become a coat, the tailor must first work with the cloth before it is a coat; and so God does with all things, he cares for us, but we must toil and work. We have plenty examples of this before our eyes, and God relates especially two here that should really make us blush with shame, namely, those of the birds and the lilies in the field. Pointing to the birds he says: "Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them."

[28] As if the Lord would say: You have never yet seen a bird with a sickle, with which it harvested and gathered into barns; yea, the birds do not labor like we; and still they are nourished. By this the Lord does not however teach that we are to be idle; but he tries by this example to take all anxiety from us. For a bird cannot do the work of a farmer as we do; yet, it is not free from labor, but it does the work for which it was created, namely,

it bears its young, feeds them and sings to our Lord God a little song for the privilege of doing this. Had God imposed more labor upon it, then it would have done more. Early in the morning it rises, sits upon a twig and sings a song it has learned, while it knows not where to obtain its food, and yet it is not worried as to where to get its breakfast. Later, when it is hungry, it flies away and seeks a grain of corn, where God stored one away for it, of which it never thought while singing, when it had cause enough to be anxious about its food. Ay, shame on you now, that the little birds are more pious and believing than you; they are happy and sing with joy and know not whether they have anything to eat.

[29] This parable is constantly taught to our great and burning shame, that we cannot do as much as the birds. A Christian should be ashamed before a little bird that knows an art it never acquired from a teacher. When in the spring of the year, while the birds sing the most beautifully, you say to one: How canst thou sing so joyfully, thou hast not yet any grain in thy barn! It would thus, mock you. It is a powerful example and should truly give offense to us and stir us to trust God more than we do. Therefore, he concludes with a penetrating passage, and asks: “Are not ye of much more value than they?”

[30] Is it not a great shame that the Lord makes and presents to us the birds as our teachers, that we should first learn from them? Shame on thee, thou loathsome, infamous unbelief! The birds do what they are required to do; but we not. In Genesis 1:28 we have a command that we are to be lords over all God’s creatures; and the birds are here our lords in teaching us wisdom. Away with godless unbelief! God makes us to be fools and places the birds before us, to be our teachers and rule us, in that they only point out how we serve mammon and forsake the true and faithful God. Now follows the other example of the flowers in the field, by which the Lord encourages us not to worry about our raiment; and it reads thus: “And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto the measure of his life? And why are ye anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?”

[31] As if to say, your life is not yours, nor is your body, you cannot make it one cubit longer or shorter; neither be anxious as to how you are to clothe yourself. Behold the flowers of the field how they are adorned and clothed, neither do they anything to that end; they neither spin nor work, yet they are beautifully clothed.

[32] By this illustration the Lord again does not wish to have us cease to sew and work, but we should labor, spin and sew, and not be overanxious and worry. The evil we have is our toil; will we in addition worry, then we do like the fools; for it is enough that each day has its own evil. It seems to me, this is disdain that is commanded, that the flowers stand there and make us blush and become our teachers. Thank you, flowers, you, who are to be devoured by the cows! God has exalted you very highly, that you become our masters and teachers. Shame, that this earth bears us! Is it an honor for us? I do not know. We must here confess that the most insignificant flower, that the cattle tread under foot, should become our teacher, are we not fine people? I think so. Now Christ places alongside of this the richest and most powerful king, Solomon, who was clothed in the most costly manner in purple and gold, whose glory was not to be compared with that of the flowers, 1 Kings 10:1. Is it not remarkable that the adornment of the flowers in the field should be esteemed higher than all the precious stones, gold and silver?

[33] However, we are so blind that we do not see what God designs thereby and what he means. The flower stands there that we should see it, it strikes us and says: If thou hadst the adornment of the whole world even then thou wouldst not be equal to me, who stand here, and am not the least worried whence this adornment comes to me. I do not however concern myself about that, here I stand alone and do nothing and although thou art beautifully adorned, thou art still sickly and servest impotent mammon; I however am fresh and beautiful and serve the true and righteous God. Behold, what a loathsome, vicious thing is unbelief!

[34] These are two fine and powerful examples of the birds and the lilies. The birds teach us a lesson as to our daily food; the flowers as to our raiment. And in the whole New Testament our shame is nowhere so disclosed and held to view, as just in this Gospel. But they are few who understand it. From these examples and parables the Lord now concludes and says: "Be not therefore, anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What

shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore, anxious for the morrow; for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

[35] Now the sum of this Gospel is: Christians should not worry about what they are to eat; God provides for them before they think of their need; but they are to labor, that is commanded them. But what the kingdom of God and his righteousness are, would require too much time to discuss, you have often heard about them, if you have been attentive. This is now enough on today’s Gospel. May God grant us grace that someday we may also even put it into practice! May the Gospel remain not only in our ears and on our tongues, but come into our hearts and break forth fresh into loving deeds!

Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. Incentive to Faith God Provides for Us.

Text: Matthew 6:24-34.

24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?
28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field,
how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:
29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not
arrayed like one of these.
30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to
morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of
little faith?
31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we
drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?
32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father
knoweth that ye have need of all these things.
33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all
these things shall be added unto you.
34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take
thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.
Matthew 6:24-34

[1] This Gospel is a part of the long sermon Christ delivered to his disciples on the mount, in which among other things he especially warned and admonished his disciples against the infamous vice of avarice and anxiety for daily bread, the legitimate fruit and proof of our unbelief. This does great harm in Christendom when it takes possession of those in the office of the ministry, who should be occupied by nothing except teaching the Word of God and faith aright, and chastising the error and sin of the world; or when it possesses these it should confess God's Words before all persons and be prepared to serve everybody for the sake of God, even if they be obliged on that account to lose their riches, honor, body and life.

[2] Christ wishes also to teach here how he desires to have his kingdom distinguished from the civil life and government, that he will not govern his Christendom upon earth so that it be conceived and vested as a government where Christians are first of all to be amply provided with temporal goods, riches and power, and who need not fear any need or danger; but he wishes to provide them with spiritual treasures and what their souls need, so that they may have his Word, the consolation of his grace, and the power and

strength of the Holy Spirit against sin and death unto everlasting life. Moreover whatever they need of temporal things for this life and the necessaries for present wants they are to expect also from him, and they are not to be terrified if they do not see this before their eyes and have it prepared for the future, and are tempted by want and need. On the other hand, they are to know that their God and Father will care for them and will surely give them all if they with firm faith are only anxious about and seek how they may continue faithful to his word and in his kingdom, and serve him there.

[3] Therefore, Christ makes a distinction in this sermon, by which he separates his Christians from the heathen and unbelievers. For he does not deliver this doctrine to the heathen as they do not accept it, but to those who are already Christians. He does not however consider those Christians, who only hear his word and can repeat it, like the nuns do the Psalter. In this way Satan also hears the Gospel and the Word of God, yea, he knows it better than we, and can preach it just as well as we, if he only wished to do so. But the Gospel is doctrine that is to be a living power and put into practice; it should strengthen and comfort the people and make us courageous and aggressive. Therefore, they who only hear the Gospel thus, so that they know and can speak about it, are not to be classed among Christians; but those who believe and do as the Gospel teaches are righteous. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other: or else he will hold to one and despise the other.”

[4] Now he, who tries to serve two masters, will do it in a way that cannot be called serving at all; for it will certainly be as the Lord here says. One can indeed compel a servant to do a certain work against his will and he may grieve while doing it; but no one can compel him to do it cheerfully, and mean it from the bottom of his heart. He of course does the work as long as his master is present, but when he is absent, he hurries away from his task, and does nothing well. Hence the Lord desires our service to be done out of love and cheerfully, and where it is not done thus, it is no service to him: for even people are not pleased when one does anything for them unwillingly. This is natural, and we experience daily that it is so. Now, if it be the case among human beings that no one can serve two masters, how much more is it true in the service of God, that our service cannot be

divided; but it must be done unto God alone, willingly and from the heart; hence the Lord adds: “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

[5] God cannot allow us to have another Lord besides himself. He is a jealous God, as he says, and cannot suffer us to serve him and his enemy. We find very few, who do not sin against the Gospel. The Lord passes a severe judgment and it is terrible to hear, that he should say this of us; and yet no one will confess, yea, no one will suffer it to be said that we hate and despise God, and that we are his enemies. There is no one, when asked if he loves God and cleaves to him, who would not reply: Dost thou take me to be such a desperate character as to be an enemy of God? But see how the text here closes, that we all hate and despise God, and love and cleave to mammon. For it is impossible that he, who loves gold and riches and cleaves to them, should not hate God. Christ here holds the two opposed to one another and as enemies, and says: If you love one of these two and cleave to the same, then you must hate and despise the other. However well a man may live here upon the earth, if he clings to riches it cannot be otherwise than that he must hate God. And whoever does not trust in gold and worldly riches, loves God. This is certain. 6-36. “Be not therefore, anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For alter all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”

[The following paragraphs 4-36 are the same as in the previous sermon.]

[4] God cannot allow us to have another Lord besides himself. He is a jealous God, as he says, and cannot suffer us to serve him and his enemy. Only mine, he says, or not at all. Behold now how beautifully Christ here introduces the example: “No man,” he says, “can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” As if to say: as it is here in man’s relations to his fellows, so it is also before God.

[5] We find very few, who do not sin against the Gospel. The Lord passes a severe judgment and it is terrible to hear that he should say this of us, and yet no one will confess, yea, no one will suffer it to be said that we hate and despise God and that we are his enemies. There is no one, when asked if he loves God and cleaves to him would not reply, yes, I love God.

But see how the text closes, that we all hate and despise God, and love mammon and cleave to it. But God suffers us to do this until his time; he watches the time and some day he will strike into our midst with all violence, before we can turn around. It is impossible for one, who loves gold and earthly possessions and cleaves to them, not to hate God. For God here contrasts these two as enemies to one another, and concludes, if you love and cleave to one of these two, then you must hate and despise the other. Therefore, however nicely and genteelly one lives here upon earth and cleaves to riches, it cannot be otherwise than that he must hate God; and on the other hand, whoever does not cleave to gold and worldly goods, loves God. This is certainly true.

[6] But who are they that love God, and cleave not to gold and worldly possessions? Take a good look at the whole world, also the Christians, and see if they despise gold and riches. It requires an effort to hear the Gospel and to live according to it. God be praised, we have the Gospel; that no one can deny, but what do we do with it? We are concerned only about learning and knowing it, and nothing more; we think it is enough to know it, and do not care whether we ever live according to it. However, on the other hand, one is very anxious when he leaves lying in the window or in the room a dollar or two, yea, even a dime, then he worries and fears lest the money be stolen; but the same person can do without the Gospel through a whole year. And such characters still wish to be considered as Evangelical.

[7] Here we see what and who we are. If we were Christians, we would despise riches and be concerned about the Gospel, that we someday might live in it and prove it by our deeds. We see few such Christians; therefore, we must hear the judgment that we are despisers of God and hate God for the sake of riches and worldly possessions. Alas! That is fine praise. We should be ashamed of ourselves in our inmost souls; there is no hope for us! What a fine condition we are in now! That means, I think, our names are blotted out. What spoiled children we are!

[8] Now the world cannot conceal its unbelief in its coarse, outward sins, for I see it loves a dollar more than Christ; more than all the Apostles, even if they themselves were present and preached to it. I can hear the Gospel daily, but it does not profit me every day; it may indeed happen, if I have heard it a whole year, the Holy Spirit may have been given to me only one hour. Now when I enjoyed this hour I obtained not only five hundred

dollars, but also the riches of the whole world; for what have I not, when I have the Gospel? I received God, who made the silver and the gold, and all that is upon the earth; for I acquired the Spirit by which I know that I will be kept by him forever; that is much more than if I had the church full of money. Examine now and see, if our heart is not a rogue, full of wickedness and unbelief. If I were a true Christian, I would say. The hour the Gospel is received, there comes to me a hundred thousand dollars, and much more. For if I possess this treasure, I have all that is in heaven and upon earth. But one must serve this treasure only, for no man can serve God and mammon. Either you must love God and hate money; or you must hate God and love money; this and nothing more.

[9] The master uses here the Hebrew, which we do not. "Mammon" means goods or riches, and such goods as one does not need, but holds as a treasure, and it is gold and possessions that one deposits as stock and storage provisions. This Christians do not do, they gather no treasures; but they ask God for their daily bread. However, others are not satisfied with this, they gather a great store upon which they may depend, in case our God should die today or tomorrow, they might then know a way out. Therefore, St. Paul says, in Ephesians 5: 5 and Colossians 3:5, riches and covetousness are the god of this world and are idolatry, with this Christ here agrees and calls it serving mammon.

[10] Now, how does it come that the Gospel and St. Paul call especially covetousness and not other sins idolatry; since uncleanness, fornication, lust, base desires, unchastity and other vices are more opposed to God? It is done to our great shame, because gold is our god, that we serve, in that we trust and rely upon it, and it can neither sustain nor save us, yea, it can neither stand nor walk, it neither hears nor sees, it has no strength nor power, with it there is neither comfort nor help. For if one had the riches of the whole world, he would not be secure for one moment before death.

[11] Of what help are his great treasures and riches to the Emperor when the hour of death arrives and he is called to die? They are a shameful, loathsome, powerless god, that cannot cure a sore, yea, it cannot keep and take care of itself, there it lies in the chest, and lets its devotees wait, yea, one must watch it as a helpless, powerless, weak thing. The lord who has this god must watch day and night lest thieves steal it; this helpless god can aid no one. You should have contempt for this lifeless god that cannot help

in the least, and is yet so scrupulous and precious; it lets its devotees wait in the grandest style and protects itself with strong chests and castles, its lord must wait and be in anxiety every hour, lest it perishes by fire or otherwise experiences some misfortune. Does this treasure or god consist in clothing, then one must be careful and on his guard against the smallest little insects, against the moth, lest they ruin or devour it.

[12] The walls of our rooms should spit upon us in contempt that we trust more in the god the moth eat and the rust corrupt, than in the God, who creates and gives all things, yea, who holds in his hand heaven and earth, and all that in them is. Is it not a foolish thing on the part of the world to turn from the true God and trust in base and low mammon, in the poor, miserable god, who cannot protect himself against rust. Oh, what a disgraceful thing this is on the part of the world! God visits gold and worldly possessions with many kinds of enemies, to bring us to see and confess our unbelief and godless character, that we thus, trust in a powerless and frail god, we who could at once so easily approach and cleave to the true, powerful and strong God, who gives us everything, money, goods, fruit and all we need; yet we are so foolish and make gods out of his gifts. Shame on thee, thou cursed unbelief.

[13] Other sins give us a little pleasure, we receive some enjoyment from them, as in the case of eating and drinking; in unchastity one has pleasure for a little while; likewise anger satisfies its desire, and other vices more so. Only in this vice one must incessantly be in slavery, hounded and martyred, and in it no one has any pleasure or joy whatever. There the money lies on a pile and commands you to serve it; in spite of it letting anyone draw from it a thimble full of wine there comes rust and devours it, and yet he dares not attack it, lest he angers his god. And when his servants have protected their god a long time they have no more than any poor beggar. I have nothing, yet I eat and drink as heartily as anyone who has a large supply of mammon. When he dies he takes just as much along with him as I do. And it is certainly the case that these people never live as well nor as richly as the poor people often do. Who arranges this thus,? God, the Lord, does it. Here some have a certain affliction of the body that they have no appetite; there others are internally unsound and never relish what they eat; here their stomach is out of order; there their lungs and liver are diseased; here is this, and there is that sickness; here they are weak and

afflicted at one point, there at another, and they never have an enjoyable hour to relish what they eat or drink.

[14] Thus, it is with those who serve this god, mammon. The true God is still of some use, he serves the people, but mammon does not, it lies quiet and lets others serve it. And for this reason the New Testament calls covetousness idolatry, since it thus, desires to be served. However, to love and not to enjoy may well vex the devil. This all now experience who love the god, mammon, and serve him. Whoever has now no sense of shame and does not turn red, has a brazen face.

[15] Thus, now it is with the word, “serve.” For it is not forbidden to have money and possessions, as we cannot get along without them. Abraham, Lot, David, Solomon and others had great possessions and much gold, and at the present day there are many wealthy persons who are pious, in spite of their riches. But it is one thing to have possessions and another to serve them; to have mammon, and to make a god out of it. Job also was wealthy, he had great possessions and was more powerful than all who lived in the East, as we read in the first part of the book of Job: yet he says, in Job 31:24-25: “If I have made gold my hope, and said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; have I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gotten much?”

[16] The sum of all is, it is God’s will that we serve not gold and riches, and that we be not overanxious for our life; but that we labor and commend our anxiety to him. Whoever possesses riches is lord of the riches. Whoever serves them, is their slave and does not possess them, but they possess him; for he dare not make use of them when he desires, and cannot serve others with them; yea, he is not bold enough to dare to touch it. However, is he lord over his riches, then they serve him, and he does not serve them; then he teaches in 1 Corinthians 7:32. Hence he aids the poor with his wealth and gives to those who have nothing. When he sees a person without a coat, he says to his money: Go out, Messrs. Dollars, there is a poor, naked man, who has no coat, you must be of service to him! There lies one sick, who has no medicine. Go forth, Squires Anneberger and Joachinesthaler, you must hasten and help him! Those, who act thus, with their riches, are their lords; and all true Christians surely do this. But those who save piles of money, and ever scheme to make their heap larger instead of smaller, are servants and slaves of mammon.

[17] He is a lord of mammon who lays hold of and uses it for the sake of those who need it and lets God rule, who says in Luke 6:38. Give, and it shall be given unto you; have you nothing more, you surely have me still, and I have still enough, yea, I have more than I have given away and more than can ever be given away. We see here and there many pious poor people only for the purpose that the wealthy may help and serve them with their riches. If you do it not, you have the sure proof that you hate God. He, whom the sentence does not terrify, that he will hear on the day of judgment, can be moved by nothing. For he will hear then from God: Behold, thou hast hated me and loved that which could not protect itself against rust and moth. Ay, how firmly you will then stand!

[18] Hence the sense is, we must own some possessions, but are not to cleave to them with our hearts; as Psalm 62:10 says: "If riches increase, set not your heart thereon." We are to labor; but we are not to be anxious about our existence. This the Master says here in our Gospel in plain and clear words, when he thus, concludes: "Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink: nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on."

[19] And he now uses a reasonable and natural form of speech, by which to close, that they are not to be anxious for the nourishment of their lives; for reason must conclude and yield that it is as Christ says, when he gives the ground and reason of his discourse by asking: "Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment!"

[20] As if he would say: You turn it just around, the food should serve your life and not your life the food. The same is true in respect to raiment; the clothing should serve the body, thus, the body serves the clothing. The world is so blind that it cannot see this.

[21] Now we must here have a high esteem for the words of the Lord. He says, "Be not anxious;" he does not say, Labor not. Anxiety is forbidden, but not labor; yea, it is commanded and made obligatory upon us to labor until the sweat rolls down our faces. It is not God's pleasure for man to tramp around idly; therefore, he says to Adam in Genesis 3:19: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken." And as Psalm 104:22-23 says: "The sun ariseth. man goeth forth unto his work and to his labor until the evening."

We are not to be anxious, this is forbidden; for we have a rich God who promises us food and clothing; for he knows what we lack, before we are concerned and begin to pray.

[22] Why then does he not give us what we need without our labor? Because it is thus, pleasing to him; he tells us to labor and then he gives it; not because of our work, but out of kindness and grace. This we see before our eyes; for although we labor every year in the field, yet God gives one year more than another. Therefore, we are fools, yea, we act contrary to God's will, when we are worried as to how to scrape together gold and riches, since God gratuitously and richly promises that he will give us all and will abundantly provide for our every want.

[23] However, one may say: Does not St. Paul tell us to be diligent, as in Romans 12:8: "He that ruleth, with diligence," and there immediately follows verse 11, "In diligence, not slothful?" In like manner to the Philippians 2:20, he says of Timothy: "For I have no man likeminded, who will care truly for your state." And Paul himself in 2 Corinthians 11:28 boasts that anxiety for all the churches presses upon him. Here you see how' we are nevertheless to be anxious. Answer: Our life and a Christian character consist of two parts, of faith and of love. The first points us to God, the other to our neighbor. The first, namely faith, is not visible, God alone sees that; the other is visible, and is love, that we are to manifest to our neighbor. Now the anxiety that springs from love is commanded, but that which accompanies faith is forbidden. If I believe that I have a God, then I cannot be anxious about my welfare; for if I know that God cares for me as a father for his child, why should I fear? Why need I to be anxious, I simply say: Art thou my Father, then I know that no evil will befall me, as Psalm 16:8 says: "I have set Jehovah always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." Thus, he has all things in his hand; therefore, I shall want nothing, he will care for me. If I rush ahead and try to care for myself, that is always contrary to faith; therefore, God forbids this kind of anxiety. But it is his pleasure to maintain the anxious care of love, that we may help others, and share our possessions and gifts with them. Am I a ruler, I am to care for my subjects; am I a housefather, I must take care of the members of my family, and so forth, according as each one has received his gifts from God. God cares for all, and his is the care that pertains to faith. We are also to be interested in one another and this is the

care of love, namely, when something is given to me, that I be diligent so that others may also receive it.

[24] Here we must be guarded, lest we make a gloss, instead of understanding simply the words as they read: Be not anxious for your life. God says: Labor, and if you accomplish nothing, I will give what is needed; does he give - then see that you rightly distribute it. Do not be anxious to get, but see to it that your domestics and others also receive of that which God has given to you, and that your domestics labor and receive a Christian training.

[25] Am I a preacher, my anxiety should not be where to receive what I am to preach; for if I have nothing I can give nothing. Christ says in Luke 21:15: "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to gainsay." But if I have that I ought to be anxious for others to receive it from me, and that I endeavor to impart it to them in the best form possible, to teach the ignorant, to admonish and restrain those who know it, rightly to comfort the oppressed consciences, to awaken the negligent and sleepy, and put them on their guard, and the like, as St. Paul did (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1, Titus 3:1) and commanded his disciples Timothy and Titus to do. My anxiety should be how others are to receive something from me; but I am to study and pray to God. Studying is my labor, this is the work he desires me to do, and when it is his pleasure, he will give. It can indeed happen that I may study a long time and he gives nothing, a year or more, and when it is his pleasure, he gives as long as it is pleasing to him. Then he gives copiously and to overflowing, suddenly in an hour.

[26] Thus, a housefather also does, he attends only to that which is commanded him, and lets our Lord God arrange as to how he will give. When he gives, then one is concerned how to impart it to his family, and he sees that they have no need as to the body and the soul. This is what the Lord means, when he says we are not to be anxious for our food and raiment; but he certainly requires us to labor. For thou must be a long time behind the oven until something is given to thee if thou dost not till the soil and work. True it is, God can easily nourish thee without thy work, he could easily have roasted and boiled corn and wine grow on thy table; but he does not do it, it is his will that thou shouldst labor and in doing so to use thy reason.

[27] In like manner it is with preaching and all our affairs. God gives us the wool, that he grows on the sheep; but it is not at once cloth, we must labor and make it into cloth; when it is cloth, it does not at once become a coat, the tailor must first work with the cloth before it is a coat; and so God does with all things, he cares for us, but we must toil and work. We have plenty examples of this before our eyes, and God relates especially two here that should really make us blush with shame, namely, those of the birds and the lilies in the field. Pointing to the birds he says: “Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them.”

[28] As if the Lord would say: You have never yet seen a bird with a sickle, with which it harvested and gathered into barns; yea, the birds do not labor like we; and still they are nourished. By this the Lord does not however teach that we are to be idle; but he tries by this example to take all anxiety from us. For a bird cannot do the work of a farmer as we do; yet, it is not free from labor, but it does the work for which it was created, namely, it bears its young, feeds them and sings to our Lord God a little song for the privilege of doing this. Had God imposed more labor upon it, then it would have done more. Early in the morning it rises, sits upon a twig and sings a song it has learned, while it knows not where to obtain its food, and yet it is not worried as to where to get its breakfast. Later, when it is hungry, it flies away and seeks a grain of corn, where God stored one away for it, of which it never thought while singing, when it had cause enough to be anxious about its food. Ay, shame on you now, that the little birds are more pious and believing than you; they are happy and sing with joy and know not whether they have anything to eat.

[29] This parable is constantly taught to our great and burning shame, that we cannot do as much as the birds. A Christian should be ashamed before a little bird that knows an art it never acquired from a teacher. When in the spring of the year, while the birds sing the most beautifully, you say to one: How canst thou sing so joyfully, thou hast not yet any grain in thy barn! It would thus, mock you. It is a powerful example and should truly give offense to us and stir us to trust God more than we do. Therefore, he concludes with a penetrating passage, and asks: “Are not ye of much more value than they?”

[30] Is it not a great shame that the Lord makes and presents to us the birds as our teachers, that we should first learn from them? Shame on thee, thou loathsome, infamous unbelief! The birds do what they are required to do; but we not. In Genesis 1:28 we have a command that we are to be lords over all God's creatures; and the birds are here our lords in teaching us wisdom. Away with godless unbelief! God makes us to be fools and places the birds before us, to be our teachers and rule us, in that they only point out how we serve mammon and forsake the true and faithful God. Now follows the other example of the flowers in the field, by which the Lord encourages us not to worry about our raiment; and it reads thus: "And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto the measure of his life? And why are ye anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

[31] As if to say, your life is not yours, nor is your body, you cannot make it one cubit longer or shorter; neither be anxious as to how you are to clothe yourself. Behold the flowers of the field how they are adorned and clothed, neither do they anything to that end; they neither spin nor work, yet they are beautifully clothed.

[32] By this illustration the Lord again does not wish to have us cease to sew and work, but we should labor, spin and sew, and not be overanxious and worry. The evil we have is our toil; will we in addition worry, then we do like the fools; for it is enough that each day has its own evil. It seems to me, this is disdain that is commanded, that the flowers stand there and make us blush and become our teachers. Thank you, flowers, you, who are to be devoured by the cows! God has exalted you very highly, that you become our masters and teachers. Shame, that this earth bears us! Is it an honor for us? I do not know. We must here confess that the most insignificant flower, that the cattle tread under foot, should become our teacher, are we not fine people? I think so. Now Christ places alongside of this the richest and most powerful king, Solomon, who was clothed in the most costly manner in purple and gold, whose glory was not to be compared with that of the flowers, 1 Kings 10:1. Is it not remarkable that the adornment of the flowers

in the field should be esteemed higher than all the precious stones, gold and silver?

[33] However, we are so blind that we do not see what God designs thereby and what he means. The flower stands there that we should see it, it strikes us and says: If thou hadst the adornment of the whole world even then thou wouldst not be equal to me, who stand here, and am not the least worried whence this adornment comes to me. I do not however concern myself about that, here I stand alone and do nothing and although thou art beautifully adorned, thou art still sickly and servest impotent mammon; I however am fresh and beautiful and serve the true and righteous God. Behold, what a loathsome, vicious thing is unbelief!

[34] These are two fine and powerful examples of the birds and the lilies. The birds teach us a lesson as to our daily food; the flowers as to our raiment. And in the whole New Testament our shame is nowhere so disclosed and held to view, as just in this Gospel. But they are few who understand it. From these examples and parables the Lord now concludes and says: “Be not therefore, anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore, anxious for the morrow; for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

[35] Now the sum of this Gospel is: Christians should not worry about what they are to eat; God provides for them before they think of their need; but they are to labor, that is commanded them. But what the kingdom of God and his righteousness are, would require too much time to discuss, you have often heard about them, if you have been attentive. This is now enough on today's Gospel. May God grant us grace that someday we may also even put it into practice! May the Gospel remain not only in our ears and on our tongues, but come into our hearts and break forth fresh into loving deeds!

[37] As I said at the beginning Christ delivered this sermon to his Christians, especially to those in the office of the ministry or to those who otherwise either had nothing or never could acquire and gather for

themselves riches and mammon, as the rest of the world does; in order that they might know from what source they could nourish and support themselves and their families. Yea, they are compelled to live in the danger of being robbed of the little earthly goods God gave them and thus, they are without the least doubt compelled to live entirely upon the help that God sends them and they expect from him, since the world gives them nothing.

[38] This is indeed painful to flesh and blood, and is very burdensome to them, yea, no one can bear or do it, unless he is a believing Christian. For the world is so disposed that it will not take the least risk in temporal matters for the future; but it must be sure of them, order beforehand and have in store and ready for use whatever it needs, as food, peace, protection and insurance, so that it can live and depend upon neither God nor the people; but as it is evident that the world enriches no one because of his faith and piety, they think they must act and live as others do, in order that they may nevertheless have also something.

[39] Against this he herewith comforts and strengthens his Christians, and again repeats: They shall therefore, not worry nor doubt nor wriggle in such unbelief, saying: Oh, what is to become of us? Who is going to give us anything? Where in this world are we Christians to get food, protection, peace? But they must know that their heavenly Father provides for this, and will also give it to them, he who for this very reason is called their Father (not the unbelievers', although he feeds all the world, and gives everything), in order to show that he will also not leave his children, he leads them into God's high work of the whole creation, that they may see how he nourishes and supports all things which he creates, after having ordered and regulated each one, — also all the birds in the air, which, as you know, do not fret about their food nor know beforehand whither they shall take it. Aye, especially also the little flowers does he so deck and adorn that such beauty and finery might more fittingly be supplied elsewhere; for does it not seem quite useless, since they only bloom for perchance a day? Must he not therefore, much more think and care for his Christians, how they may be fed and clad, and where they might dwell and stay as long as they have to live on earth?

[40] This he admonishes them to believe; and to impress them most strongly with it, not by many but by earnest words, he suddenly breaks off after having held up to them the examples from daily life and God's work

among his Creatures; and closes with these words: Shall he not much more do such things for you, O ye of little faith? He wishes to say: Well, you ought to be ashamed of yourselves, if you are Christians and know that you have a Father in heaven, to let me do so much preaching about this! Yes, ashamed you ought to be, and not permit that such things be said of you. But must I not say it, that ye are so small and have so little faith, and that ye so little confide without doubt and care in the living God, who gives you his Word and promise and has chosen you as his children — that he would nourish and support your body and life? How then will ye stand without shame and disgrace, not alone before God but before all his creatures, if that is to be said of you, and you yourselves by your own confession must testify that you, having so plentifully God's word and grace, so little trust him with caring for your miserable maggot-sack and stinking belly?

[41] Still more strongly does he speak to them by saying: "After all these things do the Gentiles seek" etc. This ought surely to deter a Christian, when he hears the public and terrible verdict spoken that those who worry and hanker after mammon are heathen, that is, people who really have no God; who, instead of God, serve mammon, in which there is only God's name and naught but lies and vanity; who therefore, are wholly cut off from God, deprived of all divine knowledge, comfort, grace and bliss. These are none other than the most miserable, most unfortunate, condemned people, who have never any salvation or comfort to hope for.

[42] Here you see the world pictured, what sort of a thing it is, namely the big, mighty crowd — excepting a very few Christians — who, as soon as they have grown up, turn altogether away from God and serve mammon, the god of lies. Him do they hold as the great, aye, the only god, because the crowd that follows him is so great; nevertheless he is nothing, a mere powerless name. So a Christian should truly be horrified and shocked, when thinking of such blindness and misery of the world; he should - with sighs and tears - strive and work for it to be far removed from such shameful practices, and run from it, as run he can, as it were out of a fire, aye, out of the midst of hell.

[43] Thirdly, in order in the most loving and comforting way to entice us to believe he again says: "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." Is he not your father, and only your father — not the birds', the geese' or ducks', nor the godless heathens' father! Then trust

him to be so loving that he will as a father care for you and neither forget nor leave you; aye, that he has long before known what he should give you, and has provided therefor ere you yourselves think of it or feel your wants. For who but he has before known or thought what you would be or need, ere you were born into this world? Therefore, honor him so far as to believe that he sees and knows such things and, knowing them, will act with you as a father. “But seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

[44] That is the chief passage in this sermon, and states the right rule and manner how we are to proceed in order to get both the divine or eternal gift, and what we need for this life. Would you rightly and well take care whereof it behooves you to take care, then let this be the first, aye, indeed, your only care, that you strive according to God’s Word to do your duty, to serve him in his kingdom as his Word teaches you — for in this consists the righteousness belonging to this kingdom — and to prize this more highly than all pertaining unto this temporal life. If you do this you have done and provided well and need not take any further burdens upon you nor cherish any cares in your heart; indeed, it should be much too small a thing for you to care for so slight a matter as the wants of your belly, and therefore, to aggrieve yourselves. Rather do this for the honor of God, and furthermore for your own use and benefit, that you strive after the great and eternal good; which if you attain and keep, the rest will surely take care of itself. Neither can you in any better way arrive at obtaining it from God, than in this wise that you first seek and ask of him the great things.

[45] For this is to his liking, that we ask great things of him, and that he be able to give great and many things. And for the reason that he gladly gives great things, he will also not stint the small things, but throw them to boot into the bargain. This God has constantly caused many pious people to experience, who, following this rule and precept, have striven to help in building God’s kingdom, have served the church, furthered God’s Word, and given thereto of their means. He then on the other hand has richly blessed them with goods, honor, etc. This is evidenced by the old examples not only of the Scriptures, but also by the history of some of our pious kings and princes, who, first having given plentifully for parishes and pulpits, for the support of the holy ministry and for schools, have thereby not become

poorer, but were much more richly blessed and endowed by God, so that they have reigned in good peace, with victory and good fortune.

[46] This he would gladly still do, if the world could or would haply for its own good follow the well-meant advice which he here gives, and not with unbelief, greed and unchristianlike scheming rage against his Word, to its own harm and ruin. So must he turn this Word with her and prove the contrary; that he who will not strive after God's kingdom and his righteousness, but despises the same and reckons to provide for himself, against God's will, by means of his own wisdom and plotting, must be deprived both of the eternal and of the temporal, and either not obtain the temporal or at least not be satisfied and happy with it. "Be not therefore, anxious for the morrow; for the morrow will be anxious for itself Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

[47] The world is always anxious about the future, and therewith thinks to assure its fate and to bring this much about that it may be removed from danger, protect and support itself. They see not the vanity thereof, and that their projects go wrong; that it be true, and experience testifies, as Christ here says, that each day brings its own misfortune and evil. Thus, it comes to pass that, with such plottings and prudence of their own, whereby they mean to ensure themselves and to forestall all coming danger, the world only causes the more woe and harm. For whenever they see that things do not go as they expected, or that an accident happens, then they begin to despond, think of one remedy and another, and imagine they must, wherever and as best they can, look for help, protection and safety; thus, they patch for themselves and think to help matters by all sorts of strange craftiness and practices, whereunto they are driven by unbelief, against God and their conscience, thus, to carry out what they have in mind, albeit they see that God does not prosper such things. Hence springs so much misfortune, misery, murder, war, and all mischief and misdoing of the wicked world. Each one means to carry out his affairs without God, to oppress and choke whosoever would hinder him, and rather to throw all things higgledy-piggledy on a heap than to desist from his mind. Thereby in all affairs and governments all good things perish and naught but evil grows; as all history and daily experience more than amply show.

[48] Against this Christ would caution his believers, that they may not waver nor stake their affairs on that which is uncertain, vainly caring for the

future, but at all times and daily do that which is right; that they may not worry how things will come out, nor permit themselves to be swerved by future and uncertain good or evil things; but rather commend care to God, and then take everything that occurs to them in good part and overcome it with faith and patience. For it cannot be on earth otherwise than that each one daily in his office, estate and calling meet with other things than he gladly welcomes, which causes him much trouble and labor. Hence does also Christ call this life daily evil or misfortune, that is to say, all sorts of misfortune, resistance, hindrance; that we may know it and be prepared for it, so as not to be frightened by any of them from doing good, neither yet to hanker after the world and become partakers in its unrighteous and evil affairs, — thereby leading ourselves and others into ruin and damnation.

Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity. The Son of the Widow of Nain Raised from the Dead.

Text: Luke 7:11-17.

11 And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people.

12 Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.

13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.

14 And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.

15 And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.

16 And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people.

17 And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about. Luke 7:11-17.

[1] In this Gospel you see how the Evangelist again presents to us a divine miracle, by which he desires to move us to lift our hearts to God, in which is the same state of things as at the time existed in this woman; for today's lesson was not written for the sake of this widow, but for the instruction and help of all who should hear this Gospel until the end of the world, among whom we also have been reckoned.

[2] In the first place, notice what lovingkindness and grace were shown to this woman by Christ. We must truly confess she did not merit them; for she is going out of the city with her friends, where there is nothing but crying and weeping. The good woman thought of nothing as little as that she should again lead back her son into the city alive, and for this reason she does not desire it, nor does she ask it, much less has she deserved it. She never thought of such a thing that Christ should come hither; yea, she did not at the time know Christ, nor did she know anything of his helping the people. Here all merit and preparations for meeting him are out of the question.

[3] Now all this has been written to the end that just as here this deed of mercy befell this widow freely and entirely of grace, only because it solicited Christ's sympathy, so from this we can draw the general rule that applies to all the merciful deeds of God, that they all overtake us without our merits, even before we seek them. He lays the foundation and makes the beginning. But why does he pity us? In this way it continues to be the grace of God. Otherwise, if we deserved it, it would not be grace. And if it be of grace, then we can say to him: Thou art a gracious God, thou doest good also to them who deserve it not.

[4] This sermon seems easy to us, but where are they who mean it with their heart? If we believed that everything comes to us from God's grace and mercy, we would daily run and rejoice, our hearts would continually rise and dwell in heaven. When we once get to heaven we will see that this is true. Now no one believes it. The god of this world, the devil, has such great power on earth that we do not see the work of God nor know it. 2 Corinthians 4:4 Therefore, we do not appreciate it, we misuse God's mercies, and are entirely unthankful to him.

[5] If I only kept in mind that he gave me eyes, truly a very great treasure, it would be no wonder if shame caused my death, because of my ingratitude in that I never yet thanked him for the blessing of sight. But we do not see his noble treasures and gifts; they are too common. But when a blind babe happens to be born, then we see what a painful thing the lack of sight is, and what a precious thing even one eye is, and what a divine blessing a healthy, bright countenance is: it serves us during our whole life, and without it one would rather be dead; and yet no one thanks God for it. Examine the entire body, and you will everywhere see traces of God's grace

and goodness. Hence Psalm 33: says: “The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.” He had pure eyes and could see far, that the whole world was full of the goodness and loving-kindness of God. From whom, however, has this goodness come? Have we deserved it? No, but it pleased God to cast his gifts thus, promiscuously into the world, which the unthankful receive almost as freely as the thankful. We are grieved when we are obliged to throw away one or two dollars, or less, or even to give them to the poor; how much does God daily cast away of his goods into the world and no one thanks him for anything? Yes, who even acknowledges their receipt?

[6] Thus, we may observe all creatures and become convinced of God’s goodness in them. Christ says in Matthew 5:5: “He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” As though he would say: I give it to the whole crowd; but who thanks me a single time for it? He enlightens my and your eyes, but no one acknowledges that it is God’s blessing. If some morning the sun should not rise, or rise three hours late, what distress and loss would that cause? How we would open our mouths and eyes? Then everyone would say: God be praised and thanked, who has given us such a light! But since it occurs daily, that the sun rises and shines at the appointed time, no one considers it a blessing. So it is with the rain from heaven, with the grain in the field and with all God’s creatures. They exist in such abundance, and we are daily so overwhelmed by their abundance that we fail to see them.

[7] At times God permits some man to fall into anxiety and need, into pain and distress, so that the world seems as though it had no God, and it makes a person blind, lame, dropsical, and lets anyone die, as here the widow’s son; for they are his creatures, he can do with them what he will. Now, why does he do this? He does it in such an abundance only that we may continually experience his lovingkindness. Therefore, as the disciples in John 9: asked the Lord concerning the man blind from his birth, whether he or his parents sinned, the Lord answered and said: “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” As though he would say: God desires to be praised in this blind person, for he sees that the treasures of the whole world do not move us, wherefore he floods us with his goodness out of pure grace, that he may present a blind person before our eyes, for us to see what a costly treasure we have in the blessing of our sight, although we cannot recognize his grace

and kindness in our fortune, that we at least might know and identify them then in our misfortune. Therefore, this man had to be blind in order that the others might know themselves, and say: Alas thou good God, what a precious gift I have, what a good thing a healthy body is and a bright countenance! But no one takes it to heart! Yea, it is true we say: have not the cows eyes also! Now, if you were blind you would of course feel the loss, which you do not now feel, because you are well and over-showered with God's blessings.

[8] So it was in the case of this widow, in whom God lets himself be known, as to what kind of a God he is, what he thinks of us, and what we must think of him. This woman has two misfortunes around her neck. First, she is a widow. This is misfortune enough for one woman, that she is forsaken and alone, and has no one to whom she dare look for comfort. And therefore, God in the Scriptures is often mentioned as the Father of the widow and orphans, as in Psalm 68:6 and Psalm 146:9: "God setteth the solitary in families. The Lord preserveth the strangers and orphans, he delivers the widow." Again: she has an only son about to die, who should have been her comfort. Now, God comes and takes away her husband and son. She had much better have lost house and home, yes, her own life, than her son and husband. But the Lord turns it around. While the husband lived the woman did not appreciate what a blessing a husband was; but when he died she first became aware of it. When he lived, she thought: O, other women have husbands, too! And thought her husband was like other husbands. But afterwards when he was dead, she became aware what kind of a man she had lost. So, too, when her son was bright and well, she did not appreciate the blessing of God, but as soon as he died, she then first saw what a treasure she had lost. Before she did not desire to spend on him; but now, since he is dead, she spends all she has and even herself upon him. And thus, it is also with us. There are many of you who do not expend ten dollars that your child may be reared better; if the child dies the parents wish and say: O would to God he were alive, I would give many hundred dollars! Why did you not give something before that he might have learned a little? What is the reason you do not appreciate the grace and blessings of God? In short, the world remains world, and it will not change into anything else.

[9] Now, the woman went ahead and did not know what God had given her; but she was soon obliged to experience it. For before she turns around, and she thinks she is the safest, God comes, tries the wife a little and teaches her certain things, takes her husband and her son. This all has been written for us that we might have an example and learn to acknowledge God when he blesses us with a healthy body, a bright countenance, and bestows upon us other blessings. He does not give them to the end that you should rejoice in them; but that you may know what to think of him. When he takes a member out of your family, permits your wife to die, or destroys one of your eyes, all this is done that you may see what you have enjoyed from him.

[10] And this is now the common teaching through all the Gospels, that we may see what kind of a God we have. It is also shown us here in this Gospel that God will forsake no one; therefore, he permits the wife to see in a new light what kind of a God she has. For when she was forsaken and had neither son nor husband, then Christ manifests himself to her and says: Learn to believe, trust God, know him to whom death and life are alike: have a good heart, be of good courage, weep not, there is no need of it. He then goes and awakens the dead, and gives him again to his mother.

[11] This and like miracles God does that the heart may learn how it should be disposed to him and what it may expect from him. As now this wife was fully convinced that there was no hope for her son, that it was impossible for her to receive him back alive again; yea, if one had said to her: Before an hour your son will be alive again, she would have regarded it as impossible and said: It is more possible for the heavens to fall than for my son to live again. Behold, here comes God before she looks around, and does what she never dared to ask of him, as it is impossible, and he restores her son alive to her again. But why does God do this? He permits man to fall so deeply into danger and anxiety, until no help or advice is within reach, and still he desires that we should not doubt, but trust in him who out of an impossible thing can make something possible, and make something out of nothing. If you are so deep in sin that your heart denies you all grace and the mercy of God and makes you think there is no hope for you, as many consciences are ensnared by such anxiety and distress; then turn about and look here how friendly and graciously God allows himself to be pictured by Christ in this Gospel; that you may observe that he means it

well with you from his heart; and that he is not here either to condemn or excommunicate you, but to preserve your soul forever. For this purpose such miracles and wonderful works are held before our eyes, and they also serve to the end, that we may see. As God here helps this widow in a temporal way through Christ, so he will help us not only bodily, but much more spiritually, and our soul forever, if we only put our hope in him.

[12] But all miracles and works of God are considered impossible in our eyes, and they are also impossible for the natural man to grasp; and this is to the end that God may be confessed to be an almighty Creator, who from something impossible can create something possible, and can make something out of nothing. It is impossible after I am dead that I should live again; and even if I should pray to all the angels and all the saints for it; nothing will result from such prayers; what then can the free will accomplish? Nevertheless in death I should say: I shall live, not through myself, but because I know that my God is so skillful that he can make something, not out of wood that lies before my eyes, but it is his nature and way to make a thing possible here from something impossible; and create something out of nothing; otherwise he were not the true and real God.

[13] Therefore, if death be present and I can no longer live, I must still know enough to say: Yet I live, and will live; so that death, that is all about me, is like a spark of fire, and life is as great as the sea. Now reason cannot grasp how this takes place. But whoever believes, knows for a certainty that to him death will be like a spark of fire in the midst of the ocean, that is extinguished in a moment. God is almighty, he who believes is in God, therefore, he is in life, and though he were in the midst of death. So too a poor person who believes, thinks like this one here in death: O! - poverty is a spark of fire, and wealth is as abundant as water in the sea; now a moment only is needed for poverty to sink, and I will be rich; for by faith God has entirely changed him who now has all things in his power. So also with shame; when one's good name and reputation go down, people think they will never again be regained; if you believe and hold to God, it is a matter only of a moment, and you are again in great honor. For our God knows the art that from invincible poverty he can create great riches, from great shame inexpressible honor. So it is also with sin, if you believe. Thus, sin compared with righteousness, is as a spark of fire compared with the whole sea of water.

[14] This you see beautifully illustrated in the case of this woman. She is overwhelmed by exceedingly great pain and anguish, so that she thinks God, heaven, earth and all things are opposed to her. And since she looks into this with the eyes of sense, sees it as it is before her natural eyes, she must conclude it is impossible for her to be delivered from her great anxiety. But when her son was raised from the dead for her, she was as though the whole heaven and earth, wood and stone, and everything laughed and rejoiced with her; then she forgot all pain and suffering, this wholly disappeared just like a spark of fire is extinguished when it falls into the sea. Therefore, it is written in the prophet Isaiah 54:6-8: "For Jehovah hath called thee as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even a wife of youth when she is cast off, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In overflowing wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting lovingkindness will I have mercy on thee, saith Jehovah thy Redeemer." But this I do not see, I think this moment is an eternal something before God; but it is in truth only a moment; and much joy follows as Psalm 8:5 also says: "For thou hast made him but little lower than God, and crownest him with glory and honor." But this is still all hid from us, and we do not see it as this wife does. Her departed son is in the midst of life, for God has him in his bosom, and intends to wake him. There is a spark of death there that surrounds him, which no one saw. But now when he became alive that was revealed which before was hidden from the whole world.

[15] Thus, God certainly deals also with us. Here we should learn the kind of God we have, namely, he who surrounds us and is about us in our very greatest dangers and troubles. Therefore, if one is poor, sticks deep in sin, lies in death, is in sorrows and other afflictions, he thinks: it is a transition state, it is a drop and a spark; for God has surrounded him on all sides with pure wealth, righteousness, life and joy, only he does not permit him to see it. But it is a matter of only a little time when we shall see and enjoy it. Thus, you have here an example, not of faith, but of the pure grace and lovingkindness of God. Now we must also say a little on the spiritual understanding or the allegorical interpretation of today's Gospel.

II. The Spiritual Interpretation of This Miracle.

[16] All works and miracles that Christ does visibly and publicly should be interpreted to the end that they may show forth the works which he does among men unseen and spiritually or within them. Therefore, this bodily death signifies the spiritual death of the soul, which man must believe. For no one can see into the soul of another while we live; but when we are dead, we then have other eyes, then we see that the whole world is dead. Therefore, the Lord spoke to a Pharisee, Matthew 8:22, who first wanted to go and bury his father: "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."

[17] This youth who is here being borne to his grave is bodily dead. But there are also some inwardly dead before God who still live here in the body. The soul is dead that does not believe in God and cleave to him. And even though he be in the midst of death, yet he lives, as I said above.

[18] This spiritual death occurs in a twofold manner: some are dead in their soul, but no one sees that death as we see bodily death, and this woman herself neither sees nor feels it. So the whole world is dead, but it realizes it not. Therefore, some are also spiritually dead, who feel it well enough, as those whom the law has terribly punished. We do not here speak of those who care nothing for spiritual death; but of those who feel that they are dead and that their heart trembles, and who feel in their conscience that they have an unbelieving heart. He is dead quite otherwise than he who does not feel it, and yet always lives in wantonness. Now the one who does not experience their unbelief cannot be helped, for he does not know his sickness, and lives on, cares nothing for God nor the world. But he who feels this death, suffers misery and distress, there is struggling and despair, the world becomes too confined for him, he seeks assistance and advice, he despises neither stone nor wood, when they can afford him counsel, not to say that he should hear anything of man, even of the most insignificant person.

[19] Who now gives him this feeling. The law does it, in that it reveals sin. The law says: "Thou shalt have no other gods." When I hear this, I must and should do it, but I cannot. Then I quickly conclude that I am condemned. When I act thus, death comes immediately and there is such a struggle in my heart, that if I should receive no help I would have to remain forever in this death and struggle. This then is the death of the only son, who lies in the bier, the pallbearers are continually carrying him into hell.

[20] The pallbearers are the preachers of the law, who do nothing else than plunge mankind ever deeper and deeper into death; as those here hasten to the grave with the dead they are the more terrified and driven the deeper into perdition. It never becomes better with mankind, yea, it is ever growing worse.

[21] This we have thoroughly experienced under the Pope, in our confession of and in our making satisfaction for sin. We allowed ourselves to think we would atone for our sins by good works; but it was only an anxiety of the conscience. Thus, we ever sank deeper toward hell. Hence, when you have people, who fear sin and condemnation, they are already dead, you dare not preach to these much more of the law, you must show them the way of salvation and preach to them the Gospel. When our Papists meet such troubled souls, they refer them to rosaries, to pilgrimages, to this and that work; but one helps like the other.

[22] The pallbearers would have still moved on and laid the deceased in his grave and buried him, had Christ not come, so Christ must come also here with his Word and grace. And this now is that other office of the Gospel, which does not teach what you are to do; but whence you are to receive help, that you may do it; as Christ does here. He asks not, what is here? or how do you do this? do you wish to have the youth restored to life again, and the like? He asks none of these things; but he has mercy on the mother, goes to her, touches the bier, and the bearers soon stand still. That is, when man preaches the goodness of God, and when Christ presents us with his merits and works, then the hand is laid upon the coffin, and the bearers stand still, that is, you no longer hear the preachers of the law, you no longer believe them; but you say: preach works here, preach works there, we have a different sermon. While our hands are on the coffin they accomplished nothing; the dead does not come to life again; but when Christ's hand touches the coffin the mighty work is done. For when men hear that Christ's work does it, and that his works are presented to us, he says: What need we to do beside? For here our doing is useless and in vain.

[23] But the dead will not be raised to life so quickly. The Word of God is of course preached to us, the goodness of God and whatever is given us through Christ; but this is not yet sufficient, this is only first touching the coffin. The voice of Christ in the heart must also be added, that we may believe the Word, that it is really as we preach. The youth does not

immediately arise after he is touched, but when the Lord spoke: “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!” This voice stirred the heart and caused the dead to rise to life. When I in like manner hear the Word, and allow human traditions to move me, men still bear me ever on and I ever remain in distress, it helps me little. I must besides the external sermon also hear this voice in the heart: “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise:” that is, I must believe this sermon, cleave to it with my heart, trust in it, and let neither sin, death, devil, nor hell draw me from it.

[24] Thus, we have two sermons. One lays the hand on the bier. This does not yet accomplish anything. But the other, when the hand is laid on the coffin and the voice follows in the heart, this accomplishes all. The first proclaims to us the works of Christ, how they are done for us and given to us. But when the voice is heard in the heart, then the one who was before dead begins to speak and to confess the faith with his mouth which he believes and feels in his heart. That is, when the heart believes, the work of love follows, namely, that you speak, that is, preach to others and thank God for the blessing and faith he has shown and given unto you.

[25] From this follows great joy and thanksgiving, by which God is praised and exalted; just as here a great report about Christ went over the entire land of the Jews and into all the neighboring countries. Thus, a Christian can lead many unto faith. Therefore, man should not make a work of jugglery out of miracles and wonders, as the Papists have done.

[26] This is said on today’s Gospel, in which we see how God helps and saves us, moved by pure grace and loving-kindness, without any merit or worthiness whatever on our part, yea, before we seek or request help from him. God grant that we may believe this!

Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. The Resurrection of the Young Man of Nain.

Text: Luke 7:11-17.

11 And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people.

12 Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.

13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.

14 And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.

15 And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.

16 And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people.

17 And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about. Luke 7:11-17.

The Spiritual Interpretation.

The lust we have inherited from Adam carries us on hour by hour to the grave and constantly holds us in the grip of death. There is no help or counsel for us, except in the mercy of Christ. When he, however, stirs our hearts the violence of lust is allayed. For by his voice, that is, by the

preaching of his Word, which moves the heart so powerfully, we who were dead are made alive again to his praise and glory.

I. The Miracle Itself.

[1] In this Gospel you see how the Evangelist again presents to us a divine miracle, by which he desires to move us to lift our hearts to God, in which is the same state of things as at the time existed in this woman; for today's lesson was not written for the sake of this widow, but for the instruction and help of all who should hear this Gospel until the end of the world, among whom we also have been reckoned.

[2] In the first place, notice what lovingkindness and grace were shown to this woman by Christ. We must truly confess she did not merit them; for she is going out of the city with her friends, where there is nothing but crying and weeping. The good woman thought of nothing as little as that she should again lead back her son into the city alive, and for this reason she does not desire it, nor does she ask it, much less has she deserved it. She never thought of such a thing that Christ should come hither; yea, she did not at the time know Christ nor did she know anything of his helping the people. Here all merit and preparations for meeting him are out of the question.

[3] Now all this has been written to the end that just as here this deed of mercy befell this widow freely and entirely of grace, only because it solicited Christ's sympathy, so from this we can draw the general rule that applies to all the merciful deeds of God, that they all overtake us without our merits, even before we seek them. He lays the foundation and makes the beginning. But why does he pity us? In this way it continues to be the grace of God. Otherwise, if we deserved it, it would not be grace. And if it be of grace, then we can say to him: Thou art a gracious God, thou doest good also to them who deserve it not.

[4] This sermon seems easy to us, but where are they who mean it with their heart? If we believed that everything comes to us from God's grace and mercy, we would daily run and rejoice, our hearts would continually rise and dwell in heaven. When we once get to heaven we will see that this is true. Now no one believes it. The god of this world, the devil, has such great power on earth that we do not see the work of God nor know it. 2

Corinthians 4:4 Therefore, we do not appreciate it, we misuse God's mercies, and are entirely unthankful to him.

[5] If I only kept in mind that he gave me eyes, truly a very great treasure, it would be no wonder if shame caused my death, because of my ingratitude in that I never yet thanked him for the blessing of sight. But we do not see his noble treasures and gifts; they are too common. But when a blind babe happens to be born, then we see what a painful thing the lack of sight is, and what a precious thing even one eye is, and what a divine blessing a healthy, bright countenance is: it serves us during our whole life, and without it one would rather be dead; and yet no one thanks God for it. Examine the entire body, and you will everywhere see traces of God's grace and goodness. Hence Psalm 33: says: "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." He had pure eyes and could see far, that the whole world was full of the goodness and lovingkindness of God. From whom, however, has this goodness come? Have we deserved it? No, but it pleased God to cast his gifts thus, promiscuously into the world, which the unthankful receive almost as freely as the thankful. We are grieved when we are obliged to throw away one or two dollars, or less, or even to give them to the poor; how much does God daily cast away of his goods into the world and no one thanks him for anything? Yes, who even acknowledges their receipt?

[6] Thus, we may observe all creatures and become convinced of God's goodness in them. Christ says in Matthew 5:5: "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." As though he would say: I give it to the whole crowd; but who thanks me a single time for it? He enlightens my and your eyes, but no one acknowledges that it is God's blessing. If some morning the sun should not rise, or rise three hours late, what distress and loss would that cause? How we would open our mouths and eyes? Then everyone would say: God be praised and thanked, who has given us such a light! But since it occurs daily, that the sun rises and shines at the appointed time, no one considers it a blessing. So it is with the rain from heaven, with the grain in the field and with all God's creatures. They exist in such abundance, and we are daily so overwhelmed by their abundance that we fail to see them.

[7] At times God permits some man to fall into anxiety and need, into pain and distress, so that the world seems as though it had no God, and it makes a person blind, lame, dropsical, and lets anyone die, as here the

widow's son; for they are his creatures, he can do with them what he will. Now, why does he do this? He does it in such an abundance only that we may continually experience his lovingkindness. Therefore, as the disciples in John 9: asked the Lord concerning the man blind from his birth, whether he or his parents sinned, the Lord answered and said: "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." As though he would say: God desires to be praised in this blind person, for he sees that the treasures of the whole world do not move us, wherefore he floods us with his goodness out of pure grace, that he may present a blind person before our eyes, for us to see what a costly treasure we have in the blessing of our sight, although we cannot recognize his grace and kindness in our fortune, that we at least might know and identify them then in our misfortune. Therefore, this man had to be blind in order that the others might know themselves, and say: Alas thou good God, what a precious gift I have, what a good thing a healthy body is and a bright countenance! But no one takes it to heart! Yea, it is true we say: have not the cows eyes also! Now, if you were blind you would of course feel the loss, which you do not now feel, because you are well and overshadowed with God's blessings.

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what a treasure she had lost. Before she did not desire to spend on him; but now, since he is dead, she spends all she has and even herself upon him. And thus, it is also with us. There are many of you who do not expend ten dollars that your child may be reared better; if the child dies the parents wish and say: O would to God he were alive, I would give many hundred dollars! Why did you not give something before that he might have learned a little? What is the reason you do not appreciate the grace and blessings of God? In short, the world remains world, and it will not change into anything else.

[9] Now, the woman went ahead and did not know what God had given her; but she was soon obliged to experience it. For before she turns around, and she thinks she is the safest, God comes, tries the wife a little and teaches her certain things, takes her husband and her son. This all has been written for us that we might have an example and learn to acknowledge God when he blesses us with a healthy body, a bright countenance, and bestows upon us other blessings. He does not give them to the end that you should rejoice in them; but that you may know what to think of him. When he takes a member out of your family, permits your wife to die, or destroys one of your eyes, all this is done that you may see what you have enjoyed from him.

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[11] This and like miracles God does that the heart may learn how it should be disposed to him and what it may expect from him. As now this wife was fully convinced that there was no hope for her son, that it was impossible for her to receive him back alive again; yea, if one had said to her: Before an hour your son will be alive again, she would have regarded it as impossible and said: It is more possible for the heavens to fall than for my son to live again. Behold, here comes God before she looks around, and does what she never dared to ask of him, as it is impossible, and he restores

her son alive to her again. But why does God do this? He permits man to fall so deeply into danger and anxiety, until no help or advice is within reach, and still he desires that we should not doubt, but trust in him who out of an impossible thing can make something possible, and make something out of nothing. If you are so deep in sin that your heart denies you all grace and the mercy of God and makes you think there is no hope for you, as many consciences are ensnared by such anxiety and distress; then turn about and look here how friendly and graciously God allows himself to be pictured by Christ in this Gospel; that you may observe that he means it well with you from his heart; and that he is not here either to condemn or excommunicate you, but to preserve your soul forever. For this purpose such miracles and wonderful works are held before our eyes, and they also serve to the end, that we may see. As God here helps this widow in a temporal way through Christ, so he will help us not only bodily, but much more spiritually, and our soul forever, if we only put our hope in him.

[12] But all miracles and works of God are considered impossible in our eyes, and they are also impossible for the natural man to grasp; and this is to the end that God may be confessed to be an almighty Creator, who from something impossible can create something possible, and can make something out of nothing. It is impossible after I am dead that I should live again; and even if I should pray to all the angels and all the saints for it; nothing will result from such prayers; what then can the free will accomplish? Nevertheless in death I should say: I shall live, not through myself, but because I know that my God is so skillful that he can make something, not out of wood that lies before my eyes, but it is his nature and way to make a thing possible here from something impossible; and create something out of nothing; otherwise he were not the true and real God.

[13] Therefore, if death be present and I can no longer live, I must still know enough to say: Yet I live, and will live; so that death, that is all about me, is like a spark of fire, and life is as great as the sea. Now reason cannot grasp how this takes place. But whoever believes, knows for a certainty that to him death will be like a spark of fire in the midst of the ocean, that is extinguished in a moment. God is almighty, he who believes is in God, therefore, he is in life, and though he were in the midst of death. So too a poor person who believes, thinks like this one here in death: O! poverty is a spark of fire, and wealth is as abundant as water in the sea; now a moment

only is needed for poverty to sink, and I will be rich; for by faith God has entirely changed him who now has all things in his power. So also with shame; when one's good name and reputation go down, people think they will never again be regained; if you believe and hold to God, it is a matter only of a moment, and you are again in great honor. For our God knows the art that from invincible poverty he can create great riches, from great shame unexpressable honor. So it is also with sin, if you believe. Thus, sin compared with righteousness, is as a spark of fire compared with the whole sea of water.

[14] This you see beautifully illustrated in the case of this woman. She is overwhelmed by exceedingly great pain and anguish, so that she thinks God, heaven, earth and all things are opposed to her. And since she looks into this with the eyes of sense, sees it as it is before her natural eyes, she must conclude it is impossible for her to be delivered from her great anxiety. But when her son was raised from the dead for her, she was as though the whole heaven and earth, wood and stone, and everything laughed and rejoiced with her; then she forgot all pain and suffering, this wholly disappeared just like a spark of fire is extinguished when it falls into the sea. Therefore, it is written in the prophet Isaiah 54:6-8: "For Jehovah hath called thee as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even a wife of youth when she is cast off, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In overflowing wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting lovingkindness will I have mercy on thee, saith Jehovah thy Redeemer." But this I do not see, I think this moment is an eternal something before God; but it is in truth only a moment; and much joy follows as Psalm 8:5 also says: "For thou hast made him but little lower than God, and crownest him with glory and honor." But this is still all hid from us, and we do not see it as this wife does. Her departed son is in the midst of life, for God has him in his bosom, and intends to wake him. There is a spark of death there that surrounds him, which no one saw. But now when he became alive that was revealed which before was hidden from the whole world.

[15] Thus, God certainly deals also with us. Here we should learn the kind of God we have, namely, he who surrounds us and is about us in our very greatest dangers and troubles. Therefore, if one is poor, sticks deep in sin, lies in death, is in sorrows and other afflictions, he thinks: it is a

transition state, it is a drop and a spark; for God has surrounded him on all sides with pure wealth, righteousness, life and joy, only he does not permit him to see it. But it is a matter of only a little time when we shall see and enjoy it. Thus, you have here an example, not of faith, but of the pure grace and lovingkindness of God. Now we must also say a little on the spiritual understanding or the allegorical interpretation of today's Gospel.

II. The Spiritual Interpretation of This Miracle

[16] All works and miracles that Christ does visibly and publicly should be interpreted to the end that they may show forth the works which he does among men unseen and spiritually or within them. Therefore, this bodily death signifies the spiritual death of the soul, which man must believe. For no one can see into the soul of another while we live; but when we are dead, we then have other eyes, then we see that the whole world is dead. Therefore, the Lord spoke to a Pharisee, Matthew 8:22, who first wanted to go and bury his father: "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."

[17] This youth who is here being borne to his grave is bodily dead. But there are also some inwardly dead before God who still live here in the body. The soul is dead that does not believe in God and cleave to him. And even though he be in the midst of death, yet he lives, as I said above.

[18] This spiritual death occurs in a twofold manner: some are dead in their soul, but no one sees that death as we see bodily death, and this woman herself neither sees nor feels it. So the whole world is dead, but it realizes it not. Therefore, some are also spiritually dead, who feel it well enough, as those whom the law has terribly punished. We do not here speak of those who care nothing for spiritual death; but of those who feel that they are dead and that their heart trembles, and who feel in their conscience that they have an unbelieving heart. He is dead quite otherwise than he who does not feel it, and yet always lives in wantonness. Now the one who does not experience their unbelief cannot be helped, for he does not know his sickness, and lives on, cares nothing for God nor the world. But he who feels this death, suffers misery and distress, there is struggling and despair, the world becomes too confined for him, he seeks assistance and advice, he despises neither stone nor wood, when they can afford him counsel, not to

say that he should hear anything of man, even of the most insignificant person.

[19] Who now gives him this feeling. The law does it, in that it reveals sin. The law says: "Thou shalt have no other gods." When I hear this, I must and should do it, but I cannot. Then I quickly conclude that I am condemned. When I act thus, death comes immediately and there is such a struggle in my heart, that if I should receive no help I would have to remain forever in this death and struggle. This then is the death of the only son, who lies in the bier, the pallbearers are continually carrying him into hell.

[20] The pallbearers are the preachers of the law, who do nothing else than plunge mankind ever deeper and deeper into death; as those here hasten to the grave with the dead they are the more terrified and driven the deeper into perdition. It never becomes better with mankind, yea, it is ever growing worse.

[21] This we have thoroughly experienced under the Pope, in our confession of and in our making satisfaction for sin. We allowed ourselves to think we would atone for our sins by good works; but it was only an anxiety of the conscience. Thus, we ever sank deeper toward hell. Hence, when you have people, who fear sin and condemnation, they are already dead, you dare not preach to these much more of the law, you must show them the way of salvation and preach to them the Gospel. When our Papists meet such troubled souls, they refer them to rosaries, to pilgrimages, to this and that work; but one helps like the other.

[22] The pallbearers would have still moved on and laid the deceased in his grave and buried him, had Christ not come, so Christ must come also here with his Word and grace. And this now is that other office of the Gospel, which does not teach what you are to do; but whence you are to receive help, that you may do it; as Christ does here. He asks not, What is here? or How do you do this? Do you wish to have the youth restored to life again, and the like. He asks none of these things; but he has mercy on the mother, goes to her, touches the bier, and the bearers soon stand still. That is, when man preaches the goodness of God, and when Christ presents us with his merits and works, then the hand is laid upon the coffin, and the bearers stand still, that is, you no longer hear the preachers of the law, you no longer believe them; but you say: preach works here, preach works

there, we have a different sermon. While our hands are on the coffin they accomplished nothing; the dead does not come to life again; but when Christ's hand touches the coffin the mighty work is done. For when men hear that Christ's work does it, and that his works are presented to us, he says: What need we to do beside? For here our doing is useless and in vain.

[23] But the dead will not be raised to life so quickly. The Word of God is of course preached to us, the goodness of God and whatever is given us through Christ; but this is not yet sufficient, this is only first touching the coffin. The voice of Christ in the heart must also be added, that we may believe the Word, that it is really as we preach. The youth does not immediately arise after he is touched, but when the Lord spoke: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!" This voice stirred the heart and caused the dead to rise to life. When I in like manner hear the Word, and allow human traditions to move me, men still bear me ever on and I ever remain in distress, it helps me little. I must besides the external sermon also hear this voice in the heart: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise:" that is, I must believe this sermon, cleave to it with my heart, trust in it, and let neither sin, death, devil, nor hell draw me from it.

[24] Thus, we have two sermons. One lays the hand on the bier. This does not yet accomplish anything. But the other, when the hand is laid on the coffin and the voice follows in the heart, this accomplishes all. The first proclaims to us the works of Christ, how they are done for us and given to us. But when the voice is heard in the heart, then the one who was before dead begins to speak and to confess the faith with his mouth which he believes and feels in his heart. That is, when the heart believes, the work of love follows, namely, that you speak, that is, preach to others and thank God for the blessing and faith he has shown and given unto you.

[25] From this follows great joy and thanksgiving, by which God is praised and exalted; just as here a great report about Christ went over the entire land of the Jews and into all the neighboring countries. Thus, a Christian can lead many unto faith. Therefore, man should not make a work of jugglery out of miracles and wonders, as the Papists have done.

[26] This is said on today's Gospel, in which we see how God helps and saves us, moved by pure grace and loving-kindness, without any merit or

worthiness whatever on our part, yea, before we seek or request help from him. God grant that we may believe this!

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity. Christ Heals the Dropsical Man on the Sabbath, and on Humility Repentance.

Text: Luke 14:1-11.

1 And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him.

2 And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy.

3 And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?

4 And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go;

5 And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?

6 And they could not answer him again to these things.

7 And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them,

8 When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him;

9 And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room.

10 But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.

11 For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Luke 14:1-11

[1] This Gospel offers us two leading thoughts; one is general and is found in all our Gospel lessons, the other is peculiar to this one. First, in its general character, it shows who the Lord Jesus is and what we may expect of him, and in this is exhibited both faith and love.

[2] Faith is here set forth in that this man, sick with the dropsy, looks to Christ and firmly believes he will help him. This faith he had as the result of his previous acquaintance with Jesus. He knows him as a kind, friendly and sympathetic man who always helps everyone and lets none go away uncomforted. Had he not heard such reports about the Lord, he would not have followed him, even into the house. He must indeed have had some gospel knowledge and believed the wonderful things spoken about him.

[3] And this is the Gospel, as I said, that must be preached and heard before there can be faith. We must know that God is kindly disposed toward us and has sent his Son from heaven to help us. This the conscience must hear and believe; for if God were unfriendly and unmerciful toward us, it would avail little to know that all his creatures sympathize with us. If God is satisfied with us, no creature can do us any harm, as St. Paul says in Romans 8:31: "If God is for us, who is against us?" Let death, devil, hell and all creation rage; we are safe. Therefore, it is the Gospel that must present to us the God-man as merciful. This is the fountain from which our heart can draw faith and a friendly confidence toward God that he will help both the dying and the living in every distress.

[4] We notice this here in the man afflicted with dropsy. He had heard of the kindness of Jesus to others and now believes that he will show the same to him. Had he not believed, it would have been impossible to help him. The Gospel resounds in all the world, but it is not heard by everybody. The Pharisees also sat there; they saw these things with their own eyes and failed not to notice what a friendly man Jesus was, but they believed not; hence the Gospel could neither reform them nor give them help and comfort. Thus, the Gospel is very universal, but the true laying hold of it is very rare. So much in regard to faith.

[5] Later we have here pictured to us also the love in Christ that goes forth and bears fruit, not for itself but for others, as is the nature of true love to do. This is now said on the first part of today's Gospel.

[6] However, this Pericope especially teaches us in the second place a necessary doctrine we must possess, if we are to make use of the laws that order the outward and temporal matters and affairs, which the church is to observe. Here we must act wisely and gently, if we wish to do the right thing, especially when weak and timid consciences are concerned. For there is nothing more tender in heaven and on earth, and nothing can bear less trifling, than the conscience. The eye is spoken of as a sensitive member, but conscience is much more sensitive. Hence we notice how gently the Apostles dealt with conscience in divers matters, lest it be burdened with human ordinances.

[7] But as we cannot live without law and order, and as it is dangerous to deal with law since it is too apt to ensnare the conscience, we must say a little about human laws and ordinances and how far they are to be observed. The proverb says: "Everything depends upon having a good interpreter." That is particularly true here where human ordinances are concerned. Where there is no one to interpret and explain the law rightly, it is difficult and dangerous to have anything to do with it. Take, for example, a ruler who acts like a tyrant and abuses his authority. If he makes a law and urgently insists on the law being executed, he treats conscience as if he had a sword in his hand and were intent on killing. We have experienced this in the tyrannical laws of popery, how consciences were tormented and hurled into hell and damnation. Yea, there is great danger where one does not know how to temper and apply the laws.

[8] Therefore, we conclude that all law, divine and human, treating of outward conduct, should not bind any further than love goes. Love is to be the interpreter of law. Where there is no love, these things are meaningless, and law begins to do harm; as is also written in the Pope's book: "If a law or ordinance runs counter to love, it will soon come to an end." This is in brief spoken of divine and human laws. The reason for enacting all laws and ordinances is only to establish love, as Paul says, Romans 13:10: "Love therefore, is the fulfillment of the law." Likewise verse 8: "Owe no man anything, save to love one another." For if I love my neighbor, I help him, protect him, hold him in honor, and do what I would have done to me.

[9] Since then all law exists to promote love, law must soon cease where it is in conflict with love. Therefore, everything depends upon a good leader or ruler to direct and interpret the law in accordance with love. Take the example of the priests and monks. They have drawn up laws that they will say mass and do their praying and juggle with God in other ways at given hours according to the clock. If now a poor man should call and ask for a service at an hour when they were to hold mass or repeat their prayers, they might say: "Go your way; I must now read mass, must attend to my prayers," and thus, they would fail to serve the poor man, even if he should die. In this manner the most sanctimonious monks and Carthusians act; they observe their rules and statutes so rigorously that, although they saw a poor man breathing his last breath and could help him so easily, yet they will not do it. But the good people, if they were Christians, ought to explain the laws and statutes in harmony with love, and say: Let the mass go, let the sacraments, prayers, and the ordinances all go; I will dispense with works, I will serve my neighbor; love put in practice in serving my neighbor is golden in comparison with such human works.

[10] And thus, we should apply every law, even as love suggests, that it be executed where it is helpful to a fellowman, and dispensed with where it does harm. Take a common illustration: If there were a housekeeper who made the rule in his home to serve now fish, then meat, now wine, then beer, even as it suits him; but perchance someone of his household took sick and could not drink beer or wine, nor eat meat or fish, and the housekeeper would not give him anything else, but say: No, my rules and regulations prescribe thus; I cannot give you anything else: what kind of a housekeeper would such a one be? One ought to give him sneezewort to purge his brain. For if he were a sensible man he would say: It is indeed true that my rules and regulations prescribe meat or fish for the table today, yet since this diet does not agree with you, you may eat what you like. See how a housekeeper may adjust his own rules and make them conform to the love he entertains for his household. Thus, all law must be applied, as love toward a fellowman may dictate.

[11] Therefore, since the Mosaic law was not understood nor modified by love in the Old Testament, God promised the people through Moses that he would raise up a prophet who should interpret the law to them. For thus, Moses says in Deuteronomy 18:15: "Jehovah thy God will raise up unto

thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall harken.” God raised up prophets from time to time to explain the law and apply it, not in its rigor, but in love. Of this Moses himself is an example. He led the children of Israel out of Egypt for forty years hither and thither through the desert. Abraham had been commanded in Genesis 17:12, to circumcise every male on the eighth day. This commandment was plain enough that all had to observe it, yet Moses neglected it and circumcised no one the whole forty years.

[12] Now, who authorized Moses to violate this commandment, given to Abraham by God himself? His authority was vested in his knowledge of the law’s spirit; he knew how to interpret and apply it in brotherly love, namely, that the law was to be serviceable to the people, and not the reverse. For, if during their journey they had to be ready day by day for warfare, circumcision would have hindered them, and he therefore, omitted it, saying in effect: Although this law is given and should be observed, yet we will apply it in the spirit of love, and suspend its operation until we come to the end of our journey. Likewise should all laws be interpreted and applied as love and necessity may demand. Hence the importance of a good interpreter.

[13] It was the same in the case of David when he partook of the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for anyone to eat, except the priest, Samuel 21:6; as Christ himself makes use of this example in Matthew 12:3. David was not consecrated, nor were his servants. When he was hungry he went to Ahimelech and asked for himself and men something to eat. Ahimelech answered: I have indeed nothing to give; the shew-bread of the tabernacle is for holy use. Then David and his men helped themselves and ate freely of it. Did David sin in the face of God’s ordinance? No. Why not? Because necessity compelled him, seeing there was nothing else to eat. It is in this way that necessity and love may override law.

[14] That is what Christ also does in our Gospel, when he heals the suffering man on the Sabbath, although he well knew how strictly the Old Testament required the observance of the Sabbath. But see what the Pharisees do! They stand by watching the Lord. They would not have helped the sick man with a spoonful of wine, even if they could have done so. But Christ handles the law even at the risk of violating it, freely helps

the poor man sick with the dropsy and gives the public a reason for his action, when he says, in effect: It is indeed commanded to keep the Sabbath day, yet where love requires it, there the law may be set aside. This he follows up with an illustration from everyday life, then dismisses them in a way they must commend, and they answer him not a word. He says: “Which of you shall have an ox or an ass fallen into a well and will not straightway draw him up on the Sabbath day?”

[15] As if to say: Ye fools, are ye not mad and stupid! If you act thus, in the case of saving an ox or an ass which may perhaps be valued at a few dollars, how much rather should one do the same to a neighbor, helping him to his health, whether it be the Sabbath or not! For the Sabbath, as he says elsewhere, was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So that the son of man is lord even of the Sabbath, Mark 2:27.

[16] Among the Jews there was a rigorous enforcement of the law, even their kings insisted on its strict observance. When the prophets came and explained the law in the spirit of love, saying: This is what Moses means, thus, the law is to be understood, then there were false prophets at hand to side with the kings, insisting on the literal text and saying: There, so it is written; it is God’s Word; one must not interpret it otherwise. Thereupon the kings proceeded to kill one prophet after another. In the same way the Papists, priests and monks act now. If anyone says: We need not observe their laws literally, but we should rather interpret them in love; then they immediately cry, Heretic! Heretic!! and if they could they would kill him; yea, they do so already quite lustily.

[17] As Christ here treats of the law relating to the Sabbath and makes it subserve the needs of man, so we should treat laws of that kind and keep them only so far as they accord with love. If laws do not serve love, they may be annulled at once, be they God’s or man’s commands. Take an illustration from our former darkness and sorrow under the Papacy. Suppose someone had vowed to visit St. Jacob, and he remembers the words: “Pay that which thou vowest,” Ecclesiastes 5:4. He may have a wife, children or household to care for. What should such a one do? Should he proceed to St. Jacob, or remain at home and support his family? There, decide for yourselves which would be most needful and what harmonizes best with the spirit of love. I regard it best for him to remain home at work and attend to the care of his family. For his pilgrimage to St. Jacob, even if that were not

idolatrous and wrong in itself, would be of little profit to him, yea, he would spend and lose more than he could gain.

[18] Another example. A mother is about to bear a child, who vowed to eat no flesh on Wednesdays, as many foolish women do. And perhaps because of this vow the mother may injure her offspring and her own body. Then the foolish confessional fathers come and say: Dear daughter, it is written in the Scriptures, what one vows, that must be kept; it is God's command and thou must at any peril keep thy vow. Thus, the good woman is soon taken captive and chained by her conscience, goes and fulfills her vow, and does harm both to herself and her offspring. Hence both have sinned, those who taught her thus, and the woman in that she did not esteem her love more than her vow, by which she neither served nor pleased God; yea, more than this, she thus, provoked God to anger by keeping her vow. Therefore, we should say to such a foolish mother: Behold, thou art about to bear a child, and thou must serve it and desist from this foolish thing, so that great harm may not spring from it; for all laws find their end in love.

[19] We should act in like manner toward the false priests, monks and nuns. When they say: Yea, we have vowed so and so, and it is written: "Vow, and pay unto Jehovah your God," Psalm 76:11, then say to them: Look, there is also a command: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." But in your vocation it is impossible to serve your neighbor, nor can you continue in it without sin. Therefore, forsake it openly and enter a state in which you are not so apt to sin, but where you may serve your fellowman, help and counsel him; and do not bother about a vow which you did not give to God your Lord, but to the devil; not for the salvation of souls and blessedness, but for damnation and ruin of both soul and body.

[20] If you are a Christian you have power to dispense with all commandments so far as they hinder you in the practice of love, even as Christ here teaches. He goes right on, although it is the Sabbath day, helps this sick man and gives a satisfactory and clear reason for his Sabbath work.

[21] There is yet another thought in this Gospel about taking a prominent seat at feasts, which we must consider. When the Lord noticed how the guests, the Pharisees, chose to sit in the first seats, he gave them the following parable to ponder: "When thou art bidden of any man to a marriage least, sit not down in the chief seat; lest haply a more honorable

man than thou be bidden of him, and he that bade thee and him shall come and say to thee, Give this man place; and then thou shalt begin with shame to take the lower place. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest place; that when he that hath bidden thee cometh, he may say to thee, Friend, go up higher. Then shalt thou have glory in the presence of all that sit at meat with thee.”

[22] This parable is aimed at the laws and precepts of the Pharisees and scribes which provide that honor should be paid to the great and powerful, giving them the preference and allowing them to sit at the head. Christ here reverses the order and says: “He that would be the greatest, let him take the lowest seat.” Not that a peasant should be placed above a prince; that is not what Christ means, nor would that be proper. But our Lord does not speak here of worldly, but of spiritual things, where humility is specially commended. Let rulers follow the custom of occupying the uppermost seats at festive boards, we have to do here with matters of the heart. Christ does not appoint burgomasters, judges, princes, lords; these stations in life he ignores as subject to civil order and the dictates of reason. There must be rulers and to them honors are due because of their position; but the spiritual government requires that its participants humble themselves, in order that they may be exalted.

[23] Therefore, the Lord said to his disciples when they disputed as to who should be the greatest among them: “The kings of the Gentiles have lordship over them, and they that have authority over them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so; but he that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve,” Luke 22:25-27. He then speaks of himself as an illustration, asking: “For which is the greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat! But I am in the midst of you as he that serveth.” And in another place, Matthew 20:26-28, he said: “Whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

[24] The Papists have commented on these verses in their own way and twisted this Gospel, saying: Yea, the Pope is to be the least or youngest, sitting at the foot and serving others; but that is to take place in the heart. They pretended to sit at the foot and to serve others as the humblest; but

withal they lorded it over all emperors, kings and princes, yea, trampled them in the dust; just as if emperors, kings, princes and rulers should not also possess in their hearts the humility of which the Lord here treats. They thus, put on airs and make a show of their carnal interpretation. If they had any humility in their hearts their lives would bear testimony to it. Christ speaks here not of outward humility alone, for the inner is the source of the outer; if it is not in the heart it will hardly be manifest in the body.

[25] Therefore, the Gospel aims at making all of us humble, whatever and whoever we may be, that none may exalt himself, unless urged and elevated by regular authority. That is what the Lord wants to inculcate by this parable, directing it to all, be they high or low. In this spirit he reproves the Pharisees and others who desire high places and are ambitious to get ahead of others. They may accept honors when regularly elected and forced to accept high places. I make these remarks to contravene and discredit their false spiritual interpretations.

[26] But now they go and mingle and confuse spiritual and worldly things, and claim it is enough if they be humble in heart when they strive for the chief seats. Nay, dear friends, heart-humility must manifest itself in outer conduct, or it is false. All should therefore, be willing to take a lower seat, even to throw themselves at the feet of others, and not move up higher, until urged to do so. Anyone who regards this rule, will do well; but he who disregards it will come to grief by so doing. That is what our Lord desires to impress upon his hearers as he closes this parable. "For everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

[27] St. Augustine adds a comment here which I wish he had not made, for it savors of vanity, when he says: "A ruler must not abase himself too much, lest his authority be weakened thereby." This is heathenish and worldly, not Christian; but we can pardon it in such a man, for even the saints on earth are not yet entirely perfect.

[28] The sum of this Gospel then is: Love and necessity control all law; and there should be no law that cannot be enforced and applied in love. If it cannot, then let it be done away with, even though an angel from heaven had promulgated it. All this is intended to help and strengthen our hearts and consciences. In this way our Lord himself teaches us how we should

humble ourselves and be subject one to another. [However concerning this virtue, what true humility is, I have said enough in former Postils c.] Let this suffice on today's Gospel.

Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity. The Two Greatest Commandments, and How Christ is David's Son and David's Lord. The First and Greatest Commandment.

Text: Matthew 22:34-46.

34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,

42 Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David.

43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying,

44 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make

thine enemies thy footstool?

45 If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?

46 And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions. Matthew 22:34-46

[1] This Gospel consists of two questions. In the first the lawyer on behalf of the other Pharisees asks Christ: Which is the great commandment in the law? In the second the Lord asks the Pharisees and the lawyer: Whose son is David? These two questions concern every Christian; for he who wishes to be a Christian must thoroughly understand them. First, what the law is, and the purpose it serves; and secondly, who Christ is, and what we may expect from him.

[2] Christ explains here to the Pharisees the law, telling them what the sum of the whole law is, so that they are completely silenced both at his speech and his question, and know less than nothing of what the law is and who Christ is. From this it follows, that although unbelief may appear as wisdom and holiness before the world, it is nevertheless folly and unrighteousness before God, especially where the knowledge of the two questions mentioned above is wanting. For he who does not know how he stands before the law, and what he may expect from Christ, surely has not the wisdom of God, no matter how wise and prudent he may pretend to be. Let us therefore, consider the first question, namely: What the law is; what it commands and how it is to be spiritually interpreted.

[3] When the lawyer asked Christ, which was the great commandment in the law, the Lord said to him: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets."

[4] As if the Lord would say: He who possesses love to God, and love to his neighbor, has all things, and therefore, fulfills the law; for the whole law and all the prophets point to these two themes, namely: how God and our neighbor are to be loved.

[5] Now one may wish to ask: How can you harmonize this statement, that all things are to be comprehended in these two commandments, since there was given to the Jews circumcision and many other commandments? To answer this, let us see in the first place how Christ explains the law, namely, that it must be kept with the heart. In other words, the law must be spiritually comprehended; for he who does not lay hold of the law with the heart and with the Spirit, will certainly not fulfill it. Therefore, the Lord here gives to the lawyer the ground and real substance of the law, and says that these are the greatest commandments, to love God with the heart and our neighbor as ourselves. From this it follows that he, who is not circumcised, who does not fast nor pray, is not doing it from the heart; even though he may perform external acts, he nevertheless does nothing before God, for God looketh on the heart, and not on our acts, 1 Samuel 16:7. It will not profit a man at all, no matter what work he may perform, if his heart is not in it.

[6] From this arises another question: Since works are of no profit to a man, why then did God give so many commandments to the Jews? To this I answer, these commandments were given to the end that we might become conscious whether we really love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and in addition our neighbor as ourselves; for St. Paul says in Romans 7:7 (3:20), that the law is nothing but a consciousness and a revelation of sin. What would I know of sin, if there were no law to reveal it to me? Here now is the law that saith: Thou shalt love God with thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself. This we fulfill if we do all that the law requires; but we are not doing it. Hence he shows us where we are lacking, and that, while we ought really to do something, we are doing nothing.

[7] That the Jews had to practice circumcision was indeed a foolish ceremony, yea, a command offensive to reason, even though it were given by God still today. What service was it to God, to burden his people with this grievous commandment? What good was it to him, or what service to a neighbor? Yea, and it did not profit the Jew, who was circumcised. Why then did God give the command? In order that this commandment and law might show them whether they really loved God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their mind, and whether they did it willingly or not. For if there were a devout heart, it would say: I verily do not know why

God gave me circumcision, inasmuch as it does not profit anyone, neither God, nor me, nor my neighbor; but since it is well pleasing to God, I will nevertheless do it, even though it be considered a trifling and despised act. Hence, circumcision was an exercise of the commandment, Thou shalt love God with all thy heart.

[8] It was also a foolish command God gave to Abraham, to slay his son, Genesis 22:2. For if reason had been the judge in this, both it and all mankind would have come to no other conclusion than this: It is an unfriendly and hostile command, how can it be from God, since God himself said to Abraham that he would multiply his seed through this son, and it would become as innumerable as the stars of the firmament and as the sand by the sea. Therefore, it was a foolish commandment, a grievous, hard and unbearable commandment. But what did Abraham do? He closes his senses, takes his reason captive, and obeys the voice of God, goes, and does as God commanded him. By this he proved that he obeyed from the heart; otherwise, even if he had put his son to death a hundred times, God would not have cared for it; but God was pleased that the deed came from his heart and was done in true love to God; yea, it came from a heart that must have thought: Even if my son dies, God is almighty and faithful, he will keep his word, he will find ways and means beyond that which I am able to devise; only obey, there is no danger. Had he not had this boldness and this faith, how could his fatherheart have killed his only and well beloved son?

[9] The Jews later wanted to follow this example and, like Abraham, offered their children unto God, hoping thereby to perform a service well-pleasing to God; but it was far from it. These poor people came to the conclusion: The service of Abraham was pleasing to God, therefore, will ours also be, and consequently they killed one child after another. O, how many healthy, noble and beautiful children perished! The prophets protested against this service, they preached, warned and wrote against it, telling the people that it was deception, but all was in vain. Yea, many a prophet lost his life because of this, as the history in the books of the kings shows.

[10] But why was this service of the Jews displeasing to God? For the reason that it did not come from their heart, and was not done out of love to God; but they simply looked upon the service, and did it without the command and word of God; but God saith: My dear sirs, I was not

concerned about the fact that Abraham offered up his son, but that he proved by this act that he loved me with his whole heart. There must be first love in the heart, then follows the service that will be pleasing to God; for all the works of the law tend to the end thereby to prove our love to God, which is in the heart; which love the law requires, and will have above everything else

[11] We are also to notice here that all the works of the law are not commanded merely for the purpose that we simply just perform them; no, no; for if God had given even more commandments, he would not want us to keep them to the injury and destruction of love. Yea, if these commandments oppose the love of our neighbor, he wants us to renounce and annul them. Take the example of this, I recently gave you: Moses brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, leading them for forty years through the wilderness, and not one of them was circumcised, although it was commanded them. Where was their obedience to the commandment? Was God not angry with them because they did not obey his commandment? No, there was a higher commandment in force at that time, namely, that they were to obey God who commanded them to come out of Egypt in haste to the promised land. By their marching they daily obeyed God, and God accepted it as obedience; otherwise he would have been angry, in that they did not keep his commandments. Both the need and the love were at hand, which set aside all commandments, for it would have been unbearable to endure the pain of circumcision and at the same time the burden of the journey. Therefore, love took the place of the commandment of circumcision, and thus, should all commandments be kept in love, or not at all.

[12] In like manner Christ excused his disciples, as is recorded in Matthew 12:3-4, when the Jews accused them of transgressing the law, of doing on the Sabbath that which was not lawful to do on the Sabbath day, when they plucked the ears of corn and ate them. Then the Lord gave them to understand that they were doing no wrong, as if to say: Here is no Sabbath; for the body needs food, necessity demands it; we must eat, even though it be on the Sabbath. Therefore, the Lord cited the example of David, which he laid before the Jews, and said, "Have ye not read what David did; he and they that were with him, when he was an hungered, how he went into the house of God and ate the shew bread which was not lawful

to eat, nor for those that were with him, excepting for the priests?" 1 Samuel 21:3f. Then David ate the bread, though he was not a priest, because hunger pressed him to do it. Neither did Ahimelech the priest violate the law in giving the bread to David, for love was present and urged him to give it. Thus, even the whole law would have had to serve David in his need.

[13] Therefore, when the law impels one against love, it ceases and should no longer be a law; but where no obstacle is in the way, the keeping of the law is a proof of love, which lies hidden in the heart. Therefore, ye have need of the law, that love may be manifested; but if it cannot be kept without injury to our neighbor, God wants us to suspend and ignore the law.

[14] Thus, you are to regulate your life and conduct. There are in our day many customs, many orders and ceremonies, by which we falsely think to merit heaven; and yet there is only this one principle, namely: the love to our neighbor, that includes in it all good works. I will give you an example we recently heard. Here is a priest or monk, who is to read his prayers or the rules of his order, or to hold mass, or say penance. At this moment there comes a poor man or woman to him who has need of his help and counsel. What shall this priest or monk do? Shall he perform his service, or shall he assist the poor man? He should therefore, act prudently and think: True, I am required to read my prayers, hold mass, or say penance; but now on the other hand, a poor man is here; he needs my help and I should come to his rescue. God commanded me to do this; but the others man devised and instituted. I will let the mandates of men go, and will serve my neighbor according to God's commandment.

[15] However, very seldom do we think that the precious service of holding mass and reading prayers should be put in the background; and such a humble service, as you regard it, should have the preference. But what is the reason? The reason is that these dream-preachers, who have nothing to present to us but the ordinances of men, have made us so timid and fearful that we came to the conclusion, if we did not regulate ourselves in everything according to their preaching, heaven itself would fall. Yea, they would rather let ten poor people starve than fail to say one mass. We find even today many monks or priests who rather let a poor man freeze, than violate their statutes and ordinances. So lamentably and miserably have they been deceived by their godless preachers and teachers, and by

their superiors, who with their statutes and devilish ordinances have drawn, and are still drawing, them away more and more from the law of God to our own notions.

[16] These are the principal fruits of unbelief and godlessness, which, as the Scriptures declare, provoke God. Should not God be angry with me, if he commands me to show my neighbor love, and I go and follow my own or other people's dreams? It is as if a master said to his servant: Go and work in the field, and the servant went and desired to wash the dishes. Should not the master rightly be angry with such a servant? Thus, it is also with God. He wants us to keep his commandments, and to regard them more than the commandments of men, and all the commandments to be subservient to love, so that all be comprehended in these two commandments, of which the Lord here speaks in this Gospel: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself."

[17] Do you want to do something pleasing to God, then do it out of genuine love. That the Jews practiced circumcision, fasted much, prayed much, and performed other like services, was not pleasing to God, for it did not come from the heart, as this commandment requires: Thou shalt love God with all thy heart. Thus, it will be also with you, even though you should belong to the Carthusian friars, or to a still more exacting order; all would avail nothing, if you had not the love of God. From this you are to conclude, all works are nothing, that do not originate in love, or are against love. No commandments should be in force, except those in which the law of love can be exercised.

[18] From this it now appears what a misleading calling that of the monks and priests is, in that they wish to merit heaven through their works alone, and they also bind the people to do good works, in order that they may thereby merit heaven, which is a cursed and godless service. Hence, as already stated, the law is to be only an exercise to prove our love; otherwise, aside from love, God never inquires about works, no matter how excellent they are.

[19] You can now see how many people know what the law means: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself. Surely they are few who know it, and fewer still who keep it. How

can they keep that which they do not know? We are blind and our nature is totally blind, and so is also human reason. It knows nothing so imperfectly as that which the law of God requires.

[20] Now here Christ shows the Pharisees and the Scribes a twofold kindness. In the first place, he dispels their blindness and teaches them what the law is. In the second place, he teaches them how impossible it is for them to keep the law. Their blindness he dispels, in that he teaches them what the law is, namely: that love is the law. Human reason cannot comprehend this nowadays any more than the Jews did then, for if it had been possible for human reason to comprehend it, the Pharisees and Scribes, who at that time were the best and wisest of the people, could have understood it; but they thought it consisted alone in performing the external works of the law; in giving to God, whether it be done willingly or unwillingly; but their inward blindness, their covetousness, and their hardened heart they could not see, and thought they thoroughly understood the law and were fine fellows, holy and pious people; but they stood in their own light. For no one is able to keep the law unless his nature is thoroughly renewed.

[21] Therefore, consider it an established fact that reason can never understand and fulfill the law, even though it knows the meaning of the law. When do you do to another what you want him to do to you? Who loves his enemy from his heart? Who loves to die? Who willingly suffers disgrace and shame? Dear sir, point me to a man who enjoys to have a bad reputation or to live in poverty! For nature and human reason flee entirely from this, are afraid, terrified and shocked; and if it were possible, as far as it were in their power, they would never suffer such misfortune. Human nature alone will never be able to accomplish what God in this commandment requires, namely, that we surrender our will to the will of God, so that we renounce our reason, our will, our might and power, and say from the heart: Thy will be done. And indeed, nowhere will you find a person who loves God with his whole heart and his neighbor as himself. It may indeed happen that two companions live friendly together; but even there hypocrisy is hidden, which continues until you are wounded by him; then you will see how you love him, and whether you are flesh or spirit. This commandment therefore, requires me to be friendly with all my heart to him who has offended me; but when do I do this?

[22] Thus, Christ desires to show us that we preach the law rightly, only when we learn from it that we are unable to fulfill it, and that we are the property of the devil. This we learn from experience, and it is shown now and then in the Scriptures, especially by St. Paul when he says in Romans 8:7-8: “Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be,” and it follows, that they who are in the flesh cannot please God.

[23] Hence, take to thyself this commandment: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and think upon it, contemplate it, and search what kind of a law it is; how far you are from fulfilling it, yea, how you have not yet even made a beginning to suffer and to do from the heart what God demands of you. It is pure hypocrisy, if anyone wants to creep into a hiding place and think: Oh I will love God. Oh, how I do love him, he is my Father! How gracious he is to me! and the like. Yes, when God does our pleasure, then we can easily say such things; but when he sends misfortune and adversity, we no longer regard him as our God, nor as our Father.

[24] True love to God does not act in this way, but in the heart it thinks and with the lips says: Lord God, I am thy creature; do with me as thou wilt; it matters not to me. I am ever thine, that I know; and if thou desirest, I will die this very hour or suffer any great misfortune; I will cheerfully do so from my heart. I will not regard my life, honor and goods and all I have, higher and greater than thy will, which shall be my pleasure all my days. But you will never find a person who will constantly regulate himself according to this commandment; for the whole life you are living in the body, in the five senses, and whatever you do in your body, should all be so regulated as to be done to the glory of God, according to the regulations of this commandment, which saith, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind.” As if Christ said: If you love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, then nothing will be lacking; you shall experience it in your daily life, namely: when everything you do, whether you wake or sleep, whether you labor or stand idle, whether you eat or drink, is directed and done out of love to God from the heart. In like manner your mind and thoughts will also be directed wholly and entirely to God, so that you will approve of nothing you are not certain is pleasing to God. Yea, where are those who do this?

[25] And this part where he says, “With all thy mind,” argues powerfully against the writings and teachings of man, upon which he especially depends, and thinks thereby to obtain a merciful God and merit heaven. Such imagination of the human reason draws us in a wonderful manner from this commandment, so that we do not love God with all the mind; as has been done hitherto, and is still done at the present day. For these priests and monks think nothing else than that God is moved by the mass and by other human inventions; but he abhors it and does not desire it, as is said in Isaiah 29:13: “In vain do they serve me, because they are teaching such doctrines which are only the commandments of men.” Matthew 15:8-9. The commandment here requires you to consider nothing good that is against God and against everything he has commanded or forbidden. It thus, requires, you to give yourself wholly and entirely to him in all your life and conduct.

[26] From this you can conclude, there is no human being who is not condemned, inasmuch as no one has kept this commandment, and God wants everyone to keep it. There we stand in the midst of fear and distress, unable to help ourselves, and the first knowledge of the law is, that we see our human nature is unable to keep the law; for it wants the heart, and if it is not done with the heart, it avails nothing before God. You may indeed do the works outwardly, but God is not thus, satisfied, when they are not done from the heart, out of love; and this is never done except man is born anew through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God aims to accomplish through the law nothing more than that we should in this way be forced to acknowledge our inability, frailty and disease, and that with our best efforts we are unable to fulfill a letter of the law. When you realize this, the law has accomplished its work. This is what Paul means when he says in Romans 3:20, “Through the law is the knowledge of sin.”

[27] From this it appears clearly that we are all alike, and are one in the inner wickedness of the heart, which the law reveals, when we look into it rightly. Therefore, we might well say, If one is good, then all are good. Therefore, no one should accuse another. It is indeed true that in public and gross sins there sticks a deeper sin; but the heart is alike bad, unless it be renewed by the Holy Ghost. But what shall I do when I once recognize my sin? What does it profit me? It helps me very much, for when I have come

thus, far, I am not far from the kingdom; as Christ says to a scribe in Mark 12:34, who also knew that the works of the law were nothing without love.

[28] But what shall we do to get rid of our bad conscience? Here follows now the other part of this Gospel, namely, who Christ is and what we can expect of him. From him we must receive and secure freedom from a wicked conscience, or we shall remain in our sins eternally, because for this purpose is Christ made known and given by the Father, in order that he might deliver us from sin, death, from a wicked conscience, and from the law.

[29] We have now heard what the law is, and how through the law we come to the knowledge of sin; but this is not enough, another has a work to do here, whose name is Christ Jesus; although the first, the law, must indeed remain; yea, it is necessary. For if I have no sense of my sins, I will never inquire for Christ; as the Pharisees and scribes do here, who thought they had done everything the law commanded and were ready to do yet more; but of Christ they knew nothing. Therefore, first of all, when the law is known and sin revealed through the law, it is then necessary that we know who Christ is; otherwise the knowledge of sin profits us nothing.

[30] But the law is known, when I learn from it that I am condemned, and see that there is neither hope nor comfort anywhere for me, and I cannot even help myself, but must have another one to deliver me. Then it is time that I look around for him who can help, and he is Christ Jesus, who for this purpose became man, and became like unto us, in order that he might help us out of the mire into which we are fallen. He loved God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself, and submitted his will to the will of his Father, fulfilled the law in every respect; this I could not do and yet I was required to do it. Therefore, he accepts him; and that which he fulfilled in the law, he offers me. He freely gives me his life with all his works, so that I can appropriate them to myself as a possession that is my own and is bestowed upon me as a free gift. He delivers us from the law, for when the law says, Love God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself, or thou wilt be damned, then I say, I cannot do it. Then Christ says: Come to me, take me and cling to me by faith; then you shall be rid of the law.

[31] Now this is accomplished in the following manner: Christ has through his death secured for us the Holy Spirit; and he fulfills the law in

us, and not we. For that Spirit, whom God sends into your heart for the sake of his Son, makes an entirely new man out of you, who does with joy and love from the heart everything the law requires, which before would have been impossible for you to do. This new man despises the present life, and desires to die, rejoices in all adversity, and submits himself wholly and entirely to the will of God. Whatever God does with him, is well pleasing to him. This Spirit you cannot merit yourself, but Christ has secured and merited it. When I believe from the heart that Christ did this for me, I receive also the same Holy Spirit that makes me an entirely new man. Then everything God commands is sweet, lovely and agreeable, and I do everything he desires of me; not in my own strength, but by the strength of him that is in me, as Paul says in Philippians, 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me."

[32] But you must take heed, that you do not undertake to secure this faith in Jesus Christ by your own works or power, or that you think lightly about this matter; for it is impossible for the natural man; but the Holy Spirit must do it. Therefore, beware of the preachers of self-righteousness, who simply blabber and say: We must do good works in order to be saved. But we say that faith alone is sufficient to this end. Our good works are for another purpose, namely, to prove our faith, as you have already frequently heard from me.

[33] Now this is the purpose of the question the Lord put to the Pharisees: What think ye of Christ; who is he and whose Son is he? But their answer, in that they say, He is the son of David, the Lord rejects and obscures their answer and refers to a passage from the Psalm, in order to leave them in doubt; so that no one is able to answer him a word.

[34] However, when David calls Christ his Lord, in that he says in Psalm 110:1, "But the lord said unto my Lord, 'Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool,'" it is to be understood that David speaks of him both as God and man, for according to the flesh alone he was the son of David. Paul also joins these two when he says in Romans 1:1-4: "I am called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God, which he promised afore through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh; who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." But it is something to know

that Christ is Lord; for this has might and power and is especially comforting in the time of affliction. But concerning this I have said more elsewhere and will therefore, now close, and pray God for grace.

Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. The Law and the Gospel, Christ, The Pharisee and the Publican.

Text: Matthew 22:34-46.

34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

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41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,

42 Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David.

43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying,

44 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?

45 If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?

46 And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions. Matthew 22:34-46

[1] In this Gospel Christ answers the question the Pharisees put to him: Which is the greatest commandment in the Law? and in turn asks them the question: What think ye of the Christ, whose son is he? Thus, this Gospel presents to us that which we continually hear and should hear, so that these two sermons must continue to be preached in Christendom, namely: the first, the teaching of the Law or of the ten commandments, and the second, the doctrine concerning the grace of Christ. For if either of these fall it pulls the other with it; while on the other hand, wherever the one remains steadfast and is faithfully put into practice, it brings the other with it.

[2] And God has ordained that these two themes shall be preached forever in the Christian Church, yea, they have always since the beginning of the world accompanied one another; they were given to our father Adam, while he was still in Paradise, and were later confirmed through Abraham, Moses and the Prophets. For they are required by the needs of humanity, fallen as it is under the power of Satan, so that we live and move in sin and are worthy of eternal death. Adam felt and lamented sin and its injuries; but later the sense of sin soon weakened and was disregarded, so that the heathen did not consider it sin although they indeed felt evil lust and desire in their bodies; but they imagined all that belonged to the character and nature of man. Yet they taught man should restrain such lust and desires and not allow them to go too far; but this nature in itself they did not condemn.

[3] Therefore, God gave this one simple teaching that reveals what man is, what he has been, and what he should again become. This is the doctrine of the Law, which Christ here cites: "Thou shalt love God with all thy heart, etc." As if to say: Thus, thou hast been, and thus, thou shalt still be and become. In Paradise you were in possession of the treasure, and were thus, created that you loved God with all your heart; this you have lost; but now you must again become as you were, or you will never enter the Kingdom of God. In like manner he speaks clearly and plainly in other places, Matthew 19:17: "If thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments." Likewise, Luke 10:28: "This do and thou shalt live, etc." This must in short be kept; and that we wish to dispute so much about it amounts to nothing, as if one might be saved without it, namely, without that which is called loving God with the whole heart and your neighbor as yourself. This divine

law must be fulfilled by you as purely and completely as the angels in heaven fulfill it.

[4] Therefore, it is wrong and not to be allowed, as some in ancient times said and as some stupid spirits now say: Although you do not keep the commandment, and do not love God and your neighbor, yea, although you are even an adulterer, that makes no difference, if you only believe, then you will be saved. No, dear mortal, that amounts to nothing; you will never thus, gain heaven; it must come to the point that you keep the commandments, and abide in love toward God and your neighbor. For there it stands briefly determined; “If thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments.” Again, to the Galatians, 5:19-21: “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that those who practice such things, shall not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, etc.”

[5] And Christ wishes this doctrine to be observed by the Christians so that they may know what they have been, what they are still lacking and what they should again become, that they continue not in the misery and filth in which they find themselves now; for if they do, they must be lost. Christ speaks right out plainly in Matthew 5:17-18: “Think not that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, the Law must be so taught and observed that not the smallest letter or one tittle of it shall in any wise pass away, till all things be accomplished.” Again, Christ says further in Matthew 12:36: “And I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof on the day of judgment.” And St. Paul in Romans 8:4: “God sent his Son in the flesh that the righteousness, required by the Law, might be fulfilled in us.” And in Romans 3:31: “Do we then make the Law of none effect if we teach man is justified through faith, and not through works. That is far from us; nay, we establish the Law.” That is, for this very reason we teach faith, by which the law is fulfilled.

[6] For this is indeed a glorious doctrine that teaches what we are to become; but that it may also be realized and not continue to be preached in vain, the other doctrine must be added, namely, how and through what means we may again return to our former state. We return when we hear what we lost in Paradise; when Adam lived in full love to God, and in pure love to his neighbor, and in perfect obedience without evil lust, and that had

he remained thus, we would still be so; but now, since through sin he fell from this command, we also lie in the same misery, full of sin and disobedience, under God's wrath and curse, and fall from one sin to another, and the Law stands there, holds us guilty, urges and requires us to be pious and obedient to God.

[7] What shall we then do here, since the Law continually commands and drives us, and we are powerless? For here my own conscience argues ever against me: Since I am to love God with my whole heart and my neighbor as myself, and I do not do it, I must therefore, be condemned and God approves and confirms the sentence of condemnation. Who will counsel me in this instance? I do not know what to counsel you, says the Law; but it decrees and demands plainly that you be obedient. Here the Prophets come now, and preach Christ, and say: One is coming who will give counsel how man may regain what he lost and again enter the state from which he fell, to which the Law points him. This is the other sermon that should and must be preached until the day of judgment, namely, the help from sin, death and Satan, and restoration of our bodies and souls, so that we may come into the state that we love God and our neighbor from our hearts. This is to be done fully and perfectly in the future life, but here in this life it should be commenced.

[8] For in the life beyond there will be no longer any faith, but perfect love, and all the Law demands we will do with our whole heart. Therefore, we must now preach what we should become and should forever continue to be, namely, that we are to love God and our neighbor with our whole heart. This I will commence, says Christ, and complete, not alone as to my own person, but I will aid you to make a beginning, and to continue ever in it, until you come where you will also fulfill it perfectly.

[9] Now this will come to pass thus,. Since we are unable to keep the Law and it is impossible for the natural man to do so, Christ came and stepped between the Father and us, and prays for us: Beloved Father, be gracious unto them and forgive them their sins. I will take upon me their transgressions and bear them; I love thee with my whole heart, and in addition the entire human race, and this I will prove by shedding my blood for mankind. Moreover, I have fulfilled the Law and I did it for their welfare in order that they may partake of my fulfilling the Law and thereby come to grace.

[10] Thus, there is first given us through Christ the sense that we do not fulfill the Law and that sin is fully and completely forgiven: however, this is not bestowed in a way or to the end, that we in the future need not keep the Law, and may forever continue to sin, or that we should teach, if we have faith then we need no longer to love God and our neighbor. But there is bestowed upon us the sense that the fulfilling of the Law may now for the first time be successfully attempted and perfectly realized, and this is the eternal, fixed and unchangeable will of God. To this end it is necessary to preach grace, that man may find counsel and help to come to a perfect life.

[11] But the help offered us is, that Christ prays the Father to forgive us our sins against this Law, and not to impute what we are still indebted. Then he promises also to give the Holy Spirit, by whose aid the heart begins to love God and to keep his commandments. For God is not gracious and merciful to sinners to the end that they might not keep his Law, nor that they should remain as they were before they received grace and mercy; but he overlooks and forgives both sin and death for the sake of Christ, who has fulfilled the whole Law in order thereby to make the heart sweet, and through the Holy Spirit to kindle and move the heart to begin again to love from day to day more and more.

[12] Thus, begins in us not only love, but also truth, that is, a true character, as the Law requires; like St. John says in 1:17, that Christ is full of grace and truth, and through him grace and truth grow in us, which neither Moses nor the law can give us. For the Law is not abolished thus, by grace, that the truth is to be overlooked, and that we should not love God; but through him we experience that we do not as perfectly keep the Law as we ought in the kingdom of forgiveness or of grace. But besides the Holy Spirit is given us, who kindles a new flame or fire in us, namely, love and desire to do God's commandments. In the kingdom of grace this should begin and ever grow until the day of judgment, when it shall no longer be called grace or forgiveness, but pure truth and perfect obedience. In the meantime he continues to give, forgive, to bear and forbear, until we are laid in our graves.

[13] Now if we thus, continue in faith, that is, in what the Holy Spirit gives and forgives, in what he begins and ends, then the fire on the judgment day, by which the whole world is to be consumed, will cleanse and purify us, so that we will no longer need this giving and forgiving, as if

there were something unclean and sinful in us, as there really is at present; we will certainly be as the brightness of the dear sun, without spot and defect, full of love, as Adam was at the beginning in Paradise. Thus, will it then be truly said, the Law is established and fulfilled, Romans 3:31. For it will then no longer blame and rebuke us; but the Law shall be considered satisfied, and the debt paid, even by ourselves; since all is now fulfilled, not through us, and yet by it we are freed and saved, so that we creep under Christ's mantle and wings, that he makes satisfaction for us until we lie under the earth and then come again out of the grave with a beautiful, glorified body that will be nothing but holiness and purity, with a cleansed soul full of the love of God. Then we will no longer be in need of his mantle and of his prayers, but we will all be there perfect and complete, as we should be. Now, since I believe in him, my sins are forgiven and I am called a child of grace. And moreover, the truth also should arise in me, that is, a new righteous character, that shall continue until it perfects me; since Christ, the truth, has come, not to destroy the Law, but to establish it, not only in himself, which was done long ago. but in me and in all Christians.

[14] These are the two doctrines that should accompany one another, since they belong together or the one is in the other, and they must always go together as long as we live here, by which the Law or God's commandment may begin to work in Christians, so that the wicked, disobedient persons of the world may be restrained and punished. Since they will not fear and love God like Christians and believers, they are obliged to fear eternal fire, perdition and other punishments. Others, however, will be taught by it from what they have fallen and how sorely and fully they have inherited sin.

[15] For when I compare my life with the Law I see and experience always the contrary of what the Law enjoins. I shall entrust to God my body and soul, and love him with my whole heart; yet, I would rather have a dollar in my chest than ten gods in my heart, and I am happier when I know how to make ten dollars, than when I hear the whole Gospel. Let a prince give a person a castle or several thousand dollars, what a jumping and rejoicing it creates! On the other hand, let a person be baptized or receive the communion which is a heavenly, eternal treasure, there is not one-tenth as much rejoicing. Thus, we are by nature; there is none who so heartily rejoices over God's gifts and grace as over money and earthly possessions;

what does that mean but that we do not love God as we ought? For if we trusted and loved him, we would rejoice more that he gave us the sense of sight than if we possessed the whole world. And the word of consolation he speaks to me through the Gospel ought to give me higher joy than the favor, money, wealth and honor of the whole world. But that it is not so and ten thousand dollars can make people happier than all the grace and possessions of God, proves what kind of fruit we are, and what a distressing and horrible fall it is in which we lie. And yet we would not see nor realize it, if it were not revealed to us through the Law, and we would have to remain forever in it and be lost, if we were not again helped out of it through Christ. Therefore, the Law and the Gospel are given to the end that we may learn to know both how guilty we are and to what we should again return.

[16] This now is the Christian teaching and preaching, which, God be praised, we know and possess, and it is not necessary at present to develop it further, but only to offer the admonition that it be maintained in Christendom with all diligence. For Satan has continually attacked it hard and strong from the beginning until the present, and gladly would he completely extinguish it and tread it under foot. For he cannot endure that the people continue in it and conduct themselves uprightly, and he seeks a hundred thousand arts and wiles only to crush it. Therefore, I so gladly preach it, as it is greatly needed; for until the present it has never been heard nor known in the Papacy.

[17] For I myself was a learned doctor of theology and yet I never understood the ten commandments rightly. Yea, there were many highly celebrated doctors who did not know whether there were nine, ten or eleven commandments, and much less did we know the Gospel and Christ. But the only thing that was taught and advocated was: Invoke the Virgin Mary and other saints as your mediators and intercessors; fast often and pray much; make pilgrimages, enter cloisters and become monks, or pay for the saying of many masses and like works. And thus, we imagined when we did these things we had merited heaven.

[18] That was the time of blindness when we knew nothing of God's Word, but led ourselves and others into misery by our own idle talk and dreams. And I was one of those who indeed bathed in this sweat or in this bath of anxiety. Therefore, let us give heed that we may thoroughly grasp and retain this doctrine, if other fanatics and false spirits wish to attack it, so

that we may be forearmed and learn, while we have the time and the beloved sun again enlightens us, and buy while the market is at our door. For it will come to this when once these lights, which God now gives, have departed, Satan will not take a furlough until he raises up other fanatical spirits to do harm; as he has already commenced to do in many places during our generation. What will take place after we are gone?

[19] Therefore, learn, who can learn, and learn well, so that we may know, first the ten commandments, what we owe to God. For if we do not know this, then we know nothing and we will not inquire about Christ in the least. Just like we monks did who either held Christ to be an angry judge or despised him entirely in the face of our imaginary holiness. We fancied we were not in sin, which the ten commandments show and punish; but we had the natural light of reason and free will, and if we lived according to that, as much as we were able, then God would have to bestow upon us his grace, etc. But now, if we are to know Christ as our helper and Savior, then we must first know, out of what he can help us, not out of fire or water, or other bodily need and danger, but out of sin and the hatred of God. But whence do I know that I lie drowned in misery? From no other source than from the Law, that must show me what my loss and disease are, or I will never inquire for the physician and his help.

[20] Thus, we have both parts of the help of Christ: the one, that he must represent us over against God and be a cloak to cover our shame, as the one who takes upon himself our sins and disgrace; a cloak, I say, for us, as the one who takes our sins and shame upon himself, but before God a throne of grace in whom there is no sin or shame; but only virtue and honor. And like a hen he spreads out his wings against the buzzard, the devil with his sin and death, so that God for his sake forgives all, and to us he can do no harm. But on the condition that you only remain under these wings. For while you are under his mantle and protection and do not come out from under it, sin that is still in you must not be sin for the sake of him who covers you with his righteousness.

[21] Then in the second place Christ does not only thus, cover and protect us, but he will also nourish and feed us as the hen does her little chickens, that is, he gives us the Holy Spirit and strength, to begin to love God and to keep his commandments. And this shall continue to the last day when faith and this cloak of shame will cease, so that we will behold the

Father without any medium or covering, and we ourselves stand before him, and there will be no longer any sin in us to be forgiven; but all will be again restored and brought back or perfected, as St. Paul says in Acts 3:21, purified and perfect, what Satan from the beginning disturbed and ruined.

[22] Now Christ wishes to teach this by his answer and the question, with which he in reply upbraided the Pharisees. As if he should say, you know nothing more than to speak of the Law, which teaches you that you should love God and your neighbor and yet you do not understand it; for you imagine you have fulfilled it, though you are still far from doing so. Just like the one in Matthew 19:20-21, who boasts he had kept all the commandments from his youth; but Christ says to him: "If thou wouldst be perfect, go sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor." This is as much as to say: Whoever will love God aright and keep his commandments, must be able to sacrifice his possessions, body and life. Therefore, another thing is necessary, Christ will say, for you to know, namely, that you know and possess the man called Christ, who helps us to the end that this doctrine of the Law may be established and perfected in you.

[23] But what does it mean to know Christ aright? This the Pharisees and scribes do not know; for they do not consider him more than David's son, that is, he who is to sit on David's throne (as born from his flesh and blood) and is lord and king, also greater and mightier than David was, and yet only to be a temporal ruler to make his people the lords of the world and bring all heathen under his rule, etc. But that they should need him in their lost state, to help them out of sin and death, of that they knew nothing. Therefore, the Holy Spirit must teach that he was not only David's son, but also God's Son, as was taught after his resurrection.

[24] Now here Christ does not explain this, but he only broaches that David in Psalm 110:1, called Christ his Lord: "How then," he says, "doth David in the Spirit call him Lord?" It does not sound right and it is against nature for a father to call his son lord, and to be subject to him and serve him. Now David calls Christ his Lord, and a Lord, to whom Jehovah himself says: "Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool," that is, be like me, acknowledged and worshipped as the right and true God; for it becometh none other to sit at his right hand; he is indeed so jealous that he allows no one aside from himself to sit equal to him, as he says in the prophesy of Isaiah 48:11, "My glory will I not give to

another.” Since Jehovah now places Christ equal with himself, he must be more than all creatures. Therefore, he proposes to them a great question, but lets them thus, stick; for they did not understand it, and it was not yet the time to make this known public. But the meaning is as our articles of faith teach us to believe; that Christ was both David’s true natural son of his blood and flesh and also David’s Lord, whom David himself must worship and hold as God. However it was impossible to make these statements harmonize, as it is still impossible for human reason, where the Holy Spirit does not reveal it, how the two should be at the same time in the one Christ, both that he was truly David’s seed and God’s Son by nature.

[25] Now Christ propounded this question to teach it is not enough to have the Law which is the only thing that shows from what state we have fallen; but whoever will return again to it and become renewed, that Christ must do through a knowledge of him, who is indeed born of David and is his flesh and blood, but not born in sin, as David and all men are born, but had to be born without man, of a drop of the pure blood of a virgin, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, that he was born a real and true man without any sin.

[26] He is the only man that has been able to keep and fulfill the Law; like all other men by nature, and yet not in the same guilt, but reared without sin and God’s wrath. This one had to intercede in our behalf before God and be our right hand and protection, be to us what the hen is to her little chickens, in whom we have forgiveness of sins and deliverance from God’s anger and hell. And not only this, but he also gives us the Holy Ghost to follow him, and here begins to extinguish and slay sin, until we come to him and be like him without any sin and in perfect righteousness; for he was raised from the dead to the right hand of the Father to totally abolish sin, death and hell and bring us to the new eternal righteousness and eternal life. Amen.

Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity. The Palsied Man Cured. Christ's Kingdom, the Faith of Others, and the Power to Forgive Sins. Christ our Righteousness.

Text: Matthew 9:1-8.

1 And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.

2 And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.

3 And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.

4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?

5 For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?

6 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.

7 And he arose, and departed to his house.

8 But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men. Matthew 9:1-8

[1] My friends in Christ, as we hear and enjoy this Gospel every year, I hope you also understand it, and know what it teaches us, and may God grant that the right life may also follow this knowledge! For the greater part of the Gospel we hear only with the ear, and we know it, but do not live according to it, whereas it should be so taught that few words and nothing but life would be the result. But what shall we do for it? We can do no more than preach it and no further raise it and carry it, we must preach and urge it until God comes and gives us his grace to the end that our words be few and that life may spring forth and grow. The first theme here offered us is the Gospel when Christ says: “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven.”

[2] These words show and contain in brief what the kingdom of Christ is, namely, this sweet voice, these motherly and fatherly words penetrating our inmost soul: “Thy sins are forgiven.” In no other sense are we to view the kingdom of Christ, so far as it is understood, than how we are to live before God. As you, beloved, well know that our highest duty is rightly to establish the conscience that we may know how we stand before God and our neighbor. Therefore, we must also hold fast to these words and become accustomed to the expression: “Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven”, and like sayings of which the Gospel is full.

[3] From this it follows that the kingdom of Christ is realized where nothing but comfort and the forgiveness of sins reign not only in words to proclaim it, which is also necessary; but also in deed, as we shall see in this example. For he did not only speak these words into the ear of this sick man; but he also forgave his sins and comforted him. This knowledge is proper for us Christians to know. It is indeed easily and quickly said and heard; but when it comes to the test the light is early extinguished, and Satan soon leads us astray; as you here observe that the scribes undertake to destroy this knowledge. I have before often said and will always say, that you should beware and properly learn the character and nature of the kingdom of Christ. For you know how reason is inclined in its every movement to fall from faith and from this knowledge to works. But here you see no works at all, no merit, here there is neither command nor law; there is nothing more than the offering of Christ’s assistance, his comfort and his grace, only kindness meets the man sick of the palsy.

[4] Therefore, if the kingdom of Christ is to grow, we must keep out of it with the law, and not be busy with works; for it is not in harmony with it to

say: Go out and run hither and thither and atone for your sins; you must observe and do this and that, if you will be free from sin; but directly without any work and law, out of pure grace, your sins are forgiven. Therefore, it is beyond the sphere of the kingdom of Christ to urge the people with the law.

[5] But we receive such things only with the ear and on the tongue, and it enters not into the depth of the heart; for sin at all times still hangs about our necks, it clings firmly to us, as St. Paul speaks of this in Romans, 7:18-19, and Hebrews 12:1. But in death we will experience it. Of this class are at present our fanatics who boast of the Holy Spirit, and pretend they would do better, some of whom are also in our midst, listen to us and contend that it is not enough for us to preach only faith and love. Yea, they say, You must do better and climb much higher. How high then must I climb? You must destroy pictures, you must kill the ungodly, and do whatever they propose. This filth now enters nearly every community where the Gospel has just been planted. These tares of Satan will also come to us, as I have often warned you. Take heed that you remain sound in your knowledge, in the true doctrine of Christ, for this knowledge and light is soon lost.

[6] Thus, I say, my friends, and would beseech you not to esteem that spirit great who proposes to you any kind of work, call it what you may, even if it would raise the dead, which they have not yet been able to do. And how is it that they say: we must kill the godless! Even if Moses commanded it that you must really do it, what sort of Christians are you then? But by this you shall truly experience which spirits are of God. and which are not. For if you give me a work to do, it is not the Holy Spirit who does it; but he goes and first brings me the grace of Christ, and then leads me to works. For thus, he speaks: Thy sins are forgiven, be of good cheer, and the like. He does not first insist on works, but first leads up to God through his sweet Word and grace, and does not immediately refer you to do some work; but later you will find works enough to do unto your neighbor.

[7] But the fanatics soon torment us with works, and profess to have a nobler spirit; they urge and insist upon our doing something first of all, and permit faith and love to be overlooked. This of course is not of the Holy Spirit. Christ first takes possession of the conscience, and when it is right in faith toward God, then he also directs us to do works toward our neighbor.

But he first highly extols faith and keeps works in the background. This they cannot understand. I would forgive them everything, if they would only not patch and mend their good works, to which they trust their existence, honor and fame. I would not care about their destroying all pictures, and melting cups and bells into one mass; but that they should make a matter of conscience out of it for those who do not destroy pictures, just as though the Holy Spirit or faith were not present unless this work be performed.

[8] I say this: Even if it were a work which God at this present hour commanded, I would not so insist upon it and condemn those who do not immediately obey it; and would find him some kind of protection, as that he is yet perhaps weak, and thus, spread over him the kingdom of grace. Let us be conscious of the fact that the work among them is directed to God, and not toward our neighbor. They make their works a necessity and say: If you do this, then you are a Christian; if you will not do it, you are no Christian. Where this or that is done there are Christians. And the fame follows their work, that they want to be esteemed better than others. Now you have the true light, therefore, be warned. Prove the spirits. We do not wish to prefer ourselves, as these persons do; but we boast in this, that we hear the Word, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven." I know that I have a gracious God; but these spirits cannot do this. Therefore, it is a mere devilish apparition that they carry from house to house. In this they lie against the Holy Spirit, and blame the Holy Ghost that he is the father of their cause. And even if the works were good, the forcing and compelling must remain in the background. Let them then keep quiet about setting us an example by their crazy works.

[9] The kingdom of Christ consists in finding all our praise and boast in grace. Other works should be free, not to be urged, nor should we wish by them to become Christians, but condescend with them to our neighbor. Thus, we should hear this Gospel to hold fast to its expressions so that they may be written, in our hearts, that this light, this Word and lamp may truly shine in us, by which we can judge all other doctrines. Thus, he says to the man sick with the palsy: "Thy sins are forgiven". These and similar words are to be taken to heart and meditated upon, since they are nothing but pure grace, and no work, by which the conscience is oppressed and forced to do

something. Thus, with these words you must protect yourselves against false teachers.

[10] We have now sowed a little of the Word, and this the devil cannot stand, for he never sleeps; the worms and the beetles will come and infect it. Yet so it must be, Christ will prove his Word, and examine who has received it and who not. Therefore, let us remain on the right road to the kingdom of Christ, and not go about with works and urge and force the works of the law, but only with the words of the Gospel which comfort the conscience: Be happy, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven.

[11] By this observe how narrow and how wide the kingdom of Christ is. Few there be who so receive the Word that it tastes good to them and judge themselves by it, and who understand what is said by: "Thy sins are forgiven." If we are now in the kingdom of Christ why then does he mention sin? Are sins always there? No one belongs to this kingdom unless his sins are revealed to him by the Gospel, otherwise these words apply to no one: "Thy sins are forgiven." Indeed all hear the Gospel, but it does not enter the hearts of all, for they do not all feel their sins. But the Gospel preaches that everything we have in us is sin. Therefore, it also offers comfort; forgiveness of sins is here. If I am to receive forgiveness of sins, I must have knowledge of sin.

[12] Forgiveness of sins is nothing more than two words, in which the whole kingdom of Christ consists. There must be sins, and if we are conscious of them, we must confess them; when I have confessed them, forgiveness and grace are immediately present. Before forgiveness is present there is nothing but sin. This sin must be confessed that I may feel and know that all that is in me is blindness; otherwise forgiveness of sins could not exist where there is no sin. However, there is no lack of sins to confess, but the lack is in not feeling and knowing our sins to confess them; then only forgiveness of them follows. But it is quite a different thing when God forgives sins, than when one man forgives another. One man forgives another his sins in a way that he thinks of them again tomorrow, or casts them up to him. But when God forgives sins it is quite a different thing than when man forgives. For God condemns no more, he banishes all wrath from him, yea, he no more thinks of the sin, as he himself says in the prophet Isaiah, 43:25. Now if this wrath is gone, then hell, the devil, death and all misfortune that the devil may bring with him, must also disappear; and

instead of wrath God gives grace, comfort, salvation and everything good that he himself is.

[13] Sin is pure unhappiness, forgiveness pure happiness. The divine majesty is great, great is also that which it forgives. As the man is, so is also his forgiveness. But you must know in your heart how great these words are in which you know how to trust, yea, for which you can cheerfully die. But only few rightly receive these words, therefore, there are but few true Christians.

[14] This then is the kingdom of Christ, and he who possesses it thus, possesses it in the right way. Here there is no work, but only the acknowledgment of all our misfortune, and the reception of all the gifts of God. Here there is nothing but simple comfort, here the words are continually heard: Be joyful, let not your conscience be troubled because of sin, or because you have not done a great amount of good; I will forgive you all. Therefore, it is not by merit, but it is a simple gift. This is the Gospel, upon which faith depends, through which you grasp and keep these words, so that they may not have been spoken in vain. For we have no other comfort of which God tells us to boast than that God says: "Be of good cheer, be comforted; for I forgive thy sins; and in my forgiveness you can glory and rejoice." Here then you have reason to boast and rejoice, but not in your own works.

[15] This the work-righteous person cannot do, for honor always follows, as they have said: Honor follows virtue as the shadow follows the man. If it is the honor of works, whether man or God has commanded them, it is nothing; if it is the honor of the works God does in us it is all right, as Psalm 118:16 says: "The right hand of Jehovah is exalted; the right hand of Jehovah doth valiantly." As though he should say: "In this will I boast and glory, namely, in that he has exalted me out of death, hell and all evil." Work-righteous people have not this glory, for they have not the Word; but as the work is, so is the praise, they urge and compel us to depart from the Word to human work. But the Holy Spirit urges us from our works to the Word. The former boast of their works, the latter, where the Holy Spirit is, rejoice internally in the heart with God, that he has done this work, and they remain clinging to grace, and attribute nothing at all to their own works.

[16] Thus, the scribes do here. When they heard these words they said among themselves: “This man blasphemeth.” For this is the nature of the holy Gospel and the true Word of God where it is truly believed, that it is blasphemed on both sides, and the whole world would destroy it; as was the case in the time of the Apostles, and as our raging princes now do, who simply wish it were dead, entirely crushed and destroyed with all those who preach and confess it. This however is the least persecution.

[17] The other persecution is much worse, which takes place among us as it also did in Apostolic times among the Apostles. So too our country squires, who enjoy the Gospel with us, and do not want to be followers of the Pope, but to be regarded as Christians; they must plunge into it; so furious they are that they boast of the Gospel, and yet they trust in their works. And here the Holy Spirit must be called the devil, there the beautiful spirit. But we must venture to say: Their cause is not just; then they will say again: Your cause is not right; for the wicked spirit does not rest unless it is praised. We have a Lord of protection, he will successfully accomplish his work.

[18] Paul calls all false spirits bold and proud. Yes, in their filth with their protectors they are proud and impudent, otherwise they are the most cowardly villains that can be found. When they are to appear and answer for their conduct, they cannot produce a single answer. Among themselves they are bold, and venture to catch God in his own Word; but when it comes to the test, they simply despair. But the Holy Spirit stands firm, checks their buffeting, makes us bold and courageous, comforts weak consciences and says: “Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven.” The true spirit is bashful, and becomes bashful in the sight of God, as Christians do who bow before God, honor him and are not proud. But before tyrants the Holy Spirit encourages them so that they fear neither tyrants nor devils, and are not frightened even if they tore their heads from their shoulders. But in God’s presence they fear and tremble like a rustling leaf. But, alas, I see the great mass of people are only concerned about continually hearing without understanding what is said. and when the time comes that they should give an answer, they stand like the pipers and can answer nothing. And thus, we also go forth to execution. We must endure such assaults and factious spirits and cannot change it. Nevertheless, we may well comfort ourselves with the thought that we have the true foundation, that our cause is right and theirs

wrong. This they also know well enough, and for this reason they can never be bold except among themselves, and there they may boast as long as they please.

[19] But the kingdom of Christ consists in this and thereby grows, namely, that the conscience be comforted with the Word. What else takes place through works and laws, all pertains to our neighbor. For I need no works before God, and must only be careful rightly to confess my sins. Then I have forgiveness of sins and am one with God, all which the Holy Spirit works in me. Then I break forth with blessings toward my neighbor, as they did here who brought the man sick with the palsy to the Lord. Those were in the kingdom, or show who are in the kingdom, as the Evangelist says, that the Lord had respect unto their faith. For had they not had any faith, they would not have brought the sick to the Lord. Faith precedes works, works follow faith. Therefore, because they are in the kingdom by faith, they bring in the sick man and thus, do the work.

[20] On this earth man lives not for the sake of works, in order that they may be profitable to him, for he is not in need of them. But if you do good works in order thereby to obtain and merit something from God, all is lost, and you have already fallen from this kingdom. But since you believe and continue to live you ought to know that you live for this very cause, namely, to carry in the sick man. God does not desire the Christian to live for himself. Yea, cursed is the life that lives for self. For all that one lives after he is a Christian, he lives for others. So these also do who bring in the sick man, they no longer live for themselves, but their lives serve others; yes, with their faith they win for the sick man a faith of his own. For this sick man had at first no faith, but after he heard the Word, Christ instills into him a faith of his own, and awakens him with the Gospel; as he is accustomed to instill faith by the Word.

[21] Thus, all works should be done, only to the end that we may see how they agree with the service for other people, to bring them to a true faith and lead them to Christ. If I tear down the pictures in churches that men may see a Christian is present, that is of no profit to the people, nor does it preach how to become free from sin; but he only desires praise, which does not lift up the consciences, and only makes the people gape with ears, eyes and mouths wide open. It is a contemptible art to demolish pictures. But to know the kingdom of Christ that I or others may be

benefited, this is well done. But you will not accomplish this even if you tear down all the churches, but only by hearing the words: Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven; then by bringing others to God's Word.

[22] The Word must be enforced, it must be beaten into men, here I must eat and drink, adorn and clothe myself, not that I may live, but that I may enforce the Word. For where the life of a Christian is not centered in the Word, it is not right. I am required to aid the conscience with the Word. I must give my neighbor meat and drink and do all I can for him in order to reach the chief thing, namely, to encourage the conscience, as they do here, who assist the sick man to recover his bodily health. And although it is a kindness or work to his body, nevertheless they so help him that his soul is also strengthened. Thus, I feed the hungry, give the thirsty drink, clothe the naked, and the like. Yet I do this not only that he may eat and drink, but that I may secure the opportunity to tell him the Word, and thus, also to bring him to Christ. These works are outside the kingdom, done to those who are not in the kingdom, in order to bring them into the kingdom.

[23] Thus, the Holy Spirit preaches, but the mad spirit of the separatists only desires to perform great wonders, to see and do miracles and signs. It is miracle enough that people learn by our preaching to know Christ and obtain a joyful conscience. Likewise, that I learned monachism, priestcraft, and everything belonging to popery to be nothing, is for me a great miracle. There is nothing in it when they make the charge that we perform no miracles. Although they do not shine so brightly and our ministers perform no miracles, as the Papists imagine they do, nevertheless, our light is pure and our knowledge correct. We surely preach the Gospel, and this they must of course conscientiously confess before each and everyone, whether they desire to do so or not. So you have learned here that the kingdom of Christ and the Gospel are devoted to the end that you concentrate all your life, whether you be wife, child or husband, that you may be one who brings the sick to Christ, and thus, be of assistance to others.

II. The Faith of Others.

[24] Now we should also consider a little the faith of others and the power to forgive sins, had we the time. I said before that it is an error to baptize the children into the faith of the church; men preached as though they were

baptized without faith. This error enters among us by force at present, for the devil does not sleep. They think infants have no faith. The Pope with his subordinates has hitherto maintained that children have no faith, but are laid into the lap of the Christian church, and were baptized in the faith of universal Christendom. These new fanatics, like the Pope, also say that children have no faith; but that we should wait until they grow up.

[25] We say that the faith of others does not assist unto salvation, even if two Christendoms were present. The child must itself believe in Christ. For I have not been born in the place of the child or for the child, nor will I die in its stead, it has a death and birth of its own. If it is to live and become free from death, it must also come to this through faith in Christ. However, we pray for the children as well as for all unbelievers; and preach, pray and labor that the unbelieving and children may also come and believe; for this we also live.

[26] So these people here had also faith, but not the man of the palsy. Yet, he must receive it if he is to get well, otherwise their faith would not have helped him. They, however, in their faith prayed Christ to give the man sick of the palsy a faith of his own. So the faith of others assists to the end that I may obtain a faith of my own.

[27] Yes, one might say: "How do we know whether children believe or not?" Neither do we know who among adults believe or who do not. If I be baptized as an adult and say: I believe; how can you know whether I believe or not? How do you know it? How, if I were to lie? No one else can know it, to this everyone is brought by his own heart and thoughts; if it is right, it is right. The child cannot stand on my faith, I have scarcely enough faith for myself. Nor shall I lay it into the lap of Christendom, but into the Word of Christ where he says: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 19:14. Luke 18:15. And thus, I shall say: "Here, O Christ, I bring a little child to thee, thou hast commanded me to bring it to thee." Now I have done my part, Christ will also certainly do his part. So I do not baptize the child in my own faith or in the faith of Christendom. But my faith and Christendom bring the child to baptism, in order that by rightly bringing it, God may give it a faith of its own, that it may believe as I believe and be preserved in the same Word that Christ has given me. And I do not baptize the child on that it has no faith, as the Bohemians think, that when it grows up it shall then first obtain faith,

and speak the Word of God over the child: Thy sins are forgiven thee; and yet it does not, as they hold, believe the words. Is not this to charge the Word of God as being false? Now to sum up: I can of course by my prayers and faith help another that he may also believe, but I cannot believe for him. The Power to Forgive Sins.

[28] The Pharisees knew very well that to forgive sins was the work of God, and belonged to him alone. For this reason they regarded Christ as a blasphemer, who as a man pretended to forgive sins. The forgiveness of sin is of two kinds: The first is to drive sin from the heart and infuse grace into it; this is the work of God alone. The second kind is the declaration of the forgiveness of sin; this man can do to his fellowman. But here Christ does both. He instills the Spirit into the heart and externally he declares forgiveness with the word, which is a declaration and public preaching of the internal forgiveness.

[29] All men who are Christians and have been baptized, have this power. For with this they praise Christ, and the word is put into their mouth, so that they may and are able to say, if they wish, and as often as it is necessary: Behold, O Man! God offers thee his grace, forgives thee all thy sins; be comforted, thy sins are forgiven; only believe and thou wilt surely have forgiveness. This word of consolation shall not cease among Christians until the last day: "Thy sins are forgiven, be of good cheer." Such language a Christian always uses and openly declares the forgiveness of sins. For this reason and in this manner a Christian has power to forgive sins.

[30] Therefore, if I say to you: Thy sins are forgiven, then believe it as surely as though God himself had said it to you. But who could do this if Christ had not descended, had not instructed me and said that we should forgive one another our trespasses? As when he says, John 20:22-23: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained unto them." And at another place, Matthew 18:19-20, he says: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." The word penetrates and performs it.

[31] Now if there were no man on earth to forgive sins, and there were only law and works what a weak, and miserable thing a poor troubled conscience would be. But now when God adequately instructs everyone, so that he is able to say to others: Thy sins are forgiven thee, wherever thou art; the golden age has arrived. On this account we are to be defiant and boastful against sin, so that we can say to our brother, who is in anxiety and distress on account of his sins: Be of good cheer, my brother, thy sins are forgiven; although I cannot give thee the Holy Ghost and faith, I can yet declare them unto thee; if thou believest, thou hast them. They who thus, believe these words praise and glorify God, even as they do here in the Gospel. That is, God has given man power to forgive sins, and thus, the kingdom of Christ is spread, the conscience is strengthened and comforted. This we do now through the Word. God grant that we may also thus, understand it.

Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. The Righteousness of the World and of the Christian, and the Power on Earth to Forgive Sins.

Text: Matthew 9:1-8.

1 And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.
2 And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.
3 And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.

4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?

5 For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?

6 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.

7 And he arose, and departed to his house.

8 But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men. Matthew 9:1-8

[1] The theme of this Gospel is the great and important article of faith, called “the forgiveness of sins”, which, when rightly understood, makes an honest Christian and gives eternal life. Therefore, it is necessary in the Christian Church to teach this article diligently and unceasingly, so that we may learn to understand it clearly and distinctly. For this is the one great and difficult art of a Christian, where he will have enough to learn as long as he lives, so that he need not look for anything new, higher or better.

[2] But that we may rightly understand this, we must thoroughly know how to distinguish two powers or kinds of piety. One here upon earth, which God has also ordained and has included under the second table of the ten commandments. This is called the righteousness of the world or of man, and serves to the end that we may live together on earth and enjoy the gifts God has given us. For it is his wish that his present life be kept under proper restraint and passed in peace, quietude and harmony, each one attending to his own affairs and not interfering with the business, property or person of another. For this reason God has also added a special blessing, Leviticus 18:5, “Which if a man do, he shall live in them”, that is, whosoever upon earth is honest in the sight of all men shall enjoy life; it shall be well with him, and he shall live long.

[3] But if on the other hand, man is unwilling to do this, he has ordained that the sword, the gallows, the rack, fire, water, and the like be used, with which to restrain and check those who will not be pious. Where such punishment is not administered and the whole country becomes so utterly bad and perverted, that the officers of the law can no longer restrain, God

sends pestilence, famine, war, or other terrible plagues, in order to subvert the land, and destroy the wicked, as has happened to the Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, and others. From this we may learn his will, namely, that such piety be exercised and maintained; and know that he will provide what is necessary; but if such piety is not practiced, he will in turn take away and destroy everything.

[4] This is in short the sense and the whole substance of this piety on earth. But it is further necessary to urge it and to admonish people that every man diligently, zealously and voluntarily exercise himself in it, and that he be not driven to it by force and punishment. This admonition consists in setting forth God's commandments and in applying them to every station of life on earth, as God has ordered and appointed them. They are to be respected and highly honored; we should find pleasure in them and heartily do what is required in the different spheres of life. When God says, "Honor thy father and thy mother," every child, manservant, maidservant, citizen, and the like, should receive the Word with joy, have no greater treasure on earth, and not imagine if he do this he is already halfway or altogether in paradise. And this should be solely done, that every heart may be assured without a doubt and say: Now I know, that such work, life, or position is right and proper and is assuredly well pleasing to God; for I have his Word and command as a sure witness, which never deceives nor fails me.

[5] For do not let this be the least grace upon earth, when you have come to this decision in your heart and your conscience rests upon it. We owe this assurance to the blessed Gospel alone, in which we should delight and which we must reverence, even if we receive no other benefit or use from it than this, that it quiets our conscience and positively teaches us how to live and in what relation we stand to God. In what error and blindness we were aforesaid, when not even a spark of such teaching enlightened us and we allowed ourselves to be led in the name of the devil by the whims of every lying preacher; we tried all kinds of works, ran hither and thither, expended and wasted our energies, money and property; here we established masses and altars, there cloisters and brotherhoods, and everyone was groping for the way in which he might serve God; yet no one found it, but all remained in darkness. For there was no God who might say: This is pleasing to me, this I have commanded, etc. Yes, our blind guides did nothing less than lose

sight of God's Word, separated it from good works, and instead of these set up other works everywhere; in addition to this they discarded and despised the positions in life, which God had appointed, as though he knew no better, nor even as well as we, how to manage his affairs.

[6] Therefore, we must constantly take heed to inculcate this Word of God, which does not burden us with any special, great and difficult works, but refers us to the condition in which we live, that we look for nothing else, but with a cheerful heart remain satisfied in it, and be assured that by such work more is accomplished than if one had established all the cloisters and kept all the orders, although it be the most insignificant domestic work. For hitherto we have been woefully deceived by the fine luster and pomp of works, hoods, bald pates, coarse apparel, by fasts, wakes, pious looks, playing the devotee, and going barefoot. Our foolishness consists in laying too much stress upon the show of works and when these do not glitter as something extraordinary, we regard them as of no value; and poor fools that we are, we do not see that God has attached and bound this precious treasure, namely his Word, to such common works as filial obedience, external, domestic, or civil affairs, so as to include them in his order and command, which he wishes us to accept, the same as though he himself had appeared from heaven. What would you do if Christ himself with all the angels were visibly to descend, and command you in your home to sweep your house and wash the pans and kettles? How happy you would feel, and would not know how to act for joy, not for the work's sake, but that you knew that thereby you were serving him, who is greater than heaven and earth.

[7] If we would only consider this, and by the power of the Word look beyond us, and think that it is not man, but God in heaven who wishes and commands these things, we would run full speed, and in a most faithful and diligent manner rather do these common, insignificant works, as they are regarded, than any others. There is no other reason why this is not done than the simple fact that the works are separated from the Word, and God's command is not regarded nor respected; we move along in a blind, drowsy manner, and think the doing of the works is all sufficient. Because we regard these works as insignificant, we stare and look around for others, become indolent and fretful, do nothing in love, faithfulness and obedience, have no scruples on account of our negligence, are faithless to our

fellowmen, injure or vex them, and thus, heap upon ourselves all manner of misery, wrath, and misfortune.

[8] This then is one part of our discourse, that this external righteousness be urged both in admonitions and in threatenings, and not be considered as of no importance. For whosoever despises it, despises God and his Word.

[9] Therefore, let every man look to himself what he is or what he has to do, and what God demands of him, whether it be to rule, to command and order, or on the contrary to obey, serve and labor, that he may attend to the duties of his office with all faithfulness for God's sake. Let him be assured that God has more respect for such faithfulness than for all the work and piety of the monks, who never yet have attained to this outward righteousness; nor are they able to extol all their works and doings as heartily as a child or servant girl performing their duties according to God's command. O, what a blessed world we would have, if people believed this, and every man remained at his post, always keeping in mind God's will and command. Then there would shower from heaven all kinds of blessings and gifts instead of the many vexations and heart-aches, which we now have, are looking for, and deserve.

[10] Above this external piety there is another, which does not belong to this temporal life on earth but which avails only before God and which leads us to the life beyond and keeps us in it. The former piety consists in works, which this present life requires to be done among men, whether they be our superiors or inferiors, our neighbors, or our kindred. It has its reward here upon earth, also ends with this life, and they who do not practice it shorten their days. But this latter piety moves and soars far above everything that is upon earth, and has nothing to do with works. For how can it have works, since all that this body can perform and that is called works, is already included in the former piety. This piety is now called the grace of God, or the forgiveness of sins, of which Christ speaks in this and other gospels, and which is not an earthly but heavenly righteousness; it does not come of our work and ability but is the work and gift of God. For that human piety may well shield us against punishment and the hangman, and permit us to enjoy temporal gifts; but it cannot attain for us God's grace and the forgiveness of sin. Therefore, even though we may have this external piety, we must nevertheless have a much higher one, which alone

avails before God, frees us from sin and an evil conscience, and leads us out of death into eternal life.

[11] This is, furthermore, the only part or article and doctrine, by believing which we become and are called Christians, and which separates and divorces us from all other saints on earth; for they all have a different foundation and nature of their saintliness, peculiar exercises, and rigorous life. It separates us also from the works of those holding positions and offices approved by the Word of God, which are indeed much higher and better than all the self-chosen ecclesiasticism of the monks. These also constitute a holy calling, so that they are called pious and deserve praise of all men because they do their duty. But all this makes no one a Christian. He alone is a Christian who receives this article in faith, and is assured that he is in the kingdom of grace, in which Christ protects him, and daily forgives him his sins. But he who looks for something else or wishes to deal otherwise with God, must know that he is no Christian, but is rejected and condemned by God.

[12] For this reason the greatest skill and intelligence is needed to grasp and understand this righteousness, and in our hearts and before God rightly to distinguish it from the above mentioned outward righteousness. For this is, as has been said, the skill and the wisdom of the Christian, but it is so high and great that even all the beloved Apostles could not speak enough of it; and yet it meets the painful misfortune that no art is mastered as soon as this. There is no greater theme for a preacher than the grace of God and the forgiveness of sin, yet we are such wicked people, that, when we have once heard or read it, we think we know it, are immediately masters and doctors, keep looking for something greater, as though we had done everything, and thus, we made new factions and division.

[13] I have now been teaching and studying this subject with all diligence for many years (more than anyone of those who imagine they know it all), in preaching, writing and reading, yet I cannot boast of having mastered it and am glad that I still remain a pupil with those who are just beginning to learn. For this reason I must admonish and warn all such as want to be Christians, both teachers and pupils, that they guard themselves against such shameful delusion and surfeit, and understand that this subject is most difficult and the greatest art that can be found upon earth; so that even Paul had to confess and say (2 Corinthians 9:15) that it is an

unspeakable gift, that is, one which cannot be described among men with words so that they may regard it as highly and dearly as it really is in itself.

[14] The reason for this is, that man's understanding cannot get beyond this external piety of works, and cannot comprehend the righteousness of faith; but, the greater and more skillful this understanding is, the more it confines itself to works and rests upon them. It is not possible for man in times of temptation and distress, when his conscience smites him, to cease from groping around for works on which to stand and rest. Then we seek and enumerate the many good deeds, which we would like to do, or have done, and because we find none, the heart begins to doubt and despair. This weakness adheres so firmly to our nature, that even those who have faith and recognize the grace of God, or the forgiveness of sins, cannot overcome it with all their efforts and exertions, and must daily contend against it. In short it is entirely beyond human knowledge and understanding, ability and power, to ascend above this earthly righteousness, and to transfer oneself into this article of faith; and although one hears much about it and is conversant with it, there continues nevertheless the old delusion and inborn corruption which would bring its own works before God and make them the foundation of salvation. Such is the case, I say, with those who are Christians and fight against this work-righteousness; others, critics and inexperienced souls are even lost in it.

[15] Therefore, this doctrine, that our piety before God consists entirely in the forgiveness of sins, must be rightly comprehended and firmly maintained. We must therefore, get beyond ourselves and ascend higher than our reason, which keeps us in conflict with ourselves and which reminds us both of sin and good works; and we must soar so high as to see neither sin nor good works, but be rooted and grounded in this article and see and know nothing besides. Therefore, let grace or forgiveness be pitted not only against sin, but also against good works, and let all human righteousness and holiness be excluded. Thus, there are in man two conflicting powers: Externally in this life he is to be pious, do good works, and the like. But if he aims beyond this life and wishes to deal with God, he must know that here neither his sin nor his piety avails anything. And though he may feel his sins which disturb his conscience, and although the law demands good works, he will not listen nor give heed to them, but will

boldly reply; If I have sin, Christ has forgiveness; yea, I am seated on a throne to which sin cannot attain.

[16] Therefore, we are to regard the kingdom of Christ as a large, beautiful arch or vault which is everywhere over us, and covers and protects us against the wrath of God; yea, as a great, extended firmament which pure grace and forgiveness illuminate and so fill the world and all things, that all sin will hardly appear as a spark in comparison with the great, extended sea of light; and although sin may oppress, it cannot injure, but must disappear and vanish before grace. They who understand this, may well be called masters, but we will all have to humble ourselves and not be ashamed to keep on learning this lesson as long as we live.

[17] For wherever our nature succeeds in finding sin, it tries to make an unbearable burden of it. Satan fans the spark and blows up a great fire which fills heaven and earth. Here the leaf must be turned and we must firmly conclude: If the sin were ever so great or burdensome, this article of faith is nevertheless much higher, wider and greater, which has been recommended and established not by man's wisdom, but by him who has comprehended heaven and earth and holds them in the hollow of his hand. Isaiah 40:12. My sin and piety must remain here on earth as far as they concern my life and conduct. But in heaven above I have another treasure, greater than either of these; there Christ is seated and holds me in his arms, covers me with his wings and overshadows me with his grace.

[18] You may say: How is this, since I daily feel sin and my conscience condemns me and threatens me with God's wrath? I answer: For this reason, I say, one must understand that the righteousness of a Christian is nothing that can be named or imagined but the forgiveness of sin, that is, it is a kingdom of power which deals only with sin and with such abundant grace as takes away all wrath. It is called the forgiveness of sin for the reason that we are truly sinners before God; yes, everything in us is sin, even though we may have all human righteousness. For where God speaks of sin, there must be real and great sin; so also forgiveness is no jest, but real earnestness. When you, therefore, consider this article you have both. Sin takes away all your holiness, no matter how pious you are on earth; again, forgiveness takes away all sin and wrath. Therefore, your sin cannot cast you into hell, nor can your piety elevate you into heaven.

[19] Therefore, when the devil disturbs your conscience, and tries to bring despair to your heart by saying: “Have you not learned that one must be pious?” then answer courageously and say: Yes, you are right; I am a sinner, that I have known before; for this article, called the forgiveness of sins, has taught me this long ago. I am to be pious and do what I can before the world; but before God I am willing to be a sinner, and to be called nothing else, that this article may remain true, else there would not be forgiveness or grace; but it must needs be called a crown of righteousness and of merits. Therefore, although I feel nothing but many and great sins, yet they are no longer sins; for I have for them a precious panacea and drug which takes away the power and poison of sin and wholly destroys it. It is this word, “Forgiveness,” before which sin disappears like stubbles before the fire. Without it no work, suffering, or martyrdom avails against the smallest sin. For without forgiveness sin is and remains pure sin, which condemns us.

[20] Therefore, only confess this article heartily and boldly and say: Before the world I may be pious and do everything that is required, but before God it is only sin according to this article. Therefore, I am a sinner, but a sinner who now has forgiveness and who sits at the throne where grace rules supreme, Psalm 116. If this were not so I would be a sinner like Judas, who saw only his sin, but no forgiveness. But Christians, no matter how much sin they feel in themselves, in that word forgiveness see much more abundant grace presented to them, and poured out over them.

[21] Thus, learn then to magnify this article and spread it as far as Christ reaches and rules, that you may elevate it far above everything in heaven and on earth. For as the Word soars over all this, so must also faith, which comprehends the Word and keeps the heart steadfast in it, overcome sin, conscience, death and the devil.

[22] Consider now what kind of a person a Christian is, who lords it over death and the devil, and before whom all sin is as a withered leaf. Now examine yourself and see how far you have learned this lesson, and whether it is such an insignificant and easy matter as some inexperienced souls think. For if you have learned and believed it, all misfortune, death, and the devil will be as nothing. But since you are still so vexed with sin, and since you are still frightened and in despair on account of death, hell and God’s judgment, humble yourself, give honor to the Word and confess that you

have never yet understood this matter. In short let every man examine his own heart, and he will find a false Christian who imagines that he knows all about this subject before he has learned the first principles of it. The words are soon heard, read and repeated, but to carry out the principle in practice and in character, so that it may live within us, and our conscience may be founded upon it and rest in it, is not in the art of man. Therefore, I say and admonish, that those who wish to be Christians may always keep it in mind, assimilate it, practice it, and chastise themselves with it, that we may at least have a taste of it, and as James 1:18, be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. For we shall never advance so far in this life as to come to a perfect understanding of it; nor did even the blessed Apostles, full of the Spirit and of faith, advance so far.

[23] Thus, far I have explained the first part, what Christian righteousness is and in what it consists. But if you ask further, whence it comes, or how it has been brought about or gained, I answer: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come from heaven and has been made man, has suffered and died for our sins. This is the cause, the means, and the treasure, through which we obtain the forgiveness of sin and for the sake of which the grace of God is bestowed upon us; for such a treasure does not come to us without means or merit. But since all of us are born in sin and are the enemies of God, we have deserved only eternal wrath and punishment. All that we are and have is condemned, and there is no help or way out of it. For sin is so grievous that no creature can quench it, the wrath so great that no man can appease and conciliate it. Therefore, another man must take our place, namely Jesus Christ, God and man, and through his suffering and death make satisfaction for our sins and pay for them. This is the price that has been set, and has been expended for us, by which sin has been quenched and the wrath of God appeased, the Father has been reconciled and made our friend.

[24] Christians alone know this and believe it, and are in this respect different from those of every other faith and worship on earth. For the Jews, Turks, false Christians, and those who would be righteous by works, also boast that God is merciful; and there is no man on earth but knows something of the grace of God, and yet all of them fail to obtain it, or in other words, they do not have the treasure in which it lies and from which it flows. They continue in their blindness and imagine they can acquire it by

their works, rigid life, and their own holiness, with which they only make the wrath and displeasure of God the more grievous.

[25] Therefore, it is necessary that we rightly learn to know this treasure, and seek forgiveness where it may be found; that is, that we thoroughly learn to know, comprehend, and keep the Lord Jesus Christ. For it is ordained that no one shall come into God's presence, find grace, nor obtain forgiveness of the least sin except through Christ. Because you are a sinner, and will always remain one, your conscience is ever present, condemns and threatens you with God's wrath and punishment, so that you cannot see the grace of God. With reference to the forgiveness of sins let me say, that you will not find anything in your heart with which you can pay them off, nor raise any funds for which God might recognize you and cancel the debt in the ledger. But if you seize Christ as the one who has become your substitute, who has taken your sin upon himself, and who has given himself with all his merit and worthiness for you, no sin can avail anything against you. If I am a sinner, he is holy, and is Lord over sin, death, Satan and hell, so that no sin can harm me, because he has been given me as my righteousness and salvation.

[26] Therefore, we have, indeed, pure grace and forgiveness of all sins, but nowhere except in and through Christ alone, and in him only it must be sought and obtained. Therefore, whoever will come before God with any kind of work, that God shall recognize and regard as meritorious for obtaining grace, will be disappointed and undeceived, yea, instead of grace he will heap wrath upon himself. Thus, you see that all other ways and means are condemned as the doctrines of devils; by which men are led and directed to their own works, or to the holiness and merits of others, as for example, of the saints who have led ascetic lives and followed the rules of their orders, and have suffered and expiated a great deal; or as those have done who have comforted people in the throes of death and have admonished them to suffer death willingly for their sins. Whoever dares to offer anything else for sin or to atone for it himself does nothing else than deny the Lord Jesus Christ, yea, disgrace and slander him, as if the blood of Christ were of no more consequence than our repentance and satisfaction, or as if his blood were not sufficient to take away all the sins of the earth.

[27] Therefore, would you be freed from your sins, cease to seek works and satisfaction, and to bring them before God; but simply creep under the

wings and into the bosom of Christ, as the one who has taken away your sins, and has laid them upon himself. Thus, you need not chastise yourself with them, nor have anything to do with them! For he is the Lamb of God, says John 1:29, which taketh away the sins of the world; and Peter says, Acts 4:12, There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved. The reason we are Christians is because we have Christ with all His merit and worthiness, not because of our efforts and works, which indeed make a St. Carthusius, a St. Francis, or an Augustinian monk, an obedient servant and extremist as they are called; but such works can never make a Christian. Behold, this is the second part which belongs to the sermon on this article.

[28] The third thought is how and by what means we may appropriate such righteousness, so that we may receive the treasure acquired by Christ. Here also we need to give heed that we take the right way, and not make the mistake, which certain heretics have made in times past, and many erroneous minds still set forth, who think that God ought to do something special with them. These imagine that God will deal separately with each one by some special internal light and mysterious revelation, and give him the Holy Ghost, as though there was no need of the written Word or the external sermon. Consequently, we are to know that God has ordained that no one shall come to the knowledge of Christ, nor obtain the forgiveness acquired by him, nor receive the Holy Ghost, without the use of external and public means; but God has embraced this treasure in the oral word or public ministry, and will not perform his work in a corner or mysteriously in the heart, but will have it heralded and distributed openly among the people, even as Christ commands, Mark 16:15: Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, etc.

[29] He does this in order that we may know how and where to seek and expect his grace, so that in all Christendom there may be the same custom and order, and not every man follow his own mind and act according to his own notions, and so deceive himself and others, which would certainly happen. As we cannot look into the heart of any man, each one might boast of having the Holy Ghost and set forth his own thoughts as divine revelation which God had inspired and taught him in a special manner; as a result, no one would know whom or what to believe.

[30] Therefore, this part also, namely the external word or preaching, belongs to Christianity as a channel or means through which we attain unto the forgiveness of sins, or the righteousness of Christ, with which Christ reveals and offers us his grace or lays it into our bosom, and without which no one would ever come to a knowledge of this treasure. For whence should any man know, or in what man's heart would it ever come, that Christ, the Son of God, came from heaven for our sake, died for us, and rose from the dead, acquired the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and offers the same to us, without publicly having it announced and preached? And although he acquired this treasure for us through his suffering and death, no one could obtain or receive it, if Christ did not have it offered, presented, and applied. And all that he had done and suffered would be to no purpose, but would be like some great and precious treasure buried in the earth, which no one could find or make use of.

[31] Therefore, I have always taught that the oral word must precede everything else, must be comprehended with the ears, if the Holy Ghost is to enter the heart, who through the Word enlightens it and works faith. Consequently, faith does not come except through the hearing and oral preaching of the Gospel, in which it has its beginning, growth and strength. For this reason, the Word must not be despised, but held in honor. We must familiarize and acquaint ourselves with it, and constantly practice it, so that it never ceases to bear fruit; for it can never be understood and learned too well. Let every man beware of the shameless fellows who have no more respect for the Word than if it were unnecessary for faith; or of those who think they know it all, become tired of it, eventually fall from it, and retain nothing of faith or of Christ.

[32] Behold, here you have all that belongs to this article of the righteousness of Christ. It consists in the forgiveness of sins, offered to us through Christ, and received by faith in and through the Word, purely and simply without any works on our part. Yet I do not mean that Christians should not and must not do good works, but that they are not to be mingled and entwined in the doctrine of faith, and decorated with the shameless delusion that they avail before God as righteousness, whereby both the doctrine of works and of faith are besmirched and destroyed. For everything possible must be done to keep this article pure, unadulterated and separate from all our own doings. But after we have this righteousness by faith,

works are to follow and continue here on earth, so that there may be civil righteousness, and that both be maintained, each in its proper place, but separate in their nature and efficacy, — the former before God in faith over and above all works, the latter works in love to our neighbor, as we said plainly enough above and always taught.

Twentieth Sunday after Trinity. Matthew 22:1-14. Parable of the Marriage-Feast the King Made for His Son.

Text: Matthew 22:1-14.

1 And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,
2 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,
3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.
4 Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.
5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:
6 And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.
7 But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.
8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.
9 Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the

marriage.

10 So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

11 And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:

12 And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

14 For many are called, but few are chosen. Matthew 22:1-14

[1] This Gospel presents to us the parable of the wedding; therefore, we are compelled to understand it differently than it sounds and appears to the natural ear and eye. Hence we will give attention to the spiritual meaning of the parable, and then notice how the text has been torn and perverted.

[2] First, the King, who prepared the marriage feast, is our heavenly Father. The bridegroom is his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The bride is the Christian Church, we and the whole world, in so far as we believe, of which we shall hear later.

[3] God first sent out his servants, the Prophets to invite guests to this wedding; they were to bid them, that is, preach, and preach only faith in Christ. But those invited did not come; they were the Jews, to whom the Prophets were sent, they would not hear nor receive those sent to them. At another time he sent other servants, the Apostles and martyrs, to bid us come, and to say to the bidden guests: "Behold, I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come to the marriage feast."

[4] These words beautifully picture to us and teach how we should make use of the life of the saints; namely, to introduce examples by which the doctrine of the Gospel may be confirmed, so that we may the better, by the aid of such examples and lives, meditate upon Christ, and be nourished by and feast upon him as upon fatlings and well fed oxen. This is the reason he

calls them fatlings. Take an example: Paul teaches in Romans 3:23f. how the bride is full of sin and must be sprinkled by the blood of Christ alone, or she will continue unclean, that is, she must only believe that the blood of Christ was shed for her sins, and there is no other salvation possible. Then he beautifully introduces the example of Abraham and confirms the doctrine of faith by the faith and life of Abraham, and says, 4:3: "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness." That is a true ox, it is properly slain, it nourishes us, so that we become grounded and strengthened in our faith by the example and faith of Abraham. Again, soon after Paul lays before us a fine fatling, when he cites David the Prophet of God and proves from him, that God does not justify us by virtue of our works, but by faith, when he says, Romans 4:6-8: "Even as David also pronounceth blessing upon the man, unto whom God reckoneth righteousness apart from works," saying in Psalm 32:1-2: "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin." Behold, that fattens and nourishes in the true sense, when we use the example and doctrine of pious saints to confirm our own doctrine and faith. And this is the true honor that we can give to the saints. Follow now further in this Gospel:

[5] "But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise; and the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them." These are the three barriers that prevent us from coming to the marriage feast. The first, or the farm, signifies our honor; it is a great hindrance that we do not think of Christ and believe in him; we fear we must suffer shame and become dishonored, and we do not believe that God can protect us from shame and preserve us in honor. The second go to their spheres of business, that is, they fall with their hearts into their worldly affairs, into avarice, and when they should cleave to the Word, they worry lest they perish and their stomachs fail them; they do not trust God to sustain them. The third class are the worst, they are the high, wise and prudent, the exalted spirits, they not only despise but martyr and destroy the servants; in order to retain their own honor and praise, yea, in order to be something. For the Gospel must condemn their wisdom and righteousness and curse their presumption. This they cannot suffer; therefore, they go ahead and kill the servants who invited them to the dinner and the marriage feast. They were the Pharisees and scribes, who put to death both Christ and his Apostles, as their fathers did the Prophets. These

are much worse than the first and second classes, who, although they despised and rejected the invitation, yet then went away and neither condemned nor destroyed the servants.

[6] Further, the Gospel says: “But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.” That happened to the Jews through the Romans under Titus and Vespasian, who burned Jerusalem to the ground, to its very foundation. However I prefer to have it understood spiritually, since the whole Gospel is to be explained spiritually. Hence this came to pass when God totally destroyed and burned to the ground the synagogue at Jerusalem, he entirely abandoned faith, scattered the people hither and thither, so that none remained together and they were robbed both of their priesthood and of their kingdom; so that there is not now a poorer, a more miserable and forsaken people on the earth than the Jews. Such is the end of the despisers of God’s Word.

[7] It now follows: “Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy.” This has also come to pass; for the Jews have not desired to know anything at all of Christ; they put him to death, also the Prophets and Apostles, and from that time to the present they have not been worthy to hear a word concerning Christ.

[8] Further: “Then he said to them, Go ye therefore, unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast.” Hence they went out into the highways, namely, to us heathen, and gathered us together from the ends of the world into a congregation, in which are good and bad.

[9] Then the King goes in to behold the guests. This will take place on the day of judgment, when the King will let himself be seen.

[10] Then he will find one, not only a single person, but a large company not clothed with a wedding garment, that is, with faith. These are pious people, much better than the foregoing; for you must consider them the ones who have heard and understood the Gospel, yet they cleaved to certain works and did not creep entirely into Christ; like the foolish virgins, who had no oil, that is, no faith.

[11] To them the King will say: “Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness,” that is, he condemns their good works, that

they no longer avail anything; for the hands signify their work, the feet their walk in life, and he will then cast them into the outer darkness.

[12] Now, this outer darkness is in contrast with the inner light, since faith alone must see within the heart. There our light, our reason must be covered and cease, and faith alone lighten us. For if a person will act according to reason and open it, there is nothing but death, hell and sin before his eyes. Reason then considers itself a candidate for death; yet it finds no help in any creature, all is a desert and dark. Therefore, reason must be barred out here, or it must despair and surrender itself as a captive to the light of faith alone. This same light then sees that it is God in heaven who is interested in us, who cares for us, upon whom the heart can meditate, who rejects all aid of reason and depends upon no creature; then man will be sustained. Now this is the sense of the words, that those cast thus, into outer darkness will be robbed of faith, and thus, cast out. Since they do not cleave to God's mercy alone through faith, they must despair and be condemned.

[13] Let us now briefly notice what is taught by this marriage feast. First, this marriage feast is a union of the divine nature with the human. And the great love Christ has for us is presented to us in this picture of the wedding feast. For there are many kinds of love, but none is so ardent and fervent as a bride's love, the love a new bride has to her bridegroom, and on the other hand, the bridegroom's love to the bride. True love has no regard for pleasures or presents, or riches, or gold rings and the like; but cares only for the bridegroom. And if he even gave her all he had, she would regard none of his presents, but say: I will have only thee. And if on the other hand he has nothing at all, it makes no difference with her, she will in spite of all that desire him. That is the true nature of the love of a bride. But where one has regard to pleasure, it is harlot love; she does not care for him, but for the money; therefore, such love does not last long.

[14] This true bride love God presented to us in Christ, in that he allowed him to become man for us and be united with our human nature that we might thus, perceive and appreciate his good will toward us. Now, as the bride loves her betrothed, so also does Christ love us; and we on the other hand will love him, if we believe and are the true bride. And although he gave us even heaven, the wisdom of all the Prophets, the glory of all the saints and angels, yet we would not esteem them unless he gave us himself.

The bride can be satisfied by nothing, is insatiable, the only one thing she wants is the bridegroom himself; as she says in the Song of Solomon, 2:16: "My beloved is mine, and I am his." She cannot rest until she has her beloved himself. So is Christ also on the other hand disposed toward me: he will have me only, and besides nothing. And if I gave him even all I could, it would be of no use to him; he would have no regard for it, even if I wore all the hoods of all the monks. He wants my whole heart; for the outward things, as the outward virtues, are only maid servants, he wants the wife herself. He demands, that I say from the bottom of my heart: I am thine. The union and the marriage are accomplished by faith, so that I rely fully and freely upon him, that he is mine. If I only have him, what can I desire more?

[15] Now, what do we give to him? An impure bride, a dirty, old, wrinkled outcast. But he is the eternal wisdom, the eternal truth, the eternal light, an exceptionally beautiful youth. What does he give us then? Himself, wholly and completely. He does not cut a piece off for me or give me a little morsel, but the whole fountain of eternal wisdom, not a little brooklet. If then I am thus, his and he mine, I have eternal life, righteousness and all that belongs to him. Therefore, I am righteous, saved, and in a sense that neither death, sin, hell, nor Satan can harm me. If he gave me only a part of his wisdom, righteousness and life, I would say: That is of no help to me, but I want thee, without thee nothing is real and true. When he gives me his servants, his Prophets, he gives me only a part and a morsel; the gifts are only concubines, among whom there is only one who is the true bride. They are distinguished thus: there are many souls to whom gifts are made, as, wisdom, love and the like; but they are not the true brides, for they do not say, Thou art mine: but they court your purse on the side, for they love the gifts. But the true bride says: Thee alone will I have, thou art mine, and not the ring, not the jewel, not the present. The above is all spoken of love.

[16] Now, what do we bring to him? Nothing but all our heartaches, all our misfortunes, sins, misery and lamentations. He is the eternal light, we the eternal darkness; he the life, we death; he righteousness, we sin. This is a marriage that is very unequal. But what does the bridegroom do? He is so fastidious that he will not dwell with his bride until he first adorns her in the highest degree. How is that done? The Apostle Paul teaches that when he says in Titus 3:5-6: "He gave his tender body unto death for them and

sprinkled them with his holy blood and cleansed them through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” He instituted a washing; that washing is baptism, with which he washes her. More than this, he has given to her his Word; in that she believes and through her faith she becomes a bride. The bridegroom comes with all his treasures; but I come with all my sins, with all my misery and heart-griefs. But because this is a marriage and a union, in the sense that they become one flesh, Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5, and they leave father and mother and cleave to one another, they should embrace each other and not disown one another, although one is even a little sick and awkward; for what concerns one, the other must also bear.

[17] Therefore, the bride says, I am thine, thou must have me; then he must at the same time take all my misfortune upon himself. Thus, then are my sins eternal righteousness, my death eternal life, my hell heaven; for these two, sin and righteousness, cannot exist together, nor heaven and hell. Are we now to come together the one must consume and melt the other in order that we may be united and become one. Now his righteousness is truly incomparably stronger than my sins, and his life unmeasurably stronger than my death; for he is life itself, where all life must be kindled. Therefore, my death thus, vanishes in his life, my sins in his righteousness and my condemnation in his salvation. Here my sin is forced between the hammer and the anvil, so that it perishes and vanishes. For now since my sin, my filth is taken away he must adorn and clothe me with his eternal righteousness and with all his grace until I become beautiful; for I am his bride. Thus, then I appropriate to myself all that he has, as he takes to himself all that I have; as the Prophet Ezekiel 16:6f says: “I passed by thee, and thou wast naked, and thy breasts were fashioned and were marriageable; then I spread my skirts over thee and covered thy nakedness, gave thee my Word and put on thee beautiful red shoes.” Here he relates many kind acts he did for her; and later he complains in verse 15, how she became a harlot. He tells us all this, that he clothed us with his riches and that we of ourselves have nothing. Whoso does not here lay hold of this as sure, that he has nothing of himself, but only Christ’s riches and cannot without doubt say, Thou art mine, he is not yet a Christian.

[18] Now since Christ is mine and I am his: if Satan rages, I have Christ who is my life; does sin trouble me, I have Christ who is my righteousness;

do hell and perdition attack me, I have Christ, who is my salvation. Thus, there may rage within whatever will, if I have Christ, to him I can look so that nothing can harm me. And this union of the divine with the human is pointed out in the picture here of the marriage feast, and the exalted love God has to us, in the love of the bride.

[19] Now the wedding garment is Christ himself, which is put on by faith, as the Apostle says in Romans 13:14: "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." Then the garment gives forth a luster of itself, that is, faith in Christ bears fruit of itself, namely, love which works through faith in Christ. These are the good works, that also flash forth from faith, and entirely gratuitously do they go forth, they are done alone for the good of our neighbor; otherwise they are heathenish works, if they flow not out of faith; they will later come to naught and be condemned, and be cast into the outermost darkness.

[20] This is indicated here in the binding of his hands and feet. The hands, as said, are the works, the feet the manner of life in which he trusted and failed thus, to cling to Christ alone. For we blame him that he had not on the wedding garment, that is, Christ; therefore, he must perish with his works; for they did not sparkle forth from faith, from the garment. Hence will you do good works, then believe first; if you will bear fruit, then be a tree first, later the fruit will follow of itself.

[21] The mistake is also readily observed here, by which many have perverted the Gospel in that they say: Although the Pope and his following are wicked, yet we must obey him and acknowledge him as the head of Christendom. Let him do what he may, and yet he cannot err, and although he may not have on the wedding garment, nevertheless he is in the congregation. But they are not so good that one might compare them to the one who had not on the wedding garment. They are the villains and murderers who killed the servants of the King; and even if they were worthy to be compared to him, yet the Gospel in this parable does not teach us to follow them, but to cast them out and protect ourselves against them. For whoever has not on the wedding garment does not belong to the congregation, is filth, like the slime, pus, and ulcers in the body; it is indeed in the body, but it is no part of the healthy body. Counterfeits are among money, but they are not money; chaff is among the wheat, but it is not wheat; so these are among Christians, but they are not Christians. This is

sufficient on today's Gospel. Let us pray God for grace, that none of us may come to such a precious and glorious marriage feast without a wedding garment.

Twentieth Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. The Kingdom of Christ, the King's Son's Marriage and the Wedding Garment.

Text: Matthew 22:1-14.

- 1 And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,
- 2 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,
- 3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.
- 4 Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.
- 5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:
- 6 And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.
- 7 But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.
- 8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.
- 9 Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the

marriage.

10 So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

11 And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:

12 And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

14 For many are called, but few are chosen. Matthew 22:1-14

[1] This Gospel is a very earnest admonition, like today's Epistle, to make good use of the time of the Gospel; and a terrible threatening of the awful punishment, that shall pass upon the secure and proud heads that despise the time of the kingdom of grace and persecute the preaching of the Gospel, and upon the false trivial spirits who bear the name of the Gospel and of Christ for a show and do not mean it in earnest. And by this Gospel is well painted forth and made plain what the multitudes are who are called God's people or the church and possess his Word, and how they are and act both as to their inner nature and their outer appearance.

[2] First, God builds up his Christendom in a way that he calls it, and what pertains to its government, the kingdom of heaven; to signify, that he has called and separated out of the world a people for himself here upon the earth through the Word of his Gospel; not to the end that it should be fitted and organized, like the outer and civil government, with temporal rule, power, possessions, government and maintenance of outward worldly righteousness, discipline, defense, peace, etc. For all this has already before been richly ordered, and it was commanded and put into man to rule in this life as well as he can; although this is also through sin weakened and spoiled so that it is not as it should be, and is a poor, miserable, weak government, as weak and transient as the human body, and is able to go no farther, where it is at its best, than the stomach, as long as the stomach performs its functions. But above that God has arranged and instituted his

own divine government, after he revealed his fathomless grace and gave his Word to prepare and gather a people, whom he redeemed from his wrath, eternal death and sin, through which they fell into such misery, and from which they could not help themselves by any human wisdom, counsel or power, and taught them to know him aright and to praise and laud him forever.

[3] Christ here calls his kingdom the kingdom of heaven, where he does not rule in a temporal way nor deals with the things of this life; but he founded and developed an eternal, imperishable kingdom, which begins on the earth through faith, and in which we receive and possess those eternal riches, forgiveness of sins, comfort, strength, renewal of the Holy Spirit, victory and triumph over the power of Satan, death and hell, and finally eternal life of body and soul, that is, eternal fellowship and blessedness with God.

[4] Such a divine kingdom can be governed, built up, protected, extended and maintained only by means of the external office of the Word and of the Sacraments, through which the Holy Spirit is powerful and works in the hearts etc., as I have often said in speaking on this theme.

[5] But in the most lovable and comforting way it is pictured to us here by Christ our Lord, in that he himself likens it to a royal wedding feast; when a bride was given to the King's son, and all were full of the highest joy and glory, and many were invited to this marriage feast and its joy. For this is among all the parables and pictures, by which God presents the kingdom of Christ to us, a select and beautiful one; that Christendom or the Christian state is a marriage feast or a matrimonial union, where God himself selects a church on the earth for his Son, which he takes to himself as his bride. God here by our own lives and experiences will make known and reflect as in a mirror what we have in Christ; and also by the common state of marriage on earth, in which we were born and reared and now live, he delivers a daily sermon and admonition in order that we should remember and consider this great mystery (for so St. Paul calls it in Ephesians 5:32), that the conjugal life of a man and wife, instituted by God, should be a great, beautiful and wonderful sign, and a tangible, yet spiritual picture, that points out and explains something special, excellent and great, hidden to and inconceivable by the human reason, namely, Christ and his church.

[6] For this accompanies the marriage state, where it is worthy of the name and may be called a truly married life, where man and wife truly live together: firstly true heart-confidence each in each from both sides, as Solomon in Proverbs 31: among other virtues of a pious wife also praises this: “The heart of her husband trusteth in her;” that is, he entrusts to her his body and life, money, possessions and honor. Likewise on the other hand, the heart, of the wife clings to her husband, he is her highest, dearest treasure on earth; for she expects and has in him honor, protection and help in all times of her need. Such a completely harmonious, equal and eternal confidence and affection are not found among other persons and stations in life, for example between master and servant, mistress and maidservant, yea, not even between children and parents. For there the love is not thus, alike, strong and perfect to one another, and an eternal union does not endure here as in the marriage state, instituted by God; as the text in Genesis 2:24 says: “Therefore, shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

[7] Out of such love and heart confidence follows now also the fellowship in all they have in common with one another or in all that befalls them, good or bad; so that each must accept it as his or her own, and add and impart help to the other with his or her means, and both suffer and enjoy, rejoice and mourn together, according as it may be well or ill with them.

[8] This now should be a parable or sign of the great, mysterious and wonderful union of Christ and his church, whose members we all are who believe on him, and as St. Paul says, Ephesians 5:30, of his flesh and bones, as at creation the wife was taken from the man. It must indeed be a great, fathomless and inexpressible love of God to us, that the divine nature unites thus, with us and sinks itself into our flesh and blood, so that God’s Son truly becomes one flesh and one body with us, and so lovingly receives us that he is not only willing to be our brother, but also our bridegroom, and turns to us and gives us as our own all his divine treasures, wisdom, righteousness, life, strength, power, so that in him we should also be partakers of his divine nature, as St. Peter says in his 2 Peter 1:4. And it is his pleasure that we should believe this, so that we may be placed in possession of this honor and of these riches; then we may rejoice and with all assurance take comfort in this Lord, as a bride does in the riches and

honor of her betrothed. And thus, his Christendom is his wife and empress in heaven and upon earth, for she is called the bride of God who is Lord over all creatures, and she sits in the highest manner in her glory and power over sin, death, Satan, hell, etc.

[9] Behold, this he shows us in the everyday picture of the wedding feast or of the married state, where we see the love and faithfulness of pious wedded persons; also in the marriage feast, in the bride and the bridegroom's joy and riches; that we learn to believe this and that we also think that Christ's heart and mind are truly thus, disposed to his bride the church; but with far greater love, faithfulness and grace. This he clearly shows us in his Word of the Gospel and by the Holy Spirit, whom he gives to his church; and prepares the glorious, joyful marriage feast, at which he is wedded to his bride and he takes her to himself, and, to speak in our childish and human way, leads his bride to the dance as with fife and drum, and takes her in his arm; again, he honors and adorns her with all his finery, that is with the blotting out and washing away of sins, with righteousness and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and with his light, knowledge, strength and all the gifts which belong to that life. These are different chains, rings, velvet, silk, pearls, treasures and jewels from the earthly ones, which are only a dead picture of those heavenly treasures.

[10] Therefore, wherever you see or hear bride and bridegroom, or the joy and beauty of a marriage feast, there open your eyes and heart, and behold what your loving Lord and Savior presents and shows to you, who prepares a glorious, royal marriage feast for you, his beloved bride, a living member if you believe in him. In that is eternal joy, good cheer, singing and springing, eternal ornaments, and all riches and the fullness of everything good.

[11] Therefore, a hearty confidence in him should grow and increase in thee that he called and chose thee through baptism to his fellowship through his inexpressible hearty love and received thee, to release thee from sin, eternal death and the power of Satan, and imparted to thee his body and life, and all that he has; yea, he so completely gave himself to thee, that thou mayest not only glory in what he did for thy sake and gave to thee, but thou mayest comfortably and joyfully glory in him as being thine. And as a bride relies with hearty confidence upon her bridegroom and holds the heart of the bridegroom as her own heart, so do thou rely from the depth of thy heart

upon the love of Christ, and entertain no doubt that he is not otherwise disposed to thee than as thy own heart is.

[12] But this is opposed beyond measure in us by our old Adam, our flesh and blood, our blindness and the stiffened hardness of our hearts, which does not permit us to see or believe it; especially if we see and experience in ourselves and in this miserable life other things before our eyes and senses. For reason sees and understands it well that the marriage feast and bridal love are in themselves a lovely and cheerful picture, and it may be taught that Christ is a beautiful, noble, pious and faithful bridegroom, and his church a glorious, blessed bride. But things come to a stop later, when everyone is to believe for himself that he is also of Christ and a member of his body and Christ bears such a heart and love toward him. The reason is that I do not see such excellent glory in myself, but on the contrary my weakness and unworthiness, and feel nothing but sorrow, sadness and all kinds of suffering and even death, the grave, and maggots, which are about to consume me.

[13] But in the face of this you should learn to believe the Word Christ himself speaks to you and God commands you to believe, that it is true (unless you wish to give God the lie) regardless of what you feel in your heart. For if you should believe, you must not cleave to what your thoughts and feelings say to you, but to what God's Word says, no matter how little of it you may experience. Therefore, if you are a person who feels his need and misery and desires from the heart to partake of this comfort and love of Christ, then incline your ears and heart hither to Christ, and lay hold of this comforting picture he presents to you, wherewith he shows that he will have himself known and believed by you, that he has in his heart a much warmer love and a more loyal fidelity to you, than any bridegroom to his beloved bride. And on the other hand you should have a much heartier and greater confidence and joy in him than any bride has to her bridegroom. So that here you may justly chastise yourself because of your unbelief, and say: Behold, can the bridal love cause such hearty confidence and joy between the bride and the bridegroom, which is still of a low order and transitory? Why do I not rejoice much more over my holy and faithful Savior, Christ, who gave himself for me and to me wholly as my own? Shame on me because of my unbelief, that my heart is not here full of laughter and eternal joy, when I hear and know how he says to me through his Word that he will

be my beloved bridegroom. Should I not much rather have here another, a higher joy, and my eyes, thoughts, heart, and whole life cleave more to my beloved Savior, than a bride to her bridegroom, who, if she is a pious and true bride, sees and hears indeed nothing more gladly than her spouse? Yea, even when she does not see him and he is absent from her, her heart cleaves to him, so that she cannot but think of him.

[14] However, as I said, it is our old Adam, the corrupt nature, that does not allow the heart to lay hold of this knowledge, joy and consolation. Therefore, it is and will doubtless continue to be, as St. Paul calls it in Ephesians 5:32, a mystery, a secret, deep, hidden, incomprehensible thing, but yet a something great, excellent and wonderful. Not only to the blind, foolish world, that cannot think or understand anything at all of these high divine things; but also for the beloved apostles and advanced Christians, that herein they have enough to learn and believe, and they themselves are compelled to confess how long they labored with it, preached about it, strove after it, and it is to them still a mystery in this life. For St. Paul himself often complained that it did not work so powerfully in him, because of his flesh and blood, as it should work if it were as fully understood and apprehended as it should be; for he and other saints would not have been so anxious, sad and terrified, as he often was, and the prophet David also lamented in many Psalms; but their hearts would have soared in pure joy. However, they will be free from all this in the life beyond, where they will see without any covering and dimness to the vision, and be filled with joy and live forever. For the present it remains a mysterious, hidden; spiritual marriage feast, that one does not see with the eyes, nor grasp with the reason; but faith alone is able to grasp it, as faith holds only to the word it hears concerning it, and yet grasps it still very weakly on account of our perverse flesh.

[15] For this marriage feast is so totally foreign to reason, that it is terrified when it thinks how great it is. I speak now still of the Christians; for the others do not come to it, they hold it simply as impossible, yea, as mere talk of fools and a fable, when they hear that God becomes man's bridegroom; but the Christians who have commenced to believe it, must be shocked and amazed at its greatness: Dear God, how shall I exalt myself so highly as to boast of being God's bride, and God's Son my bridegroom? How do I, a poor, offensive worm of the dust, come to this honor, which

never befell the angels in heaven, that the eternal Majesty condescends so very low into my poor flesh and blood and thoroughly unites himself with me, that he will be one body with me, and yet I am from the sole of my foot to the crown of my head so completely full of filth, leprosy, sin and stench before God; how shall I then be considered the bride of the high, eternal and glorious Majesty and be one body with him?

[16] But hear well that God desires it to be so. In Ephesians 5:25-27 he says: I will dress and place before me a bride, who shall be my church, that is glorious, of the glory I myself have and not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish, etc., just as I am. He does not speak of a bride that he finds in this state, pure, holy, blameless, without spot, etc.; such a bride he should not seek on the earth, but he should have remained among his angels in heaven to find her there. But he revealed himself through his Word to men, surely not for the sake of this life, but that he might be praised forever through her; and therefore, he must have had in mind something greater, to do with and through her. The great mystery is that he did not take upon himself the nature of angels, but united himself with the human nature.

[17] Here on the earth he finds nothing but a corrupt, filthy, shameless, condemned bride of Satan, that has become faithless to God, her Lord and Creator, and fallen under his eternal wrath and curse. If he is now to secure here a bride or congregation, who, to be sure, must be also pure and holy, otherwise there could be here no union, then he must first and in the highest degree show his love, that he applies his purity and holiness to her sins and condemnation, and thereby cleans and sanctifies her. This he did do, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 5:25-26, in that he gave himself for her and purchased her by his blood to sanctify her for himself, and besides cleansed and washed her by the baptism of water; and he adds a Word which one hears. By means of the same Word and baptism he prepares her to be his loving bride, and praises and claims her to be pure from sin, God's wrath and the power of Satan; furthermore does he desire that she esteem herself also as a loving, beautiful, holy, glorious bride of God's Son.

[18] Here no one sees how excellent a work is accomplished thus, hidden and secretly through God's Word, baptism and our faith; and yet by it the result is accomplished that this company of poor sinful men, who were not worthy to behold God at a distance because of their great

filthiness, are made through this bath and washing clean, beautiful and holy, so that they are well pleasing to God as the bride of his beloved Son and as his loving daughter; and this purifying commenced in this life, he develops and continues constantly in her until she is presented to him purer and more beautiful than the light and brightness of the sun.

[19] Therefore, a Christian must learn to believe this, so that he in the future does not consider himself in the light of his first birth, as he was born from Adam; but as he is called to Christ and baptized into him, and like all Christians confides in and is united with him; so they should cling to him as to their bridegroom, who through the same washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, while they are still unclean he continually purifies and adorns them until the day he presents his church to himself, not only without a spot or stain, but also without a wrinkle, very beautiful, sleek and perfect, like fresh youth.

[20] Therefore, do not be terrified if you feel too entirely unworthy and impure; for if your thoughts are fixed on that you will forget and lose this confidence and trust in Christ. But you must heed the Word Christ speaks to you: Although you are full of sin, death and perdition, yet you have here my righteousness and life, which I apply and give to you. If you are impure and filthy, you have here the washing of baptism and of my Word, through which I wash you and pronounce you clean, and will constantly cleanse you for ever and ever until you shall stand before me and all creatures perfectly beautiful and pure.

[21] This he tells us not only through his Word; but in order that we might not complain being left without admonition and preaching, he presents it to us in so many different everyday pictures and parables of wedded love, yea, of the first warmth and fervency between a bride and groom; when we see how both hearts cling to one another and one has joy and pleasure in the other. Here the bride does not fear in the least that her groom will cause her suffering or harm or cast her away; but in hearty affection confides in him and doubts not he will take her into his arms, sit with her at the table, and give her as her own whatever he has. We should in this also truly know Christ's heart, and not allow ourselves to picture him otherwise than we hear and see him both in his own Word and in the parables and signs which present him to us, that we may indeed never dare

to complain, except of ourselves and of our old Adam that hinders us in our beautiful joy.

[22] For should not man become his own enemy, and only wish that death might soon do away with him, for the reason that he knows not himself and cannot rightly, as he should, taste and enjoy his great treasure, joy and blessedness? And so perhaps it might be best for us, except that this life with its temptations, cross and sufferings is to be the school in which always and daily we more and more learn to know what he is in us and we in him, and in which therefore, we also work for this that we may seize him, even as he ran after us and seized us, in that he fetched and won us for his own with his sweat and blood. Alas, however, that we are too weak, lazy and slow thus, to run after him in this life!

[23] Behold, such is the glorious royal wedding in this kingdom, which Christ calls the kingdom of heaven, and to which we, all of us, bidden and unbidden, Jews and Gentiles, come by means of the Gospel resounding in all the world, as called by fifes and drums which, after the manner of the Scriptures, are called the voices of the bridegroom and the bride. That is to say, a marriagelike voice or sound and tone, that is a token of the wedding and the joys, and is to announce unto everyone such joy and call us thereunto.

[24] But now consider further how this wedding feast fares in the world, and how the world carries itself towards it when it is to become a partaker in this blessed kingdom. We have just heard how hard, on account of their flesh, this is even to Christians, albeit they strive after this kingdom of God and seek their comfort in Christ. But now it is further shown how the other, adverse realm of the devil in the world, as in its empire (as Christ in John 12:31 calls him a prince of the world, and St. Paul, Ephesians 6:12, the lord of the world), fights against God's kingdom and drives and chases people, lest they accept and hear the joyous, comforting word about this wedding and joy in Christ, but rather, wittingly and knowingly, scorn the same, aye, oppose themselves to it, even though they be called and bidden thereto.

[25] This is said especially of the Jewish people, who are the first bidden guests to whom God sent his servants, first the patriarchs and prophets, later also the apostles, causing them to be begged and admonished not to neglect the time of their blessedness and salvation. They, however, not alone

despise this but also fly at the servants of God, who offer them such grace, to beat them to death; nor will they listen or suffer to be told more of this wedding. These are not common and ordinary people, but the best, wisest and holiest of all, who are occupied with far higher and more needful things than to be persuaded to come to this wedding, to receive good things for nothing, and to be helped into heaven. They know much better for themselves how, by their own precious life, to bring about great works, the law's holiness and God's service. Hereof more is said in the Gospel story of the great supper (Luke 14), concerning those who excuse themselves and would not come.

[26] Like unto these are also all such as are by the Gospel called to faith and the knowledge of Christ, but will not hear and accept the same. These are always the greatest and best part of the world, who as we know, wish to be called God's people and the church. They also have to attend to far greater and better things, — how they may keep up their fine and glorious estate and condition, which they call the government and glory of the church. Of that they will not hear, and esteem it an innovation and change of the good and praiseworthy old order, etc. And the more one urges them to obey the Gospel, the less will they listen to it, and the more bitterly do they pursue it, as we always have it before our eyes in the world.

[27] Well then, we should therefore, honor at his wedding feast the King and Lord of Glory, and thank him for his abundant grace and the good to which he has called us and of which he makes us worthy, so be it we judge ourselves worthy of everlasting life, as St. Paul says, Acts 13:46. And whatever men were to gain thereby, Christ has herewith foretold them. Thus, they have themselves experienced and the belief, as it were, has come into their hands, that he has told them no lying story, but that it has proved only too true that the king has sent out his host and slain these murderers the which for now 1,500 years' experience has confirmed, namely, that this judgment has not been removed, and that thus, finally wrath has come over them and they shall remain as naught. For he himself shows that it has never yet repented him, in that he thereupon forthwith says to his men. "The wedding is ready, but the guests were not worthy," etc.

[28] Which is, also for other scorners and persecutors, a terrible token and example of the final wrath resolved against them and of such punishment wherewith he will altogether make an end also of them,

because they would not partake of and enjoy this feast: as has already happened to Greece and Rome, and will likewise happen to our blasphemers and pursuers, unless the day of judgment come between.

[29] These then have received their judgment as they would have it. In order, however, that Christ may still get people to his wedding feast, his servants must continually go on with their preaching, and bid and call whomsoever they find, until they fetch so many together that the tables are full, not indeed of the great ones, the holy and mighty men (who were first bidden but would not come). Rather must the poor, the cripples and the halt, as he elsewhere says, rejoice at being allowed to come to this feast — that is, the heathen, who are not numbered among God's people and have nothing whereof they might be proud. But among this company who are here sitting at table, there is also found a rogue, whom the king, in looking over the guests, speedily recognizes and judges to have no wedding garment, and to have come, not in honor of the wedding, but as disgracing the bridegroom and the lord who has invited him. Now these are such as also permit themselves to be numbered among true Christians, hear the Gospel, are in the outward communion of the right church and make before the people as if they also might be of the Gospel — and still they are not in earnest about it.

[30] With this Christ shows who on earth are that community which is called the church, to wit, not those who pursue God's Word and his servants of the Gospel. For these are already wholly excluded and removed by his final judgment, aye, they have spilt their own milk by their public and self-confessed act of not accepting and suffering this preaching of the Gospel, and should not and cannot among Christians be considered members of the church, because they have not its doctrine and faith. Just as little can one consider professed heathen, Turks and Jews as the church or its members. Such judgment we must now also pass on our persecutors and blasphemers of the Gospel, as for example the Pope and his following, and entirely separate ourselves from them, as they do not in the least belong to the church of Christ, but are damned by their own judgment; to which they testify by having turned us away as outlaws and outcasts. The church on earth, however, if we speak of the outward community, is a gathering of such as hear, believe and confess the right teaching of the Gospel of Christ, and have with them the Holy Ghost who sanctifies them and works in them

by the Word and sacraments. Yet among these some are false Christians and hypocrites, who nevertheless are at one with them in the same doctrine and also hold communion in the sacraments and other outward offices of the church.

[31] Aye, such people the Christians must suffer in their gathering and cannot, as men are, avoid it or prevent them from being amongst them, nor can they remove them or turn them out of their gathering. They cannot, indeed, judge and recognize them all, but must bear them and suffer their company, but only till God himself comes with his judgment, so that they become manifest and give themselves away by their wicked life or false belief and spirit of heresy as not being true and honest Christians. Of this St. Paul speaks, 1 Corinthians 11:19: “There must be also heresies among you, that they who are approved may be made manifest among you,” and on the other hand also those who are not approved.

[32] Thus, here the King comes in, himself to behold the guests, and makes manifest him who has not the wedding garment. And now that he has become manifest and is nevertheless, hypocrite that he is, impenitent, obstinate and dumb, he causes him to be bound hand and foot and, that he may not enjoy the feast, be cast out of the festive gathering, where there is naught but light and joy, into darkness, where there is no comfort nor blessedness, but only weeping and gnashing of teeth. This, then, likewise is done in the church, by which such impenitent sinners, convicted and overcome, are also openly shown out of the congregation and publicly declared outcasts from God’s kingdom.

[33] Therefore, the Christians, who are the right and dear guests at this wedding, at all times have this comfort that the others who do not belong thereto, that is both persecutors and false brethren, shall not enjoy the same. For even as the former, the persecutors, manifest themselves as not being members of the church, in that they exclude themselves and go apart; thus, the others, who for a time have crept in and have falsely sought cover under the name and semblance of true Christians, shall also finally become manifest. This also St. Paul says, 1 Timothy 5:24-25: “Some men’s sins are evident, going before unto judgment; and some men also they follow after. In like manner also there are good works that are evident: and such as are otherwise cannot be hid.”

[34] And from this it is easy to understand what is meant by this man's being without a wedding garment, namely, without the new adornment in which we please God, which is faith in Christ, and therefore, also without truly good works. He remains in the old rags and tatters of his own fleshly conceit, unbelief and security, without penitence and understanding of his misery. He does not from his heart seek comfort in the grace of Christ, nor betters his life by it, and looks for no more in the Gospel than what his flesh covets. For this wedding garment must be the new light of the heart, kindled in the heart by the knowledge of the graciousness of this bridegroom and his wedding feast. Thus, the heart will wholly cleave to Christ and, transfused by such comfort and joy, will so live and do as it knows to be pleasing unto him, even as a bride towards the bridegroom.

[35] This St. Paul calls "putting on the Lord Christ" (Galatians 3:27; Romans 13:14), also "being clothed that we shall not be found naked" (2 Corinthians 5:3); which takes place especially through faith, by which the heart is renewed and purified, and of which thereupon also the fruits — provided it be the true faith — follow and prove themselves. On the other hand, where there is no faith, there also the Holy Ghost is not, nor such fruits as please God. For whosoever does not know Christ through faith and has him not in his heart, he will also care little for God's word, nor think of living according to it; he will remain proud, insolent and headstrong, though outwardly he may, with a false semblance, practice hypocrisy and deceit.

Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity. Son of the nobleman of the Capernaum Healed, an Example of Faith.

Text: John 4:46-54.

46 So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.

47 When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death.

48 Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.

49 The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.

50 Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.

51 And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth.

52 Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.

53 So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.

54 This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judaea into Galilee. John 4:46-54

[1] Today's Gospel pictures to us a remarkable example of faith, for St. John carefully notes at three different times that the nobleman believed, and we may indeed be greatly moved by the fact, and ask, what kind of faith must he have had, that the Evangelist mentioned it so often. We have already learned so much about faith and the Gospel that I think we should rightly understand it. But since it ever occurs again and again, we are obliged to discuss it frequently.

[2] In the first place, I have often said that faith through the Gospel fully brings the Lord Jesus with all his riches home to every man; and that one Christian has just as much as another, and the child baptized today has not less than St. Peter and all the saints in heaven. We are all equal and alike in reference to faith, and one person has his treasure just as full and complete as another.

[3] Our Gospel lesson speaks further of the increase of faith, and here there is a difference. Although faith fully possesses Christ and all his riches, yet it must nevertheless be continually kept in motion and exercised, so that it may have assurance, and firmly retain its treasures. There is a difference between having a thing and firmly keeping hold of it, between a strong and a weak faith. Such a great treasure should be firmly seized and well guarded, so that it may not be easily lost or taken from us. I may have it indeed in its entirety, although I hold it only in a paper sack, but it is not so well preserved as if I had it locked in an iron chest.

[4] Therefore, we must so live on the earth, not that we think of something different that is better to acquire than what we already possess; but that we strive to lay hold of the treasure more and more firmly and securely from day to day. We have no reason to seek anything more than faith; but here we must see to it how faith may grow and become stronger. Thus, we read in the Gospel, that, although the disciples of Christ without doubt believed (for otherwise they had not followed him), yet he often rebuked them on account of their weak faith. They had indeed faith, but when it was put to the test, they let it sink and did not support it. So it is with all Christians; where faith is not continually kept in motion and exercised, it weakens and decreases, so that it must indeed vanish; and yet we do not see nor feel this weakness ourselves, except in times of need and temptation, when unbelief rages too strongly; and yet for that very reason faith must have temptations in which it may battle and grow.

[5] Therefore, it is not as the idle babblers among the theologians of the schools taught, who make out that we are lazy and careless, by saying: If one have the smallest drop or spark of love and faith, he will be saved. The Scriptures teach that one must increase and progress. True it is that you possess Christ through faith, although you only hold the treasure in a poor cloth; yet you must see to it that you firmly lay hold of him and let no power rob you of him.

[6] Consequently this nobleman or officer, whoever he was (I hold he was a courtier of King Herod), was so far in faith that he believed if he could bring Jesus into his home, he would then surely heal his son; for he had heard God's Word or the Gospel of Christ, that he cheerfully helped every person that was brought to him and refused no one his favor. His faith laid hold of this and that was the reason he went to Christ. For if his heart had been kept in suspense, so that he had thought: Who knows whether he can help you or will help you? he would not have gone to him. Therefore, it is certain that he had beforehand so conceived of Christ and believed that he would help him.

[7] The nature and manner of faith are to picture and mirror the goodness of Christ thus, in the heart of man. Therefore, the Epistle to the Hebrews says, in 11:1.: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for," that is, of something good, the grace and goodness of God. Now the faith of this man stood so, that if he had continued in it he would without a doubt have been saved, and the Lord would have had pleasure in it. However, he dealt severely with him, found an imperfection in his faith, chastised him and said: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe."

[8] How does this agree with what I said before? If faith and a good confidence in him brought the nobleman to Christ, how can he then say: Ye will in no wise believe, unless ye see signs? But, as I said, he wishes to show him that his faith is not yet strong enough; for he still clings only to the seeing and the experience of the bodily present Christ. Likewise did Christ chastise the disciples in the boat, when the storm came and he said to them: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Matthew 8:26. As if he were to say: Where is your faith now? Therefore, however good and genuine faith may be, it falls back when it comes to a battle, unless it has been well disciplined and has grown strong.

[9] Therefore, you should not imagine it is enough if you have commenced to believe; but you must diligently watch that your faith continue firm, or it will vanish; you are to see how you may retain this treasure you have embraced; for Satan concentrates all his skill and strength on how to tear it out of your heart. Therefore, the growth of your faith is truly as necessary as its beginning, and indeed more so; but all is the work of God. The young milk-faith is sweet and weak; but when long marches are required and faith is attacked, then God must strengthen it, or it will not hold the field of battle.

[10] Therefore, this man would not have been helped by the faith he had at first; he would have been forced to retreat had not Christ come and strengthened him. But how did he strengthen him? The nobleman believed, if he came to him in his house, he could surely heal his son. Then Christ gave him a rebuke, a bitter and hard answer: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe." With these words he gives faith a scornful rebuff that it cannot stand. The poor man was terrified and his faith at once began to sink and to vanish, therefore, he says: "Sir, come down ere my child die."

[11] As if he would say: Yes, you must hasten and come and yourself be present, or my son will die. Here Christ now bestows upon him a stronger faith, as God does upon all whom he strengthens in faith, and raises him thus, to a higher degree or plain that he may become strong and believe in a different way than he did before; and he speaks thus, to the father: "Go thy way; thy son liveth."

[12] Had he thus, said to him before that his son would live, he would have been unable to believe; but now he believes when faith springs forth in his heart and begets in him another faith, so that he becomes a different man. Therefore, the Lord adds to his great rebuke great strength. For, he must now cling to that which he does not see; for he did not before believe that Christ had such power and influence that he could heal his son when he did not see him and was not present with him. It is truly strong faith, that a heart can believe what it does not see and understand, contrary to all the senses and reason, and can cling only to God's Word. Here there is nothing manifest except that he believed, otherwise he would have received no help. In faith one must look to nothing but the Word of God. Whoever permits anything else to be pictured in his eyes is already lost. Faith clings to the

naked and pure Word, neither to its works nor to its merits. If your heart does not thus, stand naked, your cause is lost.

[13] Let us now take an example of this: When a priest, nun or monk boasts that he has maintained his chastity, said many masses, fasted often, prayed much and the like, and then does not keep in mind God's Word, but his own good works, and builds upon them, so that he thinks God must consequently hear him, then he is lost; for as long as this picture is in the mind, faith cannot be there. Therefore, when one is about to die and death is present, and he looks around for a way of escape and for the first step he should take, then Satan is at hand and pictures to him how dreadful and horrible death is; and besides he sees hell and God's judgment before his eyes. Then Satan is victorious, for there is no help as long as this is before his eyes. If he were wise and pictured nothing else in his heart and continued to cling to the Word of God alone, he would live, for that is a living Word. Therefore, whoever clings to the Word must stand where the living and eternal Word stands.

[14] However, this is exceedingly difficult to do; for here you see how hard it was for this nobleman; also, for the Apostles in the Gospel, Matthew 8:25-26, when they were on the water in a boat and the boat was about to sink and the waves beat into the boat, so that death was before their eyes; then they lost their hold on the Word. Had they firmly believed and said: Here we have the Word of God, here is Christ; where he is, there we are also; there would have been no danger. But since they did not have such faith, they would have had to sink and perish had not Christ come to their help. Just so it was with Peter, when he walked on the sea and came to Christ: so long as he held to the Word, the water had to bear him up; but when he turned his eyes from Christ and he let go the Word he saw the wind blowing and he began to sink.

[15] Therefore, I said, we must let go of everything and cling only to the Word; if we have laid hold of that, then let rage and roar the world, death, sin, hell and all misfortune. But if you let go the Word, then you must perish. This we see also in people who seek temporal nourishment: when they have sufficient, and their house and barn are full, they easily trust in God and say, they have a gracious God; but when they have nothing they begin to doubt, then their faith vanishes; for they picture before their eyes, that there is nothing at hand and not any provision in store, and they know

not how they shall exist; thus, care and worry drive faith out of the heart. But if they would lay hold of God's Word, they would think thus: My God lives, he assures me he will sustain my life; I will go forth and labor, he will make everything right, as Christ says, Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." If I retained this Word and would cast the other out of my mind, I would not come into need. But as long as you picture before your eyes your poverty, you cannot believe. This nobleman doubtless had also a picture in his eyes, that he might have thought: He will not grant my request, he will give me a hard answer, will not accompany me home and will cruelly turn me away. Had he fixed his eyes upon such treatment he would have been lost; but since he turned his eyes from such thoughts, Christ later gives him blessed consolation and says: "Go thy way; thy son liveth."

[16] This is the nature and way of faith: — thus, God deals with us, when he wishes to strengthen us. This is also what St. Paul means in Corinthians 3:18, when he says: "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit." The glory of the Lord with Paul is the knowledge of God. Moses also possessed a glory, the knowledge and understanding of the law. When I have a knowledge of the law, I look into his clear countenance and into his pure light. But now we have passed through that and have a higher knowledge of Christ our Lord. Whoever knows him as the man who helps in time of need and gives power to fulfill the law, through whom we have acquired the forgiveness of sins: in that way he mirrors his glory in us. That is, as the rays of the sun are reflected in the water or in a mirror, so Christ reflects himself and gives forth a luster from himself in our hearts, in a way that we are transformed from one degree of glory to another, so that we daily increase and more clearly know and understand the Lord. Then we shall be changed and transformed into the same image, in a way that we all will be one bread with Christ. This is not accomplished in that we ourselves do it by virtue of our own power; but God, who is the Spirit, must do it. For even if the Holy Spirit began such glory or illumination in us and would later forsake us, then we would be as we were before.

[17] Now we ought to be so armed that we do not remain standing still at the first degree, but continually increase; therefore, the cross, temptation and opposition must come, by means of which faith will grow and become strong, and as the glory of faith increases, the mortification of the body also increases; the stronger faith is, the weaker will the flesh be, and the smaller the faith, the stronger the flesh, and the less will the flesh be denied. We are apt to think, if I shall continually help my neighbor, what will become of me? To what will I come at last? But if we had mirrored in us true faith and Christ, we would not doubt that we should have enough, but remember that God will surely come to our assistance when the crisis comes. But if we are lost in such a little tempest, what will we do in the great conflicts of the soul? See, in this way faith is exercised and increased; if we go forth, and are today as yesterday, tomorrow as today, that is not a Christian life. Now the second thing for which John praises this man is, that he increased in faith.

[18] In the third place, he says: While he was going home, his servants met him and said to him that his son lived, and he experienced that his son began to amend in the very hour that the Lord had said to him, “Thy son liveth;” and he believed and his whole house. Here the Evangelist says again that he believed. But, if he had not believed heretofore why did he come to Christ? This is a more perfect faith, that was confirmed by the miracle. In this manner our Lord God deals with us to make us more perfect and raise us ever to a higher plane of faith. If we pass through this condition, we thus, come into the experience and become assured of our faith, as we see here that the nobleman overcomes all difficulties like an iconoclast who tears down pictures and images, receives applause and becomes certain of his cause, in that he has experienced it, and finds that he is helped by faith, and all agree; the time, the miracle and the word with the faith.

[19] What then did he now believe? Not that his son had been healed, for this kind of faith is now at an end, the healing has been done, and it is now a thing of the past. He sees before his eyes that his son lives. But out of his experience comes forth another faith, that Christ would in the future continue to help him out of other troubles and whatever dark pictures might rise before him; that is what he believed. If the Lord had said to him: Go and die; he would have replied: Although I do not know whither I shall go

or where the inn is, yet since I tried before what faith is, I will again cling to the Word. You helped me once when I could not see nor understand; you will now again help me. Moreover, if Christ had said to him: Leave home and land and your possessions, and come, follow me; he would not have thought: Yes, but how shall I support myself? No doubt the picture would have appeared before his eyes: There is everything in abundance, here is nothing; shall I let go of that, what will I come to? But now he thinks: Although nothing is here, and I see nothing, I will nevertheless cling to the Word, he will surely help me. I tried it before. This is impossible for reason, but faith can do all things.

[20] Therefore, faith exercises itself in various temptations and every day new temptations arise; for the former experiences do not always return, as one sees here. This nobleman has already made use of the work of faith, that is now past, it will never return again; but he must now try another. Therefore, the oftener a person experiences the same temptation, the better it is for him; the more he triumphs over the storm, the firmer he lays hold of Christ, and becomes skilled so to be ready to bear all that is laid upon him.

[21] In like manner it went with the Holy Patriarchs, and thus, it always goes with us; so that I believe what has taken place in former times, is of no help to me, but my faith must always turn its attention to things of the future. Therefore, when God called Abraham to depart out of his own country, he did it, and believed it, Genesis 12:1f. Now when he came into that country, God called him to go into another and later into another. Thus, he continually increased in faith, and later he became so assured, and had traced and experienced how God dealt with him, and became such a perfect character that he was willing to offer his own son as a sacrifice to God. From this it follows: Whoever is greatly tried and disciplined in this way, faces death much more willingly.

[22] Thus, you see how an example of growing faith is here portrayed; it is now clear enough, therefore, take it well to heart. Every person has indeed his own experiences in life by which he may exercise his faith, to trust God to help him. Thus, he will be able to prove how God helps him, and he can thus, make progress and grow in faith. As soon as one experience ends another always begins, so that we may see and grasp the truth that our Lord God is true. If we have the confidence that he will

nourish and sustain our bodies, we can also believe that he will save our souls. I have now spoken enough about faith.

[23] The other part of this Gospel, on love, everyone can easily understand for himself. It is clearly enough set forth and it is not necessary to speak much about how Christ served and helped this nobleman. He had no advantage or gain from it himself, but he did it purely gratuitously out of love. Also you see how the nobleman became a servant of his son. Whatever there is more in this Gospel belongs to its spiritual significance, and its exposition word for word we will commend to the quiet and wise spirits.

Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. Faith in General and in Detail.

Text: John 4:46-54.

46 So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.

47 When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death.

48 Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.

49 The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.

50 Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.

51 And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth.

52 Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.

53 So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.

54 This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judaea into Galilee. John 4:46-54

[1] A beautiful example of faith is presented in this Gospel, exhibiting, as it does, the nature and character of faith, namely, that it is to increase and become perfect; and it portrays faith in a way as to show that it is not a quiet and idle, but a living, restless thing, that either retrogrades or advances, lives and moves; and where this does not occur, faith does not exist, but only a lifeless notion of the heart concerning God. For true, living faith, which the Holy Spirit pours into the heart, cannot be inactive. This I say for the purpose that no one may be sure, even if he has attained faith, that he now has everything; with this it shall not stop, for it is not sufficient to begin, but one must constantly grow and increase, and continue learning to know God better.

[2] For, on the other hand, it is not the nature and custom of our enemy, the devil, to be idle, as 1 Peter, 5:8 says: “Be sober, be watchful; your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” If then the devil neither sleeps nor rests, it is not right for a Christian to be idle and fold his hands; but he is to consider how he may fortify himself against the power of the devil; for he is not called the prince of this world in vain, John 14:30, as today’s Epistle teaches, Ephesians 6:12: “For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” This prince rules the world, howls and rages, is mad and foolish, cannot bear that a Christian progresses; nor is it to be wondered at, for thereby a rupture is made in his kingdom and his net broken. Hence, wherever possible, he hinders the growth and development of the Christian life.

[3] When, therefore, the fire of faith is kindled and burns, and the devil feels it and becomes aware of it, he immediately grasps it with all his cunning, for he knows how his kingdom is endangered by it. Therefore, he endeavors with great zeal to protect his kingdom, and exerts himself to retain all under his obedience. Certain it is, therefore, that, when a person

begins to believe, temptation and persecution will be sure closely to follow him; and if this does not occur, it is a sign his faith is not true and he has not tightly apprehended the Gospel. For that rogue, the devil, has a sharp vision and easily becomes conscious of the presence of a true Christian. Therefore, he exerts himself to entrap him, and surrounds and attacks him on all sides; for he cannot bear that anyone should desert his kingdom.

[4] Therefore, it is dangerous to live heedlessly, for the devil is likely to take us by surprise. This happens even to the great ones among the saints, who rightly apprehend the Word of God. If they regard themselves as standing securely, this rogue is behind them, strikes them down and wrestles with them until they are vanquished. Behold, what happened to the great men of God, to Moses, to Aaron and to the princes of Judah. They had an excellent faith, when they led the people out of Egypt, and all the people went in faith through the Red Sea, through death, through the wilderness and through many other wonderful experiences, in which they manifested their faith; but at last they came to a point where everything was ruined; they feared that they would have to die of hunger and thirst in the parched wilderness. Is it not a pity that after manifesting their faith in so many great trials, going into and through death, wrestling with and overcoming it, when they regarded themselves at the very best, they should fall, allow themselves to be overcome by their belly and murmur against God, and be so fiercely attacked that they succumb and all be overthrown by Satan. Hence no one is secure, unless his faith continues to grow stronger and stronger.

[5] Moses, who had such an exceedingly strong faith, also fell; when he was to strike water out of the rock with his rod, he doubted and said to the people, Numbers 20:10: “Hear now, ye rebels; shall we bring ye forth water out of this rock?” [According to Luther’s translation, “Come here, let us see if we can bring forth water out of the rock for you.”] The good man, Moses, who had performed so many miracles, is tripped by reason and falls into carnal thoughts, fearing that the unbelief of the people would hinder the great miracle and sign. But he should have adhered firmly to the Word of God and esteemed that higher, greater, stronger and more efficacious than the unbelief of the people; but the good man was so severely tempted that he stumbled and fell.

[6] We have similar examples in the New Testament. Peter was strong and confident in faith. When he saw Jesus walking on the water, he said, impelled by his strong faith, Matthew 14:28: “Lord, bid me come unto thee,” and stepped out of the ship into the water. He was confident that the water would bear him. Peter had a remarkable faith and a bold spirit, so that he ventured upon the water and danger, yea, even death, making the venture boldly and daringly by reason of his faith in Christ. But when he thought he was most secure, the wind and storm arose and he forgot the Word and lost faith; he fell, sank into the water and permitted Satan to tear faith out of his heart. Where was then his great faith? Faith is a tender, subtle thing, and we so easily make a mistake and are liable to stumble; but the devil is watchful, and unless men exercise watchfulness, he quickly gains his point.

[7] How strongly the people were inclined toward Christ! They regarded him as a Prophet, followed him eagerly, defended him with a zeal that even the nobles of the people were amazed and did not dare to lay hands on him. But when he had been seized and bound, and led away and crucified, the people forsook him. Alas! alas! he is no longer a Prophet; no one stands by him, yea, instead they cry out, Luke 23:21, “Crucify him, crucify him!” and what is still worse, his own Disciples forsake him. Where now was their faith and holiness?

[8] So, also, we meet with similar occurrences in our day. At first, when the Gospel was proclaimed, it was a lovely sermon and all the world desired to become Christian, nobody opposed it. But when attacks were made on the monks, priests, and nuns, when the Mass was criticized; alas! they fell like leaves from the trees. Afterwards, when the nobles were also attacked, the Gospel was still more persecuted and its reception began more and more to abate. The devil does not rest yet, and hence he stirs up so many sects and factions. How many sects have we not already had? One has taken up the sword, another has attacked the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, others that of baptism. The devil does not sleep, he will do many more such things, he looks around and exerts himself to exterminate the pure doctrine in the Church and will finally, it is feared, bring it to this, that should one pass through all Germany he would find no pure pulpit, where the Word of God is preached as in former days. He tries with all his might to prevent the pure doctrine from being taught, for he cannot endure it.

[9] Escape from the enemy is most difficult. He lurks and watches everywhere, and pushes his affairs so hard, that even the learned fall and the elect stumble, as did Moses, St. Peter, and the Apostles. We think we are safe, permit matters to drift along, no one is concerned for his own welfare, no one cares for it. We should pray and call on God to maintain the Gospel and cause his holy name to be proclaimed more and more widely; but no one cares, no one prays for the advancement of the Gospel. The consequence of this must be, God will overthrow both us and Satan. Our end will be, he will make us bite the dust, and through our own rashness and indifference we shall fall into great misery.

[10] The devil also is able to present to the factious spirits the idea that they regard themselves as right, like the Arians who thought their cause was right. But there was no one who could decide whether or not their teachings were orthodox. The Christian, however, subdues his reason and does not deceive himself, but in humility says to God: "Dear Lord, although I feel certain concerning the matter, yet without thee I cannot maintain it; therefore, help me or else I am lost." To be sure he may feel certain of it, like Peter on the water, who could not well feel more sure that the water would bear him on; he knew of no more hindrance; but when the storm burst on him he saw wherein he lacked. The heart must have thoroughly grasped this idea that, although we may feel secure concerning a matter and have Scripture for it, and be prepared and fortified in the best possible manner with clear proofs, it is the power, will and might of God that protect us and defend us against the devil, our adversary and most bitter foe.

[11] This occurs only, however, when God awakens us and keeps us in his fear, so that we may always be concerned and cry to him: "O Lord, help us and increase our faith, for without thee we are lost," Luke 17:5. Our hearts should always be in the condition as if we had only begun to believe today, and always be so disposed toward the Gospel as if we had never before heard it. We should make a fresh beginning each day. The nature and character of faith is constantly to grow and become stronger. The devil, as has already been said, is not idle, and has no rest. If he is struck down once, he will arise again; if he cannot enter at the front door, he sees to it that he enters at the rear; if he cannot effect an entrance in this way, he breaks in through the roof or digs his way through underneath the doorsill, toiling

until he effects an entrance, employing all manner of cunning and schemes. If one way fails, he tries another and perseveres until he succeeds.

[12] Over against this, man is a poor, weak creature, as St. Paul says, Corinthians 4:7, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." The treasure is the Gospel; but I am weaker than the vessel in the potter's hands. An earthen vessel is a weak thing and is easily broken and its contents spilled. Hence the devil, when he notices what a treasure faith is and in what a poor vessel it is kept, rages and storms, and in his wrath says to us: "I will strike you and shatter your vessel: you have a great treasure, but I will spill it for you; I will give you a blow. If I were permitted, how soon would I shatter the vessel. You are after all nothing but a little poor and weak vessel of earth."

[13] So God has placed this poor, little vessel among enemies. How soon may it not therefore, be destroyed! It may be broken with a club; yea, if a serpent would prick it, it would go to pieces. It would be a small matter for Satan suddenly to ruin an entire country. Hence he is angry, because God takes hold of the matter in such a bantering manner and confronts him with a poor little earthen vessel, and yet he is so great a prince and so powerful a lord of the world. I would also be vexed, if I were a strong man and someone were to tickle me with a straw. I would undoubtedly crush the straw in my anger, and would rather be met with spear, sword and complete armor; even as the strong Goliath was vexed because David, without armor, dared to approach him with a staff, 1 Samuel 17:43. Thus, also the devil is angry because God wants to trample him under foot by means of flesh and blood. If a mighty spirit were opposed to him, he would not be so sorely vexed; but it greatly angers him that a poor worm of the dust, a fragile earthen vessel defies him, a weak vessel against a mighty prince. God has placed his treasure, says St. Paul, in a poor, weak vessel; for man is weak, easily aroused to anger, avaricious, arrogant, and weighed down with other imperfections, through which Satan easily shatters the earthen vessel; for if God would permit him, he would soon have utterly destroyed the whole vessel. He breaks many an earthen vessel with false doctrine. Now all this happens, says St. Paul, in order that we may learn our inability to accomplish anything by our own strength, but alone by the power of God. God has, therefore, bid defiance to the devil and said to him: Thou mighty spirit, I will oppose thee with a poor, weak earthen vessel; nevertheless,

seize it. This angers the devil exceedingly. Therefore, he goes about, as a roaring lion, in order to break and shatter to pieces the fragile vessels made of earth.

[14] See what he did with the prophets whom the peasants raised up. Certainly, no one did this but the devil, who desired to shatter the vessels and indeed did shatter many of them, so that faith and the Scriptures fared badly among them.

[15] Indeed, more factious spirits shall arise and it shall come to pass that they will not regard Christ as God, nor as the son of a virgin. For the devil is so cunning and skillful that, if one thing is taken from him, he makes use of another. Thus, it has been from the beginning, and it will continue to be so in the future. And all this is permitted, in order that we may be on our guard, lift up our eyes to heaven, so that we may know and acknowledge God, and, if we have made a beginning in faith, that God may nourish and protect the same and preserve the vessel by his power. But Satan would gladly break this earthen vessel and crush it under his feet. Others, who belong to him, he pushes hither and thither, according to his pleasure, and rejoices in them. — This is intended to serve as an introduction to the Gospel. We will now consider the text in its proper order. The Evangelist says: “And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.”

[16] This has occurred to other people also, namely, that they have had sick children; but what is to be particularly noted here, appears in these words: “When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.”

[17] Here begins the faith that depends on Christ. This Gospel shows that he had faith; for he hears of Christ, how he heals the sick; his heart recognizes Christ, cleaves to him and thinks thus: If he helps all others, he will also help me and heal my son. He regarded Christ as the person who can help men, and he expects every benefit from him. This indeed, is the heart of a true Christian, since it leads him to attach himself to Christ. If, however, this nobleman had remained in doubt, he would not have come to Christ, but his heart would have been in the condition to say: “He, indeed, helps others, but who knows if he will help me also;” and he might have left

the matter rest at this. But his faith was a living faith, and hence he arose and went to Christ. This was the beginning of faith.

[18] Now you shall see how strangely and contrary to expectation Christ met him and how his faith was tried, when he said to him: “Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe.”

[19] How are we to understand this? He says, Ye do not believe, and yet ye have faith? Thus, the Lord also spoke to Peter, Matthew 14:31, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” Peter was confident and had faith; therefore, he ventured out on the water; but when he saw the storm rage, he doubted and sank. So here also: The nobleman had heard reports concerning Christ, that he was helping everybody. He believed this and came to him. But when he heard that Christ refused to come to him, he felt hurt and his faith drooped, and he feared lest Christ would refuse to help him. This was a rebuff and here began the trial of incipient faith; for this was a hard saying, “Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe.” This expression was a trial of his faith, and produced a doubt, and caused him to stumble. The devil stood back of him and said: Return to your home, await the result; he will not help you. But the nobleman was not so easily repulsed, but said to the Lord: “Sir, come down ere my child die.”

[20] Faith was ready to droop and sink; but the Lord did not forsake him, raised him up and said to him: “Go thy way; thy son liveth.”

[21] He must have had a pure faith, or else he would not have asked the Lord to come to his son. What then did he lack? This: He believed if Christ came to his house, he could heal his son; but unless he were present, he could not effect the cure. His faith was not strong enough to realize that Christ could heal without being present. Hence, his faith had to attain a higher stage. His weak faith was gone, the little earthen vessel was shattered, and he thought his son had to die; but Christ approached, raised him up, placed him on a higher plane of faith, and said to him: “Go thy way; thy son liveth.” Thus, the man advanced from his first faith, when he believed that Christ could heal if he were present, to a higher stage of faith, by reason of which he now believed the mere word of Christ. For if he had not believed the Word, he would not have ceased until the Lord had accompanied him to his house; but he accepted the Word, believed Christ

and clung to his word; for the son was at home, and Christ was with the father.

[22] The father accepted the word of Christ and said in his heart: My son is ill; but I shall find him well. This was faith over against reason and experience. Reason would have led him to say: When I left my son, he was ill. As you left him, so you shall find him. But faith says the contrary, stands firmly on the Word and drowns itself in it, and does not at all doubt that it shall be as the Word declares: “Go thy way; thy son liveth.”

[23] This is a pure and strong faith, that requires the individual to cast away all sense, understanding, reason, eyes and heart, and sink himself into one little word and be satisfied with and feel secure in it. Christ says, Thy son liveth, so he says to himself: It is certainly true, I shall find it so. Thus, faith does not remain idle or quiet, but progresses and rises higher.

[24] So Christ also deals with us and permits us to be tried, in order to strengthen our faith. If at the close of our lives, when our time comes to die, we shall have a spark of such faith, it will be well with us; as Christ said to his disciples in the Gospel, Matthew 17:20, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you.” A mustard seed is very small, but he who has such faith, shall certainly be saved. The truth lies not in the fact that faith is small; but in that the mustard seed remains and is not destroyed by the birds; that the devil cannot tear faith out of our hearts. It does not matter how insignificant faith may be; but the power lies in seeing to it that faith be not overthrown.

[25] Peter on the water retained his pure faith as long as he unhesitatingly ventured on the water according to the word of Christ; for that reason the water bore him and he did not sink. Had he remained in this faith, he might have gone hundreds of miles on the water; but as soon as he wavered, he began to sink. So also Moses, who had a strong faith, but fell from it. Therefore, it does not matter whether faith be strong or weak; but that it perseveres, no matter how weak it may be. It may happen that he who has a weak faith, abides in faith; and that he who has a strong faith, doubts and falls. Moses and Peter had great and strong faith, so that Moses by faith led the people of Israel through the midst of the sea and through death, and Peter boldly ventured on the sea; but they both fell, although God raised

them up again. But the thief on the cross laid hold on faith once for all and clung to it.

[26] God deals with us in a way so as to put down arrogance, and that we may not become haughty and wanton, but always remain in his fear. For when temptation comes, we are liable to fall into error. We have a beautiful parable of this in the tree which begins to blossom in the spring, and soon spreads out entirely covered with white blossoms; but as soon as rain falls on it many of the blossoms are ruined, and frost utterly destroys many more of them. Afterwards when the fruit begins to appear and any wind happens to arise, much of the young fruit falls to the ground; when the fruit has more fully developed, caterpillars and worms make their appearance, and they prick and destroy the fruit to such an extent, that scarcely the twentieth part, yea, hardly a hundredth part ripens. The same thing happens to the Gospel. At first everybody wants to become a Christian, it promises to do well and is pleasing to all men: but as soon as the wind or rain of temptation comes, large numbers fall away. Afterwards come the sects and factions, like worms and beetles, which prick and pollute the fruit of the Gospel, and so much false doctrine is taught, that only a few remain faithful to the Gospel.

[27] This parable is a sign and picture of true faith. Thus, faith first consists in this, that we may be not secure and presumptuous, but remain in fear. By the grace of God we are rich in the Word of God and have been brought out of deep and great darkness; but we forget the Word, become weak, continue unconcerned about the matter and have no taste for it. If, under these conditions false prophets should break in with their false teachings and even the devil burst in, and find us idle and the house swept and garnished, he brings with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and our last state is worse than the first. And even if this should happen, we are not therefore, to despair, but instruct one another, so that we cling to God and pray to him, saying: "Merciful God, thou hast permitted me to become a Christian, help me to continue to be one and to increase daily in faith. Even if the whole world should fall, and each one conspire to do evil, and the devil break all the earthen vessels, yet I will not be turned by it, but by thy divine help will abide in the Gospel." Each one should think of the matter, as if he were alone in the world; even as it will be in death at the end of the world, when no one will be concerned about others, but each one must be concerned about himself.

[28] Thus, the faith of this man was most excellent and noble. He hears the single word, “Thy son liveth.” He believes it and goes home, gives the glory to God, grasps the word, clings to it, and does not grope after other things. Hence God also honors him in return, heals his son, lifts him up and increases his faith, does not permit him to remain in doubt and in weakness, but makes him certain and strong in faith, permits him to continue and become stronger. Nor does he wait until the man has returned to his home, but while he is still on the way allows the restoration of his son to be announced to him, permits his servants to meet him on the way, who bring him the joyous tidings, saying, “Thy son liveth.” For God cannot delay and remain outside, where there is a true heart, which depends solely on him and clings to his Word, and lets everything else go and looks only to the Word of God. In a case like this, God cannot hide himself, but permits himself to be seen and enters his heart and makes his abode there, as we read in St. John’s Gospel, John 14:23. Thus, he richly manifested himself to this nobleman, and for this reason, that we might understand the nature of this man’s faith, namely, an excellent and true faith, that was produced purely by the Word of God.

[29] What is more blessed and joyous than to believe God’s Word and cling to it in the face of all temptations, and to shut the eyes to all temptations of the devil, to lay aside sense and understanding, reason and cunning, and unceasingly say in one’s heart: “God has spoken, he cannot lie?” Nothing can be more joyful, I say, than such faith. For whatever we ask of God in such faith, we receive more abundantly than we can ever imagine, and God is nearer to us than we can realize. In a word, it all depends upon our belief and trust in him. Therefore, the Evangelist uses so many unnecessary words, as it seems to us, as these: “The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, saying, that his son lived. So he inquired of them the hour when he began to amend. They said therefore, unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth.”

[30] All this means, if we believe and trust in God, we shall know that he will richly give us all things for which we pray. And the Evangelist concludes the Gospel with these words: “And himself believed and his whole house.”

[31] Thus, his faith had increased, not only that he had risen from a lower to a higher stage of faith, but also that he had caused the members of his household to believe. He did not merely abide in faith, but he had an active faith, which did not lie still and idle in his heart, but broke forth and was exposed to others, and preached Christ to others and praised him before them, telling them how he had come to Christ, received consolation from him and how he had received help through his faith, so that all who were in his house had to believe. For it is the character and nature of faith that it attracts other people, breaks forth and becomes active in love, as St. Paul says, Galatians 5:6, “Faith working through love” is the thing that avails; for it lives and can neither remain silent, nor inactive, as King David says, Psalm 116:10, and as St. Paul, referring to believers, says, Corinthians 4:13, “I believed and therefore, did I speak.” Faith cannot do otherwise, it must break forth and speak; it cannot remain quiet, for it desires to benefit its neighbor. This man had faith for himself; but it did not remain such, but broke forth; for he doubtless preached to his household, telling them how he had come to Christ and received comfort from him; and no doubt they believed his words.

[32] Thus, we see, if we believe we are to open our mouths and confess the grace God has shown us. This also is the greatest and best work of faith, namely, to inform and teach others in the Word; for as Paul says, Romans 10:10, “With the heart, man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation.” If one is ashamed of the Word and hides it, it is a sign of a lax faith.

[33] Thus, we see that Christ makes no distinction between weak and strong faith, and rejects no one; for weak faith is also faith, and if it only continues, it will ever grow stronger-d. He came into the world, to receive the weak, and to carry and sustain them. If he were as impatient as we are, he would at once say to us: “Depart from me. I will have nothing to do with you; for you do not believe as you ought.” Who could receive help from him? But the great art of Christ is to know how to deal gently with the weak, not to knock them about and impatiently drive them away. Even though today they may not be strong, it may happen in an hour’s time that they grasp the Word more richly than we who regard ourselves as strong.

[34] Thus, we should teach one another to cling to his Word. For if we abide in his Word, we shall be sufficiently fortified against the devil; for we

have a defiance of him in the Word, even though we ourselves are weak. But to the devil, who in an hour's time could break in pieces all earthen vessels, all men would be as a feather, and he could blow them when and where he wished; but this feather shall become heavier for him than heaven and earth. For a Christian has Christ within himself; but Christ is heavier than heaven and earth. This must suffice concerning this Gospel.

[35] We have made a beginning in the attempt to formulate a German Mass. You know that the Mass is the most important external office, that has been instituted for the comfort of true Christians. Therefore, I beseech you Christians, that you may pray and supplicate God, that this work may be acceptable to him. You have often heard that no one should teach, unless he knows, that this is the Word of God. Hence nothing should be ordered or arranged unless we know that it is acceptable to God. Nor should we depend on our reason; for unless it begins of its own accord, nothing will come of it. For this reason I have hesitated so long with reference to the German Mass, in order that I might not give any encouragement to the sectarian spirits, who rush into things without thought, and have no regard whether it is God's pleasure or not. But now, since so many people from all countries have requested me, by petitions and letters, and since the secular government forces me to it, we could not well excuse ourselves and evade the matter but must regard it as the will of God. If there is anything, therefore, in this work that is human and our own, let it fall and perish, even though it have a grand and fine appearance. But if it is the work of God, it must go forward, even though it appear foolish. Therefore, all things that God does, even though not acceptable to anyone, must prosper. Therefore, I beseech you to pray the Lord, that, if it is a proper or correct Mass, it may be maintained to his honor and glory.

Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity. Parable of the Unrighteous Steward. Doing the Father's Will.

Text: Matthew 18:23-35.

23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

29 And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

31 So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. Matthew 18:23-35

[1] Through the mercy and grace of God all sins will be forgiven, however great they may be. But his sins will not be forgiven, who will not forgive his brother, as Christ has taught us to pray: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Matthew 6:12. This Gospel or parable Christ our Lord spoke in reply to St. Peter, to whom he had just entrusted the keys to loose and to bind, Matthew 16:19, when Peter asked him how often he should forgive his neighbor, whether seven times were enough? He answered: "Not seven times, but seventy times seven," and Christ then related this parable, and with it concludes, that our heavenly Father will do unto us, if we forgive not our neighbor, as this king did unto his servant, who would not forgive his fellow-servant a very small debt, after he had forgiven him so great a debt.

[2] First, before we consider the Gospel itself, let us examine what kind of a rebuke it is, by which this servant's right is denied. For the other servant who owed him a hundred shillings, should according to justice have justly paid him this money. Even the first also had a good right to demand what was his own. If an appeal had been made to the public sentiment, everyone would have been compelled to agree with him and say: It is just and right for him to pay what he owes. Why then this procedure, that his lord abolishes his claim, and besides condemns the servant because he demands and executes his right? Answer: It was thus, written that we might know that it is altogether a different thing in the eye of God than it is in the eye of the world, and often that which is not right before God, is right and just before the world. For before the world this servant stands an honorable man; but before God he is called a wicked servant, and he is blamed for acting as one who is worthy of eternal condemnation.

[3] It is therefore, decreed when we deal with God that we must stand free, and let goods, honor, right, wrong, and everything go that we have; and we will not be excused when we say: I am right, therefore, I will not suffer a man to do me wrong, as God requires that we should renounce all our rights and forgive our neighbor. Concerning this, however, our high schools and the learned have preached and taught quite differently, that we

are not obliged to give way to another and surrender our rights, but that it is just for everyone to secure his dues. This is the first rebuff. Now let us consider this Gospel more fully.

[4] We have often said that the Gospel or kingdom of God is nothing else than a state or government, in which there is nothing but forgiveness of sins. And wherever there is a state or government in which sins are not forgiven, no Gospel or kingdom of God is found there. Therefore, we must clearly distinguish these two kingdoms from each other, in which sins are rebuked, and sins are forgiven, or in which our right is demanded, and our right is pardoned. In the kingdom of God, where God rules with the Gospel, there is no demand for right and dues, but all is pure forgiveness, pardon and giving, no anger, no punishment, but all is pure brotherly service and kindness.

[5] By this, however, our civil rights are not abolished. For this parable teaches nothing of the kingdom of this world, but only of the kingdom of God. Therefore, whoever is only under the civil government of the world, is far from the kingdom of heaven, for all this still belongs to perdition. As when a prince so rules his people as not to permit anyone to be wronged, and punishes the evil doer, does well and is praised. For thus, it is in this government: Pay what thou owest, if not, you will be cast into prison. Such government we must have, but no one will thereby get to heaven, nor will the world be saved by it. But it is necessary for the reason that the world may not become worse, it is only a protection against and a prevention of wickedness. For if it were not for this government, one would devour the other, and no person could protect his life, goods, wife and child. So in order that everything may not go to ruin, God has instituted functions of the sword, by which wickedness may in part be prevented, so that the civil government may secure and maintain peace, and no one may wrong another. Therefore, it must be tolerated. And yet as we have said, it has not been established for citizens of heaven, but simply in order that the people may not fall deeper into hell, and make matters worse. Therefore, no one dare boast, who is under the civil government, that he therefore, does right before God. Before him, all is yet wrong. For you must come to the point, that you also avoid what the world claims to be right.

[6] The aim of this Gospel is to describe to us forgiveness for both parties. First the lord forgives the servant all his debt. Then he demands of

him that he also in like manner forgive his fellow-servant and pardon his debt. This God demands, and thus, his kingdom shall stand. Hence no one should be so wicked and allow himself to be so angry, as to be unable to forgive his neighbor. And, as is written, if he would even offend you seventy times seven times, that is, as often as he is able to offend you, you are to let your right and claim go, and freely give him everything. Why so? Because Christ has also done the same for you, in that he began and established a kingdom in which there is nothing but grace, that is to endure forever, that everything, as often as you sin, may be forgiven; because he has sent forth his Gospel, not to proclaim punishment, but grace alone. Now, because this government stands, you can at all times rise again, however deep and often you fall. For even if you fall, yet this Gospel and mercy-seat remain and stand forever; therefore, as soon as you come and rise again, you again have grace. But he requires of you to forgive your neighbor whatever he has done against you, else you will neither be in this gracious kingdom nor enjoy the Gospel, that your sins may be forgiven. This in short is the idea and sense of this Gospel.

[7] However, it is here not forgotten who those are who grasp and enjoy the Gospel. For it is indeed a glorious kingdom and a gracious government, because there is preached in it nothing but the forgiveness of sins, though it does not enter everyone's heart. Hence there are many rude and vicious people who misuse the Gospel, who live a free life and do as they please, and think no one shall ever rebuke them, because the Gospel preaches nothing but the forgiveness of sins. To those the Gospel is not preached, who thus, despise the great treasure and treat it wantonly; for this reason they do not belong to this kingdom, but only to the civil government, where they may be prevented from doing whatever they wish.

[8] To whom then is the Gospel preached? To those who feel their distress as this servant does his. Therefore, observe, how it is with him? The lord has compassion on his wretchedness, and gives him more than he could desire. But before this is done, the text says that the lord would make a reckoning with his servants; and as he began to reckon this one appeared before him, who owed him ten thousand talents; but as he had not wherewith to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. This was indeed no cheering sermon, nothing but great earnestness, and the most terrible

sentence. Now he becomes so uneasy that he falls down and pleads for grace, and promises more than he has and can pay, and says: "Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." Here are pictured and set forth those who enjoy the Gospel in its full measure.

[9] For thus, it is between God and us. When God wishes to reckon with us, he sends forth the preaching of the law, by which we learn to know what we owe. As when God says to the conscience: "Thou shalt have no other gods," but esteem me only as God and love me with all thy heart, and trust in me alone; this is the reckoning and the register, in which is written what we owe, this he takes in hand and reads to us and says: Do you see what you are required to do? You are to fear, love and honor me alone, and trust only in me, and hope in me for the best. But you do the contrary and are my enemy, you do not believe in me, but put your trust in other things. To sum up, you see here you do not keep a single letter of the Law.

[10] Now when the conscience hears such things, and the Law thoroughly comes at us, then we see our duty, and that we have not done it, and we perceive that we have not kept a letter of it, and must confess we have not believed or loved God a single moment. What now will the Lord do? When the conscience is thus, led captive and confesses that it must be lost, and becomes anxious and fearful, he says: Sell him and all he has, that payment may be made. This is the sentence which immediately follows, when the Law reveals sins and says: This thou shouldst do and have done, but thou hast not done it. For punishment follows sin, that payment may be made. For God has not given his Law to the end to allow those to escape who disobey it. It is not sweet nor friendly, but brings with it bitter, horrible punishment, and delivers us to Satan, casts us into hell, and leaves us in punishment until we have paid the uttermost farthing. This St. Paul has correctly explained to the Romans, 4:15: "For the Law worketh wrath." That is, when it reveals to us that we have done wrong, it brings home to our hearts nothing but his wrath and displeasure. For when the conscience sees it has done wrong, it feels that it is worthy of eternal death; and if punishment would soon follow, it would have to despair. This is meant, when the lord commands this servant to be sold with all he has, because he cannot make payment.

[11] What does the servant do now? He foolishly goes to work and thinks he will still pay the debt, falls down and asks the lord to have

patience with him. This is the torment of all consciences, when sin comes and smarts deeply until they feel in what a sad state they are before God; then they have no rest, run hither and thither, seek help here and there, to become free from sin, and in their presumption think they can do enough to pay God in full. As we have been taught hitherto; from which also have come so many pilgrimages, charitable foundations, cloisters, masses and other nonsense; so we fasted and scourged ourselves, and became monks and nuns. And all this came because we undertook to begin a life and to do many works of which God should take account and allow himself to be paid by them, and had thought to quiet and put the conscience at peace with God; and so we have acted just like this fool in today's lesson.

[12] Now a heart that is thus, smitten with the Law, and feels its blows and distress, is truly humiliated. Therefore, it falls before the Lord and asks for grace, except that it still makes the mistake that it will help itself; for this we cannot root out of our nature. When the conscience feels such misery, it dare promise more than all the angels in heaven are able to do. Here one can easily promise and bind himself to do everything that may be required of him; for he finds himself at all times thus, prepared, that he still hopes to do enough for his sin by means of his good works.

[13] Now behold the things men were guilty of heretofore in the world's history, and you will find it so. Then men preached: Give to the church, run into the cloister, establish many masses, and then your sins will be forgiven. And when they forced our consciences in the confessional, we did everything they imposed upon us, and gave more than they demanded of us. What should the poor people do? They were glad to be helped in this manner; therefore, they ran and martyred themselves to get rid of their sins; and yet it did no good whatever, for the conscience remained in doubt as before, so that it did not know on what terms it stood with God; or if it were secure; it became still worse and fell into the presumption, that God had to regard their works. Reason cannot let this alone nor get around it, so as to abandon it.

[14] Hence the Lord comes and sympathizes with this distress, because the servant thus, lies captive and bound in his sins, and in addition to this is such a fool as to want to help himself, looks for no mercy, knows nothing to say of grace, and feels nothing but sins, which press him heavily, and

knows no one to help him. Then his lord has mercy on him and sets him free.

[15] Here is represented to us the Gospel and its nature, and how God deals with us. When you are thus, held fast in sins and you torment yourself to become free from them, the Gospel comes and says: “No, not so, my dear friend, it will do no good for you to torture and torment yourself to madness; your works accomplish nothing, but God’s mercy does it all; he has compassion on your affliction, and sees you a captive in such anguish, struggling in the mire and that cannot help yourself out, he sees that you cannot pay the debt, therefore, he forgives you all.” Hence it is nothing but pure mercy. For he forgives you the debt, not because of your works and merit, but because he pities your cries, complaints and humiliation. This means that God has regard for an humble heart, as the Prophet David says in Psalm 51:19: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” Such a heart, he says, is broken and cast down and cannot help itself, and is glad when God gives it a helping hand; this is the best sacrifice before God, and the true way to heaven.

[16] Now this follows out of mercy; because God pities our distress, he yields his claims and nullifies them and never says: Sell what you have and make payment. He might well have proceeded and said: You must pay, I have the right to demand it, I will not on your account annul my own right, and no one could have blamed him. Yet, he does not wish to deal with him according to our ideas of right, but changes justice into grace, has mercy on him, and gives him liberty, with wife and child and everything he has, and makes him a present of the debt besides. This is what God preaches through the Gospel, namely: He who believes, to him not only the debt, but also the punishment shall be remitted. To this no works are to be added; for whoever preaches that through his works one can atone for his debt and punishment, has already denied the Gospel. For the two cannot be tolerated together, that God should have mercy, and that you should have any merit. If it is grace, then it is not merit: but if it is merit, then it is justice and no grace. Romans 11:6. For if you pay what you owe, he shows you no mercy; but if he shows mercy, you do not pay for what you receive. Therefore, we must leave him alone to deal with us, receive from him and believe. This is what today’s Gospel teaches.

[17] Now you see, since this servant is thus, humbled through the knowledge of his sins, that the Word ministers very strong comfort to him, when the Lord declares him free, and remits him both the debt and the punishment. By this is indicated that the Gospel does not reach vicious hearts, nor those who walk forth impudently, but only troubled consciences whose sins oppress them, from which they desire to be free; on these God will have mercy and bestow upon them all things.

[18] Thus, this servant now received the Word, and thereby became God's friend. For if he had not received the Word, it would have done him no good, and forgiveness would have amounted to nothing. Therefore, it is not enough that God has the forgiveness of sins offered to us, and has proclaimed the golden year of the kingdom of grace; but it must also be grasped and believed. If you believe it, then you are free from sin, and all is right. Now this is the first part of a Christian life, taught by this and all the Gospels, which properly consists in faith, that deals only with God. Besides it is also indicated that we cannot grasp the Gospel, unless there be present first a conscience that is afflicted and miserable because of sin.

[19] Now conclude from this that it is nothing but deception that is preached in relation to our works and free will, and if a different way to blot out sin and obtain grace is taught, than this Gospel here advocates, namely, that the divine Majesty looks upon our wretchedness and has mercy upon us. For the text says clearly, that he presents and remits to those who have nothing; and thus, concludes that we have nothing wherewith to remunerate God. So you may have free will as you wish in temporal things, in outward life and character, or in outward piety and virtue, as man can have in his own strength, yet you hear now that it is nothing before God. What can free will do here? There is nothing in it at any rate but struggling and trembling. Therefore, if you would be free from sin, you must desist from and despair in all your own works, and cling to the cross and plead for grace, and then lay hold of the Gospel by faith.

[20] Now follows the second part of this parable, that of the fellow-servant. We would gladly die every hour for the sake of our faith. For this servant has enough, he retains his life and goods, wife and child and has a gracious lord; so he would be a great fool if he would now go and do everything he could to obtain a gracious lord. His lord might then well say, he only mocks me. Therefore, he dare not add any work, but only receives

the grace offered him, be joyful and thank the Lord, and do unto others as the Lord did to him.

[21] Thus, it is now with us. If we believe, then we have a gracious God, and need no more, and it would indeed be well for us to die soon. But if we are to live on earth, our life must not be devoted to obtain God's favor by means of our works; for he who does this mocks and blasphemes God. As men hitherto have taught, that we must so long lie at God's ears with our good works, praying, fasting and the like, until we obtain grace. Grace we have already received, not through our works but through God's mercy. If you are to live, you must have something to do and work at, and all this must be devoted to your neighbor, says Christ.

[22] But that servant went out. How does he go out? Where has he been within? He had been in faith, but now he goes out through love, by which he is to show himself to the people. For faith leads the people from the people unto God, but love leads out unto the people. Previously he was within, between God and himself alone, for no one can see or vouch for faith, how both work together. Therefore, one must needs go out of the eyes of the people, where no one is seen or felt but God; this is transacted alone through faith, and no external work can be added to it. Now he comes out before his neighbor. If he had remained within, he could well have died; but he must come out and live among other people and mingle with them. Here he finds a fellow-servant whom he strikes and beats, and throttles him, demands payment and shows no mercy.

[23] This is what we have often said, that we Christians must break forth, and show by our deeds and before the people that we have the true faith. God does not need your works, he has enough in your faith. Yet he wants you to work that you may show thereby your faith to yourself and all the world. For God indeed sees faith, but you and the people do not yet see it, therefore, you should devote the works of faith to the benefit of your neighbor. Thus, this servant is an example and picture of all those who should serve their neighbor through faith.

2

[24] But what does he do? Just as we who think we believe, and partly do believe, and rejoice that we have heard the Gospel and can say a great deal about it; but no one wants to follow it in his life. We have brought

matters so far, that the doctrine and jugglery of the devil have been partly overthrown, and we now see what is right and what is wrong, that we must deal with God alone through faith, but with our neighbor through our works. But we cannot bring it to pass, that, as to love, one does to another as God has done to him; as we ourselves complain that some of us have become much worse than they were before.

[25] As this servant will not forgive his neighbor, but seeks to collect his claim; so we also do and say: I am not in duty bound to give what is my own to another, and yield my rights. If another has offended me, he owes it to me to reconcile me and ask pardon. For thus, the world teaches and acts. And here you are right, and no prince or king will compel you to give to another what is your own; but they must permit you to do what you wish with your own. The civil government only compels so far, that you may not do with another's goods what you would, not that you must give your goods to another. This is right before the world, as reason concludes: To everyone belongs his own. Therefore, he does not do wrong, who uses his goods as he will, and robs no one of his own.

[26] But what says this Gospel? If God also would have acted thus, and had maintained his right and said: I act in harmony with justice, when I punish the wicked and take what is my own, who will prevent me? where then would we all be? We would all go to ruin. Therefore, because he has given up his claim on thee, he desires that you too should do likewise. Therefore, also give up your right and think: If God has given me ten thousand pounds, why should I not give my neighbor a hundred shillings?

[27] Thus, your goods are no longer your own, but your neighbor's. God could indeed have kept his own, for he owed you nothing. Yet he gives himself wholly unto you, becomes your gracious Lord, is kind to you, and serves you with all his goods, and what he has is all yours; why then will you not also do likewise? Hence, if you wish to be in his kingdom you must do as he does; but if you want to remain in the kingdom of the world, you will not enter his kingdom. Therefore, the sentence in Matthew 25:42, which Christ will speak on the last day belongs to those who are not Christians: "For I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink," and so on.

[28] But you say: Do you still insist that God will have no regard for our good works, and on their account will save no one? Answer: He would have them done freely without any thought of remuneration; not that we thereby obtain something, but that we do them to our neighbor, and thereby show that we have the true faith; for what have you then that you gave him and by which you merit anything, that he should have mercy on you and forgive you all things that you have done against him? Or what profit has he by it? Nothing has he, but that you praise and thank him, and do as he has done, that God may be thanked in thee, then you are in his kingdom and have all things that you should have. This is the other part of the Christian life, which is called love, by which one goes out from God to his neighbor.

[29] Those who do not prove their faith by their works of love are servants who want others to forgive them, but do not forgive their neighbor, nor yield their rights; hence it will also be with them as with this servant. For when the other servants, who preach the Gospel, see that God has freely given them all things, and they refuse to forgive anyone, they become sad to see such things, and they are pained, that they act so foolishly toward the Gospel, and no one lays hold of it. What do they do then? They can do no more than come before their Lord with their complaint and say: So it goes; you forgive them both the debt and the punishment, and freely give them all things; but we cannot prevail upon them to do to others as you have done to them. This is the complaint. Then God will summon them to appear before him at the last judgment and accuse them of these things and say: When you were hungry, thirsty and afflicted, I helped you; when you lay in sins I had compassion upon you and forgave the debt; therefore, you must also now pay your debt. There is now no grace nor mercy, nothing but wrath and eternal punishment, no prayers will help from now on, and they become speechless, and are cast into torment until they pay the uttermost farthing.

[30] St. Peter said the same of those who heard the Gospel and again fell away. 2 Peter 2:21: "For it were better for them, not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered unto them." Why would it be better? Because. if they turn back it will be twofold worse with them, than it was before they had heard the Gospel; as Christ says in Matthew 12:45, of the unclean spirit, who takes unto himself seven other spirits worse than himself, comes

with them and dwells in the man out of whom they were cast, and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.

[31] Thus, it is now with us also, and it will be still more so. So it also was with Rome. There things were in a fine condition in the days of the martyrs. But afterwards they went to ruin, and abominations arose and Antichrist ruled, and the city became so wicked that it could not be worse. The grace of God preached through the Gospel is so great that the people do not grasp it, therefore, great and terrible punishment must also follow. Thus, we will see just punishment come upon us, inasmuch as we do not obey the Gospel we have and know.

[32] For as often as God has afflicted the people with severe punishment, he previously set up a great light; as when he led the Jews out of their country into captivity, he first brought forth the pious king Josiah, who again restored the law in order to reform the people; but when they again fell away, God punished them as they deserved. So also when he wished to overthrow the Egyptians, he sent Moses and Aaron to preach and enlighten them, Exodus 4:14. Again, when he wished to destroy the world with the flood, he raised up the patriarch Noah, Genesis 6, and 7. But when the people would not believe and only grew worse, terrible punishment followed. So it was with the five cities; Sodom and Gomorrah with the rest were punished, because they would not hear pious Lot, Genesis 19. Therefore, such terrible punishments will also now come upon those who hear the Gospel and do not receive it. So this servant in the Gospel is cast off, and must pay what he owes. This means, that he must endure the pain and consequences. But he who endures the pain for the debt, will never be saved. For to sin belongs death, and when one dies he dies forever, and there is no more help nor salvation for him. Therefore, let us receive these things as a warning; those, however, who are hardened and will not hear, will guard against it.

[33] This is an elegant, comfortable Gospel, and is sweet to the afflicted conscience, because it contains nothing but forgiveness of sins. But for stubborn heads and hardened hearts it is a terrible sentence, and particularly so because this servant is not a heathen, but belongs to those under the Gospel, who held the faith. For as the Lord has mercy on him and forgives him what he had done, he must without doubt be a Christian. Hence this is not a punishment for the heathen, neither for the common crowd who hear

the Gospel with the external ear, and have it on their tongue, but do not live according to it. Thus, we have the sum of this Gospel.

[34] What further the sophists are accustomed here to discuss, whether the sins will come back that were once forgiven, I let pass. For they do not know what forgiveness of sin is, and think it is something that sticks in the heart and lies still there, whereas it is the whole kingdom of Christ, which lasts forever without end. For as the sun shines and gives light none the less, although I close my eyes, so this mercy seat or forgiveness of sins stands forever, though I fall. And as I see the sun again as soon as I open my eyes, so I have the forgiveness of sins again when I look up and again come to Christ. Therefore, we must not make forgiveness so narrow, as the fools dream. This is said on today's Gospel.

Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity. Christ Answers the Question, If it were lawful to Give Tribute unto Caesar? I am the Vine.

Text: Matthew 22:15-22.

15 Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.

16 And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men.

17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?

18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?

19 Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.

20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?

21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

22 When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way. Matthew 22:15-22

[1] In this Gospel there is pictured to us, how high reason and human wisdom agree with the divine wisdom, and how shamelessly they attack even when they wish to be the most prudent; as takes place here among the Pharisees who were the best and the most intelligent people among the Jews, as they also prove themselves to be; yet their wisdom must become foolishness. They could not catch Christ in his sermons nor in his works; and yet they would gladly have had found a reason to put him to death. Therefore, they thought to seize him in the most subtle manner, and propounded to him a pointed syllogism, so pointed that human reason could not have devised a more pointed one; and said to him: "Teacher, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, and carest not for anyone: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?"

[2] They imagined thus: now we will lay hold of him: for he must answer either yes or no. Does he say yes, then we have conquered him; does he say no, then he is also caught. In that they say: "Teacher," they aim to compel him to answer and rightly agree with them; and in that they say, "We know that thou are true," they admonish him of his office. Where should Christ flee? Every door was closed to him. But he would not escape through the opening they made.

[3] Was not this a subtle device? Do they not sufficiently show that they were prudent people? Whichever way their Lord had answered he would have been taken. Yea, did they not act wisely enough in that they brought with them the servants of Herod? and thought, indeed, they would accomplish their end by stratagem, so that he should not escape. They thought thus: Wait, we will now counsel him; does he say no, then the servants of Herod are present and will put him to death as a revolutionist and as one who sets himself against the Roman government. Does he say yes, then he will speak against the independence of the Jewish people, and we will excite the people against him. For the Jews wish to be a free people, and to have their own king, of their own blood, as was promised to them by God through Moses when he wrote in Deuteronomy 17:15: "Thou shalt surely set him king over thee, whom Jehovah thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee; thou mayest not put a foreigner over thee who is not thy brother." And they did not know differently than that the same kingdom should stand until the time of the

true king, until the time of Christ; as the patriarch Jacob preached concerning it and said: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come," Genesis 49:10. And to this end God also chose especially this people and formed a kingdom from them only for the sake of Christ. They had many other sayings to the end that they should not serve anyone, they were the head and not the tail, etc., Deuteronomy 28:44. This and other like passages moved the Pharisees and scribes among the people and they boasted of it; as is now beaten into the people that the Church cannot err. Therefore, they thought thus: Does he say yes, then he blasphemes against God and is worthy of death as a blasphemer of God, and the people will stone him; for God promised and agreed to give this people liberty and they were in all times God's people even in the midst of their captivity.

[4] However, at that time as at the present, they had no king and therefore, there arose among the people at large a great murmur, faction and insurrection. For this people were educated by the law that they should have a king of their own flesh and blood, as I said; therefore, they did not cease to set themselves against foreign kings and rulers until they were destroyed and many consequently suffered death. And this happened frequently; for they were a stiff-necked, rude and hardened people; therefore, the Romans, who at the time had the rule and authority over them, protected the country well and they had to divide it into four provinces, and in all places they thoroughly took possession by means of princes and tetrarchs; in order that they, thus, divided, might not so soon come together and create revolution, so that they could be better kept in subjection where they wished to rebel against the Roman empire. Hence, Pilot was a governor appointed by Rome in the country of the Jews; Herod a tetrach of Galilea, and his brother Philip tetrach in the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrach of Abilene, as Luke relates in 3:1, and all for the purpose to make the Jews subjects of Rome. Hence the Jews became angry, raging and foolish, and especially at the time of Christ when they greatly desired to have their own king. Consequently the Pharisees now devised this scheme and thought thus: Wait, the Romans desire to have the authority and rule; if he answers no to our question, then the tetrach is at hand and will behead him; does he say yes, then the people in a mass will rise up against him and we will accomplish our end. They wish thus, as they think, to find cause to put the Lord to death, or forever suppress his doctrine and work among the people.

[5] As the Jews now do here so it is everywhere that the principal things are overlooked and we worry ourselves about other unnecessary matters. Thus, the Pharisees here take in hand and concern themselves about whether they are free or not, seeing they had in the law and in the Word of God the promise that they should be subject to none other than to their own king and yet now they are subject to the Roman emperor. They learned in their Scriptures how they should honor God and love their neighbor; they let go of that and concern themselves about other matters. They had the promise if they did according to the Word and commandment of God they should be a free people. About doing this they did not concern themselves and yet they wished to be free and have their own king. We act also in the very same way. We wish to enjoy Christian liberty and imagine if we destroy pictures or are disobedient to the government that we are by virtue of this Christians, and in this way we overlook faith and love.

[6] But what does Christ do when the Pharisees so cunningly lay hold of him? He slays them with their own words and catches them by means of their own counsel, by which they thought to catch him, he says neither yes nor no; as the Evangelist writes and says: "But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why make ye trial of me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a denarius. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's."

[7] Here you see the master stroke the Lord uses. He asks them to hand him the tribute money and inquires whose image and superscription it bears. Then they answer him Caesar's. He then freely concluded that they were subject to Caesar, to whom they were obligated to pay tax and tribute. As if he should say: Have you thus, permitted Caesar to come among you, so that he mints your money, and his coin is in circulation and favor among you, then he has triumphed in the game, as if he said: you are to blame that Caesar is your ruler. What should they do now in the face of this answer? They marveled and went away, they thought they would conquer him in a masterly manner, but their wisdom and shrewdness deceived them.

[8] This is written for our consolation, in order that we who believe in Christ should know that we have a wisdom that far surpasses all other wisdom; a strength and righteousness, which are not to be compared with any human strength or righteousness; for against the Holy Spirit no counsel

can prevail. We have the power through Christ to trample sin under our feet and to triumph over death, also a wisdom that surpasses the wisdom of the whole world. If Christ live in us by faith then we possess him who establishes this in us; but it is not experienced except in times of temptation and opposition: therefore, if I make use of it then he comes and gives me the power vigorously to press through all difficulties to victory.

[9] In like manner we should not worry that our doctrine will fail and be put to shame. For let even all the wise and prudent of the world together rise up against the Word of God; they overlook the joke that they opposed it, that it took place for their sake. It may indeed happen that they may howl and bite and snap against it so that the people think the Gospel will fail; but when they set themselves against it and wish to overthrow it, then it is certain that they are weak, and by the same trick they wished to seize and take Christ, they themselves are finally caught. As we see in this Gospel, and here and there in the writings of Paul and especially in the history of St. Stephen we see how they failed to quote the Scriptures aright, yea, that which they did quote is used against them, for the Jews charged Stephen that he spoke against the temple, Acts 6:7, and also against God who told them to build the temple, they brought forth passages of Scripture by which they tried to suppress and conquer him; but Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, showed unto them by one passage of Scripture after another how God did not live in houses made with hands. David wished to build him a house, but he did not desire it. What was the reason? God had lived a long time before David's day among his people; he must indeed be a poor God who needs a house for his dwelling place. And thus, by many histories he proves that God does not dwell in houses made by man. What should the Jews do? They have the passage clearly before their eyes, which they quoted against Stephen, (that he witnessed against themselves).

[10] In like manner must all come to shame and be overthrown who rise up against this divine wisdom and the Word of God. Consequently no one should fear even if all the wisdom and power of the world oppose the Gospel, yea, even if they plan to suppress it by the shedding of blood; for the more blood is shed, the more Christians there will be. The blood of Christians, as Tertulian says, is the seed from which Christians grow. Satan must be drowned in the blood of Christians, consequently there is no art that can suppress the Gospel by force. It is with the Gospel as with the palm

tree, which has the nature and character that it flourishes at the top, and one may laden it as heavy as he wishes; and especially if it be used as a beam or support it does not weaken under any burden, but rises in spite of the burden. Such is also the nature of the Gospel, the more one opposes it the greater it lays hold of us and the more one burdens it, the more it grows.

[11] Therefore, we should not be afraid of powers. But we should fear our prosperity and good days which cause us more harm than our anguish and persecution; and we should not be afraid in the face of the wisdom and the shrewdness of the world, for they can do us no harm. Yes, the more the wisdom of the world opposes the truth, the purer and clearer does the truth become, consequently the Gospel can experience nothing better than that the world rise up against it with all its force and wisdom; yea, the more my conscience, sin and Satan attack me, the stronger does my righteousness become. For the sins which worry me, pain me; then I persevere harder and harder in prayer and in my cry to God; then faith and righteousness become stronger and stronger. This is what St. Paul means when he says in Corinthians 12:9: my power is made perfect in weakness. Now since we possess such a treasure that becomes stronger by virtue of trial and opposition we should not fear, but be of good courage and rejoice in tribulation; as St. Paul says to the Romans, Romans 5:3: and as the Apostles did who departed from the presence of the council with great rejoicing, and thanked God that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name, Acts 5:41. If Satan were only prudent enough to keep quiet and let the Gospel be preached, he would receive less injury from it; for if the Gospel is not attacked it completely rusts and has no occasion or reason to make its power and influence manifest.

[12] Thus, we are here still secure, no one attacks us; as a result we always continue just as we were, yea, we become worse. In that certain enemies attack us with the Scriptures, they gain very little. In that they have taken up their pen against us, they accomplish no more than if they blew into the fire; but if they had cast us into the fire or beat our heads, there would indeed be more Christians for our sake.

[13] Consequently we have here a consolation, when we are attacked; that Christ is in us and holds the field of victory through us. Christ is so near us that we triumph at all times through him because we abide in Christ. As long as we do not have opposition taking us by the neck, he does

nothing; but when we are attacked and conquered, then he is at hand and puts all our enemies to shame.

[14] Here we may also learn the lesson that those who are a little more than other people, brighter, stronger, and endowed with special gifts of reason, nature and fortune, who are more artistic, learned and intelligent than others, who indeed are gifted with speech and are talented to lead other people and are able to rule and arrange everything in the best way, they are the most opposed to God and to faith, and trust more in their own strength and reason than in God. For nature, poisoned as it is, leads them to the point that they cannot and will not use their gifts to the best advantage, for the welfare and edification of their neighbor; for they trust in their gifts, and think they will obtain now this, now that, and never remember that they also need God's help and strength to that end. As the Pharisees and scribes do here, who are so certain, as they think, if they thus, lay hold of Christ, they would take him captive, for it is not possible, they say, for him to escape, we have ensnared him whether he says yes, or no.

[15] Behold, how cunning and perverse human nature is! Methinks this is well pictured here. Aye, there is nought in man but evil, lying and deceiving, cunning and all manner of mischief. Indeed, in his very nature man is nothing else than a liar, Psalm 116:11. One may not entrust anything to man. Do not imagine that anyone tells you the truth; man lies in whatsoever he speaks. And why? The fountain is evil, that is to say, the heart is not good; therefore, also the rivers flowing therefrom cannot be good. Hence does the Lord oftimes call men a generation of vipers and a brood of serpents, Matthew 22:34. Is not that a beautiful title for man? Just you go and boast of your piety, your strength, or your free will! Before the world indeed one may be fine and pious, shining with holiness; but at bottom nothing will be found but a generation of vipers and a serpent's brood, and that most of all in the worthiest, most estimable, intelligent and wise people. If you peruse the history of the Greeks, Jews and Romans, you will find that the best and wisest rulers, who according to the judgment of men, governed well, have not thought of God, but confided in themselves alone; to God's might they have attributed nothing.

[16] From this it follows that the less adroit a person is before the world, the less will he do against God; and those who are ingenious and honored in the world, lie and deceive more than the others, thinking to cover up their

deception and malice by deceitful and cunning acts. True it is they may full well conceal it; the Holy Spirit, however, has a keen eye and knows them exceeding well. Therefore, Scripture often calls such fellows lions, wolves, bears, swine, and wild beasts, namely, such as rage, eating and devouring everything with their deceit. Hence in the Old Testament the Jews were forbidden to eat some animals, as being unclean — those that are enumerated and others — for no other reason than that it might be thus, indicated that there are some people who are strong, mighty, rich, adroit, learned, intelligent and wise, people that must be shunned and fled from as though they were something unclean; such people as mislead and deceive others by their appearance, their power and wisdom. For people will not consider them as such, nor believe that they are men who plan evil things and dare to carry them out. No man whatever, therefore, is to be trusted or believed. Believe no one: he will mislead you wherever he can. Aye, if indeed you trust anyone, you will act against God, not trusting in him. For it is written, Jeremiah 17:7: “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man; blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord.”

[17] Now someone might object: What is to be done? Must we not have intercourse and dealings one with the other; and how otherwise could human life continue? Surely we must buy and sell and market our goods among the people? If no one should believe and trust the other, all human dealings would come to an end! I answer: It is true one must deal with the other, and one needs the other's help. But that I demand: Whatever you deal about among men, in buying or selling, you are to consider it as something uncertain, which is not to be trusted and believed in. For certain it is, if you trust any man, you are already deceived, for human nature, in itself, cannot but lie and deceive. Everything is uncertain among men, their deeds and words are unstable; that you may well believe.

[18] Therefore, we are to put all our trust only in the Lord, and say: O Lord, thou art my life, my soul and body, my goods and possessions, and all that is mine. Do thou direct and ordain it all according to thy divine will. In thee do I trust, in thee do I believe. Thou wilt surely not desert me in such a perilous undertaking with such and such a man, whom I do not trust. If thou knowest it to be good for me, then see to it that he be true to me; if thou dost not see that it will help me, then do not let him keep his word. I am content, thy will be done.

[19] As soon, however, as you think a purchaser to be an honest man who will keep his word, and of whom you are certain that he will not deceive you; so soon you have fallen away from God, have prayed to a specter and put your trust in a liar. Therefore, in dealing with a man, just think in this wise: If he is true, it is good; if not, why then, in God's name, let him be; he cannot do otherwise than lie and deceive. I will leave it all to God; he will make all well.

[20] Out of such false and wicked confidence placed in man there has crept into Christianity the abuse of the worship of saints. By this the Christian church, that is, the true assembly of the faithful, have suffered notable decline and damage. What else has saints' worship been but solely a devilish thing? For thus, have people reasoned: Such and such a man has been holy; such things has he said and done; therefore, we will follow after him, and teach and do likewise. St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and Gregory have done this; therefore, it is right, and I will believe it. St. Francis, Benedict, Dominicus, and St. Bernard have lived thus, have done such and such a thing; therefore, will I also live thus, and do as they have done. Furthermore, St. Augustine has been saved by such a rule. Alas, what a poor, unstable, miserable thing this is, nought but lies and dreams of man. I should damn St. Augustine and his rule, had he laid it down for the purpose of being saved thereby. So blind and foolish is our reason, that it will accept even a specter and a fiction, whereas only God's Word is to be accepted in matters of salvation. If, for example, Herod, Pilate, Caiaphas and Hanes preached the Gospel, I should have to accept it. And, on the other hand, if those who are considered saints arose and preached lies, about regulations, hoods and gowns, tonsures, ceremonies and other inventions of man, I ought not to accept them. For in such cases not the persons are to be considered, but that which they preach.

[21] Now someone might say: See here, would you be wiser than all church fathers and saints, than all bishops and rulers of the whole world? Far be it from me. I do not claim to be wiser than they. But this is true: It is impossible for that which is wise, prudent, great, handsome, mighty and powerful before the world to agree with the Word of God. For thus, it is ordained by God, that such people must always persecute the Gospel; if they were not such the Gospel would not shine and triumph as it does. The Roman emperors Hadrian, Trojan and Diocletian were the wisest of rulers,

and reigned so well that all the world praised their government. Yet they persecuted the Gospel and could not tolerate the truth. Likewise do we read of Jewish kings, Ahaz and others, who governed well, that they despised God's Word and acted contrary to God's will. In our times there have never been emperors, princes, or other people to compare with those. But then it had to come to pass that God put all wisdom of this world to shame through the foolishness of preaching, 1 Corinthians 1:21.

[22] All this is shown to us in this Gospel, which, though apparently simple and ordinary, is exceedingly rich and comprises many things. How then does the Lord finally deal with the Pharisees after they had shown him the tribute money, and answered that the image and superscription was Caesar's? The Evangelist tells us that he answered thus: "Render therefore, unto Caesar the things that are Caesars; and unto God the things that are Gods."

[23] Although they did not deserve it of the Lord, yet he teaches them the right way. And with these words he also confirms the worldly sword or government. They had hoped he would condemn it and speak against it; he does not do it, however, but praises earthly government and commands to render unto it what is due to it. It is therefore, his desire that there should be magistrates, princes and masters, whom we are to obey, be they what they may and what they list; neither should we ask whether they possess and exercise government and authority justly or unjustly. We should only pay heed to that power and authority which is good, for it is ordered and instituted by God, Romans 13:1: You are not allowed to upbraid the government, when at times you are oppressed by princes and tyrants, who abuse the power they have from God: some day they will surely have to answer for it. The abuse of a thing does not make it bad, if it was good in itself. A golden chain is good, and it is not made worse by being worn around a whore's neck; or if someone were to destroy one of my eyes with it, should I therefore, blame the chain? Truly nay.

[24] Thus, one must also bear the authority of the ruler. If he abuses it, I am not therefore, to bear him a grudge, nor take revenge of and punish him with my hands. One must obey him solely for God's sake, for he stands in God's stead. Let them impose taxes as intolerable as they may: one must obey them and suffer everything patiently, for God's sake. Whether they do right or not, that will be taken care of in due time. If therefore, your

possessions, aye, your life and whatsoever you have, be taken from you by those in power, then you are to say: I give it to you willingly, I acknowledge you as my masters, gladly will I be obedient to you. Whether you use the power given to you by God well or ill, that is your affair.

[25] But what if they would take the Gospel from us or forbid us to preach it? Then you are to say: The Gospel and Word of God I will not give up to you. This is not within your power, for your rule is a temporal rule, over worldly matters; but the Gospel is a spiritual, heavenly treasure, and therefore, your authority does not extend over the Gospel and God's Word. We recognize the emperor as a master of temporal affairs, not of God's Word; this we shall not suffer to be torn from us, for it is the power of God, Romans 1:16, against which not even the gates of hell shall prevail.

[26] Therefore, the Lord beautifully summarizes these two things, and in one saying distinguishes them from each other: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." This honor is due to God, that we are to hold him as a true, almighty and wise God, and attribute to him all the good things that can be named. And even if I do not render him this honor, he still keeps it; nothing is added to or subtracted from it. But in me he is true, almighty and wise, if I consider him as such, and believe him to be such as he proclaims himself. To the emperor, however, and to all in power, are due reverence, taxes, revenue and obedience. God will have the heart; body and possessions are the government's, which is to rule over them in God's stead. This St. Paul says to the Romans in round and clear words, Romans 13:1-7: "Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God. Therefore, he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God: and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgment. For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. And wouldest thou have no fear of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise from the same: for he is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience sake. Hence for this cause ye pay tribute also; for they are ministers of God's service, attending continually upon this

very thing. Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”

[27] And for this reason also has government been ordained by God, that it may uphold general peace, which thing alone cannot be paid for by all the money in the world. We just noticed a few things in the uprising of the peasant, what damage, misery and woe are caused by rebellion and the breaking of peace. God grant that things do not go further and that we experience no more. Enough is said on this Gospel. Of temporal government we have written a special booklet. Whoever desires to read it may do so. There he will find more on this subject.

Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. The Pharisees' Counsel put to Naught.

Text: Matthew 22:15-22.

15 Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.

16 And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men.

17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?

18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?

19 Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.

20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?

21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore

unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

22 When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way. Matthew 22:15-22

[1] This Gospel is in itself plain enough and easy to understand. Its contents are noteworthy, especially because of Christ's answer to a practical question and its doctrine. First of all our attention is directed to the intensely wicked, bitter and venomous persecution of Christ and his Word on the part of the Jews, who schemed to attack him with shrewd and deceitful questions. For these villains and base characters would gladly have put him to death as one who had wearied them beyond endurance and must be gotten out of the way, although they could find no cause for impugning either his doctrine or his life, eagerly as they sought to do so. They studied all sorts of devices and ways to catch him in his words and condemn him, which they kept up until God allowed them to vent their spite and crucify him. That class of people will obtain what they strive for, even to their own hurt. They had their time of probation and could have repented when the Son of God appeared in their midst, but they flatly refused to accept him, God suffering them to go their way and fulfill the measure of their sin to its utmost extent in that they murdered him who came to save them. Their end was destruction and obliteration as a nation. The enemies of the Gospel are no better in our day. They would put Christ out of the way if they could, and thus, it will be even to the end of time, with the same result. Amen.

[2] See now how they scheme and succeed. The wisest and most learned leaders assemble, put their heads together and decide on one of the many shrewd plans by which to cause Christ's death. Their wise counsel is as follows: If we weigh and balance the situation we find two ways to seize and accuse him. First, if he opposes Caesar, he can be charged with conspiracy; and if he is considered a conspirator we will have him in our control as one guilty, like a thief and robber, who would despoil the emperor of his majesty and crown and who is worthy of death, with which the law punishes such a crime. Should this scheme fail we can have recourse to another one, namely, to prove him to be guilty of robbing God, and have him condemned as a blasphemer. It would be regarded as a still

greater crime to prove that he robs God of the honor due him and misleads the people under the cloak of serving him. For should he say, We must pay tribute to Caesar and acknowledge him as our sovereign; he would detract from God, who alone wants to be this nation's sovereign and who has chosen us from all races to have no king but him. This also would condemn him to death. Whichever way therefore, he may answer, he will be caught and fall into our hands. Does he favor Caesar, he robs God; and if he decides in favor of God he declares against Caesar and makes himself a conspirator.

[3] Such is the counsel of those wiseacres and petty saints who resolved to lay hold of Christ with all law and authority, as an enemy either of God or of Caesar. Not that they cared so much either for the one or the other, but in order to carry their point. They were indeed anxious enough to free themselves from the yoke of Roman power, causing frequent insurrections and drawing abundantly deserved executions upon their own heads, by hundreds and thousands, and finally suffering entire destruction as a nation. In like manner, they were before God thieves and evildoers in that they corrupted his Word and persecuted its pure doctrine. So entirely submerged in these two vices were they as to have become doubly worthy of death, before God and before Caesar; they manifested their wickedness, moreover, by attempting to catch an innocent man as if guilty of their own sin, pretending to be most pious saints before God and most loyal subjects of Caesar.

[4] The Jews were used to this from time immemorial; they had treated their prophets and many godly teachers in a similar manner, and afterwards did the same to the Apostles, so that it is no wonder if they treat us in the same manner. And what have the Apostles or we either to complain of in particular, since they did not spare their Lord and God? The world cannot do otherwise. It is under the devil's control, reveling in robbery and rebellion, at the same time imputing these crimes to Christians, as if they were sinners above all sinners.

[5] And see further how they play their trick and seek to entangle the Lord so that they may not fail in their plans. They do not put the question abruptly, but approach him with a neat introduction of flattery, as though they had the best of intentions and were really in earnest about the matter. They praise and humor him with smooth words; for they think he is human

and a preacher like themselves, who thus, loves to hear such flattery and praise, and say: You are a true teacher and an upright man, what you say and do is right and good, etc., etc. With such praise a young fool might be misled to preach what the people want to hear, as nearly all false prophets do who look for the approval of men rather than that of God. They accept honor, and preach what is paid for; where their pay ends, there also ends their preaching. These were of a kind characterized by Christ when he says of them that they like to be called Rabbi, etc., Matthew 23:7. Because they are so foolish, they think he also likes to be tickled and can be fooled by servile adulations, surrendering himself to their two prongs and their death-thrusts, before he would be aware of any danger.

[6] But the saying is true: "The Lord will have them in derision." It is not an uncommon thing for one man to deceive another, but no trickery will avail with Christ. He understands the wiles of men and can entrap them in their own devices. So here; he compels these hypocrites to speak the plain truth, although they have many other things in their hearts, and thus, perfectly puts them to shame. It is indeed true that he teaches the way of God right, and fears nobody, while not one of his enemies speaks from the heart. The lips may utter truth that amounts to nothing but lies. Christ's words are true, however they may twist them. They judge him by themselves and represent him as a disturber of the peace, who would rob Caesar of his tribute money and rally the populace around him in rebellion, while he is afraid to make such declaration in public. That is their design and scheme, but they veil it under the words: "Thou teachest the way of God in truth," praise not to be condemned so far as it goes. Caiaphas, the high priest, acted in like manner, John 11:48-50, when he said: "It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. If we let him thus, alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." That was a true declaration, fitting them, while they dissembled as to their hearts' sentiments. They did not believe that the Romans would come, but were intent on putting Christ out of the way, thinking they would then fare better. And yet it happened to them even as they had prophesied, that Christ had to die for the people, and the Romans did despoil them of their land and nation.

[7] That is the lot of those who would deceive and mock God; they mock themselves and come to grief. They seek a teacher of truth, and they find such in him, against their wish, for he hits them on the head with truth in a manner that makes them reel in confusion. They wish to submit a puzzling question to him, not about the law and matters of salvation, but one that is unnecessary and insidious. They pass by the whole Pentateuch and what pertains to God's Word and way of truth, and catch on something calculated to confuse him. Moses has not instructed us about giving tribute, nor had Christ anything to do with that.

[8] There, think they, we have him securely as between two spears. Does he say yes, then we accuse him as one who would rob God; who holds heresy, and, as an apostate Jew, teaches contrary to Moses and the prophets: if, on the other hand, he says nay, we will know what to do, for the servants of Herod are at hand. He must fall into the hands of these tempters or into those of the rabble, in either case he is lost; indeed he must fall into the hands of both and surely die, for there is no escape possible in either yea or nay, represented by the two classes of people, Jew and Gentile. Was not that planned shrewdly enough? Who could escape from such a dilemma with gauntlets on both sides? They themselves would have failed to extricate themselves in a similar predicament.

[9] But the wise people met with a wisdom they neither knew of nor looked for; it was divine wisdom. Christ seizes the spear and club in their hands and turns their weapons against themselves, answering neither yea nor nay, but compelling them to give an answer which indicts themselves. There he is the Master as they had greeted him; he proves that he can answer their slippery interrogation by themselves. They are thus, obliged to run the gauntlet, and are caught in the net with which they had planned to catch him.

[10] As of in a playful mood, Christ has them show him the tribute money to start with, and asks whose stamp and superscription it bears. In that childlike way he may have made the impression that he did not know, or was not able to read, so that they concluded: We have him surely now; he is afraid and wants to dissemble in favor of Caesar, not daring to say a word against him, etc. Instead of that he takes the word from their lips, making them admit that they are caught. They must confess it, and cannot do otherwise than say, It is Caesar's. With that answer he turns the conclusion

against them: If the currency and its image is Caesar's, also the superscription, then you have my thanks for saying yea yourselves to the question you put at me. Why need you bother me with a matter that you can settle so readily? This is truly digging a pit for others and falling in yourself; setting a trap and being caught in it.

[11] Christ makes use of the same dialectics in answering others who would impugn his character, and entraps them where they meant to entrap him. As in Luke 19:21-22, where a servant had buried the pound entrusted to him in a napkin, saying: "I feared thee because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that which thou layest not down, and reapest that which thou didst not sow." He saith unto him: "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant," etc. That is, be it as thou hast said. Because thou regardedst me to be an austere man, taking what I had not laid down, therefore, it serves thee right that thou shouldst be treated in that way, and thy pound be taken from thee as from one who compels me to be austere and strict with him. I give this as a caution that people may learn to take heed and not trifle with holy things. For men can be deceived, but those who try to deceive God deceive themselves.

[12] I have often said that God acts toward man even as man is disposed; as thou thinkest and believeth concerning him, such he is to thee. The servant of whom we speak did not have an austere and severe man for his master; on the contrary, he was treated kindly and justly; but since he pictured him that way he must learn how it feels. It is the same with our belief or disbelief. If our hearts picture him as gracious or angry, pleasant or harsh, we have him that way. God is not to be mocked. Those who regard him as angry toward them will find him so; but whoever can say: I know that he will be a gracious father to me and forgive my sins, they will have that experience with him. There must, however, be no hypocrisy, no dissembling, as if the lips should say one thing and the heart thinks the opposite.

[13] Since, then, these people call him Master and a teacher of truth, although they do not believe what they say and simply try to catch and deceive him in his words; he turns the matter to their discomfiture and gives them an unexpected proof of what their lips profess. Like as if we were to regard him wrongfully as an ungracious and angry God, we would so experience him, for it is, as he says: "Out of thine own mouth will I judge

thee;” again: “By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned,” Matthew 12:37. That would serve us right and be just. Why dost thou not look him straight in the eyes and judge him as what he is, or believest on him as he reveals himself in his Word, namely, as a teacher and savior of all who are burdened with sin and desire to be godly? If such an ideal does not suit thee and thou formest a different one, thou must take what thou hast provided for thyself.

[14] This is the experience these plotters make. Their words pronounce him to be a teacher of truth, yet in their hearts they are false; however, he is a real teacher to them and exposes their knavery and hypocrisy. Christ is a good doctor. Such physicians as clearly understand the disease must be commended; they can help a patient so much better than one who simply experiments on the case. He soon learns what knaves they are; but since they call him Master, as if they would learn of him, they must hear what they do not expect, namely: “If I am a master and teacher of truth I will tell you truly what you see and seek: You are hypocrites in my judgment.” That put in plain language means: “You are deceitful fellows.” They deserve this, first, because they are not pious at all; secondly, because they cover up and decorate their falseness by making a pretense of virtue before the people. “You are double hypocrites; you do not seek the way of God nor the truth, yet you flatter me as teaching such to make yourself appear holy; and because you will not hear the truth that could save you, you must hear truth that shall reveal your hypocrisy and condemn it. For, I am, as you say, a teacher of truth. To some, that signifies life, to others, death and damnation, according as their respective faith and hearts may be. Therefore, I tell you plainly and truly what you are inwardly, namely, hypocrites and desperate rogues who are beyond help and advice and who belong to the devil. But those who are godly and would like to be so, to them I say: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” Matthew 11:28.

[15] Behold, thus, they find the right teacher of truth, not to their salvation, however, which they do not seek, but to their condemnation. They are enemies to the truth and do not like to hear such preaching; yet they must hear it, as if from their own lips, answering their question themselves, to their own exposure; as explained above.

[16] After this exposure and reproof of their impudence, silencing them with their own answer, the Master continues: “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” Let the child be baptized that its name become known. In other words: “You want to take away from Caesar what is his, and have already taken from God what is God’s. You, therefore, are rebels and blasphemers. You take and withhold, and not even question your own dishonesty, nor manifest a purpose to do what is right. That is indeed and rightly called disloyalty, where one refuses to give to Caesar what he can claim as his own.

[17] This truth they must hear from this teacher of truth, however much it may displease them to be so sternly rebuked. They hate to be called thieves and robbers, as if they were disposed to despoil the emperor (Caesar) of his authority and belongings and usurp the rights of their superiors under a pretense of justice, for which they deserved punishment in body and estate as twofold rebels. This is the first thought.

[18] Secondly. Just as they have been shown to be thieves and robbers toward the state they are similarly guilty of robbing God. They withhold what is God’s and even claim to be in the right by so doing. The prophet Jeremiah, 23:11, calls those who do not preach God’s Word in God’s name “profaners,” as withholding it from the people for whom it was given; they rob and take, not from God in heaven, but from the people to whom God sent and commanded it to be given, and give them something else instead of it. Thus, they profane and rob God, withholding the honor and obedience they owe him. Such fruits they are, these smart saints, who wished to bring Christ in reproach! It is on that account that they must hear the rebukes administered to them and be exposed as God-thieves who deserve capital punishment.

[19] Let us now pay attention to the hypocrites of our day — those prudish pietists, bishops and the Pope’s whole coterie of clerics, who persecute Christ and his followers in that they reject and condemn his Word and the acknowledged truth of the Gospel. Christ rightfully calls them robbers and profaners of God and of Caesar. They are obedient neither to God nor to the true Christian church; neither to the state nor to any constituted authority, but would be lords themselves and live and do as they like, none daring to oppose them. They are disobedient in person, and also assault innocent Christians, devour and kill whom they can and would

destroy God's kingdom completely; yet they wish to be well spoken of as being in their right, being obedient, pious and peaceable, and regarding us as heretics and sinners against God and Christendom and against the powers that be, who therefore, deserve death. Just like these in the Gospel, who would give neither to God nor to Caesar; pretend to great piety, while they seek to put Christ out of the way as one teaching what is opposed to religion and to patriotism.

[20] But how, if the wheel should reverse itself and throw the guilt, which they now heap on us Christians, upon their own heads so that they receive the reward due to the openly condemned rebels and God-thieves, who profane the majesty of both divine and human right? True, neither the Gospel nor Christ himself makes use of physical punishment, yet they should beware lest others come (and I fear very much that such will be the case) who will handle them roughly, teaching them, as others have been taught, that they must cease to persecute Christians. This would be treating them after their own fashion. The Pope, with all his apostles, disciples, lawyers and theologians, teaches: Violence need not be endured, but *vim vi repellere licet*, that is, open violence may be repelled by force. They say, what Christ teaches, Matthew 5:39, is not a duty, but simply counsel, and no one is bound by it, namely: "I say unto you, resist not him that is evil; but whoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also," etc. Their interpretation of this has the sanction of all high schools, institutions and monasteries; it can be found in all their books, nor do they hesitate to praise and justify it, holding that no one is obliged to take wrong even from the emperor, but that it is right to resist evil and strike back in self-defense, let it hit Caesar or whom it may.

[21] It were, therefore, not wrong, according to their own teaching, to resist such insufferable injury by force; and I would not lament so very much if, as a punishment from God, it should come about through some false preacher or rabble leader that such tyrants were killed. For they are intent on disorder; their teachings and doings instigate uprisings and war, while they throw the blame on us who teach righteousness, hold the government in honor and oppose conspiracy by word and deed. They would gladly kill us, and although they fail in their loyalty, they want to be honored and safeguarded in their mischief so that no harm may befall them. The popes with their followings have taught thus, not only, but they also

practiced it by their acts, opposing kings and emperors as it suited them, despising all authority and trampling the law under their feet, even claiming divine right for their doings. They would do the same now, if they could, boasting that they are in supreme authority and owe allegiance to no ruler.

[22] If they should now allow such doctrine to be preached among them, as I myself could do if I were so minded to avenge myself (may God forbid it), or the public would take such teachings from their books and statutes, and a general uprising should follow, whom would they have to blame and who could reason otherwise than that it served them right? Why are they so desperate and perverse that they reproach Christ with his teachings as seditious and blaspheme him who is their Lord, while they themselves are rebels and profaners of God? They disseminate and defend such godless and seditious teachings, and persecute us who preach the pure Gospel, as they well know, and with all faithful ones resist and preach against disloyalty and disorder. They themselves must acknowledge, if they would or could do so in their concealed malice, that they owe it to no other source than to our preaching that they for so long a time have been and are yet secured against rebellion, for if it had not been for us they might have had some different experiences. By their teaching they could not maintain nor enforce peace, favoring uprisings as it does, and if I could approve of it I would not trust myself to advocate or at least wink at any resistance of their adherents in self-protection by force.

[23] But we will neither teach nor allow that Christ's words are nothing more than counsel; we teach that Christians must suffer wrong, if needs be, and leave vengeance to God. They are to be what the Scriptures call them in Psalm 44:22, "sheep for the slaughter," who may expect death every hour of the day. The Papists know full well that they are safe in our presence; they show their gratitude by persecuting, devouring and murdering us unceasingly, until we are entirely done for. But may it not also happen that in so doing they will meet with such as will defend their rights against them and give them their due so richly deserved, thus, paying for what injury they have done to the Gospel and to us? Their doom is sealed. For the present we must suffer, and leave to God how and when he will avenge us. The punishment they deserve is in God's hand to be meted out in his own time and manner. Although they pretend to be afraid of us, we will do them no harm, allowing them to imitate the Pharisees over against the common

people who adhere to Christ. Others will give them what they fear from us, as did the Romans to those who opposed and suspected Christ and his adherents, giving them their full reward when they believed themselves secure.

[24] That is the way these will fare in time. They are afraid, though they know that we have attempted nothing to their hurt, nor do we now do so; we offer them peace and uphold peace, exhorting and teaching our people and the public generally to abstain from disloyal acts. We will not stain our hands with their blood. That is something we do not wish to be guilty of. We glory in our innocence over against them before all the world and will not implicate ourselves in their downfall. But others shall arise who will visit upon them what is written of that class of people in the Bible, as, for instance, in Proverbs 10:24, "The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him." And as Christ expresses it in Matthew 12:37: "For by thy words thou shalt be justified." Thou hast complained of disloyalty, disloyalty shall be thy portion. We will then say, Amen, and deo gratias, thanks to God, besides.

[25] Let that be said on this text to those who would reproach Christ in order to promote their own reputation and standing, so that they may see and learn what sort of a truth-teacher he is, exposing their lies and falsehood and fastening on them what they like to accuse him of, as being real liars and murderers, or misleaders and rebels; they insist on such a course, but endeavor to throw the suspicion on Christ and his adherents, in spite of the fact that these are and teach the very opposite.

[26] But we must keep this Word before our eyes; it is our rule of conduct toward the two kingdoms, God's and Caesar's, so that we may give to each the honor due him as both of divine order and example. That in both there are many who are not God-fearing, who abuse the charge and position committed to them, especially toward Christians, persecuting us as disobedient and disloyal, we admit, but it does not disturb us. We must and are willing to suffer this, at the same time we maintain our right to punish them by word of mouth, telling them the truth and hurling back the accusations heaped upon us. In so doing we satisfy justice and fulfill our duty; the rest we commit to God, how and by whom he may want to avenge us.

[27] We have said much about the teaching of Christ's answer; for it is the doctrine we insist on, that the two powers or governments, God's and Caesar's, or spiritual and temporal kingdoms, must be kept apart, as Christ does here in a clear and brief declaration, making a distinction not only, but also illustrating finely how each is to be constituted and administered. When he says, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," he refers to the relation of subjects to their rulers; the other part, "Render unto God the things that are God's," is especially intended for such as are in authority.

[28] For it is thus, ordained of God that subjects must and shall give to their rulers what they need; when he commands them to give, it is implied that these may take; and where we are to give what is due, there we infer that we owe them something, so that the language might be: "to return," rather than simply to render or give. That is something for subjects under civil authority.

[29] On the other hand, there are restrictions placed upon rulers that they govern in the same spirit, and not take from their subjects what is not due them; but remember to give and do also what they are in duty bound to do by virtue of their presiding over countries and nations, so that they may grow and prosper. That is why they were elevated by God to their respective positions of honor, not that they sit there simply as place-thieves, and doing what they like.

[30] But if that were emphasized it would be found that the world is full of real thieves and rogues, rulers as well as subjects, and the number would indeed be small from the highest to the lowest, who obey and do what is right. Subjects are most generally so disposed as to cheat their ruler and appropriate to their own use what is his, wherever they can, to say nothing about giving cheerfully, hesitating as they may do to admit that. Princes and office holders wish to have the name of being Christians and obedient subjects of the emperor, yet they do only what suits them and, if they could, they would gladly usurp the places of their superiors.

[31] The same is true of the knights who wait upon and assist the princes; if they could do so, they would gladly confiscate everything, strip their chiefs of what they have and trample them under foot; instead they take villages and castles, delight in being called "dear subjects," advise and govern in their own interests, thus, reveling, oppressing and plaguing both

lords and subjects, according to their sweet will. By the way, how many princes and office holders are there now in high positions who could claim that they give to Caesar what is Caesar's? Would not all rather fill their own coffers, bags and pockets? This all can do; but giving to Caesar what belongs to him is difficult to find; taking and stealing from him is much more common.

[32] There is a similar state of things in all other situations and offices. Servants deceive and cheat their masters, maids their mistresses, day laborers and mechanics those for whom they work. It is so in daily intercourse, at the market and elsewhere; stealing and robbing, even boldly and openly, is the common practice. In that way things go on among high and low, so that there is no royal residence, no city, no house, that is not full of knaves and thieves. Were the world plagued with this sin only, it were already too much and it deserved to have been destroyed long ago; and yet no one wants to be charged with and punished for theft, the evildoers would rather claim honor for their misconduct; especially is that the case with the lords of the nobility who strut around in glittering chains. But if they were treated as they deserve they would not be allowed to wear them on the streets, but would be dealt with as those who stole five or six dollars. It is here, as the saying goes, "Little thieves are hung in iron chains; the big public thieves are permitted to walk about with chains of gold."

[33] It should not be thus, but everyone respects his estate and position and does as it behooves him. Yea, sayest thou, is it not enough that I take nothing from anybody? Yea, truly; but there are many ways of taking; not only from under the bench where there is nothing that belongs to thee, nor out of the bag or chest of another, but also where thou art unfaithful to thy employer and permittest damage to ensue because of negligence or mischief, rather than in consequence of a mistake. As, for instance, where a citizen or neighbor overcharges another, and the nobleman filches and squeezes. According to the seventh commandment all such sharp dealing is called stealing and doing wrong; those who practice it are thieves who care nothing for a troubled conscience, and the maxim, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," becomes a rare bird. All the world is full of the perversity, "taking from Caesar the things that are Caesar's," from the bottom up; from servant up to knights and princes, so that there is no estate

on earth so plagued with thieves and rogues as that of the emperor's and government's.

[34] Government must also be told how to act toward its subjects. Those in authority also rob and take what is not theirs, and that on the responsibility of their superiors. As when an emperor or prince goes on, plaguing land and people with unnecessary assessments and other burdens. In that situation thou must also hear thy text. If thou desirest the subjects to put into practice their lesson and be honest with thee, thou must also avoid taking from them what is not thine. For Christ does not say here, Render to Caesar that which he wants and likes, but he assigns limits to him, how far he may reach, that is: "The things that are Caesar's," or what he is rightfully entitled to.

[35] Therefore, land, cities, homes, are not to be governed as the one in authority over them may like, as if an employer could treat his employees to suit his notion, contrary to the Lord's justice. Nay, the employee would say, I owe thee what is thine, not what thou mayest desire to have. One might require so much as my head or fist, or he would not pay me wages or food and clothing, and so plunder and plague me as not to leave a rag upon my body. That would be taking the rights from the manservant, and her property from the maidservant.

[36] So also if a burgomaster, ruler or office-holder should compel and plague the people to serve his whims, that could not be regarded as a lordly right, but would be stealing and doing wrong, just as much as if a fellow-citizen should steal from them. However, there is no position nowadays so insignificant but that its occupant should not desire to have the right and the power to do and command what he pleases, studying how he may oppress the people and holding that his authority empowers him to squeeze, drive and torment everybody as he pleases. Even as is now the case more especially with the poor clergymen and preachers, so that there is danger in all estates, especially in the higher ones, for in them the really great thieves are to be found. A house-servant may make a householder poor by his dishonesty; but a nobleman can steal what amounts to something, namely, a whole principality, land and people.

[37] Therefore, we must tell them how Christ has limited their prerogatives in this text, so that they may not do what they might personally

wish. It would go entirely too far, and the Pope's rule would go into effect, they being flogged by their subjects; but we neither teach nor approve of such practice. Christ does not say de facto, sed de jure, not by fact, but by right; that is, he teaches what each man must do, namely, the subjects must give, and the government must not take more than what is due; but who is to punish where both parties sin against the law is not stated.

[38] Christ does not do, as the Pope teaches that one should hit back, nor does he allow anyone to avenge himself, neither the employer nor his employee; the infliction of punishment and judgment he reserves for himself as the highest Lord and God. "Vengeance is mine," saith God, Deuteronomy 32:35. He who does not give heed to this teaching will experience this judgment. If God does not punish by the ordinary authorities he will do it by pestilence, war, revolutions and other plagues; for he can punish rulers as well as their subjects. Therefore, both are instructed as to their duty, and we will abide by his declaration. We must not and will not coerce anyone by violent measures, but say only what is right and resist wrong-doing by word of mouth. Whoever will not mind that, we excommunicate such an one in accordance with Christ's teaching, telling him that he belongs to the devil, and let him go. Others may punish the Pope and his followers who will not abide by the Word of God, but resort to violence.

[39] This is a brief statement as to the first estate or government, both in its higher and its lower functions, to show how far we are away from our true position and how full the world is everywhere of thievery. But these matters are worst of all, if one is to expound this passage (Render to God what is God's) and speak of the God-thieves in the spiritual government of Christendom, in which I and the likes of me are. For as high as heaven is above the earth, so dangerous and difficult is this office in comparison with secular or imperial positions which, indeed, are also dangerous where their occupants do not call upon God for help to discharge their duties properly and without injury to their subjects. But if unfaithful ministers or preachers get into their office they will be, not thieves of bread, meat or clothing, wherewith the body is nourished and with which jurists busy themselves, who teach nothing further than what ministers to the belly and try to check that class of stealing; but those who occupy the office that is to give the bread of eternal life to souls and, instead, cause them everlasting thirst,

hunger and nakedness, taking away the word by which man is nourished from death to life, such are not simply belly-thieves, but thieves of God and of the heavenly kingdom.

[40] Such now is the Pope with his bishops and all their retinue, who do not preach to the people, rather preventing them from receiving God's Word and what it gives and affords; doing their very best in mischief when they forbid and hinder the sacrament to be administered under both forms, as Christ instituted it, and they well know, in sheer violence and blasphemous thirst; they cannot rightly be called anything else than sacrilegious, public thieves of God, robbers of his Word and sacrament.

[41] There are among us also some who so plague and press the poor pastors with hunger and care that they cannot do their work properly; some also lowering their calling so as to reach out for the heavenly things and at the same time hanker after carnal goods, as the cliques of Pope and priest also do, who are charged with spiritual matters, but do not preach them nor suffer it to be done. They practice the two kinds of robbery and deserve all the more severe punishment. Yet the world is just as full of this miserable dishonesty as of the secular sort, and they are thieves through and through, from top to bottom, from the least to the greatest.

[42] But how will it be in the end when the final judgment shall take place? What does it mean that God must continue to call and preach: "Do render both to God and to Caesar," but all in vain, and should thus, be mocked and his Word trampled underfoot? Are we not to expect that at last there should rain upon the world a flood with thunder, lightning and hellfire? It cannot and must not be otherwise, because the trespass against God's and Caesar's right continues so boldly and so eagerly and turns the single into a double robbery, ever defending its course and resisting its punishment. God will and cannot suffer that forever. I would that he might take us and ours away in mercy so that we be spared the coming calamity! Wickedness is so very great, and so manifold in the whole world, that it exceeds the leaves on the trees and the blades of grass upon the earth in number. May God preserve and deliver us from this distress, and grant grace that we may hold to his Word in earnestness and be delivered from such evil! Amen.

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity. Daughter of the Ruler of the Synagogue Raised from the Dead and the Woman with an Issue of Blood Healed; the Gospel and Christ. The Great Physician.

Text: Matthew 9:18-26.

18 While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.

19 And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.

20 And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment:

21 For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.

22 But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.

23 And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise,

24 He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.

25 But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.

26 And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land. Matthew 9:18-26

[1] Dear friends, you know that the Gospel is nothing else than a sermon about one person who is called Christ. And although there are many other books written here and there, and many sermons preached by many different persons, both about the heathen and the Christians, yea, also about the mother of God, St. Peter, angels and many of the saints; yet they are not Gospels, for this alone is the true Gospel which sets before us Christ, and teaches the good things we may hope from him.

[2] Of course there is also at times something in the Gospel on John the Baptist, Mary and the Apostles, but this is not properly the Gospel, for they are taken into consideration so as more perfectly to indicate whence Christ came and what his office is. So Luke relates the history of John the Baptist from the beginning, his conception and birth; and that of the Virgin Mary, all which is written not for their sake, but only for the sake of the one person Christ, so that everything written in the Gospel concerns this person Christ alone. In St. Paul's Epistles there is nothing written about the saints, all there is about Christ alone. The Evangelists describe what miracles and wonders Christ performed; but they write of no work that John or Mary did; but only what Christ did, how he helped the people in body and soul, and how the people clung to him.

[3] For God has decreed it is his will that all should cling to the one man, Christ, to hope in him and hold fast to him if they would be saved. Thus, they know nothing of anyone aside from Christ, who alone has been presented unto us by God as our mercy-seat, as St. Paul writes, Romans 3:25. Hitherto one has clung to this saint, another to that, one has had Mary, another Saint Barbara, and there have been manifold sects and orders. But no one cared anything for Christ except for the name. We have had many mediators, all of whom we abandoned and held only to Christ. Therefore, St. Paul says in Romans 1:2, that the Gospel was promised by God through the prophets concerning his Son. And he insists upon it so very strongly, that nothing avails in the Gospel except the one only person, Jesus Christ. He who knows this may well thank God, that he knows where to place his comfort, help and confidence, and he will then despise and cast away all sermons about other persons.

[4] For this reason the Lord is pictured to us in today's Gospel, mingling among the people, drawing all the world unto himself by his friendliness and comforting doctrine so that they may cling to him with their hearts, depend upon his goodness, and hope to receive from him both spiritual and temporal treasures. Nor do you see him take anything from those he heals and helps; yea, he receives nothing from them but scorn and mockery, as we shall hear. Good deeds proceed from him, but he receives mockery and scorn in return.

[5] Now this is preached and submitted to the whole world, that they may learn to know this man aright, and to know how to become Christians, not how to become good and innocent. Other doctrines outside of the Gospel, like the books of the heathen masters, insist that the people should through them become good; again, the legends of the saints especially insist that the people are to live as the saints lived. To make good people does not belong to the Gospel, for it only makes Christians. It takes much more to be a Christian than to be pious. A person can easily be pious, but not a Christian. A Christian knows nothing to say about his piety, for he finds in himself nothing good or pious. If he is to be pious, he must look for a different piety, a piety in someone else.

[6] To this end Christ is presented to us as an inexhaustible fountain, who at all times overflows with pure goodness and grace. And for such goodness and kindness he accepts nothing, except that the good people, who acknowledge such kindness and grace, thank him for it, praise and love him, although others despise him for it. This is what he reaps from it. So one is not called a Christian because he does much, but because he receives something from Christ, draws from him and lets Christ only give to him. If one no longer receives anything from Christ, he is no longer a Christian, so that the name Christian continues to be based only on receiving, and not on giving and doing, and he receives nothing from anyone except from Christ alone. If you look at what you do, you have already lost the Christian name. It is indeed true, that we are to do good works, help, advise and give to others; but no one is called a Christian by reason of that, nor is he on that account a Christian.

[7] Therefore, if you wish to consider the word in its true meaning, you must identify a Christian by the fact that he only receives something from Christ, and has Christ within him; for this is what the word properly means.

Just as a person is called “white,” because of his white color, black because of his dark color, large because of his size. So also one is called a “Christian” because of Christ, who dwells in him and from whom he receives his blessings. So, if one is called a Christian because of Christ, he is certainly then not called a Christian because of his works. From this it also follows that no one is called a Christian by reason of his good works. If this be true, as it undoubtedly is, then it must follow that our orders and sects do not belong under the Christian name, and they do not develop Christians.

[8] Therefore, they are deceivers, who preach or teach in the church, and occupy themselves with commandments, works and statutes, that accomplish nothing. Although they pretend to be Christians, nevertheless they still, under this name, attempt to burden and torment us with their commands and works. By reason of my works I may well be called one who fasts, one who prays, or a pilgrim, but not a Christian. If you were to weave all your works together and add to them all the works of others, you would still not have Christ, and from these things you could not be called a Christian. Christ is something different and higher than law and the commandments of men. He is the Son of God, who is ready alone to give and not to receive. If I am so wise as to take what he offers, I have him, and if I have him I am then justly called a Christian. Thus, you have the distinction as to what a Christian is and what Christ is.

[9] Now this Gospel teaches us that Christ is the greatest and highest person, renowned in all the world, not in order to terrify the people, but to pour out all earthly and heavenly gifts, so that all men may depend upon and trust in him, and continually receive from him alone what they need. If sin terrifies my conscience and preachers of the law come and want to help me with their works, they will accomplish nothing. Christ alone can help here and no one else. Yea, the others only make it worse, even if they were Peter or Paul, or even Mary, the mother of God herself. Christ alone can do this, being ordained of God to the end that he should send forth the good news in which is proclaimed how my sins are to be forgiven gratuitously, without any work or merit on my part, only and simply out of pure grace through faith in this Christ. If now I accept what is preached I have a comfort that my sins are forgiven me before God and before the world. If I at heart hold fast to this, then I am a Christian, and for this I thank God

through Christ, who at all times gives me his Holy Spirit and grace, that sin may not harm me either here or at the day of judgment.

[10] If I fear death and do not like to die, I find in this Christ a comfort and medicine, so that I care nothing for death. If terrified at the anger of God, I have here a Mediator. Many a one runs into the desert or puts on garments of coarse hair, and thinks he will force God not to be angry with him; but it will amount to nothing; whoever has not this Christ, on him the wrath of God remaineth forever, for it is so decreed. John 3:36.

[11] Therefore, whoever would have a joyful conscience that does not fear sin, death, hell, nor the wrath of God, dare not reject this Mediator, Christ. For he is the fountain that overflows with grace, that gives temporal and eternal life. Only open thy heart and hold it forth and you will receive all. He gushes and flows forth, and can do nothing else but only give, flow and gush forth, if you can only believe it. You justly deserve that people should call you a Christian, when you are called a Christian by virtue of what you receive from Christ; if not, and you want to give him so much, you are no Christian. This is the rich precious word which St. Paul praises so highly, and can never sufficiently praise, that he so graciously gives us his Son, to pour out his grace over all who receive it. Romans 3:24 and Romans 8:32; Galatians 3:25.

[12] From this it further follows, when a Christian does good works and shows love to his neighbor, that he does not thereby become a Christian or pious, but before this is done he must have been a Christian and pious. He indeed does good works, but his good works do not make him a Christian. The tree brings or yields good fruit, but the fruit does not make the tree good. So also here, no one becomes a Christian through his works, but through Christ.

[13] From this you understand what kind of people Christians are, and what their kingdom is, namely, that they are a multitude that cling to Christ, and have one Spirit and the same gifts with him. And through this all Christians are equal, and no one has any more of Christ than another; St. Peter is no more than the thief on the cross; Mary the mother of God is no more than the sinner, Mary Magdalene. In external acts and works, of course, there is a difference among them, for the Virgin Mary had a greater work to do than Mary Magdalene, St. Peter a greater work than the thief on

the cross. This is the case when we reckon according to works; but by virtue of our works we are not Christians. The Virgin Mary is not a Christian on account of her great work that she bore in her body Christ, such a costly and inexpressible treasure, as Christ himself said to the woman, Luke 11:27-28, who cried aloud among the people to the Lord: "Blessed is the body that bore thee, and the breasts which thou hast sucked." "Yes, blessed are they," said he, "who hear the Word of God and keep it." Here you see he exalts believers above his mother. For Christians are called Christians because they believe in Christ. Virgin and mother are two very beautiful names, but they are nothing in comparison to the name of believers or Christians. Again, St. Paul is so proud, that in his Epistle to the Galatians, 2:6, he gives the office of the great and high apostles a reputation which amounts to little before God, except as it brings a blessing and is of service to others.

[14] Therefore, we are all alike through faith in Christ. Although St. Peter has a stronger faith than I, it is still the same faith in Christ. For his Father offers his Son Christ to the promiscuous crowd, and whoever receives him, gets the whole Christ, whether in weakness or in strength, it makes no difference. The woman in this Gospel, who had been sick for a long time, lays hold of Christ as well as Mary the Virgin, his mother did. Therefore, Christians have the same Spirit, one is as high-born as another, St. Peter must call me his brother, and I can also call him my brother. Yea, Christ receives us unto himself and holds us as his brothers, as after his resurrection he said to Mary Magdalene: "Go unto my brethren and tell them, I ascend unto my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God." John 20:17. And St. Paul calls Christ the first-born among many brethren, Romans 8:29. Of this he speaks very beautifully in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, 8:9-12, where he speaks of weak brethren thus: "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to the weak. For if a man see thee who hast knowledge sitting at meat in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be emboldened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through thy knowledge he that is weak perisheth, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And thus, sinning against the brethren, and wounding their conscience when it is weak, ye sin against Christ."

[15] The summary of this entire Gospel is, that we learn to know Christ aright, and not only that we have the mere name, but know that we have all

things from him. If we are Christians we have all things, and God is our Father, and we are lords of all things in heaven and on earth; this no work of ours can bring to pass, be it as great and costly as it may. Now you see how far they are from the Christian name, who live under the dominion of the Pope. The Gospel preaches nothing but the one person, Christ; not even Mary, much less the Pope or any work, be it as costly as it can. It must offer Christ alone and no one else, whom God the Father has sent among us, only that we should draw all from him, and wait for his grace and goodness.

[16] Now when they preach to you Christ as a judge, how he is to appear on the judgment day, and how you should do many good works that he may reward you for them, and you agree to this, then he will indeed be a judge to you and not a Savior. And if he be thus, presented to you as people are accustomed to paint his mother showing him her breasts, this is actually to preach the devil and not Christ, who only gives but receives nothing. It is indeed true, when you have received from him, then good works will follow of themselves, without force or demand; and this is represented to us very beautifully in today's Gospel.

[17] For here, you see, Christ preaches the Gospel to the people. Now preaching is no insignificant work, for here he does us a great service, in that he becomes our teacher and instructs us, how we may come to the knowledge of himself. This is a part of his great grace and kindness. While he is here on earth he does not cease to teach, so that we may receive him as our Savior and Redeemer; afterwards he follows us with his good works which he manifests everywhere to everyone as he needs. You find no one in the Gospel who ever asked anything of the Lord, whose help was denied and not given. As many as came to him, blind, deaf, lame, palsied and dropsical, he received and helped all as they desired, and healed them from all diseases, as Luke 6:19 says: "And all the multitude sought to touch him; for power came forth from him, and healed them all."

II The Gospel and Christ in Detail.

[18] Thus, he does also to this woman. The woman hears him preach, and perceives he is a good, indulgent man, who appears friendly toward all the world; then she also began to cleave to him and take courage to think, because he cast none away from him, she too was welcomed to enjoy his friendship and goodness. Therefore, she lets all the Apostles go, and casts

her heart's trust and confidence only on the Lord, and says to herself: "If I do but touch his garment, I shall be made whole."

[19] Only see what a heart the woman had. Hers is indeed a noble, great faith and confidence. She did not think otherwise in her heart than that he would certainly help her, if she only touched his garment with her hand, and yet she is not so bold as to approach him openly. She regards herself as unworthy to speak to him or look at him; for she knows that she deserved nothing, and never did anything for the Lord. Therefore, she so plans as to approach him from behind, falls down at his feet and merely touches the hem of his garment. There is nothing but mere awkwardness and unworthiness here. Who had merited that the Lord should permit the Gospel to be preached to these people? There is no preparation, no work; yet the poor woman is there and hopes to obtain great things from the Lord, that he would release her from her sickness. She had had an issue of blood for about twelve successive years. How could she earn anything under such circumstances, or how could she because of her disease be worthy of anything? Of course she was worthy, but only to receive and not to give; for at that time she was not able to give the least thing.

[20] And this is the true preparation for the grace and goodness of Christ, that I feel my need of it. And then it harmonizes beautifully, that the two meet together, the rich and the poor, Christ and the sinner. Yet it is a great art, to persuade people that they are poor and in need of grace. It is a difficult matter, nor does the devil permit it to be done, but always diverts the people to their good works, that they may under no circumstances receive the idea that they stand in need of the grace and mercy of Christ.

[21] The text says the wretched woman had the issue of blood for twelve years, and to cure it, had spent all her living upon physicians. And the more she spent for this purpose, the worse she became. Luke and Mark both especially refer to this, and show thereby that, the more the law and works are preached, the worse it becomes among us, and we receive nothing from it but one harm and injury after another. The conscience can never be quieted by our good works. When one sin is expelled from the conscience, another soon enters, yea, the medicine and the work often make a sin, where otherwise there is none, until we come to Christ; as this woman here who had been sick so long and would never have received help, had she never come to Christ, from whom she received her health without any work

whatever; she gives him nothing, and only receives from him, and allows him to give.

[22] So it goes with all sermons that do not preach Christ, and it is here indicated that we must constantly employ the Word, and always exercise ourselves in the Word without intermission, for such men we still find at all times, who have like anxious and troubled consciences. For this woman signifies all poor consciences who have an issue of blood, that is, they feel their sins. And the issue of blood flows continually and cannot cease. For flesh and blood does nothing but what they wish. Now when feeling gets the upperhand, the wretched people go to work and want to help themselves; then one does this, the other that, and none as yet has accomplished anything.

[23] Hence many orders and institutions have arisen because men have conjured up so many works that all of them can scarcely be named. What was the cause of all this? Nothing but the conscience tormented with sin, that has so exercised and harassed us, that we thought thereby to redeem our souls and be free from all sins. But Christ was not in it, because we only wished to give without receiving. Therefore, it has ever become worse with us, as with this woman, whom all the physicians endeavored to heal, but she never found one able to help her. Thus, too we have believed all the physicians; if anyone came who had accomplished some little work we welcomed him. Dear Lord, we were anxious to be well, were anxious to have a joyful conscience, and were anxious to be free from sin.

[24] The physicians are the preachers of the law and the lords over Christians. If one were very anxious to be free from sin, what did they do to him? They gave him medicine, from which he only became weaker and sicker. This we have seen and in part also felt a great deal, how, to our great and real injury, the people sought to be good by means of their own works, and thereby deliver themselves from sin. But it did no good, we only became more and more discouraged by sin and death, so that there were no more discouraged people to be found on earth than just the priests, the monks, the nuns, and those who go about with their good works. If one had a boil, then the druggists had to work, there was a drugging, a going and running as though the soul would immediately pass away; thus, they were afraid and discouraged. And no one fears the last judgment so keenly as just these very spiritual people. This they also beautifully show, when they so

treat of works that they always add one work to the other, and never constantly trust in any single work; and the more they do the worse they become, the more discouraged and unbelieving they become, and it is with them just as with this woman.

[25] It is quite a beautiful parable, and is well adapted for our benefit. We have not only spent our temporal goods for this purpose, but we have also risked our lives with fasting, with castigation, and with other unbearable burdens, so that some become insane over it, and lose all their natural strength and finally lose their souls in the bargain. I have also been one of these and have been caught deeper in this drugstore than many others. I could not so quickly come to the point, to cast to the winds the law of the Pope. It was a bitter and difficult task for me to eat meat on Friday, and conclude that the law and order of the Pope amounted to nothing. God help us, how difficult it was for me, before I dared to do it! Therefore, one should become free from this in his conscience, and despise the traditions of the Pope, to do which he must indeed have a strong, firm foundation in faith; if he has this not, he will think several times before he takes the risk.

[26] And as it was with this woman, who spent all her living upon the physicians, and even then was not made whole, yea, only became worse, so it is with us. Here all our works, cares and labors are lost. Here all our human obedience and all our orders fall to the ground, and all we spent in that line was wholly lost. Now we see the laws and traditions of the Pope and the bishops are nothing, before which we trembled and feared. All this helped us just as much as it did this poor woman, who spent all her goods and possessions, yes, and also risked her life to this end. O, what medicine and treatment this woman had to use! How tried, weak and sick she often became from them! Yea, if she could have become well, she would have devoured the whole drugstore. But all availed nothing, she had to bear her sickness for twelve long years.

[27] But how was the poor woman at last helped? As soon as she approached the man called Christ and placed her hope and comfort in him, she became well. But who directed her to this man? Of course the physicians did not. For when our pastors preach Christ, the affairs of the Pope and all his traditions are overthrown. Who then told her? She heard it from someone who also had been healed, and that not by the physicians. He without doubt told her there was one who is called Jesus, who is a friendly,

gracious man, helps everyone, and allows no one to go from his presence unassisted, and that he is sent from God just for the purpose of helping everyone. And many had told her who received help from him. So that they also brought her to him. As the woman heard these things she abandoned the physicians and went to Christ.

[28] And so it takes place today. Christ is not preached, but only mere human works: do this, and do that. And in spite of this the knowledge of Christ enters among the people, what we are to expect of him, and that he alone must do everything, without our works and merit. When we hear this voice we follow him, and obey his Word, and let the physicians go for good, and care no longer for the preachers of the law or of works, nor inquire about their commandments and traditions, but we go with all the desire of our heart to this man, called Christ, and say: Yes, indeed, from this man we must receive it without any merit, yea, how foolish I acted, that I ventured so much for it! May God bless thee, my dear Pope! May God bless you, my dear bishops, monks and priests, I shall never need your medicine again, your work and merit, your commandments and traditions, you have martyred me too long with these things. I have found one who gives me all things freely, that I in time past had to buy from you with piles of money. He gives it to me without work or merit, whereas I before had to risk my body, strength, health and life for it. Good night and farewell! I will never come to you again.

[29] Thus, one becomes a Christian, not by the decretals of the Pope, or by means of works and human traditions, but by the grace and kindness of Christ. Now whoever has a troubled, distressed conscience, fears sin and is terrified at death, or otherwise experiences no good in himself, let him come hither to this man and confess what ails him, call upon him, and he will most certainly help. "Pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us," Psalm 62:8; 50:15, and say to him: Behold, here is an empty vessel that needs to be filled. Fill it, O Lord! I am weak in faith, strengthen me; I am cold in love, warm me and make me burn, that my love may flow out to my neighbor. I have not a firm, strong faith, at times I doubt, and cannot wholly trust in God! Alas, Lord, help me, increase in me my faith and trust. I have locked up the treasure of all my goods in thee. I am poor, thou art rich, and hast mercy on the poor, I am a sinner, and thou art righteous. In me is the river of sin; in thee is all fullness and righteousness.

[30] If you once learn this, the laws of the Pope cannot take thee captive. From his laws and commands you receive nothing, but like this woman you spend everything you have, your body and goods, and at last your soul besides. And then you will say: I desire him from whom I can receive something, not him to whom I must give.

[31] The other Gospels write thus, of this woman: When she became well Jesus felt that a power had gone out of him, and turned to the people and asked: "Who is it that touched me? And then the Disciples answered: "Master, the multitudes press thee and crush thee;" but the Lord was not satisfied with this, and replied: "Someone did touch me; for I perceived that power had gone forth from me," Mark. 5:25; Luke 8:46; I know that someone has received something from me. The Lord did all this because this woman's faith was acceptable to him, which he desired to make known to all people. For he desires nothing more than that a man trust and believe in him. It was also done for the sake of the ruler, to confirm his faith by this miracle and transaction. Therefore, Mark writes thus: As the woman saw that the Lord knew it, she feared and trembled and came and cast herself at the feet of the Lord and told him all in truth that was done to her by him. Then the Lord goes to work and absolves her and says to her: "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague."

[32] Are not these friendly words? What joy must not this woman have experienced, as she permitted another to show her a kindness? This joy and peace all receive, who look to this man for help. Now where this joy is, there its works must immediately follow, which prove this joy. So the peace and joy in this woman had to become manifest. For as soon as she received the good deed from the Lord, she confessed it before all the people, and was not ashamed to have it told that she received something from him, and yet gave nothing for it. This work and thanksgiving, however, God desires from us, namely, that we confess and proclaim his kindness, grace and good deeds before all men, so that others may also come and receive his benefits as this woman did. Thus, my Christian life urges me to do good to others, as God has done to me through Christ, only that thus, Christ may become known; but thereby I do not become a Christian. Just as this woman is not made whole by her knowledge, for she was well before all her work and knowledge. But after she becomes well she confesses Christ, and praises him, only for the good of others, and goes and does good works, one after

the other. Thus, we, too, live, if we are only Christians, in order that one may serve the others wherever we can. Hence, as this woman became well before she did all her works, so we Christians must also become whole before we can do any good works.

Concerning the Daughter of the Ruler.

[34] As the Gospel is represented in this woman, so it is also represented to us in the daughter of the ruler. This ruler of the Synagogue whom Mark calls Jairus, had a strong faith and confidence in the Lord that he would raise his deceased daughter to life. For had he not had such a disposition of heart toward him, he would not have come to him, and requested a thing of him which was by nature impossible. Therefore, in this he shows his faith. When now the Lord observed the faith in him, he could not but do his will, and immediately arose and went with him. During his journey the history of this woman takes place, who had been sick for twelve years, as we have heard.

[35] And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute players and the crowd making a tumult, who were there in compliance with the law of Moses, and blew with horns and trumpets, as in our country the bells are rung, to call the people together; he commanded the people and the flute players to give place and said: "The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth." And they laughed him to scorn. This means that, when the preaching of the Word goes forth thus, that Christ is the man who helps and our works will not do it, then the world cannot avoid it, it must laugh and scorn, and be offended (1 Corinthians 1:23), for it is not acceptable to the world that Christ should help us. As the people do here, who said without doubt: Alas, this is a grand master or doctor, what shall he help? for he does not know what it is to sleep or enter the grave?

[36] In the world the Gospel must have the reputation of being a foolish sermon, despised and scorned; for the devil cannot hear that this preaching is honored in the world, for it brings no advantage to his kingdom, this he feels, of course, and hence he attacks it with all cunning, so that he may hinder it and cause it to be worthless among his own followers, whose hearts he has entirely blinded and possessed, that the light of the Gospel may not shine for them, as St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:4. For it is

impossible that the preaching of Christ should not produce some fruit. It will not be preached in vain, Isaiah 55:11; although there be but few who receive it, it matters not.

[37] As Satan feels it is a loss to him, and that the preaching of the Word is directed against his kingdom, he has no rest, he persecutes, despises and attacks it on all sides, as he at present rages and storms in all the world. For the preaching of Christ overthrows everything pleasing to the devil and the world, and what the world regards as the most holy and costly. For the world paints for itself a god who accepts our good works, and is pleased with the mass, vigils, foundations, rosaries, caps, pates, hempen ropes, and what more be the works of fools with which the Pope is employed. Now when one comes and brings the Gospel, and preaches against this nonsense of the Pope, and he is obliged to do, and says: It is nothing, it is deception, it is opposed to Christ and the Scriptures; he must suffer himself to be called a heretic and a worthless fellow, a perverter of the people, and then they quite grandly assert: Do you want to rule the whole world? do you think you are the wisest? Our forebears also were not fools. Many holy, pious people have done these works and preached of them, should you first come to destroy all? This must not be! Then the raging and storming time begins, with persecution and death, and the devil will claim he is right, let it go as it may.

[38] This is enough on today's Gospel for the present. Hark well, that you learn from the Gospels that all things are to be found in the one person who is called Christ. And remember, too, that a Christian receives his name alone from Christ. I do not say this in vain, for I know what it costs to keep it, in temptation and in the battle of life. Let us call upon God for grace, that we may take this in earnest, and grasp it with our hearts. Amen.

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity. Second Sermon. Two Examples of Faith, and Christ's Call from the Dead.

Text: Matthew 9:18-26.

18 While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.

19 And Jesus arose, and followed him, and [so did] his disciples.

20 And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind [him], and touched the hem of his garment:

21 For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.

22 But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.

23 And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise,

24 He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.

25 But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.

26 And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land. Matthew 9:18-26

[1] This narrative is more fully and faithfully presented by the other Evangelists, Mark and Luke, and is a rich and beautiful Gospel, both in its doctrine and consolation, for it teaches the correct knowledge of the divine will in spiritual wisdom and understanding, (as may be noted in the Epistle

for today) and affords consolation and strength under the cross and amid suffering. Let us note a few of its lessons.

[2] First, the Lord is here represented surrounded by the people, as a kind and affable man, as St. Paul in Titus 3:4, says, that through him the grace and love of God have been made manifest, through which he shows himself willing and ready to help and serve all men, and also renders help to those who in true faith seek it from him.

[3] But they are people who are in misery, trouble, sorrow and distress. He will be with them and permit himself to be found by them; for with such, his Word and work can be made effective. But his Word and miracles are useless and lost among the carnally secure, the mighty, the rich and prosperous, because they are not capable of receiving his grace and favors, for they are already satisfied and satiated, and seek comfort and happiness in other things or even in themselves. In order to receive the grace and benefits of Christ, men must realize they have no comfort and help in any creature, and that they experience nothing but trouble and sorrow; and it is true as the Church sings in Luke 1:53: "The hungry he hath filled with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away."

[4] From this you see how graciously and paternally God manifests himself toward us, since he comes to us so closely through his beloved Son and seeks the poor and miserable, in order to pour out his grace upon all, who are willing to receive it; because he sent his Son to us, in order to be with us and dwell among us, as St. John, 1:14, says, and take care of us as his own flesh and blood. He assumed the same poverty and misery, so that he might deliver us from our misery, that is, from sin and death. Therefore, he also desires that we seek and expect such help from him through faith, as he says in John 6:40: "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone that beholdeth the Son and believeth on him, should have eternal life."

[5] This is the knowledge which Christians require and through which alone they become Christians and children of God, as Isaiah, 53:11, says: "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many," and John 1:12: "To them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name." For whatever else can be taught, done, or comprehended, however great, beautiful, praiseworthy, valuable or holy it may appear, cannot make Christians of people, that is, persons who have

obtained forgiveness of sins and a gracious God, unless they know and by faith lay hold of the Savior, the Son of God, who came into the world that by the shedding of his blood he might take away our sins and reconcile us to God.

[6] This doctrine and knowledge of the Gospel should be cherished and lauded by the whole world, because it alone publishes this true and joyous consolation, that God has had mercy on poor, unworthy and miserable sinners, and does not wish to impute unto them their sins, but out of pure grace forgives them. No other doctrine or sermon on earth can save or give the same, as the whole world, Jews, Gentiles and Turks, must acknowledge.

[7] Therefore, no person can of himself reach that point where he is before God free from horrible unbelief, and a condemned conscience, is able with a true heart to call upon God, and knows for a certainty that God will hear him, except alone through this knowledge of Christ, whom God himself has appointed as his Mediator and publicly testified that he will be gracious, hear and bless all who call upon him through Christ. Hence those only are Christians who render true service to God and can comfort themselves in the joyful assurance, that the true God is their God and that he will be with them and help them; whereas all others, who do not know Christ, are truly without God and cannot call upon him with true hearts, nor be comforted, but must perish before God in eternal and terrible doubt and destruction.

[8] This Gospel presents two beautiful examples both of the help of Christ and of faith which clings to and finds comfort in Christ, and obtains help from him. First, that is a beautiful faith of the ruler of the synagogue, which leads him to Christ in his distress, at the time when his daughter was lying at the point of death and when he could only say that she must die before he could return home; for he says: "My daughter is even now dead," and when all men had given up the hope and thought that help could be secured for her. Yet he did not despair, but, while the rest of his household despaired, wept and lamented, and could think of nothing except how to lay out the dead body and arrange it for the flute players and others, he went to Christ in the firm confidence that if he brought him to his daughter, she would be restored to life. He believed Christ was the one who could help, not only to restore and maintain health as long as body and soul were still united, but that he could also restore life after body and soul had been

separated by death. This was certainly at the time a remarkable example of faith, since nothing like it had ever before been heard or seen, unless perhaps the miracle of the raising of the widow's son to life, Luke 7:11 sq., had occurred before and the report of it had reached his ears. Nor was it a greater mark of faith that he could without a doubt conclude in his heart that Christ would restore his daughter to life; for if he would have doubted and followed the human thoughts of reason, he would certainly not have gone to Christ, but would have thought that he had delayed too long; or that although Christ had restored someone else to life, it would not necessarily follow that his daughter should also be restored to life, since so many sons and daughters of parents were daily dying, none of whom were being restored to life.

[9] This is the virtue of the right kind of faith, which was also, shortly afterwards, praised in the woman who had an issue of blood, namely, that it clings steadfastly to Christ, grasps and holds fast to the Word heard from him, does not inquire or look to that which the human mind may suggest, nor to what other people believe or do; but straightway concludes, with reference to the reports concerning Christ, that he is the one who can help in time of need; who has helped others and therefore, will help now. Such a heart and faith truly find Christ and receive according to their faith.

[10] In the second place, his faith concerning the Person of Christ was of such a character (which was indeed a great spiritual knowledge) that he rightly regarded him as the true Messiah sent by God, not such as the great mass of the Jews, especially the scribes, thought that he would come publicly before the people as a great and mighty lord and king with great pomp and show, so that everybody would regard and receive him as the one sent to them from God and in addition expected that he would deliver them from bodily slavery under the foreign dominion of the Roman Emperor and establish them as the mighty rulers of the world. On the contrary, over against such dreams and Jewish notions, he regarded him as the true Lord and Messiah, although he was not thus, regarded and received by his own people, the Jews, who was sent from God, not to confer temporal power, possessions, honor and freedom, but to help in those things and necessities where no man can help, namely, to redeem us from the peril of death and the power of the devil, yea, to turn death into life and confer life. He must not be regarded as a mere man, but as that one who truly has in himself

divine and eternal power and authority over all creatures, because he believes that he holds in his hands power over life and death, that is, that he truly is the Son of God, as the Scriptures declare.

[11] The other example of faith deserves no less praise, namely, that of the poor woman who had an issue of blood twelve years, on account of which she suffered in her body and lost all her strength, and because of this she had long despaired of receiving human help and comfort. She came to Christ, as she had heard of him, and could come to him in the certain and undoubted confidence that he could help her in her great need, and with the heartfelt assurance that he was so good and gracious as to help her and not let her go away unaided. Of this she was so certain and confident that her heart was free from care and grief, although she had reason to doubt. She was concerned only with the thought of how she would be able to get to Christ, wondering and thinking: "Ah! If I could but touch the hem of his garment." Then she firmly and confidently concluded in her heart, "I shall be made whole." But she did not know how to reach him, because she saw the crowd was so great and she, a poor, sick woman, could not well break through such a crowd of people. Besides, the law did not permit her to come among the people; yet her faith and desire urged her not to desist, but to press through the crowd until she came behind him and touched his garment.

[12] Behold here, how her faith overcame two obstacles. First, her faith was so strong that she believed she could obtain help, if only she could touch his garment. She did not deem it necessary to come to him and with many words present her complaint and pray that he would have mercy on her and help her, nor did others pray for her; but she sought only to reach him and touch him, for she thought, if only she could do this, she would receive help. She neither doubted his power, nor his willingness to help. Hence she did not deem it necessary to do more, in order to secure his help, than to touch merely the fringe of his outer garment. Therefore, she did not deem it necessary that she should come before him to be touched by him; yea, she did not regard herself worthy to be addressed by him; nor was her heart so full of confidence that, notwithstanding this, she lacked courage to come into his presence, and hence was neither seen nor heard by him. But she was satisfied simply to come up behind him, secretly and unnoticed by the crowd, and did not doubt as to the help she expected to receive. Nor did

her faith deceive her, for as soon as she touched the hem of his garment, the fountain of blood was stopped.

[13] Now, that a poor, simple woman should be able to see and know that this man's help and power were such that it was not necessary to speak to him at length, but that he was able to see in secret, even though he should not publicly show that he knows anything of our necessities or wished to help us, must be the result of a great and extraordinary illumination of the Spirit and the knowledge of faith. Accordingly, her faith produced such an assurance in her, that all doubt was removed, and she realized that if she could only reach him with even the most insignificant means, she would be helped. This, indeed, means a strong faith that this man must possess divine, almighty power and authority, that he can see and understand the secret thoughts and desires of the heart, although not a word is spoken; and that he can prove his work and help, although she sees and feels nothing externally except the words we heard him utter, which produced faith in her heart.

[14] She desired nothing besides this Word, nor did she ask for more than merely to touch his garment, which she used as an external means and sign to gain the desired help. Likewise, we need nothing more in our lives and in the kingdom of faith than the external Word and Sacraments, in which he permits himself to be touched and seized as if by his garment.

[15] Hence you may see what faith, which clings to the Person of Christ is and does, namely, a heart that regards him as the Lord and Savior, the Son of God, through whom God reveals himself and bestows upon us his grace, assuring us that through him and for his sake, he will hear and help us. This is the true spiritual and heartfelt worship of God, where the heart has to do with Christ and prays in his name, even though not a single word may be uttered aloud, and gives the honor due him, regards him as the true Savior, who can hear and know the secret desires of the heart and manifest his power and help, although he does not permit himself to be externally touched or approached, according to our thoughts.

[16] The other master-piece of her faith is, that she is able to overcome the feeling of her own unworthiness and roll from her heart the heavy stone, which weighed her down so heavily, and yet makes her so diffident that she dare not publicly approach Christ like other persons. The judgment passed

upon her by the law was that, as an unclean woman, she was not allowed to associate with other people. For, in Leviticus 15:19 we read that a woman like her shall be regarded unclean as long as she has the issue of blood; and that whatever she has on or about her, shall be unclean; and that whoever touches her or whatever she touches, shall be unclean. This proved no small distress to her, not only by reason of her malady and bodily uncleanness, but especially because she recognized and felt in it the punishment of God, imposed upon her before all people, and which separated her from the congregation of God's people. This continued for twelve long years, during which time she had tried all kinds of remedies with many physicians and yet was not helped by any, but grew worse continually, so that she was compelled to conclude that God had punished her with special severity because of her sins and would not help her. She was now forced to despair of human aid and thought she had to die of her disease and punishment.

[17] It was, therefore, not without a struggle and conflict that she maintained her faith in that which she sought in Christ; for she could not help but think: Behold, I am an unclean woman, punished of God, and everyone knows me. If I appear before this Lord, everyone and even he himself may simply condemn my boldness and impudence for coming into his presence and I may receive more wrath and severer punishment from God instead of mercy, and be forced to confess that I had been served rightly if he casted me from him in his anger. This trial and struggle show also that, as the text says, after she had been discovered, she was terrified and trembled, even though she had received the desired help; and yet she was filled with fear, lest he would speak harshly to her and censure her, because she had not been afraid to come to him and secretly steal the desired help.

[18] But her faith, which clearly set before her the good and gracious heart of Christ, broke through all these barriers; besides, her great need, yea, even her despair compelled her to become impudent before God and, regardless of the prohibition and judgment of the law, her own shame urged her to conclude: This Savior must be laid hold of, in spite of what the law, her own heart and all the world, yea, what even he himself may say. Here is the man who can help and who is also a good, gracious and faithful Savior. On the other hand, I am a poor, miserable woman, who needs his help. He will certainly not become other than he is, because of me, nor permit his

grace and help to fail me. Let his will be done in me; it will be better for me that I should be covered with shame, than the injury I would receive if I should fail to seek the help which I may be able to receive from him. She fixed her heart on the idea that if she could only touch this man, her need would be removed and the desired help received; and she would afterwards speak with Moses and the law, so that she might remain uncondemned by him, etc.

[19] Behold, that is a beautiful faith, which realizes its unworthiness and yet does not permit itself to be hindered on this account to place its confidence in Christ, nor to doubt his grace and help, but breaks through the law and everything that frightens it away from him; yea, if the whole world would attempt to hinder and thwart, yet it does not think of leaving this man until it has laid hold on him. Therefore, it presses through all barriers and attains what it seeks in Christ, and immediately experiences the power and work of Christ, even before he begins to speak. For it cannot apply to Christ in vain, even as Christ himself testifies, when he says: “Thy faith hath made thee whole.”

[20] Besides, faith like this is so pleasing to Christ that he does not wish it to remain concealed in her and that the power and work made effective by it should remain a secret, but what is in her heart must be published to everybody so that her faith may be praised before the whole world and be strengthened in her. Therefore, turning and looking around, he asked and desired to know who touched him; for he felt that power had gone forth from him. When she found she had to be discovered, she became afraid and began to tremble; for a heart filled with the great and implicit trust which she had in him, and yet also with humility and the knowledge of her unworthiness, must regard itself guilty, because she had gone contrary to Moses and because she realized he might justly be angry with her, because she could be so bold and impudent as to press through the crowd to him. And hence in the midst of the work, after she had already been healed and her heart was filled with joy, her faith had to contend with fear and terror, and yet only to enjoy all the more consolation and joy in Christ. For Christ does not wish faith to remain concealed in the heart, but desires it to be publicly confessed, so that the glory of God may thereby be praised and others also be spurred on to believe.

[21] Therefore, when this woman was in fear and danger, lest she should be disgraced before all and be condemned according to the law, yea, even she herself be compelled to make a public confession, Christ began to confirm her faith, to say she had done well in disregarding Moses and the law, that is, the judgment passed upon her unworthiness; and now he publicly shows the same disregard, will have her unaccused and uncondemned, yea, esteems her faith so highly that he ascribes to it alone the power and efficacy that helped her, just as if he had done nothing in the matter. In like manner, he was accustomed to speak at other times, as to the ruler, Matthew 8:13, "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee," and again to the Canaanite woman, Matthew 15:28, "Be it done unto thee, even as thou wilt."

[22] We should learn from this woman to realize the power of faith, and in our temptations and conflicts to call for help. For, as I have already stated, it is through such faith that we become Christians, and a distinction is shown between us and all other people on the earth, the Turks, heathen and Jews. For we must know that it is one thing to be a good man, perform many and great deeds, live a good, honorable and virtuous life, but quite another thing to be a Christian. For in that which concerns our lives and work we often receive great praise and honor before men, even from Jews and Turks, as many great and excellent men have been highly praised in pagan histories for their uprightness and virtue. Again, there have been many among the Jews, as Gamaliel, Paul before his conversion, Nicodemus and others (as this poor woman), who have with all zeal lived according to the law, so that in their external life before the world, they surpassed many true Christians.

[23] But even here a difference as great as between heaven and earth must be noted between Christians and others. A Christian is one who has a different kind of light in his heart, that is faith, which truly knows and lays hold on God and truly worships him. Through the Word of God he knows and realizes his own unworthiness and receives the true fear of God; and again finds comfort in his faith, believes and trusts he has obtained forgiveness of sin and redemption in Christ, the Son of God, and for his sake is acceptable to God and elected to eternal life; and in all his need, when he feels his own weakness, or is tempted, can find refuge in God, appeal to him and expect his help; and he knows he shall be heard.

[24] No other person than a Christian has this faith and assurance, be he Jew, Turk, Papist, or whatever he may be called, no matter how pious and good his life may be, or how much he may pride himself that he worships and serves God and hopes for eternal life; for the service, worship and life of such persons still lack two great things, which prevent them from being acceptable to God: first, they do not have the true God, that is, do not know him as he has revealed himself and will be known, to wit, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, his Son. Hence they walk in blindness and miss God, because they seek him according to their own notions and apart from Christ, and are deprived of the knowledge of the true Divine Being.

[25] Secondly, they lack the possibility of the true and assured knowledge of the will of God, because they do not have the Gospel. Hence, they cannot be certain that God will assuredly hear them, and must always remain in doubt whether or not God will hear them and interest himself in their behalf. Accordingly their appeals and prayers can be nothing more than mere vain and useless thoughts and babblings, through which the heart finds no consolation in God, nor expect anything from him, but rather flee from him and are therefore, truly without God, and use the name of God in vain.

[26] But the Christian's prayer consists in this that he prays to the true God, namely, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has revealed himself to men through his Word; and besides he has the certain confidence and assurance against all doubt that God will be gracious to him and hear his prayer for the sake of Christ, his beloved Son.

[27] This is the beautiful example of the woman. Now we turn to the daughter of the ruler of the Synagogue. But here, too, faith must contend and be strengthened; for although, as we have already heard, he had an excellent faith, yet it could scarcely have been maintained, had it not been strengthened. For, while Christ was still speaking with the woman, Mark 5:35-36 and Luke 8:49, say a message was brought, stating the man's daughter had died, and requesting him not to trouble the Master. This meant all would amount to nothing, since they had delayed too long; hence he should leave the matter and think only of how to bury his child.

[28] This must have been a severe blow to the ruler's faith. But the fact that the woman had just been healed, must have prevented his faith from

failing, and indeed strengthened it to resist the doubts concerning his daughter. And Christ himself is present to comfort and strengthen him against this stumbling block, in order to show that he is unwilling that even such weak faith should be injured in any way, but be established and strengthened; and in view of this he admonishes and encourages all persons by saying: "Doubt not, only believe, etc." This he said in order to see how highly he was pleased with the faith that clings to him, and that he was ready to guard against its being overcome; as he spoke to the Apostles, and especially to Peter, who fell so easily, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

[29] Now when Christ came to the house, this man's faith had to receive another blow; for there they saw and heard nothing but the tumult, weeping and wailing, and the blowing of trumpets (which they used at the death of their friends, as we do bells). All this cries in his heart that nothing was left but death, and his faith had nothing on which to lay hold against despair, except the word which Christ spoke against the tumult and lamentations: "The child is not dead, but sleepeth," on account of which he was mocked and laughed at as a fool; for they all saw and knew that the maid was dead, and that there was no breath nor spark of life in her. They could not but think: See, our master or ruler must be mad or silly to bring this fool here, who tries to convince us that the maid is not dead, when everyone can clearly see she lies stiff in death, a dead corpse, ready to be placed under ground.

[30] They had come together at the synagogue, as at a common gathering place, as we do at our churches, where on the Sabbath the Word of God was taught, because throughout the whole country there was neither church nor temple, except at Jerusalem. And this ruler of the synagogue occupied the same position among them that our pastors occupy, and others occupied the place of assistants or readers, who read Moses or preached, circumcised the children and instructed the young, and visited the sick and sorrowing to comfort them. These had to be together in the synagogue and testified concerning this work of Christ, even with their mocking and scornful laughter, namely, that the maiden had certainly died and been raised from the dead. The ruler therefore, before he could experience the work of Christ, was compelled, in the face of this offense and mockery, to cling to the one word of Christ and with him be regarded as a fool and in his

folly learn this spiritual wisdom that death is not death to Christ, but only a sleep. II. Christ's Call from the Dead.

[31] Let us learn from this to become fools with Christ and this ruler and teacher, in order that we may understand these words. Although this man's words may be despised by the world and be regarded as foolishness, yet they are very precious, for in them there certainly lies hid the highest wisdom of heaven and earth. For this passage, as a general expression, teaches you that your death in Christ is nothing more than a mere sleep, so that you may be able to look through and beyond the horrible sight and frightful larva of death and the grave, yea, apprehend the same truth of death, if only you hear these words in faith and accept them as true in Christ.

[32] Here we have nothing to do with ox eyes, or even man's eyes, but with the eyes with which Christ sees, and with the ears with which Christ hears, yea, a mind and heart like Christ himself has. A swine, when it sees the dead body of a man lying before it, can only conclude that it is a carcass like any other dead body, which is devoured by birds or animals, or is decomposed. So also a person without faith neither sees nor understands more, and in this respect cannot be distinguished from the brute, except in so far as he carries his head upright, while that of the brute is turned to the ground; for his thoughts can reach only as far as this life is concerned. Therefore, it is not to be wondered at that the mind should affect such so-called wisdom as this: "How can a person be said to sleep when he no longer has either breath or life, is buried under ground and is in process of decomposition?" On the other hand, he who desires to learn how to perceive and understand God's kingdom, power and work, must shut his mind and understanding, purify his eyes, cleanse his ears, and see and hear what Christ says in this matter, and how it is in his sight apart from this life, where our understanding, mind and thought cannot reach.

[33] In this passage you hear that Christ says that to him the dying of a person is not death, but a sleep, yea, from his point of view none of those who have lived and died before our time are dead, but are all alive, as those we see standing before us; for he has concluded that all shall live, yea, he holds their lives in his hands. For you must here clearly distinguish between the thoughts and actions of Christ, and the views, thoughts and understanding of the world, as I have said before, so that you may not

remain in the blind and brutish thought and opinion concerning the dead and putrifying body, but rather perceive that this is the Lord of all creatures, whether to us they be dead or alive, and that all life comes from him and is maintained in and by him, so that if he would not maintain life no one could live a single moment.

[34] Besides the regular daily maintenance of life, he must maintain it without our will and help when we sleep, a condition in which man has no control over his mind and life, and does not know how he falls asleep and wakes again. Therefore, it is not difficult for Christ, in the hour when body and soul are separated, to hold in his hand the soul and spirit of man, even though we ourselves neither feel nor see anything, yea, even though the body be entirely consumed. For, since he can preserve the breath of life and spirit, apart from the body, so he can again bring the body together out of dust and ashes. This he has proved in this and similar examples, when he restored to life with one word those who had truly died and whose body and soul had been separated. Hence we must conclude that he holds in his hand the life of those who have died; for if this power did not belong to him, he could not restore life.

[35] In the second place, you must not calculate how far life and death are apart, or how many years may pass while the body is wasting in the grave, and how one after another dies, but endeavor to grasp the thought of Christ with reference to the conditions apart from this time and hour. For he does not calculate time by tens, hundreds or thousands of years, nor measure the years consecutively, the one preceding, the other following, as we must do in this life; but he grasps everything in a moment, the beginning, middle and end of the whole human race and of all time. And what we regard and measure according to time, as by a long drawn out rule, all this he sees as at a glance, and thus, both the death and life of the last as well as of the first man are to him as only a moment of time.

[36] Thus, we should learn to view our death in the right light, so that we need not become alarmed on account of it, as unbelief does; because in Christ it is indeed not death, but a fine, sweet and brief sleep, which brings us release from this vale of tears, from sin and from the fear and extremity of real death and from all the misfortunes of this life, and we shall be secure and without care, rest sweetly and gently for a brief moment, as on a sofa, until the time when he shall call and awaken us together with all his dear

children to his eternal glory and joy. For since we call it a sleep, we know that we shall not remain in it, but be again awakened and live, and that the time during which we sleep, shall seem no longer than if we had just fallen asleep. Hence, we shall censure ourselves that we were surprised or alarmed at such a sleep in the hour of death, and suddenly come alive out of the grave and from decomposition, and entirely well, fresh, with a pure, clear, glorified life, meet our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the clouds.

[37] Therefore, we should entrust and commend to our true Savior and Redeemer ourselves, body, soul and life, with all confidence and joy, just as we must commend to him our life without care in our bodily sleep and rest, assured that we shall not lose it, but be truly and carefully preserved in his hand, maintained and again restored. Here you see, as he shows in reality, how easy it is for him to awaken men from the dead and restore them to life, as he came to the maiden, took her by the hand, as someone else might do to awaken one from sleep, and with a word called, "Maid, arise!" and the maiden suddenly arose, as if she had been awakened from sleep. We see here neither sleep nor death, but wakefulness and freshness, even as Lazarus came forth from his tomb.

[38] Behold, this Word of Christ is not a matter of laughter and foolishness to faith (as to others among the prudent and the saints according to the law, who nevertheless remain in fear and terror of death, have to do with their thoughts about death and works), but of great wisdom, by which death and all the images of death are swallowed up, and in their place true comfort, joy and life are obtained. The act and experience must assuredly follow this Word of Christ and faith in his Word cannot fail. Let this be regarded as a masterpiece and a wonderful work of alchemy or a science, which indeed does not turn copper and lead into gold, but turns death into sleep, your grave into a soft sofa, the time from the death of Abel until the last day into a brief hour, a work which no creature has nor can attempt except through faith in Christ. If you can believe this, that is, let the Word of Christ be true and not a lie, you have already overcome both death and the sting of death, and in their place have obtained sweet rest.

[39] Scripture everywhere affords such consolation, which speaks of the death of the saints, as if they fell asleep and were gathered to their fathers, that is, had overcome death through this faith and comfort in Christ, and awaited the resurrection, together with the saints who preceded them in

death. Therefore, the early Christians (undoubtedly from the Apostles or their disciples) followed the custom of bringing their dead to honorable burial and wherever possible interred them in separate places, which they called, not places of burial or graveyards, but coemeteria, sleeping chambers, dormitoria, houses of sleep, names which have remained in use until our time; and we Germans from ancient times call such places of burial God's acres, as St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 15:44, says: "It is sown a natural body;" for what we now call church yards were not at first places of burial. This is the teaching and comfort of this Gospel lesson.

[40] Further, we are shown here, as in a painting, both in the woman with the bloody flux and in the maiden, the result of attempting to govern conscience by means of the law, without a knowledge of Christ. There are two classes of people: One class consists of the sick, poor timid consciences, who feel their secret need and sins, as well as the judgment and curse of the law, that is, that they are under the wrath of God, desire earnestly to be freed from it, seek help and counsel from many physicians, expend all their possessions, body and life, and yet receive no help, neither improvement nor comfort, but continually grow worse; until they at last give up in despair and resign themselves to death; finally Christ comes to them with his Gospel. Many good-hearted people have hitherto experienced this under the Papacy, who earnestly strove to become pious, did everything as they were directed and taught, and yet gained from it only terrified and timid consciences, and on account of the fear and horror of death and of the judgment day, would gladly have ended their lives. This is the result of all teaching at its best, apart from the knowledge of Christ.

[41] The other class, like the daughter of the ruler, are those who are without the law, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, that is, are free and live securely, do not feel the terrors of the law, think they are prosperous and safe until they are suddenly struck down and die, as St. Paul, speaking of himself, Romans 7:11, says that he lived without the law, but afterwards through the law sin became alive and slew him.

[42] Since both the woman and the daughter were delivered from their need and from death, there is no counsel or help other than that which acknowledges Christ and hears the truly comforting, living voice of the Gospel, which has the power to abolish sin and death, and to give to the conscience everlasting comfort, joy and life, wherever these are accepted in

true faith. And here the doctrine is clearly set forth, that we are justified and saved, without our merit, gratuitously, alone through faith, and so are delivered from sin and death. The poor woman brought nothing to Christ, except her great unworthiness, so that she had to be ashamed of it, yea, was filled with fear and terror when forced to make herself known. There was even far less personal merit or worthiness in the ruler's daughter, because she lay there in death and was altogether without life and action. In a word, we must confess that in ourselves we have nothing, nor are able to live or do anything to please or to bring us favor and life, unless his pure grace be conferred upon us.

[43] But after we have received forgiveness of sin, consolation and life, let us begin to teach and do good works. Just as the woman, after she had been healed, and the maiden, after she had been restored to life, did good and living deeds. Thus, we too have power in Christ to live according to the will of God, and know that our lives and works begun in Christ are acceptable to him. Whatever else might be said here, how Christ performs his works and wonders in his Church, in which are seen the fruits of faith, though secretly and obscurely, as in both these instances of the woman and the maiden, so that the world was not allowed to see them, would make our present discussion too lengthy.

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Trinity. The Destruction of the Jewish Kingdom, the Abomination of Desolation, and the End of the World. Christ Looking Down on Jerusalem.

Text: Matthew 24:15-28.

15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)

16 Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains:

17 Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house:

18 Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.

19 And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

20 But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:

21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

23 Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.

24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

25 Behold, I have told you before.

26 Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.

27 For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

28 For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together. Matthew 24:15-28

[1] In this chapter there is a description of the end of two kingdoms; of the kingdom of the Jews, and also of the kingdom of the world. But the two Evangelists, Matthew and Mark, unite the two and do not follow the order as Luke did, for they have nothing more in view than to relate and give the words of Christ, and are not concerned about what was said either before or after. But Luke takes special pains to write clearly and in the true order, and

relates this discourse twice; first briefly in the 19th chapter, where he speaks of the destruction of the Jews at Jerusalem; afterwards in the 21st chapter he speaks of both, one following the other.

[2] Notice therefore, that Matthew unites the two and at the same time conceives the end, both of the Jewish nation and of the world. He therefore, cooks both into one soup. But if you want to understand it, you must separate and put each by itself, that which really treats of the Jews, and that which relates to the whole world. This we wish to do now.

[3] Notice, first, how Christ prophecies in this chapter concerning the final destruction of the Jewish nation, which the Jews did not at all believe, even though they had been dearly told through great signs and words, the promises of God which he made to the fathers, like unto which had happened to no other people upon the earth. For this reason they strongly insisted and depended upon it, thought it will continue forever, as they think even at the present time; that their kingdom is not destroyed but has only disbanded a little and shall be re-established. They cannot get it out of their minds that they are not completely ruined.

[4] For this reason, God announced besides his miracles with clear and plain prophecies that their kingdom shall have an end and that God had abolished the external reign of the law, meats, offerings, etc., and would establish another which shall endure forever, as the angel announced to the virgin concerning Christ, as recorded in Luke 1:33. "And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

[5] Among the various passages which treat of the end of Judaism there is especially one that is introduced by Christ, namely: the prophet Daniel, 9:25f, speaks of the terrible abomination, standing where he ought not, when he says concerning the Jewish nation, "Know therefore, and discern, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the anointed one, the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and three-score and two weeks," that makes together seventy weeks or years, "And after the three-score and two weeks, shall the anointed one be cut off, and shall have nothing: and the people of the Prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and even unto the end shall be war; desolations are determined. And he shall make a firm covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the

week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease; and upon the wing of abominations shall come one that maketh desolate; and even unto the full end, and that determined, shall wrath be poured out upon the desolate.”

[6] The Prophet Daniel desired to know the definite time when this should come to pass, but he could not learn it, and although the angel pointed out a definite time, it was nevertheless too dark for the prophet to understand, hence he said before: But at last, at the last time, you shall see everything, that is, your prophecy, that is to be revealed to you, shall transpire at the end of time. For when Christ sent out the Gospel through the ministry of himself and of the Apostles, it lasted three or three and a half years, that it almost amounts to the calculation of Daniel, namely the 490 years. Hence he also says, Christ shall take a half a week, in which the daily offerings shall cease; that is, the priesthood and reign of the Jews shall have an end; which all took place in the three and a half years in which Christ preached, and was almost completed in four years after Christ, in which the Gospel prospered the most, especially in Palestine through the Apostles (that when they opened their mouth, the Holy Ghost fell as it were, from heaven, as we see in the Acts of the Apostles), so that a whole week, or seven years, established the covenant, as Daniel says; that is, the Gospel was preached to the Jews, of which we spoke before. Now, when the time came that a new message or sermon began, there must also begin a new kingdom, that is, where Christ rules spiritually in our hearts through the Word and faith. If this is now to continue, then the other must be set aside and has no more authority and must cease. This is the part of the prophecy of the prophets, which Christ is explaining.

[7] The other treats of the abomination of desolation. Here Christ now says, When ye shall see this one standing in the temple, then take heed (he wants to say) for that is a sure sign from Daniel’s prophecy that his kingdom is now at an end; and do not let yourselves be deceived because the Jews and weak Christians think that it shall never be destroyed.

[8] But the abomination of which Daniel writes is that the Emperor Cajus, as history tells, had put his image in the temple at Jerusalem as an idol, for the people to worship, after everything there had been destroyed. For the Scriptures call idolatry really an abomination, because God abhors and abominates it, inasmuch as he is the enemy of no sin so much as of this.

The others he does truly punish, but he does not cast the people away if they repent, as he says in Psalm 89:31-34: “If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. But my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.” But this sin, called idolatry, which is really unbelief and denial of God, which he cannot at all endure, condemns man completely. For where this remains in the heart of man, so that he teaches and believes correctly, indicates that our works are nothing, and that we shall be acceptable to God and serve him aright alone through faith, then there will be a truly godly character; there light and truth abide. Although alongside of faith there runs a sense of the weakness of the flesh. It is not an abomination before God, but only a daily sin that God will punish unto repentance; yet he keeps the people, spares them and forgives them, when the people turn to him and learn to acknowledge his goodness. On the other hand, where this faith and doctrine do not exist, everything is lost; for it is impossible for man not to establish for himself a false worship and choose his own opinion and work, and worship it, so that he really denies God and his Word, and God is entirely turned aside; so that his grace cannot operate. Such abomination is generally the most beautiful and the greatest holiness in the eyes of the world, which outwardly appears in beautiful works and customs; but inwardly is full of filthiness, as we can see at the present day in our orders and church services where they are at their best. However there are again some Christians who are not like these in their works and ways; but are truly holy before God.

[9] Now Christ says, when the abomination, that is, this idol, shall stand in the temple, the kingdom shall finally be made desolate and destroyed, so that it can never be rebuilt again, as Luke expresses it clearly in these words, Luke 21:20f: “But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that our desolation is at hand. Then let them that are in Judea flee unto the mountains; and let them that are in the midst of her depart out; and let not them that are in the country enter therein. For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.” And further, “Woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight may be not in the winter, neither on a Sabbath: for then shall be great tribulation, such as had not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be.”

[10] All this pertains still to the Jewish nation. For if this should come upon us at the end of the world, then would we, according to the text, have to be in the land of Judea, because he really points to that country. It is also true, when he says that no greater calamity has been or can be upon the earth than was at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem; as we see in history, how unmercifully they were slaughtered and even killed one another, cast themselves into the fire, and permitted themselves to kill one another. Yea, the famine was so great that they ate the strings of cross-bows and even their own children. It was so shameful and abominable that like pity and distress shall never be heard again.

[11] But they themselves wanted it, hence God permitted them to be thus, blighted and destroyed. He would gladly have had mercy upon them and preserved them, but they brought themselves to such distress with their stiffneckedness, that they killed and consumed one another; that as they began it, all such murder and bloodshed had to increase. Thus, the death of Christ and of all the prophets is most abominably avenged on them, and that without ceasing, they raged against the Word of God, and persecuted and drove away the Apostles, as St. Paul says in Thessalonians 2:15-16, that the wrath of God finally came upon them.

[12] When such fearful wrath and abominable plagues are at hand, says Christ, then flee wherever ye are able to flee; for these words, "Then flee unto the mountains, he that is in Judea, and he that is upon the housetop," etc.; then; "He who is in the field," etc., are all written or spoken symbolically, as if to say, hasten quickly away; the sooner the better, and let no one find or overtake you. This also came to pass. After the Jews had been sufficiently warned by many signs, that they should submit themselves to the Romans, and they would not; then the disciples and apostles fled away and followed this saying of Christ, they left everything behind that was in Judea and never returned to take anything.

[13] "And pray ye," he says further, "that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a Sabbath;" that is, see to it that you flee at the right time, that you be not overtaken. For he did not want to perform a miracle and keep them safely in the midst of the enemy, although he could have done so; for he had determined that everything that was there should be completely destroyed together; therefore, all as one mass were only fit for destruction. If there were indeed a great multitude at Jerusalem according to the record,

a million and a hundred thousand men were melted together, as many as were in the city. Therefore, Jesus admonishes the disciples that they should not postpone their flight to the Sabbath, when they did not dare to journey; nor to the winter, when it would be cold; but that they should depart, the sooner the better; that if they hesitate, an inconvenient time to flee would come.

[14] Thus, far Jesus speaks concerning the Jews. Now I have said before that Matthew and Mark unite these two ends together. Therefore, it is difficult to discriminate, and yet we must discriminate between the two. Therefore, notice that what had been said up to the present, all referred to the Jews; but now he weaves both together, breaks off abruptly, does not concern himself about the order in which the passages were spoken by Christ, and how they are connected with and follow one another; but leaves it to the Evangelist Luke, yet he wants to say that it shall be thus, at the last day, and says: “And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved; but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.”

[15] This refers to both parts and the meaning is, that the distress shall not endure long, for the sake of the godly; for the war against the Jews did not last quite two years, when peace was declared. But since all this has reference also to the end of the world, we wish to apply these passages concerning the Jews also to ourselves, so that we do justice to the Evangelist.

[16] That a war shall come again as came upon the Jews, I do not expect, because the text says: There shall be such tribulation as shall never be again, as we also read and see; but another punishment shall come upon us; as that was a temporal war, so at the end of the world will a spiritual war come over the ungodly, who will be in the same condition as the Jews. Thus, they will agree with one another: as that calamity came upon Jerusalem according to God’s ordering and everything was ground to powder; so abominable, and even worse, shall it be before the last day, when he shall come and make an end of the whole world.

[17] For when Christ ascended into heaven, he established his kingdom not only in Judea, but extended it into all the world by means of the Gospel, which is being preached and heard everywhere. But we are doing just like the Jews, we deny and persecute the Word of God, kill the Christians who

confess and preach this Gospel, as at the first the Romans, and afterwards to the present day, the Pope, bishops, princes, monks and priests do. This has now been done, for more than five hundred years, and no one was allowed to preach the Word of God, unless they repeated from the pulpit the text of the Gospel for a mere show, and afterwards brought out of it or put into it the mere doctrines of men. If anyone opposed it, they rose against him with fire and sword and suppressed it. And it avails nothing, how they are warned and frightened by words and signs; they still stand in their pride, storm and rage against it as lunatics, so that God will ever have sufficient reason to destroy them finally and eternally at the last day.

[18] Therefore, this passage in Daniel concerning the abomination applies also to us. For we also have indeed a real abomination or desolation sitting in a holy place, namely: in Christendom and in the consciences of men, where God alone should sit and reign, of which Daniel speaks in very clear words in the 8th and 9th chapters. For this is the real pure doctrine, if we preach that we are redeemed by Christ from sin, death, Satan and all misfortune, and are planted in the kingdom of God through the Word and faith and thereby are made free from all law, and that no man, whoever he be, can enter into the kingdom of God through the works of the law nor be made free from sin. Where this is preached and believed, there Christ reigns spiritually in the heart without a medium; there is the Holy Spirit with all the treasures and fullness of the riches of God.

[19] But what is the Pope doing? He is sitting not in the natural temple or God's house, but in the spiritual, in the new and living temple of which Paul says: "If any man destroyeth the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are," Corinthians 3:16-17. In all times many devils and heretics have tried to sit here, and all who are preaching against the true doctrine: If you want to be saved, then simply join this or that society and order, and do this or that work. They draw away the people from faith to works, although they are using the words, Christ is the Lord, but in truth deny him, for they do not say a single word that he forgives sins alone through grace, and redeems from death and hell, but they say: Through this order, through these works, we must do penance for sin, and atone for it in order to obtain grace, which is as much as to say: Christ did not accomplish it, he is not the Savior; his suffering and death cannot help, for if your works can accomplish it, then Christ cannot

accomplish it only through his blood and death, or the other must be in vain. If you insist upon your works, then you drive out Christ; you deny and put to shame his precious blood and him with it; then he cannot reign in your heart through his Word, work and spirit, but my work is my idol whom I let sit in my heart and reign.

[20] Thus, you see whether the Pope is not the greatest arch-abomination of all abominations, to whom Christ and Daniel refer; and the true Antichrist, of whom it is written that he sitteth in the temple of God, among the people, where Christ is named and where his kingdom, spirit, baptism, Word and faith should be: because he interferes with the office and kingdom of Christ by his fanaticism of the spiritual rites of Christ, wants to rule over the consciences and govern with his propositions and works. And he can in truth be called an “abomination of desolation,” who is only destroying and laying waste everything, for as has been said: Christ and my works cannot abide together; if the one stands, the other must go down and be destroyed; wherefore the Pope has made desolate the kingdom of Christ, as far as his diocese reaches, and all who join him have denied Christ.

[21] St. Paul prophesied all this, when in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, he calls him: “The man of sin and the son of perdition, he that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God.” But that the Papists want to turn this passage from themselves and say: Christ and Paul are speaking of the temple of Jerusalem, that Antichrist shall sit and rule there, amounts to nothing. For Christ says here, that Jerusalem together with the temple shall have an end, and after its destruction it shall never be rebuilt. Therefore, since Paul is pointing to the time after the Jewish kingdom, and the destruction of the material temple, it cannot be understood otherwise than of the new spiritual temple, which as he says himself, we are. There, Paul says, the Pope shall sit and be honored, not above God, but above everything that is called God, for the name of God does indeed remain the highest honor, therefore, he cannot exalt himself above the true God, but above that which is called God and is worshipped; that is, he is exalted against his preaching and honor, higher than the true God, as is apparent in that so many princes and the world are clinging to him and regard his command higher and greater than the command of God. If any man eats meat contrary to his command or goes out of the impure calling of the

priest, monk, or nun, into married life, as God has commanded, or according to the institution of Christ takes the sacrament in both forms; that is the greatest sin. They regarded it much less than stealing, adultery and all open vice against the command of God, and no one is even allowed to punish them for it. Yea, that they themselves defame the Word of God, persecute and kill the Christians, they esteem as the highest service of God, as it is also the highest service they can do for their god, the Pope. Is not this exalting and honoring Antichrist against God, so that if anyone speaks or does anything against this, if he gets into their hands, he must immediately die? I think now that enough has been pictured forth and explained concerning this abomination.

[22] Now it is high time for him to run and flee, who is able to flee; let everything he has behind and depart; the sooner the better; not with his feet but with his heart, in such a way that he will be rid of the abomination and enter the kingdom of Christ through faith. But to do this reason and a keen insight are needed rightly to discern the abomination. It cannot be seen in any way better than when we compare it to Christ who teaches, as stated above, that we are reconciled to God, and are saved through his blood. But the Pope ascribes this power to our works. Thus, you ever see that to be saved through works and not to be saved through works (to believe on Christ as our justification before God) are contrary to each other. If you then want to remain with Christ, you must flee from the Pope and let him go.

[23] This is now the abomination of desolation that has reigned until our time; but is now revealed through the grace of God, but will never be destroyed by emperor or worldly power. It must all be higher than that material destruction, since that was such a great tribulation, that there never can be a greater physically. Therefore, did God reserve the destruction of this abomination for himself, as Paul says in Thessalonians 2:8: "Whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming." Although they themselves fear evil from worldly power and insurrection, yet this shall not be so well with them. For they are not worthy of such mild punishment, and God will not grant unto them that they be destroyed through man, but will do it himself without means, through his Word. Inasmuch as it has now made a beginning and the kingdom is destroyed even to the extent that it avails nothing, nor can take

captive the conscience of those who know the Gospel. However hostile the Pope rages against the Gospel; he must nevertheless fall at the feet of princes and seek help from them. Hence his power is weakened and broken by means of the Gospel; but his final destruction is reserved unto the last day. Therefore, it must continue in part until Christ at his coming shall destroy and grind to powder all together from heaven.

[24] But as at that time among the Jews, the days were shortened, as Christ said, so must now also the days be shortened for the elect's sake; for we see that the government of the Pope has had opposition and has declined during the last hundred years, without, at the Council of Constance where Huss was burned at the stake, having frightened everybody that he was held as God; but the truth came finally to light, so that now it is very much despised and can endure but a little longer; hence we notice, as I said before, that our text refers not only to the Jews but also to our abomination, the Pope's kingdom. Now Christ says further: "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Christ, or, here; believe it not."

[25] From this passage we should indeed know and understand how to conquer the Pope and his rebel horde, who abolish the kingdom of Christ, and bind the Christian life to external and visible things, as they also publicly declare: Where the Pope is, there is the Christian church. They want to lead us to the point that we should find, feel and touch it in person or state, or in a manner that is wholly external. Thus, they do in all their cloisters and institutions. Therefore, they say: If you enter this calling, eat, clothe yourself, pray and fast so and so, then you will atone for your sins and be saved. Heretofore Christ pictured this beautifully to us, and pointed to all these cloisters, callings and works, by which they wish to help the soul, and warns us to be careful of them, and not to permit ourselves to be drawn from the foundation upon which we stand; that we cannot become Christians through any such thing; but are redeemed from all evil alone through his blood and are planted into his kingdom, if we believe. He thus, takes from our eyes all temporal and external things, casts to the ground with one word all doctrines that do not proclaim faith in its purity, and all life that is not regulated according to the right doctrine of faith. In short, he adds: "If anyone says, here or there is Christ," believe it not, which means: Beware of everything that leads you to works, for it surely deceives and separates you from me. "For there shall arise false Christs, and false

prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.”

[26] These are admirable, earnest and fearful words, that these preachers of works must force this truth into the people with such a show and emphasis that even the saints who stand in faith cannot protect themselves against it, but are led astray thereby, as has been the case. For the dear fathers, Augustine, I think Jerome also, likewise St. Bernard, Gregory, Francis, Dominicus and many others, although they were godly men, have all erred here, as I have often remarked in other places. For this error, that the Christian life was bound to external things, was early introduced and they with others were swept into it, and it went so far that they were led into it by their outward conduct, as we see in the books of St. Bernard, how poorly he writes when he answered anyone on the questions of their monastic life; but when he writes freely out of his own soul, he preaches so elegantly that it is a pleasure for him, as Augustine, Jerome, Cyprian, the great and noble martyr, and many others experienced. But when any question was laid before them concerning the law and external regulations, whether we should understand it so, or so, then they immediately stumbled and fell, so that little was needed to mislead them. Still the followers of the Pope use this as the greatest argument against us. They say, should so many holy people and teachers have erred, and should God have forsaken the world so completely? They do not see that this becomes to them a stumbling block to cause their fall.

[27] What shall we now answer them? The passage lies clearly before us. This we must believe and let it stand; we cannot get away from it, even though the holy angels in heaven were against it, for should not Christ be holier and his Word amount to more than their word? For he never at any time says: Lord of the many or of the great multitude, but of the small number, of the elect, that they should stumble, so that they would almost be led astray, and he warns us that we should not cling to this, when we see that they cling to external things. Had they then not erred, Christ could not have been right when he proclaimed it. Now if all the saints should come and bid me believe in the Pope, I would not do it, but say: Even though you are of the elect, Christ nevertheless has said that there should be abominable and dangerous times: that you also must err. Therefore, we must cling alone to the Scriptures and to the Word of God, which say he is not here nor there.

Where he is, there I shall be. He will not be there where my work or calling is. Now whoever teaches me otherwise deceives me; therefore, I still insist that nothing avails that they propose, as for example: The holy fathers and teachers thought so, lived so, hence we also must think and live in like manner; but this avails: Christ taught and thought so, therefore, we must also think the same, for he is authority, above all the saints. “Behold, I have told you beforehand. If therefore, they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; go not forth: Behold, he is in the inner chambers; believe it not.”

[28] At the time of the holy fathers, Anthony and others, shortly after the Apostles, the fallacy already arose, of which Christ is speaking here, although Anthony strove against it, that everybody was running to the wilderness by the thousands, and it gained such favor that later Jerome and Augustine almost worshipped custom, and did not know how sufficiently to praise it. Now when we look at it in the right light, this text powerfully opposes that movement, and there were also among them many heretics and many condemned persons, and although there were godly people among them who escaped the deception, nevertheless the example was dangerous and cannot be commended. Also St. Francis was a holy man, but his example and the order he established we are not to follow. But this no one, not even the saints, has recognized; so deeply and with such great display has it taken root. The Christian life is not confined to the wilderness, but moves freely in public society as Christ and the Apostles lived, that we come before and among the world, preach and admonish openly, to bring the people to Christ; but the people who run to the wilderness, do not want to remain in the world where they must suffer so much. They choose for themselves their own strict life, want thereby to be better Christians than others, as also the cloisters do, which are designated by Christ as the “chambers.” Christ closes now and says: “For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man.”

[29] By this Christ wishes to say: Only do not believe them, when they want to bind Christ to this or that, and try to lead you from faith to works. I warn you not to fall from the pure faith, for you know not it what hour I will come. When anyone neglects his looking for me, then I will come as suddenly as the lightning flashes from heaven. When anyone clings not to

him by faith, he is lost. Therefore, see to it, that that day does not come upon you unawares. Remain steadfast in the faith, so that if you be indolent and sleep, Satan may not tear you from your faith. But these words here follow each other in disorder. For as I said, Matthew gives these passages all in a heap and not in order. Therefore, it does not agree exactly with the words which follow here: “Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”

[30] That is, you need not ask where the place is, where Christ shall come. I am where I wish to be, hence we will meet each other, as we say: “Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.” For as the eagle does not paint for himself the place to which it will fly, but wherever the carcass is, there they will be gathered together; thus, mine own will also find me. Where I am, there shall my elect also be. This is the text concerning the end of the Jews and of the world, to which Matthew now unites the passages concerning the signs of the last day, all which Luke separates clearly. This will belong to another occasion and is elsewhere fully discussed. Note. Some on the last Sunday of the year preach on the Gospel of John 6, where Christ feeds the multitudes with five loaves and two fishes, which is explained in the Winter Postil during Lent. — God be praised forever.

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Trinity. Christ’s Coming on the Last Day, and His Judgment of the Christians and the Godless. Christ’s Return.

Text: Matthew 25:31-46.

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. Matthew 25:31-46

[1] The words of this Gospel are in themselves clear and lucid. They have been given both for the comfort and encouragement of believing Christians, and for the warning and terror of others, if perchance, they might be of help to them. While most lessons almost exclusively teach and inculcate faith, this one treats only of the works, which Christ will examine at the last day, that it may be seen that he wishes them to be remembered and performed by those who wish to be Christians and be found in his kingdom.

[2] And Christ himself gives this admonition here in the strongest terms that can be given, both in the consoling promise of a glorious, eternal reward, and in the most terrible threatenings of eternal wrath and punishment upon all who despise the admonition; so that whoever is not moved and aroused by these words can certainly never be moved by anything. For Christ says, he will himself come visibly in his majesty, at the last day, with all the angels, and that he will transplant all who have believed in him and have exercised love toward his followers, into his father's kingdom of eternal glory all who believe in him and love his saints; and that he will also cast into hell forever all who live not as Christians, and who separate themselves from him and all his saints.

[3] Now, had it not been told us we should be inquisitive beyond measure to know what would happen on the last day, and what Jesus would say and do on that day. Here we are now told, and have set before us first of all, death, which no one can escape; but after that the day of judgment. Then it shall come to pass that Christ will bring together by means of the resurrection all who have ever lived upon earth; and at the same time he will descend in great inexpressible majesty, sitting upon the throne of judgment, with all the heavenly host hovering around him; and all the good and bad will appear, so that we shall all stand exposed before him and no one will be able to conceal himself.

[4] The appearance of this glory and majesty will immediately become a great terror and pain to the condemned, as we read in today's Epistle lesson, lest they shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10. For even if there were no more than a single angel present, there would not remain in his presence one fickle, wicked conscience, were it possible to escape, any more than a thief and a rascal can bear to come before a human judge. If he could

escape, he would much prefer it, if only for the purpose that he might escape public disgrace, to say nothing of his being compelled to hear the judgment passed upon him. What a terrible sight this will be, when the ungodly shall see not only all God's angels and creatures, but also the Judge in his divine majesty, and shall hear the verdict of eternal destruction and hell fire pronounced upon them forever! This ought surely to be a strong, powerful admonition for us to live as Christians, so that we may stand in honor and without fear at the right hand of this majestic Lord, where there will be no fear nor terror, but pure comfort and everlasting joy.

[5] For he will then, as he says here himself, immediately separate the goats from the sheep. And this will take place publicly in the presence of all angels, men, and creatures, and before the whole rabble of an ungodly world, that it may be seen who have been pious, honest Christians, as well as who have been false hypocrites. This separation cannot take place in the world until that day, not even in the assembly that constitutes the Christian Church. The good and the bad must remain together in this world, as the parable of the wedding guests says, Matthew 22:10; or as Christ himself had to tolerate Judas among his Apostles. Christians are even now grieved that they must remain here in the midst of a crooked, perverse, ungodly people, which is the kingdom of Satan, Philippians 2:15.

[6] While they have their sufferings here upon earth, they will have also their comfort on the coming day of judgment, when Christ will separate them from the other flock, so that after that day no false, ungodly men, nor death, nor devil can ever touch them or offend them.

[7] Then he will pronounce the verdict in the very words in which he has already prepared it and set it forth, and he will certainly not change it. And the words are peculiar in this that he makes them depend upon the deeds and works here mentioned, which they have or have not done, and which are the basis and cause of his judgment. And all these words set forth at length the works which have been done as well as those which have been neglected. And all this shall happen in the twinkling of an eye, when the hearts of all men shall be revealed before all creatures; and as it is preached here, so there all will be forthwith executed.

[8] You may ask why Christ there especially examine works called deeds of mercy, or the neglect of such works? Six different kinds are mentioned in

the text, although many more might be given; yet were one to judge critically in the matter, there are no more works than those implied in the fifth commandment: Thou shalt not kill; in which we are commanded in general, as Christ himself explains it, not to be angry with our neighbor, but to be kind to him and ready to serve and assist him, supply his wants in times of need, whether in hunger, thirst, nakedness, suffering, imprisonment, sickness or other troubles, and to do this even to those who may have given us occasion for anger or for unmerciful acts, and thus, do not appear to be worthy of our love and benevolence. For that is a poor virtue which does good only to those we love, or from whom we hope to receive kindness and thanks in return. But one might, as has been said, add to those works of mercy many more from other commandments; for example from the sixth, that one is to assist his neighbor, to protect his wife, children and domestics, and to keep them under proper restraint and in honor; also from the seventh, eighth and last commandments, that is, to help save and maintain the goods and property, house, home and good report of his neighbor; also to help protect and defend the poor, the oppressed and the downtrodden.

[9] Now Christ says also in Matthew 12:36, that men must give an account on the day of judgment not only of the transgressions of these commandments, but also of every idle word they have spoken. Then where shall the works of the first table, the greatest commandment, as right teaching, faith, prayer, hearing and preaching of God's Word, and the like, find their place? Why does he pronounce such a harsh and severe judgment only upon those who have omitted to do the works of the fifth commandment? Because these works appear almost the same as those which the heathen do. For the Turks do more works of this kind and boast more of them than we who are called Christians. Among them each one regards his neighbor as his brother and shares with him whatever he has. Nay, they regard it the greatest unfaithfulness and most shameful vice not to share bread with a neighbor in times of hunger. Why does he so highly extol these works which shine so brightly also among the Turks and among the heathen? Certainly he does not mean to say that those also who are not Christians merit eternal life by reason of such works?

[10] For Christ himself shows that he is speaking of the works of believing Christians, when he says: "I was hungry and ye gave me to eat,"

etc.; “what ye have done unto the least of these my brethren ye have done unto me.” For there is no doubt that he who performs such works of mercy to Christians, must himself be a Christian and a believer; but he who does not believe in Christ, will certainly never be so kind toward a Christian, much less toward Christ, so that for his sake he would show mercy to the poor, and needy; therefore, he will refer to these works at the judgment, and accordingly pronounce the verdict to both parties, to those who have done, and those who have not done these works, as a public testimony of the fruits of their faith or of their unbelief.

[11] It seems as though he meant hereby to show that many Christians, after receiving the preaching of the Gospel, of the forgiveness of sins and grace through Christ, become even worse than the heathen. For he also says in Matthew 19:30, “Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.” Thus, it will also be at the end of the world; those who should be honest Christians, because they heard the Gospel, are much worse and more unmerciful than they were before, as we see too many examples of this even now. Aforetime when we were to do good works under the seduction and false worship of the Papacy, everyone was ready and willing; a prince, for example, or a city, could give more alms and a greater endowment than now all the kings and emperors are able to give. But now all the world seems to be learning nothing else than how to estimate values, to rake and scrape, to rob and steal by lying, deceiving, usury, overcharging, overrating, and the like; and every man treats his neighbor, not as though he were his friend, much less as his brother in Christ, but as his mortal enemy, and as though he intended to snatch all things to himself and begrudge everything to others.

[12] This goes on daily, is constantly increasing, is a very common practice and custom, among all classes of people, among princes, the nobility, burghers, peasants, in all courts, cities, villages, yes in almost every home. Tell me, what city is now so strong and pious as to be able to raise an amount sufficient to support a schoolmaster or a preacher? Yes, if we did not already have the liberal alms and endowments of our forefathers, the Gospel would long ago have disappeared in the cities on account of the burghers, and in the country because of the nobility and peasants, and poor preachers would have nothing to eat nor to drink. For we do not love to give, but would rather take even by force what others have given and

endowed. Therefore, it is no credit to us that a single pulpit or school is still maintained. Yea, how many there are among the great, the powerful, and the rich, especially in the Papacy, who would like to see nothing better than all preachers, schools, and arts exterminated.

[13] Such are the thanks to the blessed Gospel, by which men have been freed from the bondage and plagues of the Pope, that they must become so shamefully wicked in these last times. They are now no more unmerciful, no more in a human, but in a satanic way; they are not satisfied with being allowed to enjoy the Gospel, and grow fat by robbing and stealing the revenues of the church, but they must also be scheming with all their power how they may completely starve out the Gospel. One can easily count upon his fingers, what they who enjoy the Gospel are doing and giving here and elsewhere; and, were it only for us now living, there would long since have been no preacher or student from whom our children and descendants might know what we had taught and believed.

[14] In short, what do you think Christ will say on that day, seated on his judgment throne, to such unmerciful Christianity? “Dear sir, listen, you have also pretended to be a Christian and boasted of the Gospel; did you not also hear this sermon, that I myself preached, in which I told you what my verdict and decision would be: ‘Depart from me, ye cursed?’ I was hungry and thirsty, naked and sick, poor and in prison, and ye gave me no meat, no drink, clothed me not, took me not in, and visited me not. Why have ye neglected this, and have been more shameless and unmerciful toward your own brethren than the Turk or heathen?” Will you excuse yourself by pleading: “Lord, when saw we thee hungry or thirsty?” etc. Then he will answer you again through your own conscience: Dear sir, were there no people who preached to you; or perhaps poor students who should have at the time been studying and learning God’s Word, or were there no poor, persecuted Christians whom you ought to have fed, clothed and visited?

[15] We ought really to be ashamed of ourselves, having had the example of parents, ancestors, lords and kings, princes and others, who gave so liberally and charitably, even in profusion, to churches, ministers, schools, endowments, hospitals and the like; and by such liberal giving neither they nor their descendants were made poorer. What would they have done, had they had the light of the Gospel, that is given unto us? How did the Apostles and their followers in the beginning bring all they had-for their

poor widows, or for those who had nothing, or who were banished and persecuted, in order that no one among them might suffer for the necessities of life! In this way poor Christians should at all times support one another. Otherwise, as I have said, the Gospel, the pulpit, churches and schools would already be completely exterminated, no matter how much the rest of the world did. Were it not for the grace of God, by which he gives us here and there a pious prince, or godly government, which preserves the fragments still left, that all may not be destroyed by the graspers and vultures, thieves and robbers; were it not for this grace, I say, the poor pastors and preachers would not only be starved, but also murdered. Nor are there now any other poor people than those who serve, or are being trained to serve the church; and these can obtain no support elsewhere, and must leave their poor wives and children die of hunger because of an indifferent world; on the other hand the world is full of useless, unfaithful, wicked fellows among day laborers, lazy mechanics, servants, maids, and idle, greedy beggars, who everywhere by lying, deceiving, robbing and stealing, take away the hard earned bread and butter from those who are really poor, and yet go unpunished in the midst of their wantonness and insolence.

[16] This I say, that we may see how Christ will upbraid the false liars and hypocrites among Christians, on the day of judgment, and having convicted them before all creatures will condemn them, because they have done none of the works which even the heathen do to their fellows; who did much more in their false and erroneous religion, and would have done it even more willingly had they known better.

[17] Since now this terrible condemnation is justly pronounced over those who neglected these works, what will happen to those who have not only neglected the same, have given nothing to the poor Christians, nor served them; but robbed them of what they had, drove them to hunger, thirst and nakedness, furthermore persecuted, scattered, imprisoned, and murdered them? These are so unutterably wicked, so utterly condemned to the bottomless pit with the devil and his angels, that Christ will not think or speak of them. But he will assuredly not forget these robbers, tyrants, and bloodhounds any more than he will forget or pass over unrewarded those who have suffered hunger thirst, nakedness, persecution and the like, especially for his and his Word's sake. He will not forget those to whom mercy has been shown, even though he speaks only to those who have

shown mercy and have lent their aid; for he highly and nobly commends them, when he says. “Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me.”

[18] On account of this judgment fear and trembling might well seize our great spiritual prelates, as they call themselves, the popes, cardinals, bishops, canons, priests, and the whole diabolical rabble of the antichristian crowd at Rome, and everywhere, in their monasteries and brothels, if they were not altogether hardened and deliberately given to Satan, body and soul. They think and act as though they were especially appointed to snatch to themselves everything that belongs to the poor church, and in their own wantonness to consume, spend, waste, squander in dissipation, gambling and debauchery, in the most shameful and scandalous manner, whatever has been given for the maintenance of students, schools and the poor people. They mock God and man, Peter 2:13; yea, they publicly murder innocent, pious people.

[19] Yea, woe, another and eternal woe, to them and to all who side with them. For it had been better for them, had they never been born, as Christ says of Judas. Therefore, they ought rather to wish that their mothers had drowned them in their first bath, or that they had never come forth from the womb, than that one of them should have become pope or cardinal or a popish priest. For they are nothing else than merely desperate and select ones, not highway robbers, but public country thieves, who take, not the goods of the mighty and the powerful that really have something, but of the poor and wretched, of the parish churches, schools, and hospitals, whose morsels are snatched from their teeth, and whose drink is torn from their mouths, so that they are unable to maintain life.

[20] Therefore, let every man beware of the Pope, the bishops, and the priesthood, as he would beware of those who have already been condemned alive to the abyss of perdition. Truly Paul did not prophesy in vain, 2 Timothy 3:1, that in the last days perilous times shall come. Yet all the world moves along indifferently and gives no heed to this terrible judgment that has already been decided against such unmerciful robbers, thieves, and murderers of poor Christians, but especially against those who pretend to be Christians, who after having received grace slide back again, and like a dog eat their own vomit, or as the swine wallow in their own filth, 2 Peter 2:20-22, and thus, having been first, become last before anyone is aware of it.

[21] The second reason why Christ especially mentions these works of mercy and their omission, from the fifth commandment, is, that he wishes to remind us, who have been called to be Christians, have received mercy through our Lord, have been redeemed from the wrath of God and the guilt of the fifth commandment and from eternal death, and on the contrary have a gracious God, who is good to us in time and in eternity, to remind us, I say, to look upon all this and regard it as having been done not only for our salvation but also for an example. For, since he has shown us such mercy as to save us, we are also to act toward our neighbor in a manner as not to transgress against the fifth commandment, which especially demands love and mercy. And we are not to do these things simply because of the commandment and of the threatening of judgment, but for the sake of the example of the excellent and great goodness God has shown. For this example cannot be without blessed results, as God's work of redemption is not without power and good fruit. Although most people become worse from having heard the Gospel, there must nevertheless be some who rightly understand it and remain faithful to it; for he says that he will separate them into two flocks; therefore, there must also be pious ones who have kept this commandment.

[22] Therefore, see to it that you are among those who are kind and merciful here upon earth for Christ's sake, or who even suffer for his sake, then you may joyfully await the last day, and need not be afraid of the judgment; for he has already selected you and placed you among those who shall stand at his right hand.

[23] For we, who are Christians, should hope for the coming of this judgment and desire it with our whole heart; as we pray for it in the words: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, deliver us from evil; so that we may also hear the glad and welcome words: Come, ye blessed, into the kingdom of my Father. This is the verdict we await; for this reason we are Christians, and just for the sake of this hope we are so severely oppressed, first by Satan and by our own flesh, which would not have us believe this and rejoice over it; then by the tyranny and enmity of the world. For we must constantly see and hear the maliciousness which Satan and the world practice against the Gospel. There is so much misery upon earth that we ought to be tired of this life and cry aloud: Come, dear Lord, and deliver us.

[24] For there are certainly souls who are joyfully and with a good conscience awaiting the judgment of Christ; for they are in the rank and fellowship of those who believe in Christ, and who show fruits of faith through charity and beneficence toward the poor, or through patience in suffering with them. For, as I have said, he who does not have faith will not do works of mercy to Christians, but he who does them, will do them because he believes that he has a faithful Savior and Redeemer in Christ, who has reconciled him to God. Therefore, he must have also a kind, loving heart toward his neighbors, even toward his enemies, and serve them in every time of need. Yea, he endures also, as I have just said, those things which come upon him from the world and the devil on account of his faith. Whosoever is thus, minded, I say, let him be joyful and of good courage; for he has already the blessed and joyful verdict: Come, thou blessed one, for thou hast also been one of the least of my brethren, who hast thyself suffered hunger and thirst, or who hast served the other hungry and thirsty ones, and hast shown mercy, as I have done.

[25] Behold, therefore, the separation of the sheep and goats is already made in this life, so that everyone can experience it internally and must indicate and show it also externally. For they who have not faith will surely do none of these things: they will neither comfort themselves with the grace of Christ, nor think of exercising mercy; they pass by the Word of God and their neighbor, as though they neither saw nor heard anything; they do not care to know that there is a Lord whom they are to serve and who will demand such service from them. For if they would consider that they must die, and appear before this judgment seat, they would not at the time defraud anyone of a farthing. But, on the contrary, they think best to turn their eyes away from death and to keep the heart from thinking of it.

[26] The world is so blind and hardened, that it can see before its eyes the great mass of men of all kinds who have passed away, and who are daily passing away, but is unwilling to behold it with seeing eyes, and to heed it, but continues securely and gaily in its wickedness. Furthermore, when it hears of the terrible judgment and condemnation that shall come upon it, it gives no heed to the consolation and example offered through Christ, but practices all kinds of unmercifulness; strives to hear and will have nothing else than the terrible, irrevocable verdict pronounced upon it from the

judgment seat of Christ, and immediately after be cast from his presence into eternal hellfire.

[27] Wherefore he who may yet be converted and is ready to listen, will have enough, both to frighten and warn him, and to animate and persuade him to accommodate himself to the Word and example of Christ, while there is time and opportunity, so that he need not hear with the world this dreadful judgment, but may have joy and comfort in mercy with all Christians. Nor did Christ spare his Apostles, but earnestly admonished them, when he said in Luke 21:34-36: "Take heed to yourselves, lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life," which, he shows, will be most prevalent at the end of the world," and that day come on you suddenly as a snare; but watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man," etc.

[28] Notice, however, as I said, that he wishes to distinguish the good works of the Christians from the works of the Turks and the heathen. For he speaks of the works done unto him, of which both parties claim to be ignorant, the wicked excusing themselves, because they had not seen him, etc. But herewith he has most beautifully explained the fifth commandment, that it means, he who fulfills it can be none else than a believing Christian, who did it unto Christ. Thus, the woman who anointed his head and feet, Matthew 26:10-13, fulfilled this commandment and is praised by him when he says: "She has wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you, and if ye wish ye can always do good unto them, but me ye have not always. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which this woman hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." Again in Matthew 10:42: "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones, who believe in me, a cup of cold water, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

[29] We should therefore, impress the fact upon our hearts and consider that it is a great and fine thing to do good to a Christian; but on the contrary also, what it is to do evil to him, as I said of the Pope, the bishops, the tyrants, and feudal nobility, who take from the feet of Christ what they have not given him the food, the drink, the lodging and the support of the poor, who are poor for Christ's sake, because they are not in the position, as ministers, sextons and school masters, to rule the world; nor are they able to

engage in any other business in which they might gain a livelihood; for then they would also have been made the partakers of power and would receive enough. But since they have no part in the government, the world gives them nothing for their services. As they receive nothing for God's nor Christ's sake, they can have nothing, and must leave behind them poor, wretched widows and orphans.

[30] Those in other positions and offices, who have plenty in all respects, do not wish and cannot attend to the duties and the services of the church, neither do they know how. And when ministers and pastors engage in worldly trades and pursuits, they step outside of their proper calling. Therefore, they must be supported, if they are to have anything to eat, from beggary, of which Christ here speaks; but he makes it so precious that whosoever gives meat or drink to the least of his members on earth, he recognizes the same as though it had been done and given to himself. Do we wish then to be Christians, and expect from Christ the honor to be praised and rewarded in the presence of all creatures, we must, indeed, cheerfully and gratuitously give to those who are to perform the duties of their office gratuitously, because they can have no share in secular matters. This we are to do in order to escape the curse and wrath that will come upon those who would not have mercy on their poor brethren, who had to suffer hunger, thirst, misery, and imprisonment in the world in order to bring us to Christ.

[31] But how does it happen that the righteous do not recognize and know that they have done their works unto Christ? They say: Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, etc.? The reason is, that to give something to a poor minister, chaplain, teacher, sexton is regarded as a matter altogether of too small significance to be so precious in the sight of God. Yea the world looks upon it as so much money thrown away. Yet will anyone say that the world would be so much richer, were there no pupils, schools, hospitals? Or that it is on their account any poorer, unless it were entirely heathen, or it were, as heretofore, compelled to give enough for the devil's sake, and allow itself to be flayed to the bone by those who have cheated it of body and soul. In short, the churches and schools receive the very least from the world; yet it is jealous, complains bitterly, and makes a great cry about what they already have, although it gives nothing, and claims to make much better use of its means, when at other times it gives a hundred times

as much to shameless, dissolute villains and jugglers; it soon forgets of how much it allows brother Guy to be robbed, and then even it takes a beating in the bargain. It never enters the brain of the world to think and believe that this means to give to Christ; nor is it easy for us to see it ourselves.

[32] But Christ is able to speak and judge rightly in this matter, and he knows how much depends upon it. For it is truly impossible to bring up the young in the kingdom of God in any other way than by means of schools; nor is it possible to maintain the Word of God without pulpits. Where these are allowed to fall into disuse, there will be a second Sodom and Gomorrah, which will fare as those of old, who despised the Word of God, and would not listen to nor endure pious Lot. Thus, also Ezekiel, 16:48-50, prophesies of Jerusalem: "As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters. Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom: pride, fullness of bread, and prosperous ease was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me; therefore, I took them away as I saw good," etc.

[33] The same conditions now exist everywhere. Every peasant, burgher, nobleman is simply gathering dollars, waits and saves, eats and drinks, is insolent and mischievous as though God were nothing at all. No one cares for the despised Jesus in his poverty; nay, he is even tread under foot, until all obedience, discipline and honor are destroyed among us, as they were in Sodom and Gomorrah, and matters become so bad, as to become unbearable, because all admonition and preaching seem to be of no avail.

[34] Right unwillingly do I prophesy; for I have often experienced how it came true; but the same conditions, alas, prevail now everywhere; and I fear and must almost resign myself that Germany may have the same experience as Sodom and Jerusalem, and will be a thing of the past; it will either be destroyed by the Turks or it will crumble by its own hand, unless the last day overtake it soon. For the present conditions are altogether unbearable and so exceedingly bad that they cannot become worse; and if there be still a God, he cannot thus, let matters go on unpunished.

[35] And now the world will not take heed, nor recognize that it must die and stand before God in judgment, but it rages against recognized truth. Let

us give heed and take it to heart, that the wrath of God may not also sweep us away. For what else would God need to do to that end, than let loose both the Turks and Satan against us. The Turk would be compelled to cease doing what he has done and is still doing, were we not so hardened in blindness and impenitence, and so completely ripe for judgment. The reason is that we rage so blasphemously against God's Word and his proffered help, and then in addition make our boast against the Turk.

[36] And I hold that, if we Lutherans, as they call us, were only dead, the whole world would immediately cry, "Victory," as though they had already devoured every single Turk. But it shall happen to them also that a hundred shall be slain by one Turk. And when the cry of murder is once heard, how unmercifully the Turks will cut in pieces all people, men, women, and children. Then shall we also begin to cry and lament. It shall come to pass that we shall do as did the Jews, put Christ out of the way. When he has been crucified, we shall be able to take care of the Turk, as Squire Caiaphas and the Jews took care of the Romans; thus, the youngers at Jerusalem thought, if they could only put the prophet Jeremiah out of the way, they would surely be safe from the king of Babylon. What happened? After they had cast Jeremiah into the dungeon, the king came and led them all into captivity. Thus, I can also see that God has spun a web over Germany as it is determined to be guilty in the same manner of willful blindness, defiance, wickedness, contempt, and ungratefulness in opposing the precious Gospel. It is determined to be guilty of foolishness before God, for which it will have to pay dearly. May God preserve us, and grant us and our little flock that we may escape this terrible wrath, and be found among those who honor and serve our dear Christ, and await the judgment at his right hand joyously and blissfully. Amen.

To the reader: If it should happen that another Sunday after Trinity should follow the 26th, which is very seldom the case, then it might be well to use the last preceding Epistle and Gospel for the 27th Sunday after Trinity, and on the Sunday preceding the 27th take the following text for the Epistle and the Gospel: Epistle, 2 Peter 3:3; Gospel, Matthew 24:37-51.

Epistles

First Sunday in Advent. An Exhortation to Good Works. The Day of Grace. Word and Sacrament.

Text: Romans 13:11-14.

11 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. Romans 13:11-14

[1] This epistle lesson treats not of faith, but of its fruits, or works. It teaches how a Christian should conduct himself outwardly in his relations to other men upon earth. But how we should walk in the spirit before God, comes under the head of faith. Of faith Paul treats comprehensively and in apostolic manner in the chapters preceding this text. A close consideration of our passage shows it to be not didactic; rather it is meant to incite, to exhort, urge and arouse souls already aware of their duty. Paul in Romans 12:7-8 devotes the office of the ministry to two things, doctrine and exhortation. The doctrinal part consists in preaching truths not generally known; in instructing and enlightening the people. Exhortation is inciting

and urging to duties already well understood. Necessarily both obligations claim the attention of the minister, and hence Paul takes up both.

[2] For the sake of effect and emphasis the apostle in his admonition employs pleasing figures and makes an eloquent appeal. He introduces certain words “Armor,” “work,” “sleep,” “awake,” “darkness,” “light,” “day,” “night” which are purely figurative, intended to convey other than a literal and native meaning. He has no reference here to the things they ordinarily stand for. The words are employed as similes, to help us grasp the spiritual thought. The meaning is: Since for sake of temporal gain men rise from sleep, put aside the things of darkness and take up the day’s work when night has given place to morning, how much greater the necessity for us to awake from our spiritual sleep, to cast off the things of darkness and enter upon the works of light, since our night has passed and our day breaks.

[3] “Sleep” here stands for the works of wickedness and unbelief. For sleep is properly incident to the night time; and then, too, the explanation is given in the added words: “Let us cast off the works of darkness.” Similarly in the thought of awakening and rising are suggested the works of faith and piety. Rising from sleep is naturally an event of the morning. Relative to the same conception are Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 5:4-10: “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness... ye are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that are drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, since we are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God appointed us not unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.”

[4] Paul, of course, is here not enjoining against physical sleep. His contrasting figures of sleep and wakefulness are used as illustrations of spiritual lethargy and activity the godly and the ungodly life. In short, his conception here of rising out of sleep is the same as that expressed in his declaration (Titus 2:11-13): “For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of

the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” That which in the passage just quoted is called “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,” is here in our text described as a rising from sleep; and the “sober, righteous, godly life” is the waking and the putting on the armor of light; while the appearing of grace is the day and the light, as we shall hear.

[5] Now, note the analogy between natural and spiritual sleep. The sleeper sees nothing about him; he is not sensitive to any of earth’s realities. In the midst of them he lies as one dead, useless; as without power or purpose. Though having life in himself he is practically dead to all outside. Moreover, his mind is occupied, not with realities, but with dreams, wherein he beholds mere images; vain forms, of the real; and he is foolish enough to think them true. But when he wakes, these illusions or dreams vanish. Then he begins to occupy himself with realities; phantoms are discarded.

[6] So it is in the spiritual life. The ungodly individual sleeps. He is in a sense dead in the sight of God. He does not recognize - is not sensitive to - the real spiritual blessings extended him through the Gospel; he regards them as valueless. For these blessings are only to be recognized by the believing heart; they are concealed from the natural man. The ungodly individual is occupied with temporal, transitory things, such as luxury and honor, which are to eternal life and joy as dream images are to flesh and blood creatures. When the unbeliever awakes to faith, the transitory things of earth will pass from his contemplation, and their futility will appear. In relation to this subject Psalm 76:5, reads: “The stouthearted are made a spoil, they have slept their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their hands.” And Psalm 73:20: “As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou wilt despise their image.” Also Isaiah 29:8: “And it shall be as when a hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion.” But is it not showing altogether too much contempt for worldly power, wealth, pleasure, and honor to compare them to dreams - to dream images? Who has courage to declare kings and princes, wealth, pleasure and power but creations of a dream, in the face of the mad rage of earth after such things? The reason for such conduct is failure to rise from

sleep and by faith behold the light. “For now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed.”

[7] What do these words imply? Did we believe before, or have we now ceased to believe? Right here we must know that, as Paul in Romans 1:2-3 says, God through his prophets promised in the holy Scriptures the Gospel of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom all the world was to be saved. The word to Abraham reads: “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Genesis 22:18. The blessing here promised to the patriarch, in his seed, is simply that grace and salvation in Christ which the Gospel presents to the whole world, as Paul declares in the fourth chapter of Romans and the fourth of Galatians. For Christ is the seed of Abraham, his own flesh and blood, and in Christ all believing inquirers will be blessed.

[8] This promise to the patriarch was later more minutely set forth and more widely circulated by the prophets. All of them wrote of the advent of Christ, and his grace and Gospel, as Peter in Acts 3:18-24 says: The divine promise was believed by the saints prior to the birth of Christ; thus, through the coming Messiah they were preserved and saved by faith. Christ himself (Luke 16:22) pictures the promise under the figure of Abraham’s bosom, into which all saints from the time of Abraham to Christ’s time, were gathered. Thus, is explained Paul’s declaration, “Now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed.” He means practically: “The promise of God to Abraham is not a thing for future fulfillment; it is already fulfilled. Christ is come. The Gospel has been revealed and the blessing distributed throughout the world. All that we waited for in the promise, believing, is here.” The sentence has reference to the spiritual day, Paul later speaks of, the rising light of the Gospel; as we shall hear.

[9] But faith is not abolished in the fulfillment of the promise; rather it is established. As they of former time believed in the future fulfillment, we believe now in the completed fulfillment. Faith, in the two instances, is essentially the same, but one belief succeeds the other as fulfillment succeeds promise. For in both cases faith is based on the seed of Abraham; that is, on Christ. In one instance it precedes his advent and in the other follows. He who would now, like the Jews, believe in a Christ yet to come, as if the promise were still unfulfilled, would be condemned. For he would make God a liar in holding that his word is unredeemed, contrary to fact.

Were the promise not fulfilled, our salvation would still be far off; we would have to wait its future accomplishment.

[10] Having in mind faith under these two conditions, Paul asserts in Romans 1:17: "In the Gospel is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith." What is meant by the phrase "from faith unto faith?" Simply that we must now believe not only in the promise but in its past fulfillment. For though the faith of the fathers is one with our faith, they trusting in a Christ to come and we in a Christ revealed, yet the Gospel leads from the former faith to the latter. It is now necessary to believe not only the promise, but also its fulfillment. Abraham and the ancients were not called upon to believe in accomplished fulfillment, though they had the same Christ with us. There is one faith, one spirit, one Christ, one community of saints; but they preceded, while we come after, Christ.

[11] Thus, we the fathers and ourselves have had and still have a common faith in the one Christ, but under different conditions. Because of this common faith in the Messiah, we speak of their act of faith as our own, notwithstanding we were not alive in their day. And similarly, when they make mention of hearing, seeing and believing Christ, the reference is to ourselves, in whose day they live not. David says (Psalm 8:3): "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers," that is, the apostles. Yet David did not live to see their day. And (Psalm 9:2): "I will be glad and exult in thee; I will sing praise to thy name, O Thou Most High." And there are many similar passages where one individual speaks in the person of another in consequence of a common faith whereby believers unite in Christ as one body.

[12] Paul's statement "Now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed" cannot be understood to refer to nearness of possession. For the fathers had the same faith and the same Christ with us, and Christ was equally near to them. Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and forever." That is, Christ exists from the beginning of the world to all time, and through him and in him all are preserved. To him of strongest faith Christ is nearest; and from him who least believes, is salvation farthest, so far as personal possession of it goes. Paul's reference here is to nearness of the revelation of salvation. When Christ came the promise was fulfilled. The Gospel was revealed to the world. Through Christ's coming it was publicly preached to all men. In

recognition of these things, the apostle says: “Salvation is nearer to us” than when unrevealed and unfulfilled in the promise. In Titus 2:11, it is said: “For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation.” In other words, God’s grace is revealed and publicly proclaimed; though the saints who lived prior to its manifestation nevertheless possessed it.

[13] So the Scriptures teach the coming of Christ, notwithstanding he was already present to the fathers. However, he was not publicly proclaimed to mankind until after his resurrection from the dead. It is of this coming in the Gospel the Scriptures for the most part teach. Incident to this revelation, he came in human form. The taking upon himself of humanity would have profited no one had it not meant the proclamation of the Gospel. The Gospel was to present him to the whole world, revealing the fact that he became man for the sake of imparting the blessing to all who, accepting the Gospel, should believe in him. Paul tells us (Romans 1:2) the Gospel was promised of God; from which we may infer God placed more emphasis upon the Gospel, the public revelation of Christ through the Word, than upon his physical birth, his advent in human form. God’s purpose was concerning the Gospel and our faith, and he permitted his Son to assume humanity for the sake of making possible the preaching of the Gospel of Christ; that through the revealed Word salvation in Christ might be brought near might come to all the world.

[14] Some have presented four different forms of Christ’s advent, adapted to the four Sundays in Advent. But the most vital form of his coming, that upon which all efficacy depends, the coming to which Paul here refers, they have failed to recognize. They know not what constitutes the Gospel, nor for what purpose it was given. Despite their much talk about the advent of Christ, they thrust him from us farther than heaven is from earth. How can Christ profit us unless he be embraced by faith? But how can he be embraced by faith where the Gospel is not preached? The Day of Grace “The night is far spent, and the day is at hand.”

[15] This is equivalent to saying, “salvation is near to us.” By the word “day” Paul means the Gospel; the Gospel is like day in that it enlightens the heart or soul. Now, day having broken, salvation is near to us. In other words, Christ and his grace, promised to Abraham, are now revealed; they are preached in all the world, enlightening mankind, awakening us from sleep and making manifest the true, eternal blessings, that we may occupy

ourselves with the Gospel of Christ and walk honorably in the day. By the word “night” we are to understand all doctrines apart from the Gospel. For there is no other saving doctrine; all else is night and darkness.

[16] Notice carefully Paul’s words. He designates the most beautiful and vivifying time of the day - the delightful, joyous dawn, the hour of sunrise. Then the night has passed and the day broken. In response to the morning dawn, birds sing, beasts arouse themselves and all humanity arises. At daybreak, when the sky is red in the east, the world is apparently new and all things reanimated. In many places in the Scriptures, the comforting, vivifying preaching of the Gospel is compared to the morning dawn, to the rising of the sun; sometimes the figure is implied and sometimes plainly expressed, as here where Paul styles the Gospel the breaking day. Again, Psalm 110:3: “Thy people offer themselves willingly in the day of thy power, in holy array: out of the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth.” Here the Gospel is plainly denominated the womb of the morning, the day of Christ’s power, wherein, as the dew is born of the morning, we are conceived and born children of Christ; and by no work of man, but from heaven and through the Holy Spirit’s grace.

[17] This Gospel day is produced by the glorious Sun, Jesus Christ. Hence Malachi calls him the Sun of Righteousness, saying, “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in its wings.” Malachi 4:2. All believers in Christ receive the light of his grace, and righteousness, and shall rejoice in the shelter of his wings. Again, in Psalm 118:24, we read: “This is the day which Jehovah hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” The meaning is: The natural sun makes the natural day, but the Lord himself is the author of the spiritual day. Christ is the Sun, the source of the Gospel day. From him the Gospel brightness shines throughout the world. John 9:5 reads: “I am the light of the world.”

[18] Psalm 19:1 beautifully describes Christ the Sun, and the Gospel day: “The heavens declare the glory of God.” As the natural heavens bring the sun and the day, and the sun is in the heavens, so the apostles in their preaching possess and bring to us the real Sun, Christ. The Psalm continues: “In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run his course. His going forth is from the end of the heavens, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.” It all refers to the

beautiful daybreak of the Gospel. Scripture sublimely exalts the Gospel day, for it is the source of life, joy, pleasure and energy, and brings all good. Hence the name “Gospel” joyful news.

[19] Who can enumerate the things revealed to us by this day by the Gospel? It teaches us everything - the nature of God, of ourselves, and what has been and is to be in regard to heaven, hell and earth, to angels and devils. It enables us to know how to conduct ourselves in relation to these whence we are and whither we go. But, being deceived by the devil, we forsake the light of day and seek to find truth among philosophers and heathen totally ignorant of such matters. In permitting ourselves to be blinded by human doctrines, we return to the night. Whatsoever is not the Gospel day surely cannot be light. Otherwise Paul, and in fact all Scripture, would not urge that day upon us and pronounce everything else night.

[20] Our disposition to run counter to the perfectly plain teachings of Scripture and seek inferior light, when the Lord declares himself the Light and Sun of the world, must result from our having incurred the displeasure of Providence. Had we no other evidence that the high schools of the Pope are the devil’s abominable fostering places of harlots and knaves, the fact is amply plain in the way they shamelessly introduce and extol Aristotle, the inferior light, exercising themselves in him more than in Christ; rather they exercise themselves wholly in Aristotle and not at all in Christ. “Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light.”

[21] As Christ is the Sun and the Gospel is the day, so faith is the light, or the seeing and watching on that day. We are not profited by the shining of the sun, and the day it produces, if our eyes fail to perceive its light. Similarly, though the Gospel is revealed, and proclaims Christ to the world, it enlightens none but those who receive it, who have risen from sleep through the agency of the light of faith. They who sleep are not affected by the sun and the day; they receive no light therefrom and see as little as if there were neither sun nor day. It is to our day Paul refers when he says: “Dear brethren, knowing the season, that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep, etc.” Though the hour is one of spiritual opportunity, it has been revealed in secular time, and is daily being revealed. In the light of our spiritual knowledge, we are to rise from sleep and lay aside the works of darkness. Thus, it is plain Paul is not addressing unbelievers. As before

said, he is not here teaching the doctrine of faith, but its works and fruits. He tells the Romans they know the time is at hand, that the night is past, and the day has broken.

[22] Do you ask, Why this passage to believers? As already stated, preaching is twofold in character: it may teach, or it may incite and exhort. No one ever gets to the point of knowledge where it is not necessary to admonish him continually, to urge him to new reflections upon what he already knows; for there is danger of his untiring enemies the devil, the world and the flesh wearying him and causing him to become negligent, and ultimately lulling him to sleep. Peter says (1 Peter 5:8): “Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” In consequence of this fact, he says: “Be sober, be watchful.” Similarly Paul’s thought here is that since the devil, the world and the flesh cease not to assail us, there should be continuous exhorting and impelling to vigilance and activity. Hence the Holy Spirit is called the Paraclete, the Comforter or Helper, who incites and urges to good.

[23] Hence Paul’s appropriate choice of words. Not the works of darkness but the works of light he terms “armor.” And why “armor” rather than “works”? Doubtless to teach that only at the cost of conflicts, pain, labor and danger will the truly watchful and godly life be maintained; for these three powerful enemies, the devil, the world and the flesh, unceasingly oppose us day and night. Hence Job (Job 7:1) regards the life of man on earth as a life of trial and warfare. Now, it is no easy thing to stand always in battle array during the whole of life. Good trumpets and bugles are necessary preaching and exhortation of the sort to enable us valiantly to maintain our position in battle. Good works are armor: evil works are not; unless, indeed, we submit and give them control over us. Then they likewise become armor. Paul says, “Neither present your members unto sin as instruments of unrighteousness” (Romans 6:13), meaning: Let not the works of darkness get such control of you as to render your members weapons of unrighteousness.

[24] Now, as already made plain, the word “light” here carries the thought of “faith.” The light of faith, in the Gospel day, shines from Christ the Sun into our hearts. The armor of light, then, is simply the works of faith. On the other hand, “darkness” is unbelief; it reigns in the absence of the Gospel and of Christ, through the instrumentality of the doctrines of

men of human reason instigated by the devil. The “works of darkness” are, therefore, the “works of unbelief.” As Christ is Lord and Ruler in the realm of that illuminating faith, so, as Paul says (Ephesians 6:12), the devil is ruler of this darkness; that is, over unbelievers. For he says again (2 Corinthians 4:3-4): “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that perish: in whom the god of this world [that is, the devil] hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ... should not dawn upon them.” The character of the two kinds of works, however, will be discussed later. “Let us walk, becomingly (honestly), as in the day.”

[25] Works of darkness are not wrought in the day. Fear of being shamed before men makes one conduct himself honorably. The proverbial expression “shameless night” is a true one. Works we are ashamed to perform in the day are wrought in the night. The day, being shamefaced, constrains us to walk honorably. A Christian should so live that he need never be ashamed of the character of his works, though they be revealed to all the world. He whose life and conduct are such as to make him unwilling his deeds should be manifest to everyone, certainly does not live in a Christian manner. In this connection Christ says: “For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reproved. But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God.” John 3:20-21.

[26] So you see the urgent necessity for inciting and exhorting to be vigilant and to put on the armor of light. How many Christians now could endure the revelation of all their works to the light of day? What kind of Christian life do we hypocrites lead if we cannot endure the exposure of our conduct before men, when it is now exposed to God, his angels and creatures, and on the last day shall be revealed to all? A Christian ought to live as he would be found in the last day before all men. “Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.” Ephesians 5:9. “Take thought for things honorable,” not only in the sight of God, but also “in the sight of all men.” Romans 12:17. “For our glorying is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom... we behaved ourselves in the world.” 2 Corinthians 1:12.

[27] But such a life certainly cannot be maintained in the absence of faith, when faith itself - vigilant, active, valiant faith - has enough to do to remain constant, sleepless and unwearied. Essential as it is that doctrine be preached to the illiterate, it is just as essential to exhort the learned not to fall from their incipient right living, under the assaults of raging flesh, subtle world and treacherous devil. "Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy."

[28] Here Paul enumerates certain works of darkness. In the beginning of the discourse he alludes to one as "sleep." In 1 Thessalonians 5:6, it is written: "Let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober." Not that the apostle warns against physical sleep; he means spiritual sleep unbelief, productive of the works of darkness. Yet physical sleep may likewise be an evil work when indulged in from lust and reveling, through indolence and excessive inebriety, to the obstruction of light and the weakening of the armor of light. These six works of darkness include all others, such as are enumerated in Galatians 5:19-21, and Colossians 3:5 and 8. We will divide them into two general classes, the right-hand class and the left-hand class. Upon the right are arrayed these four reveling, drunkenness, chambering and wantonness; on the left, strife and jealousy. For scripturally, the left side signifies adversity and its attendant evils - wrath, jealousy, and so on. The right side stands for prosperity and its results rioting, drunkenness, lust, indolence, and the like.

[29] Plainly, then, Paul means to include under the two-mentioned works of darkness, strife and jealousy, all of similar character. For instance, the things enumerated in Ephesians 4:31, which says: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing, be put away from you, with all malice"; and again in Galatians 5:19-21, reading: "Now the works of the flesh are... enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revellings and such like." In short, "strife and jealousy" here stand for innumerable evils resulting from wrath, be it in word or deed.

[30] Likewise under the four vices - reveling, drunkenness, indolence and lewdness - the apostle includes all the vices of unchastity in word or deed, things none would wish to enumerate. The six works mentioned suffice to teach that he who lives in the darkness of unbelief does not keep himself pure in his neighbor's sight, but is immoderate in all his conduct,

toward himself and toward his fellowman. Further comment on these words is unnecessary. Everyone knows the meaning of “reveling and drunkenness” - excessive eating and drinking, more for the gratification of appetite than for nourishment of the body. Again, it is not hard to understand the reference to idleness in bedchambers, to lewdness and unchastity. The apostle’s words stand for the indulgence of the lusts and appetites of the flesh: excessive sleeping and indolence; every form of unchastity and sensuality practiced by the satiated, indolent and stupid, in daytime or nighttime, in retirement or elsewhere, privately or publicly - vices that seek material darkness and secret places. These vices Paul terms “chambering and wantonness.” And the meaning of “strife” and of “jealousy” is generally understood.

Put on Christ, the Armor of Light

“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

[31] In this admonition to put on Christ, Paul briefly prescribes all the armor of light. Christ is “put on” in two ways. First, we may clothe ourselves with his virtues. This is effected through the faith that relies on the fact of Christ having in his death accomplished all for us. For not our righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ, reconciled us to God and redeemed us from sin. This manner of putting on Christ is treated of in the doctrine concerning faith; it gives Christ to us as a gift and a pledge. Relative to this topic more will be said in the epistle for New Year’s day, Galatians 3:27: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ.”

[32] Secondly, Christ being our example and pattern, whom we are to follow and copy, clothing ourselves in the virtuous garment of his walk, Paul fittingly says we should “put on” Christ. As expressed in Corinthians 15:49: “As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” And again (Ephesians 4:22-24): “That ye put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, that waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.”

[33] Now, in Christ we behold only the true armor of light. No gormandizing or drunkenness is here; nothing but fasting, moderation, and restraint of the flesh, incident to labor, exertion, preaching, praying and doing good to mankind. No indolence, apathy or unchastity exists, but true discipline, purity, vigilance, early rising. The fields are couch for him who has neither house, chamber nor bed. With him is no wrath, strife or envying; rather utter goodness, love, mercy, patience. Paul presents Christ the example in a few words where he says (Colossians 3:12-15): “Put on therefore, as God’s elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any, even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye: and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness, and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to the which also ye were called in one body; and be ye thankful.” Again, in Philippians 2:5-8, after commanding his flock to love and serve one another, he presents as an example the same Christ who became servant unto us. He says: “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man.”

[34] Now, the armor of light is, briefly, the good works opposed to gluttony, drunkenness, licentiousness; to indolence, strife and envying: such as fasting, watchfulness, prayer, labor, chastity, modesty, temperance, goodness, endurance of hunger and thirst, of cold and heat. Not to employ my own words, let us hear Paul’s enumeration of good works in Galatians 5:22-23: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control.” But he makes a still more comprehensive count in 2 Corinthians 6:1-10: “We entreat also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain (for he saith, At an acceptable time I hearkened unto thee, and in a day of salvation did I succor thee: behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation) [in other words, For now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed, and now is the time to awake out of sleep]: giving no occasion of stumbling in anything, that our ministration be not blamed; but in everything commending ourselves, as ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in

tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; in pureness, in knowledge, in longsuffering, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” What a rich stream of eloquence flows from Paul’s lips! He makes plain enough in what consists the armor of light on the left hand and on the right. To practice these good works is truly putting on Jesus Christ.

[35] It is a very beautiful feature in this passage that it presents the very highest example, the Lord himself, when it says, “Put ye on the Lord.” Here is a strong incentive. For the individual who can see his master fasting, laboring, watching, enduring hunger and fatigue, while he himself feasts, idles, sleeps, and lives in luxury, must be a scoundrel. What master could tolerate such conduct in a servant? Or what servant would dare attempt such things? We can but blush with shame when we behold our unlikeness to Christ.

[36] Who can influence to action him who refuses to be warmed and aroused by the example of Christ himself? What is to be accomplished by the rustling of leaves and the sound of words when the thunderclap of Christ’s example fails to move us? Paul was particular to add the word “Lord,” saying, “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.” As if to say: “Ye servants, think not yourselves great and exalted. Look upon your Lord, who, though under no obligation, denied himself.” “And make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.”

[37] Paul here briefly notices two different provisions for the flesh. One is supplying its natural wants furnishing the body with food and raiment necessary to sustain life and vigor; guarding against enfeebling it and unfitting it for labor by too much restraint.

[38] The other provision is a sinful one, the gratification of the lusts and inordinate appetites. This Paul here forbids. It is conducive to works of darkness. The flesh must be restrained and made subservient to the spirit. It must not dismount its master but carry him if necessary. Sirach (chapter

33:24) says: “Fodder, a wand, and burdens are for the ass; and bread, correction, and work for a servant.” He does not say the animal is to be mistreated or maimed; nor does he say the servant is to be abused or imprisoned. Thus, to the body pertains subjection, labor and whatever is essential to its proper welfare. Paul says of himself: “I buffet my body and bring it into bondage [subjection].” 1 Corinthians 9:27. He does not say he brings his body to illness or death, but makes it serve in submission to the spirit.

[39] Paul adds this last admonition for the sake of two classes of people. One class is represented by them who make natural necessity an excuse to indulge their lusts and gratify their desires. Because of humanity’s proneness to such error, many saints, deploring the sin, have often in the attempt to resist it, unduly restrained their bodies. So subtle and deceptive is nature in the matter of its demands and its lusts, no man can wholly handle it; he must live this life in insecurity and concern. The other class is represented by the blind saints who imagine the kingdom of God and his righteousness are dependent upon the particular meat and drink, clothing and couch, of their own choice. They look no farther than at their individual work in this respect, and fancy that in fasting until the brain is disordered, the stomach deranged, or the body emaciated, they have done well. Upon this subject Paul says (1 Corinthians 8:8): “Food will not commend us to God; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse; nor, if we eat, are we the better.” Again (Colossians 2:18-23): “Let no man rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility and worshipping of the angels... which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body; but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh.”

[40] Gerson commended the Carthusians for not eating meat, even though debility made meat a necessity. He would deny it even at the cost of life. Thus, was the great man deceived by this superstitious, angelic spirituality. What if God judges its votaries as murderers of themselves? Indeed, no orders, statutes or vows contrary to the command of God can rightfully be made; and if made they would profit no more than would a vow to break one’s marriage contract. Certainly, God has here in the words of Paul forbidden such destruction of our own bodies. It is our duty to allow the body all necessary food, whether wine, meat, eggs or anything else; whether the time be Friday, Sunday, in Lent or after the feast of Easter;

regardless of all orders, traditions and vows, and of the Pope. No prohibition contrary to God's command can avail, though made by the angels even.

[41] This wretched folly of vows has its rise in darkness and blindness; the looking upon mere works and trusting to be saved by the number and magnitude of them. Paul would make of works "armor of light," and employ them to overcome the works of darkness. Thus, far, then, and no farther, should fasting, vigilance and exertion be practiced. Before God it matters not at all whether you eat fish or meat, drink water or wine, wear red or green, do this or that. All foods are good creations of God and to be used. Only take heed to be temperate in appropriating them and to abstain when it is necessary to the conquest of the works of darkness. It is impossible to lay down a common rule of abstinence, for all bodies are not constituted alike. One needs more, another less. Everyone must judge for himself, and must care for his body according to the advice of Paul: "Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." Had there been any other rule for us, Paul would not have omitted it here.

[42] Hence, you see, the ecclesiastical traditions that flatly forbid the eating of meat are contrary to the Gospel. Paul predicts their appearance in 1 Timothy 4:1-3, where he says: "But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving." That these words have reference to ecclesiastical orders and those of the entire Papacy, no one can deny. They are plain. Hence the nature of papistical works is manifest.

[43] Also you will note here Paul does not sanction the fanatical devotion of certain effeminate saints who set apart to themselves particular days for fasting, as a special service to God, one for this saint, another for that. These are all blind paths, leading us to base our blessings on works. Without distinction of days and meats, our lives should be temperate and sober throughout. If good works are to be our armor of light, and if the entire life is to be pure and chaste, we must never lay off the arms of defense, but always be found sober, temperate, vigilant, energetic. These fanatical saints, however, fast one day on bread and water and then eat and

drink to excess every day for one fourth of the year. Again, some fast from food in the evening but drink immoderately. And who can mention all the folly and works of darkness originating from regarding works for the sake of the efforts themselves and not for the purpose they serve. Men convert the armor of good works into a mirror, fasting without knowing the reason for abstinence. They are like those who bear a sword merely to look at, and when assailed do not use it. This is enough on today's epistle lesson.

Second Sunday in Advent. Exhortation to Bear with the Weak. The Word of Hope. Missions to the Heathen. The Holy Spirit.

Text: Romans 15:4-13.

4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

5 Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:

6 That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

8 Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers:

9 And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy

name.

10 And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.

11 And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.

12 And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.

13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. Romans 15:4-13

[1] It is quite probable the individual who arranged this epistle text knew little about Paul. He includes in the selection more than pertains to the theme. The beginning "Whatsoever things were written," etc. relates to what goes before. The text should have begun with the words, "Now the God of patience." It is necessary to a clear and methodical understanding of the passage that we remember this: the Romans to whom the apostle writes were converts to Christianity from both Jews and gentiles. At that time there were many Jews living in all countries, and especially were they found in Rome, as we learn from the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. Having properly inculcated the doctrines of faith and of good works all through the epistle, the apostle in conclusion introduces several exhortations to the Romans to preserve harmony in faith and in good works, removing what might be productive of discord and subversive to unity of the Spirit. There are two difficulties which today as in all times strongly militate against the unity of the Spirit, against faith and good works. They must here be carefully noted and described.

[2] The first difficulty was this: Some Jewish converts feared that deviating from former customs would be committing sin. Notwithstanding they had been taught the New Testament freedom regarding meats, days, clothing, vessels, persons, conditions, customs; that only faith renders us righteous in God's sight; and that the restrictions of the Law concerning the eating of flesh and fish, concerning holidays, places, vessels, were entirely abolished; yet so completely fettered by old customs were their weak consciences and imperfect faith, they could not exercise such liberties. Again, both Jews and gentiles, in consequence of this same disordered idea, could not venture to eat of bread and meat offered to idols by unbelievers,

though sold in the public market. They imagined that to eat thereof was to honor the idols and deny Christ, when in fact the act had no significance. For all kinds of food are clean, and good creatures of God, whether in the hands of heathen or Christians, whether offered to God or to the devil.

[3] The second difficulty was this: They of better understanding and stronger faith had not sufficient regard for the weak, but exercised their liberty indiscreetly, offending the weak by eating and drinking without discrimination whatever was set before them. Not that there was any wrong in the act so far as the food was concerned; the wrong consisted in their indiscretion in causing the weak to err through the act. For the latter, beholding, could neither agree with them nor dissent from them. Had they thought to consent, their weak consciences would have interposed, protesting, "It is sinful; do it not." Had they thought to dissent, conscience again would have interposed, objecting, "You are not Christians for you do not as other Christians do; your faith must be false." Thus, they could neither do one thing nor the other without opposing conscience. Now, to violate conscience is equivalent to violating faith, and is a grievous sin.

[4] Paul here teaches us to have patience and bear with the weak, and not to conduct ourselves carelessly before them; rather to agree with them, become weak with them until they grow stronger in the faith and recognize their liberty. We are to guard against creating discord in faith over the subject of meats and drinks or any other temporal thing. The apostle, however, discriminates upon this point, for in general his teaching recognizes two classes of individuals to be considered in the matter. One consists of those weak in the faith, of whom we have already spoken. It is to this class alone Paul here refers. They are good, pious, common people, willingly doing better when they have the knowledge or power. They are not tenacious of their opinions; the trouble lies altogether in weakness of conscience and lack of faith. They are unable to extricate themselves from prevailing doctrines and customs. The other class are obstinate. Not satisfied to enjoy liberty of conduct for themselves, they must enforce it upon others, constraining them to their own practices. They claim that because certain liberty is permissible, it must be enjoined. They will not listen to real truth in the matter of Christian liberty, but strive against it. They are to blame for the weakness of the first class. For their doctrine disregards the weak consciences and misleads them into the belief that

certain conduct is essential. This domineering class delight in bringing simple consciences into subjection to their demands. Paul does not here refer to that manner of people; no, but he elsewhere teaches us to faithfully oppose them and always do the opposite. Titus 1.

[5] The best rule to follow in such matters is the rule of love. You should hold the same attitude toward these two classes that you would toward a wolf and a sheep. Suppose a wolf were to wound almost fatally a sheep, and you were to proceed with rage against the sheep, declaring it to be wrong in being wounded, that it should be sound; and you were violently to compel it to follow the other sheep to the pasture and to the fold, giving it no special care; would not all men declare you inconsiderate? The sheep might well say: "Certainly it is wrong for me to be wounded, and unquestionably I ought to be sound; but direct your anger toward the inflicter of my wounds, and assist in my recovery." So should these Romans have done and have faithfully repelled the wolf-like teachers. At the same time, the consciences weakened and discouraged by false doctrines should have received consideration. The Church at Rome ought not to have denounced nor ignored them, but rather to have carefully healed their spiritual disorder and ultimately eradicated the wrong doctrines, in patience bearing with their weak brethren lest they should cause them to err.

[6] Now, the circumstance Paul here speaks of has long since passed, and the law of Moses concerning meats, drinks, apparel, place, and so on, is no longer pertinent; yet another has been introduced in its stead, causing even greater trouble, and Paul's doctrine on this point is more necessary now than then. There is today established by the Pope and the clergy a worldwide system of human devices in regard to meats and drinks, apparel and place, days and seasons, persons and orders, customs and performances, so elaborate that one can scarce eat a morsel, drink a drop, or open his eyes even, but there is a law concerning the act. Thus, is our liberty usurped. Particularly is it true in convents and cloisters, where it is unanimously contended that we must be clothed and shorn in a certain way, must conduct ourselves by certain rules, and must not eat this meat, drink that drink, and so on, lest we sin by disobedience. There obedience to human doctrines has been exalted to the point of highest esteem. The monks and nuns regard it the foundation, the corner-stone, of their religion, and base upon it their souls' salvation.

[7] No one will open his eyes to the fact that mere human devices and doctrines are ensnaring souls, weakening consciences, dissipating Christian liberty and faith, and replenishing hell. Wolves! wolves! How abominably, awfully, murderous, how harassing and destructive, are these things the world over! This matter of obedience to human doctrine has never been agitated sufficiently to discover weak consciences. No one has opposed in word or act the teachings harmful to them. Whosoever has deviated from the doctrines has been condemned, and denounced as an apostate, a roving monk, an abandoned Christian. Thus, forcibly have the sheep not only been enfeebled, but driven into the jaws of the wolf. Oh, the wrath, the indignation, the displeasure, of the Divine Majesty!

[8] If now, by the mercy of God, these papistical doctrines should be recognized as merely human, as false and assumed, things God has not commanded; and if some were to have courage enough to depart from custom in the matter of masses, prayers, garb, meats, and to maintain their Christian liberty according to the Gospel, the two classes referred to would take offense. The first, the Papists, would rant and rage, making loud outcry: "Our teachings must be observed! He who disregards them is a heretic, a heathen, a Jew, and disobedient to the Church." They would continue to cry "Obedience to the Church!" solely for the sake of retaining in fetters and spiritual death the consciences which, as they have been taught to do, regard their obedience as unto the Church, when in reality it is unto mere papistical knavery and satanic devices, things whereby many saints, even, have been misled and deceived; St. Francis, for instance, and others. The second class the weak in the face of the others' outcry and of their own established custom, would err, being puzzled as to whose doctrine to accept, though sincerely desirous to follow the right. But whatever course they might take, conscience would oppose them. Should they essay to accept our Christian liberty, their own established custom and the outcry of the Papists would deter them. Their consciences bound by these two restraints, they would not dare deviate from the old way lest they oppose God. On the other hand, should they not accept our Christian liberty, they would again fear they were opposing the God we proclaim. Whither, then, shall flee the poor, weak conscience over whom Christ and the devil contend?

[9] To this situation Paul's teaching appropriately applies. The doctrine of the devil and his Papists is wholly destitute of compassion. In violent rage it compels immediate retraction from our doctrine of liberty. It excommunicates and curses the offender, casting him down four thousand miles below hell, if he does not recant in the twinkling of an eye and renounce every letter and tittle of his belief. From the fact of the rage manifested, as well as from the fruit of papistical doctrine, we perceive who is its author. The teaching of Christ, however, does not so. It calls not for summary rejection of the individual who fails to quickly retract and readily desist when found to err in faith; notwithstanding there is more reason it should than in the case of papal teaching. Recognizing the weak and wounded condition of the offender, Christ's doctrine comes in a friendly way, teaching the real truth about human laws that of Christian liberty. It is patient, bearing with him who does not immediately abandon his erroneous ways, and giving him time to learn to forsake them. It allows him to do the best he can, according to what he has been used to, until he is made whole and clearly perceives the truth.

[10] Therefore, the Christian must on this point discriminate between the two classes mentioned. The weak should receive his kindly and patient instruction, but the roving, ranting kind are to meet with his earnest opposition. Let him teach and perform everything calculated to annoy and oppose the latter, and quietly omit whatever is pleasing to them, and let him honor their ban with a great easel-box. This is the consistent course of Christian love. It is the treatment every man desires for himself. Were anyone of us misled by a weak conscience, he would desire a little time to retrieve instead of being precipitately cut off from the Church. He would like to be kindly instructed, to be borne with for a while and to be delivered from the wolves. Such is Christ's conduct toward us, and such does he desire our conduct toward one another to be.

[11] The second cause of discord Paul also removes. There is, and always will be, among Christ's followers a class who are weak and sickly in good works, just as the first were defective in faith. We have, then, two kinds of invalid Christians those affected inwardly, in faith and conscience; and those outwardly unsound, in works and deportment. Christ desires none of them to be rejected, but would have all received. He would give Christian love abundant opportunity to exercise itself, to heal its neighbors,

to do them good and to bear with them, in matters inward and outward in faith and conduct. The weak in conduct are they who sometimes fall into open sin; or again they who are called in German wunderliche Koepfe [odd heads] und Seltsame [strange],” people easily irritated or with other shortcomings which make it difficult to get along with them. Especially have we instances among husbands and wives, masters and servants, rulers and subjects.

[12] Now, where Paul’s Christian doctrine does not obtain, naturally each individual forgets the beam in his own eye and perceives only the mote in his neighbor’s. One will not bear with the faults of the other; each requires perfection of his fellow. Hence they reflect upon each other’s conduct. One resorts to this subterfuge, the other to that, to evade the harassing censure and displeasure of his neighbor. He who can, cuts the other’s acquaintance, drops him, and then justifies himself with the excuse that his motive was love of righteousness; that he did not want to associate with wicked persons, but desired the company of only the good and godly like himself.

[13] This evil holds sway chiefly in individuals ranking more or less high in the estimation of their fellows, who lead respectable lives and are particularly favored. These puff themselves up and put on airs. Whoever is not just like them is held in disgrace, in disparagement and contempt. Only themselves are worthy of admiration. But he who measures up to them, whose life is equally respectable, ah! he is righteous and a good friend; with him they can associate with perfect satisfaction to themselves as individuals who love only righteousness and the righteous, and hate nothing but wickedness and the wicked. They are not aware of the secret satanical pride in the inmost recesses of their hearts, which pride is the very reason they haughtily and meanly despise their neighbors for their imperfections.

[14] Love of virtue and hatred of vice may spring from two different motives; one heathenish, the other Christian. Christ, too, is an enemy to sin and a friend to righteousness. Psalms 45:7 says of him, “Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness.” And this saying does not conflict with Moses’ declaration concerning Christ, “Dilexit populos,” Yea, he loveth the people.” Deuteronomy 33:3. But heathen love of virtue and hatred of vice, like the unreasoning swine, indiscriminately roots up and tosses together vices and virtues, regardless of the individual; truly a friend

to no one but itself. This truth is evident from the fact that so long and so far as virtue adorns the individual, so long and so far heathenism loves him and is interested in him; but when virtue is lacking, the individual is rejected.

[15] Now, the Christian hatred of sin discriminates between the vices and the individual. It endeavors to exterminate only the former and to preserve the latter. It does not flee from, evade, reject nor despise anyone: rather it receives every man, takes a warm interest in him and accords him treatment calculated to relieve him of his vices. It admonishes, instructs and prays for him. It patiently bears with him. It does only as the doer would be done by in circumstances of like infirmities.

[16] The Christian's whole purpose in life is to be useful to mankind; not to cast out the individual, but to exterminate his vices. This we cannot do if we refuse to tolerate the faulty person. It would be a very inconsistent case of charity in which you should desire to feed the hungry, satisfy the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick, but at the same time should not permit the hungering, the thirsting, the naked and the sick to approach you. But just so your unwillingness to tolerate a wicked or faulty person is inconsistent with your willingness to help him, or to aid him to godly living.

[17] Let us learn from this that the life of Christian love does not consist in seeking godly, upright, holy individuals, but in making them godly, upright and holy. Let this be the Christian's earthly labor, whether it calls for admonition, prayer, patience or other exercise. For the Christian does not live to seek after the wealthy and strong in virtue, but to make such virtuous ones from the poor, weak and infirm.

[18] So, then, the text admonishes to two thoughts to Christian love and to good and noble works; not only to bearing with our neighbor's spiritual imperfections of faith and conduct, but also to receiving him into fellowship, to healing him and to restoring from infirmities. They who fail so to do, create seditions, sects and divisions; as in time past the heretics, Donatists and Novatians, and many others, separated from the Church because they were unwilling to tolerate sinners and the faulty. There must be heretics and sects where the doctrine of Christian love is ignored; it cannot be otherwise.

[19] St. Augustine, commenting on the sixth chapter of Galatians, says: "In nothing is one's religious character so well shown as when, in dealing with the sinful individual, he insists on redemption of the sinner rather than on reproach; on his welfare rather than on reproof." Upon this subject of Christian love, Paul says (Galatians 6:1-2): "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." In other words: "Neglect not to take upon yourselves the burdens of your neighbor, whatever is hard for him to bear. Seek not to derive advantage from him, but bear his burdens." To use him for your own advantage is not bearing but being borne. Advantage belongs to the angels in yonder life. At the same time we are to make a distinction between the two classes before mentioned. We are to avoid as heathen those who obstinately attempt to justify their sins and are unwilling to forsake them. For so we are taught in Matthew 18:17. The doctrine of Christian love is applicable only to them who, though perceiving the wrong, yet stumble through weakness or imperfection. Let us examine the text. The Word of Hope "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope."

[20] In the selection of this epistle passage it should not have been made to begin with these words. They pertain to the first part of the chapter. We shall therefore present the text in its proper order. The apostle with the fifteenth chapter begins to teach the aforesaid principle of love which is to have expression in our attitude toward our neighbor of erring conduct; even as in the fourteenth chapter he taught us to manifest love toward our neighbor of imperfect faith. He says, "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good, unto edifying. For Christ also pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell upon me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope." In these truly forcible words Paul teaches the principle of love that is to enable us to bear with the imperfect conduct of our neighbor.

[21] First, he tells us we are under obligation to forbear. Whence arises this obligation? Doubtless from the Law and from love (Matthew 7:12): “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them; for this is the law and the prophets.” Now, there is no one of us who would not have others bear with him in his infirmities and help him to do better. In return, we are under obligation to conduct ourselves in a similar manner toward our fellows. The strong should bear with the feeble and help them to better things.

[22] Secondly, Paul teaches we are not to take pleasure in ourselves; that is, not to consider ourselves good because of abilities superior to those of our neighbors. For that means but to delight in beholding others in sin and depravity, from unwillingness to see them our equals or our superiors; and to rejoice at the misfortunes which prevent their gaining ascendancy. Truly this spirit is diametrically and fundamentally opposed to love. The Pharisee in the Gospel (Luke 18:11) thanks God he is not like other men. So good does he regard himself and so does he delight in himself, it would be painful indeed to him were there any other without sin.

[23] Now, are not they detestable individuals who begrudge grace and salvation to others, and who rejoice to see them ruined in sin, but at the same time are ambitious to be regarded pious and holy, strong enemies to sin and friends to godliness? But what is Paul’s teaching? Emphatically not this. He says no one should unduly approve himself, regard himself good. What then? Let him secure the approbation of others. Let everyone so conduct himself as to gain the approval of his neighbor. Each should bear his neighbor’s infirmities with patience and gentleness, and by kindness win his love and confidence. Let him not treat his neighbor with a rashness and severity that shall warrant the latter’s fear and shall drive him farther away, leading him to expect no favors ever and to become but more sinful.

[24] But you will say, “If I proceed in the way that shall please my neighbor I must let him have his own way and allow him to continue as he is. But this is not Paul’s thought, for he adds the modifier “for his good.” His meaning is that each should so conduct himself as to please his neighbor in the things that make for that neighbor’s betterment, and in those only. And, indeed, our conduct toward our fellow may be such as to deny him his will without incurring his displeasure. But if he be dissolute beyond our power to benefit him, let him go; we have made a reasonable effort to

gratify him in so far as we could contribute to his improvement. We cannot force his approval of our efforts to please him. Paul requires no more of us than to please our neighbor in the way of ministering to his good. The world does not delight even in the fact that God gave his own Son to die for its happiness.

[25] Therefore, when Paul tells us everyone should please his neighbor in that which is good, his intent is not for us merely to strive to please our fellows; that is not what is required of us. But he would have us, in obedience to the rule of love, conduct ourselves in a way we might reasonably expect pleasing to them; in a way that if we fail we are not at fault. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:33: “Even as I also please all men in all things.” So would he have us please everyone in all things. How did Paul please all men when Jews and gentiles were his deadly enemies? He did everything for their benefit, and what reasonably should have pleased them.

[26] Now, in the third place, to more effectually impress this doctrine, the apostle cites the example of Christ, saying Christ did not please himself. And what does he mean? Simply that notwithstanding Christ’s holiness and graciousness, he did not despise us. Nor did he have pride in himself as the Pharisee did because he possessed something we had not. He rejoiced not in the fact that we had nothing while he had all things and all power. On the contrary, because he was grieved over our destitute condition, he devised a plan to be with us whereby we may become like him, possessing what he possesses and being liberated from our sins. There being no other way, he put forth his whole being and all his powers to accomplish our redemption. He assumed our sins and exterminated them. His purpose in it all was to please us and to win our affection. Thus, is fulfilled Psalm 69:9: “The reproaches of them that reproach thee are fallen upon me.” Our sins reproach and dishonor God, as our good conduct contributes to his honor and praise. So the prophet speaks of God’s reproach and dishonor. All our sins are fallen upon Christ so as to be removed from us. Had Christ treated us as the Pharisee treated the publican, and as haughty saints do poor, faulty sinners, who of us would have been redeemed? Paul again holds up the example of Christ in Philippians 2:5-8: “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found

in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.”

[27] Such should be our spirit in regard to the sins of our neighbor. We should not judge, backbite nor condemn him. We should keep an undesigning eye upon him, solely for the purpose of delivering him, even at the hazard of our own bodies, our lives, fortunes and honor. Let him who fails here, know he has lost Christ and is a heathen saint.

[28] Now follows our text. It is because of the words cited from Psalm concerning Christ that Paul says, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime,” etc. By way of explaining the bearing of that passage here, and in what way it concerns us when it was spoken of Christ and is fulfilled in him, the apostle goes on to give us a general admonition from the Scriptures, saying that not only this passage but the entire Scriptures were written for our learning. True, the Bible contains much about Christ. But so it contains much about numerous saints - Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob - which was not recorded for their sakes. The Bible was written long after their time; they never saw it.

[29] So, however much is written about Christ, it is not for his sake; he had no need for it. It is recorded for our instruction. The record of Christ’s words and deeds is for our edification, the model for us to follow. It is with this same understanding Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:9: “For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.” Do you suppose God’s care is for the ox, or is not the verse written for our sakes? Surely for our sakes. As if the apostle had said: “God’s care is not for the ox but for us.” Not that God does not govern and provide for all creatures, but that he does not write and speak for them. What should he write and speak to oxen? Only to man does he speak. So here; although the words are about Christ, they are not directed to him but to us, for our learning: we, too, are to conduct ourselves as the Scriptures tell us Christ and his saints have done.

[30] Mark the book the apostle here presents for the perusal and study of Christians, none other than the holy Scriptures. And he tells us it contains doctrine for us. Now if our doctrine is to be found in the Bible, we certainly should not seek it elsewhere; all Christians should make daily use of this book.

[31] Observe, however, what the devil has accomplished through the Papists. It was not enough for them to throw the Bible under the table, to make it so rare that few doctors of the holy Scriptures possess a copy, much less read it; but lest it be brought to public notice they have branded it with infamy. For they blasphemously say it is obscure; we must follow the interpretations of men and not the pure Scriptures. What else is their proceeding but giving Paul the lie here where he says the Bible is our manual of instruction? They say it is obscure and calculated to mislead.

[32] How was God to reward such blasphemers and criminal destroyers of the Scriptures? Had he consulted with me about the matter, I would have entreated him - since they cast reproach upon his clear word, declaring it obscure and unsafe, and exclude it from the sight and knowledge of men, throwing it under the table - to give them in its stead Aristotle and Averrois, along with the endless statutes and fallacies of the Pope, to let them rave after these, studying Aristotle all the days of their lives and learning nothing; and yet to permit the dolts to be crowned masters of the liberal arts and doctors of the holy Scriptures. Yet up to this time none of them have understood a single line in Aristotle, or at most have learned no more than a five-year-old child or the most depraved dolt knows. For Aristotle is a hundredfold more obscure than the holy Scriptures. If you would know what he teaches, I will tell you in few words: "A potter can make a pot from clay; a blacksmith cannot unless he learns how." If there is anything in Aristotle more exalted than this, believe not a word I have said. Demand of me to prove it and I will.

[33] I say this to show how well Christ has rewarded the Papists for denouncing his Scriptures as obscure and unsafe, and for perverting their design; for he permits the Papists to read the writings of a dead heathen, who is not strong in real science, no, not in anything but darkness. What I have cited is the very best thing in Aristotle. I say nothing of his virulent and fatal positions. The universities deserve annihilation. Nothing more pernicious and satanic ever has been or ever will be on earth.

[34] Now, let us return to Paul. He tells us here what we should read and where we should seek our doctrine. Were there any other book, he would have designated it. Further, he shows the nature of the fruit resulting from perusal of the Bible; for he says, "That through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope." Now let all other doctrine

present itself, let all other books be introduced, and see if they have any virtue or power to comfort a single soul in its least tribulation. Truly, no comfort but that of God's word is possible to the soul. But where will we find God's word except in the Scriptures? What do we accomplish by reading other books to the exclusion of the Book? Other books may have power to slay us, indeed, but no book except the holy Scriptures has power to comfort us. No other bears the title here given by Paul - book of comfort - one that can support the soul in all tribulations, helping it not to despair but to maintain hope. For thereby the soul apprehends God's word and, learning his gracious will, cleaves to it, continuing steadfast in life and death. He who knows not God's will must doubt, for he is unaware what relation he sustains to God.

[35] But how shall I express the situation? The calamity is beyond the power of words, even inconceivable. The evil spirit has accomplished his design; he has suppressed the Book and introduced in its stead so many books of human doctrine that we may well say we are deluged with them. Yet these contain only error, falsehood, darkness, venom, death, destruction, hell and the devil. This condition of things our abominable ingratitude has merited.

[36] Observe the aptness of Paul's expression where he links patience with the comfort of the Scriptures. The Bible does not remove adversity, suffering and death. No, it simply reveals the holy cross - Paul calls it the Word of the Cross - therefore patience is necessary. In the midst of suffering, however, the Bible consoles and strengthens, that our patience may not fail but press on unto victory. Under the strong comfort of God's solacing assurance that he is present to direct, the soul bears up with courage and joy beneath its sufferings. This life is simply a mortification of the old Adam, which must die. So patience is essential. Again, since the life to come is not evident to mortal sense, it is necessary for the soul to have something to which it may cleave in patience, something to help it to a partial comprehension of that future life, and upon which it can rest. That something is God's Word. To it the soul cleaves; therein it abides, and therein is conveyed from this earthly life to the life to come as in a safe ship. Thus, does the hope of the soul continue steadfast.

[37] Mark you, the real mission of the Scriptures is to comfort the suffering, distressed and dying. Then he who has had no experience of

suffering or death cannot at all understand the comfort of the Bible. Not words but experience must be the medium of tasting and finding this comfort. Paul mentions “patience” before “comfort of the Scriptures” to indicate that he who, unwilling to endure suffering, seeks consolation elsewhere cannot taste the comfort of the Word. It is the province of the Word alone to comfort. It must therefore meet with patience first. It is jealous and will not permit human relief on a level with itself, which would be to frustrate the purpose of patience and suffering.

[38] Now, it is no small cross and calls for no little measure of patience to bear the imperfections and sins of our neighbors. In some instances these things are oppressive enough to evoke, on the part of the sufferers, desire for death, either for themselves or someone else. To maintain Christian patience under these trials, the afflicted must comfort themselves with those portions of Scripture that show Christ’s example. They will be helped to steadfastness and submission in suffering by perceiving that for their sakes Christ has submitted to far greater suffering, and has taken upon himself the infinitely heavier burden of their sins in the effort to redeem them.

[39] Note, the comfort accompanying this patience is productive of a firm hope in Christ that we shall be like him. By contemplation of his record we are assured that for our sakes he has submitted, and continues to submit, to suffering. But to him who forgets Christ’s example and the Scriptures, there remains very little comfort and patience, even when reason and material things have done their best to comfort him. For their efforts must be ineffectual. They cannot reach the inmost life of the heart. All the patience and comfort they are capable of affording is merely visionary. “Now, the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus.”

[40] This epistle lesson should have commenced here. This verse has reference to the imperfections of both our faith and our conduct, but more especially to the frailties of faith, as we shall see. It is a prayer, with which Paul follows his preaching and teaching and concludes his letter to the Romans. Lest one might presume to exercise patience and to know the comfort of the Scriptures all by his own power, Paul in his prayer reminds us they are gifts of God, to be obtained through prayer. Particularly is it beyond our power to bear with the imperfections of others and to preserve the simple unity of faith.

[41] Therefore, Paul says, “God of patience and of consolation;” that is, God is the Lord, and grants patience and consolation. Just as he is the God of heaven and earth, so is he the God of patience and consolation. All are his gifts and his creatures. Paul says God “grants” patience and comfort; we do not possess them of ourselves. If they are granted they are not of nature but of grace, and are gifts. If God does not direct his Word to the heart to fit the needs of the individual, the heart will never discover this patience and consolation. Indeed, where God does not grant them, the Scripture is neglected and human doctrine sought, as in the case of condemned popery. But where he grants grace to search the Scriptures first, he gives likewise patience and consolation. There is no more marked manifestation of God’s wrath than the fact that he permits the decline of his spoken and written Word; so not undesignedly the apostle uses the particular language of this prayer. On the other hand, God gives no greater blessing than when he exalts his Word among us and permits it to be read. Truly, then, we should all repeat this prayer with the apostle.

[42] “To be like-minded one towards another.” What do these words imply? How can the weak be “minded” like the strong? The phrase means each to tolerate the prejudices of another, and think that may be good which appears proper to another. Prejudice is the cause of all parties, sects, discord and heresy. As the proverb says, “Pleased with his own way is everyone, Hence the land with fools is overrun.” Paul here would arrest self-pleasing and prejudice. Nothing is more intolerable and pernicious to the Christian faith and the Church than prejudice. The victim of it cannot rid himself of the fault. He must follow his own way, differing from the commonly accepted one. He must establish a course pleasing to himself. This is the cause of the many parties and various customs in the different institutions and cloisters of the world, all mutually discordant. Each one is best pleased with his own choice and condemns the way of others.

[43] But the apostle enjoins the Romans to be of one mind and tolerant of one another. The weak in conscience should accept as right what they of strong faith and sound conscience observe. The effort should be for a oneness of faith and conscience, and a sameness of opinion; and to avoid the wrangling occasioned by conflicting personal ideas of what is right. He would have them illustrate the psalmist’s declarations (Psalm 68:6): “God setteth the solitary in families;” and (19D301 Psalm 133:1): “Behold, how

good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” For instance, should one of weak faith observe one whose faith is strong eat meat or indulge in drink, or do what to him appears sinful, let him refrain from judging, even though he would not and could not do likewise. He should be of Paul’s opinion on the subject: “Let each man be fully assured in his own mind.” Romans 14:5. Then malice, contention and condemning may be avoided, and unanimity of purpose and disposition maintained. On the other hand, if the weak in faith is unable to do as his stronger brethren, they should not force him to it or despise him, but be content to tolerate him in regard to his eating, drinking and doing until he is likewise strong. Paul says, “Him that is weak in faith receive ye, yet not for decision of scruples.” Romans 14:1. That is, ye shall not compel him saying, “This is right and that wrong,” but treat him considerately and instruct him until he, too, shall become strong.

[44] It is not necessary that we should all follow the same occupation. One may be a smith and another a tailor without impairing unity of faith and purpose, only let one tolerate the outward calling of the other. If some foolish individual were to interfere and teach that the occupation of a smith is an ungodly trade, he would be responsible for erring consciences and weakened faith. As privilege of occupation is right, so in the external things of meats, apparel and place, we are at liberty to follow our own pleasure. Then he who comes along and teaches it is wrong for you to use such and such things, as the Pope and the clergy teach, causes you to err. On the other hand, if another comes saying you must use certain things, he likewise causes you to err. But he who pursues a medium course, teaching liberty in the matter, not condemning you but permitting you to retain your own custom until you extricate yourself, and at the same time hard presses the wolves that would force you into that custom as a thing not optional but binding, this teacher gives you true instruction.

[45] It is not wrong to fast in honor of the name of an apostle, or to confess during Lent. But neither does he who omits these things commit any evil by this omission. Let him who desires to fast and make confession, do so, but let not one censure, judge, condemn or quarrel with his fellow over the matter. One individual should be like-minded with another, tolerant of what the other does and regarding his action as right because in itself blameless.

[46] He deserves censure who in these questions rashly presumes to judge according to the dictates of his own doctrine and destroys this unity saying, "Do so and you do right; do not so and you do wrong." He is an apostle of the devil, and his teaching is the doctrine of Satan. This is the manner of the Pope and the Papists. It pertains not to shepherds but to wolves to preach doctrine of this character. Under such a condition of things, Christian unity must be dissolved. Difference of opinion becomes manifest: "You are a heretic"; "you are disobedient to the Church"; "you do wrong," and so on just what the devil desires.

[47] Having destroyed unity, taken captive the conscience and deprived of liberty, the Pope proceeds to take your money. Then he gives you a bill of exchange permitting you to eat butter, eggs and meat, a privilege Christ gave you in the Gospel, a privilege whereof the Pope robbed you and which he as the pious shepherd sells to you again. But your indulgence in the privilege again, gives offense to your fellows. In short, the government of the Pope so abounds with grasping and re-grasping, with offense and repetition of offenses, with exchanges and re-exchanges, that it is plainly evident it simply belongs to the designing devil, who effects confusion of conscience until no one is able to comprehend the right course.

[48] But I refer to toleration only in the things wherein we are at liberty to be lenient. We should resist the Pope with his wicked and foolish laws as we would resist a wolf; and yet we are to permit the weak in faith to continue in their practices for a time, until we are able finally to extricate them from error. They must not be too hastily and rashly rejected, with disastrous results to their consciences.

[49] But in things not optional with us, things prescribed or prohibited by Christ, there is little room for disputation, whether it be the weak in conscience or the strong who are concerned. In such case every individual, the least as well as the greatest, is under obligation to withstand the Pope; for instance, when he and all his followers teach that the mass is to be regarded as in the nature of a sacrifice and a good work. This is the most monstrous abomination that ever arose on earth. On it is founded the Pope's government with all its cloisters and other institutions. In this error no one is excusable, whether weak or strong; for Christ instituted the mass as a sacrament and testament. No one can sell or transfer it or give it away. As in the case of baptism, each must receive it for himself. There are in the

Pope's canons many more abominations similar to this misuse of the mass. Indeed, considering the foundation, it is easy to perceive the character of the building. Everything existing in popedom is the wantonness of the devil, from turret to foundation. He who does not believe it, will experience it.

[50] The apostle enjoins us to be likeminded "according to Christ Jesus"; that is, from a Christian point of view. For unbelievers, too, are likeminded, but according to the flesh, the world and the devil, and not according to Christ. The Jews were of one mind against God and his Christ, as Psalm 2:2 tells us. Christian unity resists sin and everything opposed to the religion of Christ without, however, committing or designing any sin. It works to the unifying of Christians generally, first with reference to faith and then to outward conduct.

[51] When one is weak in faith and defective in conduct, the spirit of Christian unity, though deploring his condition, does not forsake him, much less disparage, reject or condemn him. His Christian fellow is interested in his welfare and conducts himself toward the weak one as he would himself be treated, and as Christ has indeed treated him in similar and more important matters. Thus, is perpetuated that principle wherein the individual follows the way approved of others, conforming to their views and adhering to the same opinions. But the obstinate pursue a course quite the reverse, forsaking, rejecting and judging him who differs from them, and following their own ways, guided by their own opinions; as do the orders of popery, and other sects. "That with one accord ye may with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

[52] All the good we can do to God is to praise and to thank him. This is the only true service we can render him, according to his words in Psalm 50:23: "Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth me; and to him that ordereth his way aright will I show the salvation of God." We receive all blessings from him, in return for which we should make the offering of praise. If anything else purporting to be service to God is presented for your consideration rest assured it is erroneous and delusive. For instance, the distracted world attempts to serve God by setting apart houses, churches, cloisters; vestures, gold-trimmed, silk and every other kind; silver vessels and images; bells and organs, candles and lamps; the money for which expense should have been appropriated to the poor if the object was to make an offering to God. Further, it keeps up a muttering and

wailing in the churches day and night. But true praise and honor of God, a service that cannot be confined to place or person, is quietly ignored the world over. The pretenses of priests and monks about their system of exercises being service to the Lord, are false and delusive.

[53] Service to God is praise of him. It must be free and voluntary, at table, in the chamber, cellar, garret, in house or field, in all places, with all persons, at all times. Whosoever teaches otherwise is no less guilty of falsehood than the Pope and the devil himself. But how shall there be with us honor and praise of God, true service to him, when we neither love him nor receive his blessings? And how shall we love him when we do not know him and his blessings? And how shall we know him and his blessings when no word is preached concerning them and when the Gospel is left to lie under the table? Where the Gospel is not in evidence, knowledge of God is an impossibility. Then to love and praise him is likewise impossible. As a further consequence it is necessarily impossible for divine service to exist. Even if all the choristers were one chorister, all the priests one priest, all the monks one monk, all the churches one church, all the bells one bell; in brief if all the foolish services offered to God in the institutions, churches and cloisters were a hundred thousand times greater and more numerous than they are, what does God care for such carnivals and juggling?

[54] Therefore, God complains about most of the Jews in the second chapter of Micah, because they silenced his praise, while at the same time, they piped, blared and moaned like we do. True divine service of praise cannot be established with revenues, nor be circumscribed by laws and statutes. High and low festivals have nothing to do with it. It emanates from the Gospel, and certainly is as often rendered by a poor, rustic servant as by a great bishop.

[55] It is plainly evident who have abolished divine service and still daily suppress it. They are none but that hopeless rabble, the Pope and his blockheads, the bishops and priests, monks and nuns, whose great boast is of their divine services; who delight to be called the spiritual class and, by their juggling, grasp the advantages and honors of the world and live in riotousness. Yet they pretend to help others to heaven with their foolish works and no mention of the Gospel. Indeed, they persecute and condemn the Gospel, giving Peter just occasion to term them children of condemnation.

[56] Note, Paul says divine service must be rendered with “one mind” and with “one mouth.” We render divine service when we are harmonious, and when we recognize our common equality and our common blessings in Christ; when none exalts himself above another nor assumes special advantages. Do you ask how it is we are equal, I reply: All outside of Christ are equally condemned. One needs Christ as much as another. When converted, all receive the same baptism and sacrament, the same faith, the same Christ and Spirit, the same Gospel, in a word, the same God. Here in this wilderness the heavenly bread is impartially distributed. Then how can it possibly be right for one to exalt himself over his fellow spiritually, one priest above the other? What can he have that surpasses Christ? And each has the same Christ, and Christ receives each one unreservedly.

[57] True, one may embrace Christ more fervently than another; he may love him more and be more steadfast in his faith. Nevertheless, he has not for that received of Christ more than another. Christ is one and the same Christ to all, and in the things of salvation alike to everyone. Therefore he is truly Christ. Since there is one common blessing for the weak and the firm in faith, for the strong in Christian conduct and for the erring, one should not esteem another more lightly than himself, nor reject him. He is to recognize his fellow as an equal. Then shall praise to God arise harmoniously and emanate as from one heart and one mouth. For so each individual praises God, and heart and mouth are actuated by the same impulse common to his fellows. All recognize Christ and render thanksgiving for what they receive through him; as prophesied in Psalm 72:15: “Men shall pray for him continually; they shall bless him all the day long.” But he who offers thanks simply for his own advantages or possessions, destroys unanimity of purpose and expression, and belongs not to the communion of saints. Thus, the Papists and sects do. From them we never hear praise of Christ, but praise of their own works.

[58] That Paul calls us to praise “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and not to confine our praise to Christ, is worthy of special notice in our day when we extol the honor of the saints so highly that we trust in them and fail to press into God’s very presence. We find one satisfied in calling upon St. Barbara and obtaining her favor, while there is no certain knowledge that she is a saint. Another is satisfied with Christofel, which is

without doubt one of the greatest fictions and lies. But scarcely anyone is satisfied to honor the Virgin Mary and have her favor.

[59] I fear abominable idolatry will Thus, gain ground, because we place in the saints the confidence and trust that should be placed in God alone, and expect from them what we can receive from God alone; and if no other evil were involved, it is a question whether the worship and honor of saints is supported by a passage or example in Scripture, and whether it is not contrary to this and like sayings of Paul, which teach us to press into the presence of God and place all our trust in him and expect everything we need for him. Christ, too, through the whole Gospel, points us to the Father. He came into the world that we should through him come to the Father.

[60] To come to the Father does not mean to walk on bodily feet to Rome or to fly to heaven on wings. It means to rely upon God with sincere confidence as upon a gracious parent; as the opening of the Lord's Prayer implies. In proportion as we have such confidence of heart, do we come nearer to the Father. Both reason and experience must confess, if the heart trusts in God, the Creator, that all trust in creatures vanishes, whether in saints in heaven or upon earth. Therefore Peter says: "Knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold,... but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ... so that your faith and hope might be in God." 1 Peter 1:18-21. And Paul says, "Through whom [Christ] also we have had our access by faith into this grace," etc. Romans 5:2.

[61] I admit that some can make a proper use of honoring the saints and the virgin Mary; though it is seldom they do. The example is dangerous and it should not be introduced into the congregation as a practice. The teaching of Christ and of all the apostles is, that we should cheerfully approach God the Father alone through Christ. For it soon happens, because of man's terrible fall, that people seek comfort more from the saints than from God, and pray to their names for help rather than to God. It is a perverted, an unchristian, state of things that exists at present. I fear the world is full, yes, full, of idolatry.

[62] God permits the worshiper of saints at times to receive help and perform wonders; yet, he does so through the agency of the devil. For it is God who gives to the servants of Satan their bodies and lives, their

possessions and honor, and this he does through the agency of Satan. This is plainly evident; like a rich prince may give a treasure to one knave through another knave. Hence we are not to build upon miraculous signs nor upon the example of the multitude, but alone upon the teachings of Christ, or of his apostles, in this and all cases.

[63] Now, while Christ is our common blessing, as before said, we should at the same time ascribe all to the Father; for Christ is the Father's gracious manifestation whereby our hearts are drawn to himself. So we should confidently love and praise the Father for his lavish blessings. With such exercise our hearts will learn to comfort themselves in him and to look to him for every blessing in life or death; but this through Christ and not through merit in ourselves. Christ was given that by him we might Thus, confidently approach the Father. John 14:6 declares: "No one cometh unto the Father, but by me."

[64] Notwithstanding Christ is truly God and one might safely repose confidence in him, yet he constantly points to the Father; for he would not have mankind continue to trust in his humanity as the disciples did before his suffering, instead of lifting its thoughts above his humanity, up to his divinity. We must look upon Christ's humanity as enabling him to be a way, an evidence, a work of God, whereby we come to God. We are to place our whole confidence in God, and in him alone, being very careful not to devote any portion of it to the mother of God or any saint and so set up an idol in our hearts. "Wherefore receive ye one another, even as Christ also received you, to the glory of God."

[65] What is the significance here of that word "wherefore?" "There are two reasons," the apostle would say to the Romans, "why ye should receive one another. The first is, because of Christ's example. As ye have heard, the Scripture presents Christ to us as one upon whom fell the infamy of our sins - for us he was ignominious in God's sight - and who did not despise, reject or revile us, but received us that he might redeem us from our sins. We are, then, under particular obligation to receive one another."

[66] The other reason the apostle presents for our receiving one another is that Thus, we contribute to the praise and honor of God. This we learn from Christ. He everywhere testifies that all he does is in obedience to his Father's will, and that he came for no other purpose than to do the will of

God. It is certain, then, he bore the ignominy of our sins simply because it was his Father's will.

[67] Mark the exceeding mercy of the Father's controlling will in placing upon his beloved and only Son our sins, and permitting him to bear the shame of them, merely that we might escape condemnation therefor. Now, a true recognition of this, God's gracious will, must evoke sincere love and praise to him and gratitude for his mercy. For, once the individual glimpses the Father's merciful will, he has a conscience so happy and serene he cannot restrain himself but must honor and praise God for his priceless blessings.

[68] Note, Paul says Christ has in himself upheld the honor of God by receiving us and bearing, yes, exterminating, our sins. So should we likewise take upon ourselves the burdens, the sins and imperfections, of our neighbors, and bear with and help to reform them. When such Christian conduct is manifest before sinners and the spiritually weak, their hearts are attracted to God and forced to exclaim: "Truly, he must be a great and gracious God, a righteous Father, whose people these are; for he desires them not to judge, condemn nor reject us poor, sinful and imperfect ones, but rather to receive us, to give us aid and to treat us as if our sins and imperfections were their own. Should we not love and exalt such a God? Should we not praise and honor him and give him the implicit confidence of our hearts in all things? What must be the character of that God who desires his people to be so noble?"

[69] Mark you, this is the praise God would have from us, that we receive one another and regard our neighbor's condition as our own. Such conduct on our part would encourage others to believe and would strengthen the faith of believers. But where will we find in all the world any who follow Christ's example in this respect? Only tyrants, yes, devils, rule in church offices, who do nothing but excommunicate and condemn, drive and hound the people. Missions to the Heather "Now I say that Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that he might confirm the promises given unto the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy."

[70] The apostle has submitted to the Romans his sentiment that, in obedience to the example of Christ, they should receive one another, to the

honor of God, and make no distinction between Christ's people, whether saints or sinners, strong or weak, rich or poor, since all are entitled to the same privileges. For all have the same blessings in Christ, who creates unity of heart, spirit, mind and word and renders common all things, whether spiritual or temporal, and however diverse they may be. Now Paul goes on to establish his position with strong passages of Scripture. Standing between Jews and gentiles as an arbitrator and mediator, he by the use of scriptural authority dissipates all causes of discord. He would say: "You Jews cannot reject the gentiles, even though they do not follow your customs in eating and drinking, for they have the very same Christ you have, according to Scripture prophecy." Again, "You gentiles cannot despise the Jews for not conforming to your ways in the matter of eating and drinking, for the Scripture promises to them the same Christ you profess." "Now," Paul's argument is, "since the Scripture gives to all equal privileges in Christ, and Jews and gentiles are brought together under his authority, and since outside of Christ is naught for anyone, but in him everyone has all things, in view of these facts, why contend, why judge one another and stir up factions? Why not much rather receive one another in kindness as Christ received you? No one is favored over another and no one has less than another. Why then contend, and create schisms, over the question of meats, drink, clothing; over observance of time and place; over manners and such things? These are not vital in any respect; they are temporal things, outside of Christ, and contribute nothing to salvation. Let every man exercise the liberty he desires in these matters. If any is still weak in faith and has not freedom of conscience, patiently bear with him till he becomes strong, for your lenience will cost you nothing; you will still have Christ unreservedly."

[71] To understand Paul's words here we must remember he is wont to refer to the Jewish people as "the circumcision," for they practiced the rite. Circumcision was a token whereby they were distinguished from other peoples. Such metaphors are often employed; for instance, we refer to women when we say, "Misfortune is oft woven with a weft of tresses"; to monks in the words, "Observe, what the cowl may not do"; or designate the priests when we exclaim, "How avaricious the bald pate!" And horsemen are indicated by the words "spurs" and "stirrups." It is in this metaphorical sense Paul, referring to a characteristic sign, terms the Jews "the circumcision" and the gentiles *praeputium*, "the uncircumcision": "They

saw that I had been entrusted with the Gospel of the uncircumcision, [that is, of the uncircumcised gentiles] even as Peter with the Gospel of the circumcision [that is, of the Jews].” Galatians 2:7-8. And again: “Remember, that once ye, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called Circumcision,” etc. Ephesians 2:11. So here he says, “I say that Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision”; that is, of the Jewish people. Using a convenient term, he calls Christ a “minister,” as he calls all preachers and apostles ministers. “What then is Apollos? and what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed.” 1 Corinthians 3:5. The substance of the apostle’s words is this: Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision. That is, a preacher, teacher, apostle, messenger, sent from God to the Jewish people. For Christ never preached to the gentiles. He was not sent to them, but to the Jews only.

[72] But Christ was a minister to the Jews, not because of their merit, but as here stated, “for the truth of God.” And what do we understand by those words? God promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that Christ should be born of their seed. To maintain God faithful in his promises, Christ came in fulfillment thereof. Thus, is the truth of God proven; God keeps his promises. For the sake of God’s truth, or in other words, that God might be proven truthful, and not for the sake of merit on the part of anyone, Christ became an apostle and a minister of the circumcision. This explanation is necessary to satisfy the succeeding phrase, “that he might confirm the promises given unto the fathers.” Observe the apostle’s meaning in the words “the truth of God,” the fulfillment and establishment of the divine promise made to the patriarchs concerning Christ.

[73] True, Jews and gentiles have Christ in common, yet the promise was not to the gentiles; it was to the Jews exclusively. Paul tells us in Romans 3:2 that the Jews “were entrusted with the oracles of God”; and again, in Romans 9:4, that the Law was given to them. So, too, Christ came to the Jews alone, as he says himself: “I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Matthew 15:24. It was the peculiar privilege of the Jews to have Christ promised to them, and to be able to await his coming. But to the gentiles was nothing promised, and they awaited nothing. At the same time, Jews and gentiles are on common ground in the fact that, Christ being promised of pure grace, he was given to the gentiles also. After the

promise was made to the Jews, the gentiles had just reason to regard the coming Messiah as given to them also.

[74] The Jews, then, have Christ not only through grace in the promise, but also because of the truth of God in fulfillment of his promise. But the gentiles have neither the grace of the promise nor the truth of fulfillment. They have merely the naked, unpromised, unexpected mercy Christ gives to them. There is no promise, and no obligation for fulfillment of the truth of God. Yet, the Scriptures having revealed that the gentiles should obtain Christ, though without promise, hope or expectation, the Scriptures must be fulfilled. Therefore, one people is not favored over the other. But Christ was given to the Jews through divine promise and divine truth, and to the gentiles through pure, unexpected mercy. Since the Scriptures contain a promise to the Jews and a prediction concerning the gentiles, the two peoples have a common bond in Christ. Hence each should receive the other as a participant in the common blessing. The Jews are not to despise the gentiles; because the Scriptures say the gentiles shall praise God for his mercy, and how shall the Jews despise those who enjoy God's mercy and praise him for it? On the other hand, the gentiles should not despise the Jews; for to the latter was Christ promised, and in fulfillment of the promise he became their minister and preacher, making God faithful to his word.

[75] Let us see what Paul's intent is in declaring: "I say that Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that he might confirm the promises given unto the fathers." Why this claim? Doubtless that none may despise the Jews, but rather receive them, in obedience to the example of Christ. Christ did not despise them; nay, he was even publicly promised and given to them as their own minister, preacher and apostle. But what do you say, Paul, in regard to the gentiles? "I do not say they are promised aught, but I say they enjoy and praise the mercy of God given them without promise, as the Scriptures imply. So, too, none should despise the gentiles, but rather receive them, in obedience to Christ's example." As Christ is a common bond between Jews and gentiles, though not given to each people in just the same way; so should there be unity among us. We must receive one another, bear one another's burdens and have patience with imperfections, regardless of personal appearance, name, condition or anything else. "Therefore, I will give praise unto thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name."

[76] Now the apostle goes on to quote some Scripture passages revealing the fact that the gentiles shall praise God for his mercy. This first quotation is found in Psalm 18:49, and also in Psalm 108:3. The words are spoken by the prophet for Christ, as in both cases the whole Psalm makes plain. Now, if this declaration is to be verified, Christ must be present with the gentiles, not physically but spiritually. For unless Christ is present spiritually, praise of him is not forthcoming; but the singing of his praise is guarantee of his spiritual presence. So, this quotation forces us to conclude that the gentiles shall believe in Christ and possess him; in other words, enjoy the mercy of God. Yet the verse makes no promise to them. It is merely a revelation concerning their future conduct.

[77] We have before mentioned what constitutes true service of God. Here the prophet refers to it as praising and singing unto God's name. And so is it defined throughout the Scriptures. Now, praise is simply a confession of blessings received. The Hebrew and apostolic word in this verse is *confitebor*, "I will confess thee"; meaning, "I will thank and praise thee and declare, All have I received from thee." "And again, he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people."

[78] These words are quoted from Deuteronomy 32:43, where Moses says, "Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people." The Hebrew, however, admits of the rendering, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with him" (understand "his people"). It is with this thought of God, it seems to me, the apostle introduces the quotation. Yet, whether we read it Thus, or otherwise, clearly no one praises the people of God, nor rejoices with him, unless he be partaker of God's blessings and own him God. For he who does not possess God and his blessings is an enemy to God's people, cursing and persecuting them, as God says in Genesis 12:3, "I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse." Here you see, they who bless God's people are partakers of his blessings. So, this second quotation teaches conclusively that the gentiles shall become Christians. "And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles and let all the peoples praise him."

[79] This verse is Psalm 117:1-2. It also has reference to true service of God. Therefore it, too; teaches that the gentiles shall be the people of God. For only they serve (praise and honor) God who are his people. "And again, Isaiah saith, there shall be the root of Jesse, and he that ariseth to rule over Gentiles, on him shall the Gentiles hope."

[80] We have this declaration in Isaiah 11:10. In Hebrew it reads: “And it shall come to pass in that day that the root of Jesse, that standeth for an ensign of the people, unto him shall the nations seek; and his resting place shall be glorious.” The meaning evidently is that the gentiles shall possess Christ and he shall reign over them. Paul makes a slight change in the words, following the rendering of the old translators who wrote the Bible in the Greek language. The meaning of the quotation is the same, however. The “root” of Jesse should not be understood here as “stem” or “tree” in the genealogical sense, as the artist would delineate the “tree” of Jesse, the father of David, with its many branches; and as we understand when we sing of the blessed Virgin, “the stem of Jesse has sprung forth.” That would be altogether a forced construction. Christ himself, and none other, is the “stem” or “root.” The construction of this passage from Isaiah makes that meaning plain, for it says practically, “The gentiles shall hope for the stem or root of Jesse, which is to rule the nations,” etc. This prophecy cannot be made to refer to the human Jesse or to our blessed Virgin.

[81] Christ is the root of Jesse. He descended from the lineage of Jesse, through David, but in him physical descent ceased. He suffered and was buried in the grave as an ill-favored root, concealed from the world, and out of him grew that beautiful tree, the Christian Church, spreading out into all the world. The root of Jesse is properly delineated when portrayal includes the sufferings of Christ and their fruits.

[82] Paul’s assertion “and he that ariseth to rule over the Gentiles” is equivalent to the Hebrew “that standeth for an ensign of the people.” It shows Christ’s government a spiritual one. The Gospel raises him as a standard before the whole world, an ensign to which we must be loyal through faith. We do not see him physically; we behold him only through the ensign, the Gospel. And it is through the Gospel he reigns over men; not in a physical presence.

[83] Again, the expression “on him shall the Gentiles hope” does not materially differ from the Hebrew rendering “to it shall the Gentiles seek.” The meaning is, the gentiles shall look unto the root of Jesse and cleave only to him, placing all confidence and hope in him and finding in him their consolation. They shall seek for and desire naught else. But the phrase “and his grave [resting place] shall be glorious,” contained in the quotation from Isaiah but omitted by the apostle, is not well rendered by Jerome, who

thinks Isaiah refers to the glorious grave of Christ. Isaiah's thought was of Christ's rest being glorious; that is, his death should mean something more than that of ordinary mortals, to whom death is the end of glory. The glory of the root of Jesse had its beginning in his death. For not until then was he raised to true life and power, to real glory and honor, an ensign for the gentiles, and ruler of them. Indeed, then he was seated at the right hand of God, Lord over all things. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit."

[84] Paul concludes this passage with a noble prayer, desiring the Romans to be filled with joy and peace. He calls upon the "God of hope," referring to the hope God alone gives through Christ and in Christ.

[85] The way we possess peace and joy we have before spoken of; the secret is in perceiving the will of God, how he gave Christ to bear our sins, which we are under obligation to believe. The more clearly we perceive his will, the stronger will be our faith, our hope and love. Hence, we must continually preach the Gospel, receive it, and meditate upon it. For faith comes through no other medium than the Gospel. The apostle says, in effect; "May God, who through the Gospel effects hope, grant you grace, enabling you to appropriate the Gospel and believe. Through believing, you first perceive Christ. Thereupon follow perfect peace and an assured conscience. These are blessings common to all, and you will have harmony among yourselves." The Christian's peace and joy is something received, not as the gift of the world is received, through mortal sense, but through faith. He who is the source of your good, and from whom you derive your peace and joy, is not recognized by sight or touch. However, in the world you will have disquietude and grief. But learn that Christ is the common blessing of all and you will enjoy blessed peace. For all being alike rich, no one can begrudge another anything. This is what it means to have peace and joy through faith or in faith.

[86] "That ye may abound in hope," continues the prayer. In other words, "that your hope may ever increase." Now, suffering and persecution contribute to the increase of hope. We are not given increased hope to decrease adversity; no, adversity is increased that hope may not rely on human power but be established through the power of the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit aids us, fortifying our hope and enabling us not to fear nor

to flee from the disasters of the world; but to stand firm even unto death, and to overcome all evil; so that evil must flee from us and cease its attacks. Remember, it is hope in the power of the Holy Spirit, not in human weakness, that must do all this through the medium of the Gospel. As before said, "Through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we have hope." Where the Gospel is not, there is neither hope, comfort, peace, joy, faith, love, Christ, God, nor anything good. Evidence of this fact is before us in the wretched, spiritless, carnal clerical orders, notwithstanding their much praying and holding of masses. From these things, O thou God of hope, of patience and of comfort, graciously preserve us. Amen.

Third Sunday in Advent. Stewards of God's Mysteries. Faithfulness in Stewards. Man's Judgement and God's Christ.

Text: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5.

1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.

4 For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

[1] This epistle selection illustrates the Gospel lesson for the first Sunday in Advent, wherein we learned the disciples did not themselves ride on the colt, but led it to Christ and set him thereon. That is what the apostle does here. The Corinthians had come to divisions among themselves and to boasting of certain apostles as their leaders. With one party it was Peter, with another Paul, and with yet another Apollos. Each one exalted the apostle by whom he was baptized or was taught, or the one he regarded most eminent. Now comes Paul and interposes, permitting no one to boast

of any apostle, and teaching them to laud Christ alone. He tells them it matters not by whom they were baptized and taught, but it is of the utmost importance that they all hold to Christ together and own allegiance to him alone. Paul beautifully teaches how the apostles are to be regarded. The whole passage is a fierce thrust at Popery and the clerical government, as we shall see. "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

[2] The reference is to all apostles and all heirs to the apostolic chair, whether Peter, Paul or any other. Let us, then, be very careful how we regard the apostles and bishops; we must attach neither too much nor yet too little importance to them. Not without reason did Paul - the Holy Spirit, in fact - make this restriction; and without doubt we are under obligation to follow it. The same limit here made concerning apostles applies to bishops. It designates the character of their office and the extent of their power. So when we see a bishop assuming more than this text gives him warrant for, we may safely regard him, as a wolf, and an apostle of the devil, and avoid him as such. Unquestionably he must be Antichrist who in ecclesiastical government exceeds the authority here prescribed.

[3] First, Paul warns us against receiving apostles or bishops as anything but "ministers of Christ;" nor should they desire to be regarded otherwise. But the term "minister of Christ" must not in this connection be understood as one who serves God, in the present acceptation of the phrase praying, fasting, attendance upon Church services, and all the things styled "divine service" by ecclesiastical rites, institutions and cloisters, and by the whole clerical order. Theirs are merely humanly devised works and words, whereby Paul's teaching here and elsewhere is wholly obscured, even to the extent of making it impossible to know what he means by the "ministry of Christ." He has reference to the ministry that is an office. All Christians serve God but all are not in office. In Romans 11:13, also, he terms his office a ministry: "Inasmuch as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I glorify my ministry." And in the epistle selection preceding this (Romans 15:8) he says: "I say that Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision." Again (2 Corinthians 3:6): "Who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit."

[4] What language is forcible enough to serve me in the attempt to eradicate from the hearts of all Christians that error so deeply impressed of

Popery wherein they interpret the ministry of Christ - or the service of God - in no other light than as their own works, performed to Christ without any authority to do them? Mark you, beloved, to serve Christ, or to serve God, is defined by Paul himself as to fulfill a Christ-ordained office, the office of preaching. This office is a service or ministry proceeding from Christ to us, and not from us to Christ. Note this carefully; it is important. Otherwise you cannot understand the design of the Pauline words, “ministry, ministration, to minister.” So he always has it. Seldom does he speak of the service or ministry rendered primarily above them to God; it is usually of the ministry beneath them, to men. Christ, too, in the Gospel bids the apostles to be submissive and servants of others. Luke 22:26. To make himself clearly understood in this matter of service, or ministry, Paul carefully adds to the word “ministers” the explanatory one “stewards,” which can be understood in no other way than as referring to the office of the ministry.

[5] He terms his office “service or ministry of Christ” and himself “minister of Christ,” because he was ordained of God to the office of preaching. So all apostles and bishops are ministers of Christ; that is preachers, messengers, officers of Christ, sent to the people with his message. The meaning of the verse, then, is: “Let every individual take heed not to institute another leader, to set up another Lord, to constitute another Christ. Rather be unanimously loyal to the one and only Christ. For we apostles are not your lords, nor your masters; we are not your leaders. We do not preach our own interests, nor teach our own doctrines. We do not seek to have you obey us, or give us allegiance and accept our doctrine. No, indeed. We are messengers and ministers of him who is your Master, your Lord and Leader. We preach his Word, enlist men to follow his commandments, and lead only into obedience. And in this light should you regard us, expecting of us nothing else than to bring the message. Though we are other persons than Christ, yet you do not receive through us another doctrine than his; another word, another government, nor another authority than his. He who so receives and regards us, holds the right attitude toward us, and receives, not us, but Christ, whom alone we preach. But he who does not so regard us, does us injustice, discards Christ, the one true Leader, sets up another in his stead and makes gods of us.”

[6] In Judges 8:22-23 we read that the children of Israel said to Gideon: “Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son also,” to

which Gideon answered, “I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: Jehovah shall rule over you.” And in 1 Samuel 8:7 we are told that when the children of Israel desired a king of Samuel, God said: “They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them.” Thus, we see God cannot permit any authority to usurp his own among his people.

[7] But perhaps you ask: “Where was the sin of the people when they desired Gideon to rule over them? Had not God given Gideon leadership in the contest, and did he not later provide many holy kings expressly for them?” I reply it was not a sin for the children of Israel to have sovereigns; it was not contrary to God’s will; for there must be temporal authorities. But the sin consisted in the fact that, not content with God’s government, they chose human government instead. Gideon and the holy kings did not extend their authority as rulers a hair’s breadth farther than God’s command warranted, and they did not regard themselves in any other light than as the servants or ministers of God; that is, they ruled according to God’s direction and not according to their own. Thus, was perpetuated God’s government in its purity, and they were servants in it; as were the apostles servants in the word of Christ. Hence David sings of his own kingdom as identical with God’s. He says: “Arise, O Jehovah, in thine anger: lift up thyself against the rage of mine adversaries and awake for me; thou hast commanded judgment. And let the congregation of the peoples compass thee about; and over them return thou on high. Jehovah ministereth judgment to the peoples.” Psalm 7:6-8.

[8] But where more authority is assumed than God’s command gives, and where the magistrate attempts to rule according to human doctrines, or the subjects seek such leadership, idolatry results and the leader assumes a new character. The magistrate is no longer a servant or minister, but rules arbitrarily, without command of God. God says of them as he said to Samuel concerning the children of Israel: “They have not rejected the magistrate, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.” I refer here to spiritual matters, to the sovereignty of the soul, which must stand before God. Civil government is a matter that does not pertain to nor concern the soul.

[9] Where divine leadership is shared with any other than God or Christ, there must also be doctrine and commandments differing from the doctrine

and command of Christ. Service of Christ must immediately fail; Christ must be rejected for the establishment of a new sovereignty. Plainly enough, no one can be servant of Christ and at the same time teacher of his own message. The two conditions cannot exist at the same time. How can one be a servant of Christ if he does not teach Christ's message? Or how can he teach his own message when he is under obligation to teach only Christ's? If he advocates his own counsels, he makes himself lord and does not serve Christ. If he advocates Christ's counsels, he cannot himself be lord.

[10] From this you may judge for yourself whence arises Popery and its ecclesiastical authority, with all its priests, monks and high schools. If these can prove they teach nothing but the message of Christ, we must regard them as his ministers or servants. But if we can prove they do not so teach, we must regard them as not his servants. Now it certainly is clear that their teaching is not the doctrine of Christ, but their own doctrine. Hence it is evident they constitute the kingdom of Antichrist and are servants of the devil. For Paul makes a firm stand here and declares: "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ."

[11] Their claim that in addition to the teachings of Christ, the commandments of the Church may be taught - and they intimate that their teachings are the doctrines of the Church - is of no significance. Paul's teaching here continues to stand, that the Church belongs neither to Peter nor Paul, but to Christ only, and acknowledges none but the servants or ministers of Christ. You see, then, the blasphemy of the Pope in crying obedience to his doctrines as the road to salvation, and disobedience to them the road to damnation. Paul here makes obedience to these things a work of the devil; as he does also in 1 Timothy 4:1-3: "But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by them that believe and know the truth." And Christ says: "My sheep hear my voice, and a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers. I know mine own, and mine own know me." John 10:5-14.

[12] Note the harmony between Paul's teaching and this statement of Christ's that any other than the voice of Christ is a strange voice, the

doctrine of the devil, and to be avoided. You see here Christ's own verdict in regard to doctrines, what his Church hears and teaches, and what are and what are not the commandments of the Church. The Church has no other doctrine than that of Christ, and no other obedience than to obey him. All the Papists say, then, concerning obedience to the commandments of the Church is in the same class with what Paul calls speaking lies in hypocrisy, moved by false spirits and doctrines of devils.

[13] The same is the meaning of the phrase "stewards of the mysteries of God." The word "steward" here signifies one who has charge of his lord's domestics; one whose office is the same as that of stewards in monasteries at the present day, or provosts in nunneries, or governors, managers and overseers of the sort. For *oekonomus* is Greek and signifies in English a steward, or one capable of providing for a house and ruling the domestics. Christ in Matthew 24:45 calls such a one simply a servant: "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath set over his household, to give them their food in due season?" Such a servant was Eliezer, the steward of Abram's house. Genesis 15.

[14] Now, God's household is the Christian Church - ourselves. It includes pastors and bishops, overseers and stewards, whose office is to have charge of the household, to provide nourishment for it and to direct its members, but in a spiritual sense. Paul puts a distinction between the stewards of God and temporal stewards. The latter provide material nourishment, and exercise control of the physical person; but the former provide spiritual food and exercise control over souls. Paul calls the spiritual food "mysteries." The practice of providing it has so long been discontinued we do not now know what a steward is nor what is meant by "mysteries." Church officials imagine that when they baptize, celebrate mass and administer other sacraments, they exercise the mysteries, and that now there is no proper mystery but the mass. At the same time, they know not the meaning of the term in this connection.

[15] I cannot just now find a word in German equivalent to *mysterion*, and it will be well to retain the Greek form, as we have with many other words. It is equivalent to "secret," something hidden from our eyes, invisible to all, and generally pertaining to words. For instance, a saying not easily understood is said to contain a hidden meaning, a secret, a *mysterion*

- something is concealed therein. The concealment itself may properly be termed “mystery”; I call it a secret.

[16] What, then, constitutes the mysteries of God? Simply Christ himself; that is, faith and the Gospel concerning Christ. The whole Gospel teaching is far beyond the grasp of our reason and our physical sense; it is hidden to the world. It can be apprehended only by faith; as Christ says in Matthew 11:25: “I thank thee, O father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes.” And as Paul tells us (1 Corinthians 2:7-8): “We speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, which none of the rulers of this world hath known.”

[17] Expressed in the clearest manner possible, “mystery” is the reception of the things of faith - that Christ the Son of God was born of a virgin, died and rose again, and all this that our sins might be forgiven. These things eye sees not nor reason comprehends. Indeed, as Paul says (Corinthians 1:23), they are mere foolishness to the wise, and simply an offense to the self-righteous saints. How can the natural man perceive, or reason acknowledge, that the man Christ is our life and salvation, our peace, our righteousness and redemption, our strength and wisdom, Lord of all creatures that he is even God, and everything else the Scriptures testify of him? None can apprehend these truths except he hears and believes them through the Gospel. They are too far beyond sense and reason to be grasped by the natural man.

[18] So, then, the mysteries of God are simply the blessings in Christ as preached through the Gospel and apprehended and retained by faith alone. Paul says relative to the matter, speaking on how men should behave themselves in the house of God: “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; he who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory.” 1 Timothy 3:16. This is spoken of Christ, who was manifest in the flesh. He dwelt among men who had flesh and blood like himself, yet he was still a mystery. That he was Christ, the Son of God, the life, the way, the truth and all good, was hidden.

[19] Yet he was “justified in the Spirit;” that is, through the Spirit’s influence believers received, acknowledged and retained him as all we have

mentioned. "To justify" means simply to pronounce just, or at least to admit as just; as we have in Luke 7:29: "All the people when they heard, and the publicans, justified God." Again, in Psalm 51:4: "That thou mayest be justified when thou speakest." This is equivalent to saying: The believer in Christ justifies him, and acknowledges the truth that Christ alone is our life and righteousness and wisdom, and that we are sinners, condemned and perishing. For such Christ is, and such is his claim. He who acknowledges this his claim justifies him in the Spirit; but he who does not justify him relies upon his own works; he does not see himself condemned but contends against and condemns Christ. [This justification of Christ is effected by no one unless he possesses the Holy Spirit, whose work alone it is. Flesh and blood cannot do it, even if it be publicly presented to our eyes and preached into our ears.]

[20] The statement in Romans 1:4, "Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness," has reference to justification. As if to say: "In unbelievers Christ is nothing; not only despised, but utterly condemned. But the saints whose life is in the Spirit who sanctifies them, strongly and boastfully maintain that he is the Son of God. To them it is proved and firmly, settled."

[21] Paul might have said: "We are the stewards of the wisdom of God, or of the righteousness of God," and so on. For all this Christ is; as he says (1 Corinthians 1:30): "Who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." But this would have been specifying, and he desired to embrace in one word all the blessings in Christ which the preaching of the Gospel brings; so he styles them "mysteries." We may understand it as if he said: "We are spiritual stewards whose duty it is to minister the grace of God, the truth of God, but who can enumerate all? Let us briefly sum them up and say, the mysteries of God; mysteries and hidden things because faith alone can attain them." He adopts the same style in Romans 1:4 when he comprises in one word how Christ was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, preached to the gentiles, and so on. Similarly, in 1 Timothy 3:16 he expresses it briefly in Greek, *oristheis*, determined. In short, Christ was declared and determined, was received and regarded, as the Son of God, by angels, gentiles, the world, heaven and all things; since for this purpose he was manifested, justified, revealed, preached, believed, received, and so on. Hence, he indicates it

here by the plural word “mysteries,” and in 1 Timothy 3:16 by the singular “mystery.” The words are, however, equivalent in this connection. Christ is all in all, one mystery, and many mysteries, as expressed in the many mysterious blessings we have from him.

[22] It is worthy of note that Paul adds to “mysteries” the modifier “of God;” he means the hidden things God grants and which exist in him. For the devil also has his mysteries, as Revelation 17:5 says: “Upon her forehead a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great,” etc. And again, in the seventh verse, “I will tell thee the mystery of the woman;” The things over which the Pope and his priests now preside as stewards are mysteries of the latter class; for they intimate that their doctrine and deeds win heaven, when in reality they but conceal death and hell for all who trust therein. But the mysteries of God enfold life and salvation.

[23] Thus, we arrive at the apostle’s meaning in the assertion that a minister of Christ is a steward in the mysteries of God. He should regard himself and insist that others regard him as one who administers to the household of God nothing but Christ and the things of Christ. In other words, he should preach the pure Gospel, the true faith, that Christ alone is our life, our way, our wisdom, power, glory, salvation; and that all we can accomplish of ourselves is but death, error, foolishness, weakness, shame and condemnation. Whosoever preaches otherwise should be regarded by none as a servant of Christ or a steward of the divine treasurer; he should be avoided as a messenger of the devil. So it follows: Faithfulness in Stewards “Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”

[24] Upon this all depends. After faithfulness God inquires. Angels, men and all creatures look for and demand it; not the mere name or honor of steward will answer. The question is not whether one’s bishopric be large or small; nor is it particularly important whether or no he be outwardly pious. The question is, does he faithfully execute the duties of his office, acting as a steward in the blessings of God? Paul here permits us much liberty to judge the doctrines and lives of our bishops, cardinals and all Papists. The same faithfulness is also required by Christ: “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath set over his household, to give them their food in due season?” Matthew 24:45.

[25] What is the nature of the faithfulness of the Papists - how does it measure up? Tell me, who would be reformed or profited were any one bishop to have prominence and power enough to possess every bishopric, as the Pope tries to do? Who would be benefited if a bishop were so holy that his shadow would raise the dead? Who would be the gainer if he had wisdom equal to all the apostles and prophets? But none of these things are inquired after; the question is, Is he a faithful bishop? Does he administer to the household of faith the Word of God? Does he preach the Gospel and dispense the mysteries of God? Emphatically the inquiry is made upon these points. Here is where the individual is benefited. Above all things, then, faithfulness is demanded of stewards.

[26] Now, measure the Pope and all the ecclesiasts by the requirements of this text. Tell me, what is the Pope seeking? Is not the sole purpose of all his grasping and raging to enable him to rule supremely and arbitrarily? His whole concern is for fame, power, position and wealth, for authority over all men. Through the Pope's blasphemous lips the devil deceitfully endeavors to emphasize the importance of obedience to popish laws, and the danger to the soul's salvation from disobedience. The Pope is not concerned about faithfulness to the Christian household. For tell me where in all his innumerable laws and commands - a veritable flood of them - where in the whole extent of his government, did you ever learn of his touching with a single word upon the mysteries of God? Or where has he preached the Gospel? All his utterances relate to quarrels, to prebends, or at best to the matter of pates and apparel. Indeed, he openly condemns the Gospel and the mysteries of God. And the bishops and ecclesiasts follow him with their endowments, cloisters and high schools.

[27] They have so perverted apostolic faithfulness that with them a faithful bishop, abbot or ecclesiastical prelate is one who loyally manages, guards, improves and increases their temporal possessions - the heritage of St. Peter, the Castle of St. Moretz, the land of the holy cross, the interests of the Virgin and other concerns of the Church, in a word, their own emolument - under the name of God and of the saints; the world, even in its most sordid state, bears no comparison to them. Such are the princes, the bishops and prelates who have the credit of having governed well the Church; it matters not whether or no they have, during their whole lives, read or heard the Gospel, not to mention their disregard for their duty to

preach it. The blasphemous tongue of the Pope, in its worldwide unrestraint, calls them good stewards of the blessings of God who are utterly useless, unless it be to fill the place of treasurer, assessor, guardian, bailiff, architect, mayor, plowman, butler or kitchen steward for some temporal lord. Such is their apostolic fidelity; this and nothing more. In the meantime, souls are perishing. Divine interests are going to ruin. The wolf reigns and devours. In spiritual affairs the popish stewards see no danger and afford no security. They sit unconcernedly counting over their profits, attending to the interests of St. Laurence and with extreme faithfulness providing for the property of the Church a faithfulness in return for which they are certain Christ has prepared for them no inferior seat in heaven. O wretched, lost, blinded multitude, how securely you are going on toward hell!

[28] I cannot pass without notice here - for I must relate it as a warning against similar attempts - a trick of the devil which, I heard it said, he exhibited in time past at Merseburg, in our own country. It had to do with the golden cup of Emperor Henry. The Pope's beloved people zealously relate a certain falsehood, for which they obtain indulgences. They assert that the roasted Laurence, by casting the golden cup into the balance, got so much the better of the devil that he was forced to release the soul of the Emperor, in consequence of which he (the devil) was enraged to the extent of breaking an ear off the cup. Such gross, foolish, idle falsehoods are intended to blind us Christians from perceiving the devil's trickery. What is the devil's purpose in this fabrication? The whole thing is a design to establish by the miraculous, the wealth, luxury and delicate faithfulness of the prelates of which we have spoken. Thereby the weak-minded are to be induced to believe they can overcome the devil by presenting gifts to the Church. But Peter says this conquest is only to be affected by the power of faith. These are the signs Christ and Paul predicted would accompany the misleading of the elect from the faith.

[29] A fidelity even more beautiful to contemplate exists among unspiritual lords and faithful stewards of the same class actively engaged in directing the spiritual welfare of souls. Certainly, these are true stewards and the right sort! So extremely holy are they, St. Peter will have to be on his guard if he holds his place with them. They are our spiritual fathers, priests, monks and nuns - who exercise themselves in obedience to the

Pope, the holy Church and every form of human institutions and orders and statutes. Among them are the paragon, the quintessence, the kernel, the marrow, the foundation - and how shall I enumerate all the honorable titles which they assume and hold from custom? Yes, far enough from custom! The beautiful little cat has pretty, smooth fur.

[30] Here is where we find our good stewards and our unheard-of fidelity. How tenaciously, how rigorously and earnestly, they adhere to that sort of obedience and maintain those traditions. Yes, indeed, they are the proper saints. Few bishops who rigidly observe the holy, spiritual law can rank with them. But when we investigate their cloisters and review their doctrines and conduct, we find that no people on earth are less acquainted with the mysteries of God and farther from Christ. Indeed, they act as if mad, maliciously storming Christ with their own inventions. They are the Gog and Magog of the Revelation of John, contending against the Lamb of God. For they exalt their own works to the extermination of faith, and are termed the faithful stewards of God, as the wolf among the sheep is the shepherd.

[31] Now, he that hath ears, let him hear what Paul says: "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful;" but he is faithful who is occupied with the mysteries of God. The conclusion, then, is - the Pope, the bishops, monks and nuns, the founders and inmates of universities, and all who with them build upon anything or are occupied with anything but Christ, the Gospel and true faith, though they may have indeed the name of servants and stewards of Christ, are in reality servants and stewards of the devil, their lord, and are engaged with his mysteries or secrets. Christ, in the saying we have quoted from Matthew, tells us further, the servant of the household should be not only faithful, but also wise, able to discern between the mysteries of God and the mysteries of the devil, that he may safely guard and keep himself and those committed to his care. For, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:13-14, false apostles sometimes fashion themselves into true apostles of Christ, even as the devil transforms himself into an angel of light.

[32] Where wisdom to discern the mysteries of God is lacking, the greater the faithfulness, the greater the danger; as we perceive in the two mentioned cases of false, seductive faithfulness on the part of the unspiritual saints. Paul well knew how the mysteries of the devil would

prevail; so, while silent in regard to every other qualification necessary for stewards, he points out faithfulness. Had our bishops remained faithful stewards of God, popery and its peculiar spiritual orders undoubtedly would not have been introduced; the common spiritual order and life of faith would have been maintained. And were they now to return to faithfulness, the strange special orders would soon pass, and the true common ones be restored. Man's Judgment and God's "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment."

[33] First, we must understand Paul's language here, and explain the terms of the original, with which we need to be as familiar as with our mother tongue. He employs the word "judge," or sentence, in a worthy sense; that is, as carrying the thought of esteem. "Judgment," as generally understood, conveys the idea of condemnation. But this is true: Every public judgment operates in two ways. One party is condemned, the other liberated; one is punished, the other rewarded; one dishonored, the other honored. The same is true in private judgment. While the Pharisee in the Gospel praised himself, he censured the publican and others; while he honored himself, he dishonored others. And the attitude of everyone toward his neighbor is either praise or censure. Judgment must involve these two things. Hence, Paul here says he is judged, or sentenced, by the Corinthians; that is, their judgment renders honor and praise unto him. By extolling Paul above the other apostles, decision is made between him and the others, to his advantage and with prejudice against them. Some, however, judged in favor of Peter, others of Apollos. That "judgment" is here equivalent to "praise" is evident from the conclusion of the passage: "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, then shall each man have his praise from God." What is this but saying, Praise not, let God praise? It is God's prerogative to judge, to praise and to crown man; we are not to perform that office for one another.

[34] The expression "man's judgment" (menschliche Tag) implies that judgment of approval whereby man exalts and makes illustrious and renowned those he esteems. The thought is suggestive of the illumination or glory of day, which renders visible things unrevealed in darkness. In the Latin, illustrious people - they who are on everyone's tongue - are called *praeclari*, *nobiles*, *illustres*. In German, "durchlauchtige" stands for those of high renown, those having name and reputation superior to others. On the

other hand, the unrenowned are called obscuri, ignobles, humiles - insignificant, unknown, humble. The holy Scriptures term kings and princes doxas, glorias, claritates, indicative of glory, splendor and popularity. Peter (2 Peter 2:10) says of the Pope and his adherents that they tremble not to rail at glories. That means they will curse dignitaries, kings, princes, and all exalted in earthly glory; this when Christ has commanded us to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to do good to our persecutors. We see how the Pope defames on Maundy Thursday in the Bulla Caenae Domini; and, indeed, whenever it pleases him.

[35] Man's judgment, then, is expressed in the clamor and ostentation men make before the world. Jeremiah says (Jeremiah 17:16), "Neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest." In other words, "They accuse me of preaching new doctrines solely to gain a name, and honor and praise before men; to win their esteem. But thou knowest it is not so; I have not sought such honor and praise." Christ says (John 5:41), "I receive not glory from men." That is, "I do not desire men to laud and extol me." And (John 8:50), "I seek not mine own glory." Again (John 5:35), speaking of John the Baptist, "Ye were willing to rejoice for a season in his light." The meaning is, "It would have pleased you to have John's testimony contribute to your honor and praise; you would have liked to enjoy for a short season the esteem of the people. This is what you sought."

[36] Paul regards it a very trivial matter to command the clamorous honor and praise of men, to gain a reputation with them. He aptly calls such popularity "man's judgment," or human glory. For it is of human origin and not directed of God; and, with men, it shall pass. Paul would say: "I do not desire your praise, nor the praise of all the world." Let men seek for that. Servants of Christ and stewards of God look to Christ and to a divine glory for their judgment.

[37] But the apostle surely manifests ingratitude in not sending the Corinthians a bagful of bulls or letters; in not blessing them nor distributing indulgences among them in recognition of their great honoring of the apostolic see. The Pope would have conducted himself in a manner much worthier of an apostle. Yes, indeed; he would have anathematized them had they not illumined him with the glory of their judgment. He would have said, "I am a Papist; the Pope is the highest, the holiest, the mightiest." Had Paul so desired he might have become pope, might have held supremacy; he

had but to utter a single word. He had only to receive them who desired to join themselves to him; the others would have been obliged to yield. But in his stewardship, he strove for faithfulness rather than for exaltation. Hence, he had to remain a common tentmaker and to travel on foot.

[38] From this verse, clearly the Corinthians judged with distinction of persons, preferring that baptism and Gospel which they had themselves received. They intimated that Paul, or Peter, or Apollos, was supreme. This Paul could not admit. He holds the apostles equal, whatever their individualities. He who is baptized and taught by Paul is as much a Christian as one baptized and taught of Peter, or Apollos, or anyone else. In opposition to this teaching, the Pope fiercely rants, admitting no one a Christian unless instructed of himself. At the same time, he teaches mere infidelity and the foolish works of men.

[39] Now, Paul condemns undue respect of persons, and in the matter of stewardship for God is concerned only about faithfulness. By these very teachings, he removes every reason for divisions; his Church cannot be disunited, but must remain harmonious, allowing equality in all things. How can there be divisions when one minister of Christ is like another, when he is equally a steward of God? So long as there is no difference in privilege, even if one does exceed another in faithfulness, it will not create sects; it will only publish the common Gospel with greater efficiency.

[40] Paul's words have reference not to one apostle only, but to every apostle. He does not say, "Let a man so account of me," but "Let a man so account of us;" of "us," mark you. Who is meant by "us"? Himself, Peter, Apollos - they about whom the matter arose. The conclusion necessarily is that Peter and Paul are to be considered equal. Then either Paul's teaching is wrong, when he regards all apostles equal servants of Christ and stewards of God, or the claims and proceedings of the Pope must be false and this text a powerful enemy of popedom. "Yea, I judge not mine own self."

[41] You may inquire how it is that Paul should look upon his own judgment of himself as truer than the judgment of any other; for we see how the majority of men praise or highly approve themselves. Naturally one is pleased with himself, but few receive the glory of "man's judgment" - are honored in the sentence of others. We might expect Paul to reverse the statement, saying: "With me it is a very small thing that I should judge

myself; I desire neither this human glory of man's judgment, nor the praise of yourselves or of all the world." But he speaks, rather, as a Christian and according to the state of his own conscience before God. The Corinthians exalted Paul in the things acceptable to God. They insisted he was higher, greater and better before God than the other apostles; but certain other Christians extolled Peter. Now, there is with God no better evidence of the soul's condition than what the conscience reveals. God judges not, like men, according to appearance, but according to the heart; as we learn from 1 Samuel 16:7: "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh on the heart." So it is plain the evidence of our consciences is of greater weight before God than the testimony of all the world. And this evidence alone will stand; as said in Romans 2:15: "Their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men."

[42] Paul would ask: "Why should divisions arise among you concerning us? What if one is preferred of men before another? It is altogether immaterial. For even our own consciences refrain from judging as to who ranks first in God's sight." Solomon says, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Proverbs 28:26. There are no grounds for divisions. No one knows who ranks first with God. Christ himself does not claim the right to set one soul on the right hand and the other on the left. Matthew 20:23. Since all the apostles are alike before God, since one is a minister of Christ as well as another, and since we may not know who ranks first in God's estimation, let no one presume to judge, much less to exalt himself above another because of temporal power, wealth or popularity. The exaltation of the Pope and the claim that his eminence is from God is in violation of this principle; Paul's words dispute it, teaching that no one is able to know nor judge until the last day.

[43] But here the keen tongues of the Papists seek to effect a breach. They assume that Paul does not deny the supremacy of Peter, or of the Pope, but forbids judgment of the person himself as to how good or bad he is in God's sight. I admit that Paul does forbid such judgment, nevertheless the design of the Corinthians for which he rebukes them was to exalt the office, the baptism and the doctrine, wholly because of the person; otherwise they would not have said, "I am a good follower of Paul," "I am a good follower of Peter," and so on. Well they knew that doctrine, baptism

and office were the same with all the apostles, but their object was to exalt the office and its efficacy with the standing of the individual. Paul, however, takes the opposite stand; he assumes equality of office upon the very ground of equality of individuals in man's sight, since none can know another's standing before God. Had the Corinthians desired to exalt the individual only, and not the office, they would not have created sects and said, "I am of Paul," etc. Just as we may hold St. Peter holier in person than St. Augustine and yet not cause division thereby. But it is creating sects for one to say, "I am of Peter," and another, "I am of Augustine," meaning, "The doctrine taught me is superior to what is taught you."

[44] The hypocritical Papists, being well aware that their false claim for the supremacy of the Pope cannot stand unless backed by his personal holiness, proceed to bolster up that falsehood by a greater one. They endeavor to give him the reputation of personal goodness by saying he cannot err, for the Holy Spirit never forsakes him, and Christ is ever with and in him. Some of them, knowing the absurdity of denying that the Pope does openly sin, are so bold in their blasphemous utterances as to declare it is impossible for him to remain in mortal sins for a quarter of an hour. Thus, accurately have they measured with hourglass and compasses the extent of the Holy Spirit's presence in the Pope. Why do they tell such blasphemous falsehoods? Doubtless because they are aware of the futility of attempting to maintain supremacy without personal goodness; they would be compelled to admit that exaltation without piety must be of the devil. It cannot be said the Corinthians exalted the person independently of the office; it was because of his office.

[45] Do you ask further concerning Paul, who desired to be regarded a minister of Christ and a steward of God, why did he not judge himself? I reply: As before stated, the ministry and the office are not his but God's, who enjoined them upon him. As no man can create the Word of God, so no man has authority to send it forth, or constitute an apostle. God has himself accomplished the work; he has constituted the apostles. Hence, we should own the work, glory in it, confess it, and give to publish abroad the news of the priceless blessing the one God has bestowed. To illustrate: Though I cannot constitute myself a living soul, I ought to glory in and confess the fact that God has created me a human being. But just as I am incapable of

judging how I stand and will stand in the sight of God, so I cannot judge which apostle or steward is greatest before God.

[46] But you object: You teach, however, that a Christian should not doubt his acceptance with God, and he that doubts is no Christian; for faith assures that God is our Father and that as we believe so shall it be unto us. I reply: Indeed, I would have you hold fast the assurance of faith in the grace of God; faith is simply a steadfast, indubitable, sure confidence in divine grace. But this is what I say: the Corinthians' intent was to judge the apostles by their personal goodness and works, that according to one's holiness, rank and merit might his office be exalted and his followers secure some honor above others. But Paul overthrows all works and merit, leaving them to God's judgment, and places every apostle in the same rank as to office and faith. They fill one and the same office and are justified by one and the same faith. The question of who ranks first in goodness, position, merit and achievement must be left to God; it is not an occasion for divisions in the community. Hence follows: "For I know nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified."

[47] This verse also implies that the Corinthians judged the apostles in regard to the worthiness of person and works; Paul admits his conscience does not reproach him, and confesses to the truth of their judgment so far as his person and conscience are concerned. But, he teaches that such judgment does not suffice before God; and that all decisions based on the same principle are false.

[48] Much might be said on this verse. It shows us all works are rejected and no one is made godly and happy by any of them. The fact that Paul dared say "I know nothing against myself" proves him certainly to have abounded in good works; nevertheless he says, "I am not hereby justified." By what is he justified, then? By faith alone. Could one be justified upon the grounds of a clear conscience - knowing nothing against himself - his confidence would rest in himself. He could judge and extol his own character, as do presumptuous saints. Then faith and God's grace would be unnecessary; we would have in ourselves all essentials and could easily dispense with God. The fact is, however, all depends on our reliance upon the grace of God. Thereby are we justified. The subsequent judgment of our works and character, of our calling and worthiness, must be left to God. We

are certain we are vindicated by none of these things, and uncertain how God will estimate them.

[49] It is easily evident to all, I presume, that Paul refers to his character after conversion when he says he knows nothing against himself; for, concerning his previous life, he tells us (1 Timothy 1:13) he was an unbeliever, a blasphemer and a persecutor of the first Christians.

[50] The question, however, arises, How can it be that he is not justified by his clear conscience when he declares (2 Corinthians 1:12): “For our glorying is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we behaved ourselves in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward”? This quotation contains the answer. The words, “in the grace of God,” give it. We are indeed to rejoice in the grace of God, to boast of and glory in it; since it is founded upon the glorying of our conscience. Even had not these words been included, it must necessarily be understood that reference is to the glorying in grace or else to honor before the world. It is the privilege and the duty of everyone to acknowledge before men his innocence, to rejoice in having injured no one. And he should not call evil what he knows to be good. At the same time such glorying avails nothing before God; he must judge the heart, though men are satisfied with deeds. Before God, then, something more than a good conscience is necessary. Moses says (Exodus 34:7), “Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty.” We read (Romans 3:27), “Where then is the glorying?” And again (1 Corinthians 1:31), “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”; that is, in his grace. “But he that judgeth me is the Lord.”

[51] The thought here is, “I will wait for God’s judgment and praise.” Paul says also (2 Corinthians 10:18), “For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.” His intent, however, is not to deter them from godly living but rather to incite thereto. Although no man is capable of judging and commending another, yet none shall go unjudged and uncommended. God himself will judge and praise right living. We should be so much the more faithful in doing good because God is to be judge; we are not to be remiss here even though uncertain as to how he judges us. “Wherefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make

manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall each man have praise of God.”

[52] We may well ask, Are we not to give praise to one another? Paul says (Romans 12:10), “In love of the brethren be tenderly-affectioned one to another.” And Christ (Matthew 5:16): “Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” And the apostle also tells us (2 Corinthians 6:8) we must here upon earth walk “by evil report and good report.” But, we reply our faith alone, not our works, is the chief thing to be honored in all cases. Good works are imperative, and we should extol them in others; but no one is to be judged, justified or preferred because of them. The farmer at his plow sometimes may be better in God’s sight than the chaste nun.

[53] The five foolish virgins (Matthew 25:2), despite their virginity, are condemned. The widow who threw into the treasury two mites (Mark 12:42) did more than all the others who cast in much greater amounts. The work of the woman who was a sinner (Luke 7:37) is extolled above any work of the Pharisees. It is impossible for us mortals to discern the relative merits of individuals and the value of their works; we ought to praise all, giving equal honors and not preferring one above another. We should humble ourselves before one another, ever esteeming our neighbor above ourselves. Then we are to leave it to God to judge who ranks first. True, he has declared that whoever humbles himself shall be exalted, yet it is not evident who humbles and who exalts himself; for the heart, by which God judges, is not manifest. One may humble himself when secretly in his heart he is haughty, and again the meek-hearted may exalt himself.

[54] So Paul says: “The Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts.” Then it will appear who is really worthier, superior and better, and whose works excel.

[55] It is most unchristianlike to base our estimation of one upon his outward appearance and visible works; to say, for instance, that the Carthusian leads a life essentially better than the farmer, or than any married man. Indeed, the Carthusian if he does right will esteem his own life inferior to that of the married man. For God judges not according to outward expression, but according to the secrets of darkness and the

counsels of the heart, and how can the Carthusian know which is the humbler and holier, his own heart or the farmer's?

[56] Applicable here are two instances, in my opinion the best in all the "Lives of the Fathers." One is of St. Anthony, to whom it was revealed that a tanner at Alexandria, a humble, honest mechanic, but one in no wise illustrious, was far superior to the saint because of his humility of heart. The other relates to Paphnutio, who, despite all his austerity of life, was not superior to a fifer nor to either of two married women. It was a special manifestation of grace that God revealed these two incidents at a time when monastic life was most intense, and works prodigious. His purpose was to deter us from judging by outward appearances - by works - and to teach us to value all works alike and to prefer others above ourselves.

[57] Now you will say: If all stations are alike and all works of the same value, none to have preference, what advantage is it to us to forsake the world and enter the holiest orders, to become monks, nuns and priests, in the effort to serve God? I reply: Did not Christ and Paul foretell that false Christs and prophets should arise and deceive many? Had the doctrine of equal service to God under all conditions and in all works continued to stand, certainly no monasteries and cloisters would have been established - or at least they would not have increased so rapidly - to create the illusion that service to God consists only in meeting their requirements. Who would have become a priest, who a monk, yes, who a pope and bishop, had he realized that in such capacity his position and its works are no more meritorious than those of the poorest nurse maid who rocks children and washes swaddling clothes? It would grievously distress, yes, and shame, the Pope had he to humble himself to a nurse maid, esteeming his works inferior to hers - he whose position and works are so meritorious that kings, and even God's saints, are scarce worthy to kiss his feet. The holy Papists, then, must institute something superior to Paul's teaching here. They are compelled to judge themselves, and to proclaim their position and works supreme, else they cannot sell their merits and procure heaven for poor laymen, married persons and individuals in various stations, implying that these do not in their lives serve God.

[58] Now, seeing how impossible it is for the present ecclesiastical order to stand unless it disposes of this passage from Paul and exalts its religious life with distinction above that of other Christians, it is certainly clear

enough that popery, with its monasteries and cloisters, is based on mere falsehoods and blasphemies. The Papists style themselves “ecclesiastical” or “spiritual” and others “secular,” when God sees none as ecclesiasts or churchmen, but as believers; and believers are found for the most part not among the clergy but among the laity. What greater deception than to call the clerical order spiritual, and to separate it from the class among whom true spiritual life exists? God alone is to judge who is holiest and best. The clerical order assumes the title “spiritual” simply because they have shaved heads and wear long cloaks. What folly - even insanity!

[59] You will say: If this be true, it was better for us to leave the cloisters and monasteries. I reply: There are but two things for you. Follow the teaching of this lesson, commending not yourselves. Regard your order and station no better than as if you were not an ecclesiastic, and your chastity not superior to that of an honest, loyal wife and mother; if you are not willing so to humble your ecclesiasticism, then discard caps, bald pates, cloisters and all. Either adopt this course or know that your ecclesiasticism, your spirituality, has its origin, not with a good spirit, but with an evil spirit. You will never overthrow Paul’s doctrine here. It is better to be a mother among the common believers in Christ than to remain a virgin in the devil’s cause. Paul stands firm on the point that we must not judge ourselves.

[60] But you will loudly object: Jerome and many others have highly commended virginity; and Paul, too (1 Corinthians 7:38), teaches it is better to be a virgin than to marry. I answer: Let Jerome be here or there, Augustine here or Ambrose there, you have learned what God here says through Paul, that no one shall judge himself or anyone else to be best. God’s command should have more weight than the sayings of many Jeromes, were they as numerous as the sand grains upon the seashore or the leaves of the forest. True, Paul says it is better to be continent than to marry, but he does not say “in God’s sight.” If he did, it would be a contradiction of his words here. He who lives continently, it is true, is freer to publish the Gospel than the married man; and it was with the thought of Gospel furtherance that Paul applauded virginity, or continence. He says: “He that is unmarried is careful for the things of the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 7:32. Christ also applauds the eunuchs (Matthew 19:12), not for the sake of their condition but for the sake of their profit to the kingdom of heaven; that is, for the sake of their furtherance of the Gospel. Now, although none cares

less for the Gospel than do these ecclesiasts, they continue to exalt their position above that of others, and to extol continence for the mere sake of the merit in denial, not for the end it serves. To illustrate the advantage of continence: It is better to learn a trade than to be a servant; and why? Not because it is a condition more acceptable to God, but because it offers less hindrances to his service. It is in this light that Paul applauds virginity and continence; but only in those who have a desire for it through the grace of God.

[61] At present no one cares whether continence is a help or a hindrance; everyone plunges into it, thinking only of how exalted, worthy and great it makes them. All is done with such pains and danger, unwillingness and impurity, that an adequate cry and protest cannot be raised against the evil. Still they wish to be better than other people. Thus, they have brought such reproach upon the marriage state that it is considered an impure and disgraceful life. As a reward God permits their continence to pollute their garments and beds continually. Really there is no greater or more polluted incontinence than theirs, inordinate, imprisoned, restrained and intolerable as it is. "Bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts."

[62] Paul gives the reason we should refrain from commending ourselves or any other when he declares that the hidden things of darkness and the counsels of the hearts are not yet brought to light. Since God judges according to the secrets of the heart which we cannot know, we should withhold judgment of the various stations and works of men, and not make distinction. The virgin is not to exalt her state of virginity above the station of the wife. The Pope ought to humble his eminence below the position of the plowboy. No one should presume to regard his own station, or that of another, as better before God than the occupations of other men.

[63] Every person should be free to choose and live in the state that suits him, all being alike until the Lord comes. But, were this principle to be carried out where would the holy fathers and the spiritual lords obtain their daily bread, not being accustomed to labor? They secure their subsistence by making the impression that the common man is in error and by separating from him their states and position. They judge themselves to be the best people, confident of enjoying the common man's treasures, because his state is nothing. Hence arise so many institutions, and gifts flow to the

cloisters, chapels and churches for the especial benefit of these idle, beloved gluttons and gormandizers. All this would fall were Paul's teachings introduced.

[64] By the "hidden things of darkness" and the "counsels of the hearts" Paul refers to the two powers commonly but not very intelligibly termed "will" and "reason." Man possesses in his inmost being two capacities: he loves, delights, desires, wills; and he understands, perceives, judges, decides. I shall term these capacities "motive" and "thought."

[65] The motives and desires of man are deep and deceitful beyond recognition; no saint, even, can wholly comprehend them. Jeremiah says (Jeremiah 17:9-10): "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it? I, Jehovah, search the mind, I try the heart." And David (Psalm 32:2): "Blessed is the man in whose spirit there is no guile." Many pious individuals perform great works from a selfish motive or desire. They seek their own interests, yet never with assurance. They serve God not purely for love of him, but for the sake of personal honor or profit; of gaining heaven and escaping the tortures of hell. One cannot realize the falseness of his motives until God permits him to endure many severe temptations. So Paul calls such motives "hidden things of darkness," a most appropriate name. Not only are they concealed, but in darkness, in the inmost heart, where they are unperceived by the individual himself and known to God alone.

[66] Remembering this deplorable secret motive of the heart, we should be induced to submit ourselves one to another and not to contrast any particular work or station with others. The motive determines the force and judgment of every work, every station, of all conduct, of every life. As Solomon says (Proverbs 16:2): "Jehovah weigheth the spirits" - God is the weighmaster of the spirits. Since there may be something of good concealed in the secret heart of the wife and likewise something of evil in the virgin's heart, it is absurd and unchristian to exalt a virgin above a wife because of her continence, a purely external virtue. It is just as unreasonable to measure the two by their external life as to compare the weight of eggs by putting the shells into the balance and leaving out the contents.

[67] Now, according to our secret motives so are our thoughts - good or evil. Our motives and desires control our aims, decisions and reasonings.

These latter Paul terms “counsels of the heart” - the thoughts we arrive at in consequence of our secret motives and desires.

[68] Of these two, Mary hints in her song of praise (Luke 1:51): “He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart.” She calls intent or motive of the heart - the “hidden things of darkness” her desire, while the “counsels” and imaginations are the heart’s expression. Moses, referring to man’s heart, says (Genesis 6:5): “Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” And Christ (Matthew 6:22-23) earnestly warns us against the same false motive: “The lamp of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness!” The reference in this whole quotation is to the secret workings of darkness, which are not to be overcome in any way but by despair of our own works, and strong faith in the pure grace of God. Nothing is more conducive to this end than sufferings severe and many, and all manner of misfortunes. Under such influences man may learn, to some extent, to know himself; otherwise all is lost.

Fourth Sunday in Advent. A Christian's Conduct Toward God and Man. The Peace of God. Fruit of the Spirit.

Text: Philippians 4:4-7.

4 Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:4-7

[1] The text, though short, is a suggestive and important lesson in Christian faith. It teaches how we should conduct ourselves toward God and our neighbor. It says: "Rejoice in the Lord always."

[2] Joy is the natural fruit of faith. The apostle says elsewhere (Galatians 5:22-23): "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." Until the heart believes in God, it is impossible for it to rejoice in him. When faith is lacking, man is filled with fear and gloom and is disposed to flee at the very mention, the mere thought, of God. Indeed, the unbelieving heart is filled with enmity and hatred against God. Conscious of its own guilt, it has no confidence in his gracious mercy; it knows God is an enemy to sin and will terribly punish the same.

[3] Since there exist in the heart these two things - a consciousness of sin and a perception of God's chastisement - the heart must ever be depressed, faint, even terrified. It must be continually apprehensive that God stands behind ready to chastise. Solomon says (Proverbs 28:1), "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." And Deuteronomy 28:65-66 reads, "Jehovah will give thee there a trembling heart... and thy life shall hang in doubt." One may as well try to persuade water to burn as to talk to such a heart of joy in God. All words will be without effect, for the sinner feels upon his conscience the pressure of God's hand. The prophet's injunction (Psalm 32:11) likewise is; "Be glad in Jehovah, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." It must be the just and the righteous who are to rejoice in the Lord. This text, therefore, is written, not for the sinner, but for the saint. First we must tell sinners how they can be liberated from their sins and perceive a merciful God. When they have been released from the power of an evil conscience, joy will result naturally.

[4] But how shall we be liberated from an accusing conscience and receive the assurance of God's mercy? The question has been sufficiently answered in the preceding postils, and will be again frequently satisfied later on. He who would have a quiet conscience, and would be sensitive of God's mercy, must not, like the apostates, depend on works, still further doing violence to the heart and increasing its hatred of God. He must place no hope whatever in works; must apprehend God in Christ, comprehend the Gospel and believe its promises.

[5] But what does the Gospel promise other than that Christ is given for us; that he bears our sins; that he is our Bishop, Mediator, and Advocate before God, and that Thus, only through him and his work is God reconciled, are our sins forgiven and our consciences set free and made glad? When this sort of faith in the Gospel really exists in the heart, God is recognized as favorable and pleasing. The heart confidently feels his favor and grace, and only these. It fears not God's chastisement. It is secure and in good spirit because God has conferred upon it, through Christ, superabundant goodness and grace. Essentially, the fruits of such a faith are love, peace, joy, and songs of thanksgiving and praise. It will enjoy unalloyed and sincere pleasure in God as its supremely beloved and gracious Father, a Father whose attitude toward itself has been wholly

paternal, and who, without any merit on its part, has richly poured out upon that heart his goodness.

[6] Such is the rejoicing, mark you, of which Paul here speaks a rejoicing where is no sin, no fear of death or hell, but rather a glad and all-powerful confidence in God and his kindness. Hence the expression, "Rejoice in the Lord"; not rejoice in silver or gold, not in eating or drinking, not in pleasure or mechanical chanting, not in strength or health, not in skill or wisdom, not in power or honor, not in friendship or favor, nay, not in good works or holiness even. For these are deceptive joys, false joys, which never stir the depths of the heart. They are never even felt. When they are present we may well say the individual rejoices superficially, and without a heart experience. To rejoice in the Lord - to trust, confide, glory and have pride in the Lord as in a gracious Father - this is a joy which rejects all else but the Lord, including that self-righteousness whereof Jeremiah speaks (Jeremiah 9:23-24): "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he hath understanding, and knoweth me." Again, Paul enjoins (2 Corinthians 10:17), "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

[7] The apostle further commands in our text to rejoice "always." Thus, he rebukes those who rejoice in God - who praise and thank him - only a portion of the time. These rejoice when it is well with them; when not, rejoicing ceases. Concerning them Psalm 48 teaches, they will praise God when he favors them. David does not so. He declares (Psalm 34:1): "I will bless Jehovah at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth." And David has good reason to do so, for who will harm or distress one favored of God? Sin harms him not; nor death nor hell. David sings (Psalm 23:4): "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." And Paul queries (Romans 8:35): "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" And then he goes on (Romans 8:38-39): "For, I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." "Again I will say, Rejoice."

[8] The apostle emphasizes his admonition by repeating it. It is essential that we rejoice. Paul, recognizing that we live in the midst of sin and evil, both which things depress, would fortify us with cheer. Thus, rejoicing, even if we should sometimes fall into sin, our joy in God will exceed our sorrow in sin. The natural accompaniment of sin truly is fear and a burdened conscience, and we cannot always escape sin. Therefore we should let joy have rule, let Christ be greater than our sins. John says (1 John 2:1-2): "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins." Again (1 John 3:20): "Because if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Our Conduct to Man – Forbearance "Let your forbearance [moderation] be known unto all men."

[9] Having instructed the Corinthians concerning their conduct toward God - their duty to serve him with joyful hearts - Paul proceeds briefly to teach them how to conduct themselves before men, saying, "Let your moderation be known unto all men." In other words: Rejoice always before God, but before men be forbearing. Direct your life so as to do and suffer everything not contrary to the commandments of God, that you may make yourselves universally agreeable. Not only refrain from offending any but put the best possible construction upon the conduct of others. Aim to be clearly recognized as men indifferent to circumstances, as content whether you be hit or missed, and holding to no privilege at all liable to bring you into conflict or produce discord. With the rich be rich; with the poor, poor. Rejoice with the joyful, weep with the mourning. Finally, be all things to all men, compelling them to confess you always agreeable, uniformly pleasant to mankind and on a level with everyone.

[10] Such is the meaning of the little word here employed by the apostle - *epiikia*, equity, clemency, accommodation - and which we cannot better render than by "moderation" or "forbearance." It is the virtue of adapting or accommodating oneself to another; of endorsing that other; of making all equal; of presenting a like attitude toward all men; not setting oneself up as a model and pattern; not desiring mankind to do homage to one, to conform to one's position. Justice may be classified as severe and mild. Too severe justice is often mitigated, and that is the equity, the moderation and clemency of the law. The Latin translator has rendered our word *modestiam* "moderation." This word would properly convey the thought were it not

generally understood in its relation to eating, drinking and dressing. Here the intent is to indicate that moderation of life which adjusts and adapts self to the abilities and circumstances of others, yielding, commending, following, mitigating, doing, allowing, forbearing, according as one recognizes what the capacity and condition of a neighbor demands, even to the disparagement of one's own honor and life, and the detriment of his possessions.

[11] For the sake of a better understanding, let us illustrate: Paul says (Corinthians 9:19-22): "For though I was free from all men, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law... I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some." That is, Paul ate and drank with the Jews according to the law, and generally conducted himself in harmony with its requirements; though he was not obliged so to do. He also ate and drank with the gentiles regardless of the law, and conducted himself without respect to its requirements and as the custom of the gentiles. For only faith and love are requisite. All else man is free to omit or to observe. Therefore, for the sake of one, all laws may be observed; for another, omitted. Observance must be adapted to the individual case. Now, suppose some blind, capricious individual intrudes, demanding as necessary the omission of this thing and the observance of that, as did certain Jews, and insisting that all men follow him and he none - this would be to destroy equality; indeed, even to exterminate Christian liberty and faith. Like Paul, in the effort to maintain liberty and truth, everyone should refuse to yield to any such demand.

[12] To illustrate further: Christ suffered his disciples to break the Sabbath - and himself frequently broke it - where necessary (Matthew 12 and Mark 2); but where necessity did not require otherwise, he observed the day. He assigned as reason for his conduct, "The Son of man is lord even of the sabbath." Mark 2:28. That is, the law of the Sabbath permits freedom; for the sake of extending love and service to one, it may be broken; and to another, it may be observed.

[13] Because of the Jews, Luke says, Paul circumcised Timothy. But he would not permit Titus to be circumcised for the very reason that false brethren insisted upon it and were unwilling to concede it a matter of choice. Paul claimed authority both to observe circumcision and not to observe it, according as would best contribute to the benefit of others. He deemed neither one course nor the other necessary. He did not believe in circumcision for the sake of the work itself, as a thing which must be performed.

[14] But to make the application to ourselves: When the Pope commands us to confess, to receive the sacrament, to fast, to eat fish, or to perform any bidding of his, and insists that we must do these things because the Church requires it of us, we should calmly trample upon his injunctions, doing what is directly opposed, simply to defy him and maintain liberty. But when he does not insist upon these things, we should honor his desire by observing with observers and omitting with those who omit, presenting Christ's testimony, "The Son of man is lord even of the sabbath," and declaring him much more Lord of human laws. To exercise our liberty in the observance of these commands, works no harm to faith nor to the Gospel; but to observe them by a forced act of obedience, destroys faith and the Gospel.

[15] The same rule applies to all external institutions and ordinances, as monastic vows and rules. They are in themselves but a matter of choice and are not opposed to faith or love. We should maintain the privilege of observing them in love and liberty, for the sake of our associates to preserve harmony with them. But when it is insisted that certain ordinances must be honored, that their observance is an act of obedience essential to salvation, we should forsake cloisters, tonsures, caps, vows and rules, and even take the opposite course, by way of testifying that only faith and love are the Christian essentials and it is our privilege to observe or omit all other things, being controlled by love and our associations. To conform to laws in a spirit of love and liberty works no harm, but to conform through necessity and forced obedience is to be condemned. Let this rule apply to ceremonials, hymns, prayers and all other Cathedral ordinances, so long as they are observed as a matter of love and liberty alone. Only for the service and for the enjoyment of the assembled company are they to be observed, and that when they are works not in themselves evil. When urged as

inherently essential, we are to refrain; we must oppose them in order to maintain the liberty of faith.

[16] Herein you see the diabolical character of the papal institutions, cloisters, in fact all popedom. For they simply make a matter of liberty and love one of necessity and forced obedience, whereby the Gospel, faith included, is exterminated, not to mention the consequent wretchedness of the common people who submit to obey for the sake of their appetites. For how many now attend the choral ceremonies and pray specified hours for God's sake? A general destruction of cloisters and other institutions would be the best reformation in this respect. They are of no benefit to Christianity and might easily be dispensed with. Before liberty could be established in one such institution, a hundred thousand souls might be lost in the others. When a thing is not beneficial and serves no purpose, but does unspeakable injury, and is beyond remedy, it is much better to utterly exterminate it.

[17] But again, when civil government enjoins laws and demands tribute, we should freely serve, even though we are constrained. In this case our liberty and faith are not endangered. For civil government does not claim that observance of its laws is essential to salvation, but essential to civil dominion and protection. In submitting to it, then, conscience maintains its liberty, and faith is not impaired. To whatever does not do violence to our faith, and benefits others, we should fully conform. But when it is insisted that observation of any material laws is essential to salvation, our course of action should be the same as that already suggested relative to the laws of the Pope and the cloisters.

[18] Now, the illustrations given serve as examples to follow in every instance. As Paul here teaches, let one put himself on an equality with all men, being not content to consider simply his own claims and rights, but the wishes and well-being of others. Paul has here in a single word set aside all rights. If your neighbor's condition really demands that you yield a certain personal right or privilege, and you insist upon that privilege, you act at variance with the principle of love and equality and are indeed blameworthy. For in yielding you sustain no injury to your faith, and your neighbor is profited. You would desire him to do Thus, unto you a principle of natural law. Indeed, we further add, in the event of one working you harm or injury, you are to put the best construction upon his act, excusing it in the spirit of that holy martyr who, when all his possessions were taken

from him, said, “Truly, they can never take Christ from me.” Say you likewise: “His act injures not my faith; why not excuse him? why not submit, and accommodate myself to him?”

[19] I cannot better illustrate than by citing the conduct of two good friends, whose manner toward each other may serve as an example for us in our conduct toward all men. How did they act? Each did what pleased his fellow. Each yielded, submitted, suffered, wrought and accepted, just in accordance with his conception of what might profit or please the other, and all voluntarily, without constraint. Each adapted and accommodated himself to his friend, never from any selfish motive offering restraint. If one infringed upon the other’s property rights, he was kindly excused. In short, in their case was neither law, demand, restraint, nor fear; naught but perfect freedom and good will. Yet all things moved in a harmony the hundredth part of which could not be secured by any laws or restraints.

[20] The headstrong and the unyielding, they who excuse none but are determined to control all things by their own wisdom, lead the whole world into error. They are the cause of all the wars and calamities known on earth. Yet they claim justice as their sole motive. Well has it been said by a certain heathen: *Summum jus, summa injuria* the most extreme justice is the greatest injustice. Ecclesiastes 7:16 also warns: “Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise.” As the most extreme justice is the greatest injustice, so the most extreme wisdom is the greatest folly. The old adage is, “When the wise act the fool, they are grossly foolish.” Were God always to execute extreme justice, we could not live a moment. Paul commends gentleness in Christ (2 Corinthians 10:1), saying, “I... entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.” So we are to moderate our attitude, our demands, our wisdom and wit, adapting ourselves to the circumstances of others in all respects.

[21] Observe the beautiful aptness of the words, “Let your forbearance be known unto all men.” You may ask: “How can one become known to all men? And must we boast of our forbearance, proclaiming it to everyone?” God forbid the latter. Paul does not say, boast of and proclaim your forbearance. He says, let it be experimentally known by all men. That is, exercise forbearance in your deeds before men; not think or speak of it, but show it in your conduct. Thus, men generally must see and grasp it must have experience of it. Then no one can do otherwise than admit you are

forbearing. Actual experience will defeat every desire to speak of you in any other way. The mouth of the fault-finder will be stopped by the fact that all men know your forbearance. Christ says (Matthew 5:16): “Even so let your light so shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” And Peter (1 Peter 2:12): “Having your behavior seemly among the Gentiles; that, wherein they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.” It lies not in our power to make our moderation acceptable to all men, but it is enough for us to give everyone opportunity to perceive it in our lives.

[22] By the phrase “all men” we are not to understand all individuals on earth, but every sort of person friends and foes, great and humble, lords and servants, rich and poor, native and alien, relatives and strangers. Some there are whose manner toward strangers is most cordial and acquiescent, but toward their own household, their domestics, with whom they are familiar, they manifest only rigor and austerity. How many there are who excuse the harshness of the great and the rich, who wrest to the most favorable construction what they do and say, but with servants, with the poor and the inferior, are severe and unfeeling, placing the most unfavorable construction upon their every word and act. Again, men are affectionate toward children, parents, friends and relatives, always judging them with the utmost lenience. Indeed, how often friend flatters friend, until the practice becomes a public vice as one imitates and regards admirable all acts of the other. But with foes and adversaries men adopt the opposite course. In them they can find no good, no reason for toleration or favorable construction; rather, they censure according to appearances.

[23] In denunciation of such unequal and partial forbearance, Paul here speaks. He would have a Christian’s forbearance perfect and complete, manifested toward one as toward another, whether friend or foe. He would that the Christian bear with and excuse everyone, regardless of person or merit. Forbearance is essentially good, inherently kind; just as gold remains gold whether possessed by a godly or an ungodly individual. The silver did not become ashes when Judas the traitor received it. Similarly, all gifts of God are real and remain the same in everyone’s possession. That forbearance which is a fruit of the Spirit retains its characteristic kindness whether directed toward friend or enemy, toward rich or poor.

[24] But frail, deceptive human nature assumes that gold, though remaining gold in St. Peter's hand, becomes ashes in the hand of Judas. The forbearance of human nature, of natural reason, is kind, not to all men, but to the rich and the great, to strangers and friends. Hence it is false, empty, deceptive; mere dissimulation and treachery before God. Note how impossible it is for human nature to exercise complete spiritual forbearance, and how few individuals are conscious of the imperfections of that supposedly beautiful, transcendent forbearance they manifest toward some persons while they show the reverse to other individuals, presuming they Thus, act rightly. But such is the teaching of our mean, filthy human nature with that same beautiful reason, which ever decides and proceeds contrary to the Spirit and the things of the Spirit. As Paul says in Romans 8:5, "They that are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh."

[25] In these few words Paul comprehends the Christian's entire conduct toward his neighbor. The forbearing individual treats everyone rightly, in word and act; treats him as he ought, physically and spiritually, bearing with his evils and imperfections. Such conduct may be defined as simply love, peace, patience, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, in fact, everything included in the fruits of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22. Objections Answered

[26] But you will say: "Yes, but in that case who would be left in the enjoyment of a morsel of bread because of the wicked people ready to abuse equality and take our all, not permitting us to live on the earth even?" Note Paul's beautiful answer to your question, in the conclusion of this epistle lesson. He says, first, "The Lord is at hand."

[27] Were there no God, you might well Thus, fear the wicked. But not only is there a God; he "is at hand." He will neither forget nor forsake you. Only be forbearing to all men, and let him care for you; leave it to him how he is to support and protect you. Has he given you Christ the eternal treasure? how then shall he not give you the necessities of this life? With him is much more than anyone can take from you. Then, too, you possess in Christ more than is represented in all this world's goods. On this subject the psalmist says (Psalm 55:22): "Cast thy burden upon Jehovah, and he will sustain thee"; and Peter (1 Peter 5:7), "Casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you." And Christ in the sixth chapter of Matthew points us to the lilies of the field and the fowls of the air. The thought of

these passages is the same as that of “The Lord is at hand.” Now follows, “In nothing be anxious.”

[28] Take no thought for yourselves. Let God care for you. He whom you now acknowledge is able to provide for you. It is the heathen, unknowing he has a God, who takes thought for himself. Christ says (Matthew 6:31-32): “Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” Then, let the whole world grasp, and deal unrighteously, you shall have enough. You shall not die of hunger or cold unless someone shall have deprived you of the God who cares for you. But who shall take him from you? How can you lose him except you yourself let him go? We have no reason to take thought for ourselves when we have a Father and Protector who holds in his hand all things, even them who, with all their possessions, would rob or injure us. Our duty is to rejoice ever in God and be forbearing toward all men, as becomes those assured of ample provision for body and soul; especially in that we have a gracious God. They without him may well be concerned about themselves. It should be our anxiety not to be anxious, to rejoice in God alone and to be kind to men. On this topic the psalmist says (Psalm 37:25): “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.” And again (Psalm 40:17), “The Lord thinketh upon me.” Prayer “But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

[29] Here Paul teaches us to cast our care upon God. The meaning is: Take no thought for yourselves. Should anything transpire to give you care or anxiety - and such will be the case, for many trials will befall you on earth - make no effort to escape it, be it what it may. Have no care or anxiety. Turn to God with prayer, with supplication, entreating him to accomplish for you all you would seek to effect by care. And do so in thankfulness that you have a God solicitous for you and to whom you may freely come with all your anxieties. Who does not so when misfortune befalls but endeavors to measure it by his reason and to overrule it by his counsel, and falls into anxiety - this man plunges himself into deep wretchedness, loses his joy and peace in God, and all to accomplish nothing. He but digs in the sand, sinking himself ever deeper, and effects no

good. Of this fact we daily have testimony in our own experience and in that of others.

[30] It may be necessary to add this, however: Let no one conclude he will be utterly careless and rest upon God, making no effort, no exertion, not even resorting to prayer. Whoso adopts this course must soon fail and fall into anxiety. We must ever strive. Many care-engendering things befall us for the very purpose of driving us to prayer. Not undesignedly does the apostle contrast the two injunctions, "In nothing be anxious," and, In all things flee to God. "Nothing" and "all" are contrasting terms. Paul Thus, makes plain that many things transpire which tend to create in us anxiety, but we must not let them make us over-anxious; we must commit ourselves to God and implore his aid for our needs.

[31] Now, let us examine Paul's words and learn how to frame our prayers and what attitude to assume. He makes a fourfold division of prayer: prayer, supplication, thanksgiving and petition. By "prayer" we understand simply formal words or expressions - as, for instance, the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms - which sometimes express more than our request. In "supplication" we strengthen prayer and make it effective by a certain form of persuasion; for instance, we may entreat one to grant a request for the sake of a father, or of something dearly loved or highly prized. We entreat God by his Son, his saints, his promises, his name. Thus, Solomon says (Psalm 132:1), "Jehovah, remember for David all his affliction." And Paul urges (Romans 12:1), "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God"; and again (2 Corinthians 10:1), "I... entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." "Petitioning" is stating what we have at heart, naming the desire we express in prayer and supplication. In the Lord's Prayer are seven petitions, beside prayer proper. Christ says (Matthew 7:7-8): "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." In "thanksgiving" we recount blessings received and Thus, strengthen our confidence and enable ourselves to wait trustingly for what we pray.

[32] Prayer is made vigorous by petitioning; urgent by supplication; by thanksgiving, pleasing and acceptable. Strength and acceptability combine to prevail and secure the petition. This, we see, is the manner of prayer practiced by the Church; and the holy fathers in the Old Testament always

offered supplication and thanks in their prayers. The Lord's Prayer opens with praise and thanksgiving and the acknowledgment of God as a Father; it earnestly presses toward him through filial love and a recognition of fatherly tenderness. For supplication, this prayer is unequalled. Hence it is the sublimest and the noblest prayer ever uttered.

[33] These words of Paul beautifully spiritualize and explain the mystery of the golden censer whereof Moses has written much in the Old Testament, detailing how the priests should burn incense in the temple. We are all priests, and our prayers are the censer. The first is the golden vessel, which signifies the precious words of prayer; such as the language of the Lord's Prayer, the psalms, and like written prayers. Always in the Scriptures the words are represented by the vessel; for words are a medium for containing and conveying thought, just as the vessel serves to contain wine, water, coals or anything else. Similarly, the golden cup of Babylon mentioned in Revelation 17:4 typifies human doctrine; and the sacramental cup, containing Christ's blood, is the Gospel.

[34] The live coals in the censer stand for thanksgiving, for enumerated benefits in prayer. That coals signify benefits Paul implies where, quoting Solomon's injunction in Proverbs 25:21-22, which the apostle cites (Romans 12:20): "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head." Burning coals of fire, the benefits are, and powerful to take captive and enkindle the heart. The Law forbid to take coals from any place but the altar; accordingly, we must not in prayer urge our own works and merits, as did the Pharisee in the Gospel (Luke 18:11-12) but acknowledge the benefits in Christ. He is the altar upon whom we are offered. By this benefit we render thanks and pray. Paul says (Colossians 3:17), "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." God cannot permit us to regard anything but our altar Christ. Thus, he teaches, where it is recorded (Leviticus 10) that Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, were devoured by fire before the altar because they took coals for the censer from elsewhere than that place of sacred offering.

[35] The petition whereby prayer is made complete is typified by the smoke ascending at the laying of the thyme - the incense - upon the coals. Paul's exhortation, "Let your requests be made known unto God," recognizes and explains the symbol of the smoke rising from the censer. His

meaning is: “If you would offer a sweet savor of incense to God, express your petition in supplication and thanksgiving. This is the precious, sweet incense recognized by God, ascending as straight before him as a taper and a rod.” Such prayer penetrates heaven. Grateful recognition of God’s benefits induces us to pray voluntarily and fervently, naturally and with delight; just as the coals of fire make strong the volume of smoke. If there be not first the coals to generate heat, if there be not gratitude for benefits to enkindle fervor, prayer will be sluggish; it will be cold and dull.

[36] But what is meant by “making known” our prayers to God when he knows them even before we begin, in fact, comes to us first and induces us to pray? I answer, Paul uses this expression by way of teaching us how to really and truly pray - not to pray vainly or at a venture as do they who are indifferent whether God hears them or not, who are ever uncertain of being heard, yes, are inclined to think they will not be heard. That is not praying; it is not petitioning. It is tempting and mocking God. Should one entreat me for a penny and I knew he did not believe, did not have a thought, that I would give it him, I would not be disposed to hear him. I would conclude he was either mocking me or was not in earnest. How much less will God hear mere noise! True prayer is the “making known” of our desires to God. In other words, we must not doubt that God hears us; that our prayer reaches him; that our requests assuredly shall be granted. If we do not believe we are heard, that our prayer reaches God, undoubtedly it will not reach him. As we believe, so will it be. The ascending smoke is but our faith when we believe our appeal reaches God and is heard. Paul’s words hint at the frequent claims of the psalms: “My cry before him came into his ears.” (Psalm 18:6). “Let my prayer be set forth... before thee.” (Psalm 141:2. Relative to this topic, Christ says, “All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” (Matthew 21:22). See also Mark 11:24). And James counsels (James 1:6-7): “But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting; for he that doubteth... let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.”

[37] Easily, then, we recognize the bawling in the cloisters and cathedrals all over the world as mere mockery, a tempting of God. Prayer of that sort is well enough made known to men, considering the constant loud outcry and bellowing of them who offer it. But to God it is unknown. It fails to reach him because the offerers do not believe, or at least are uncertain,

that it will. As they believe, so is it. Time indeed it is for such mockery and tempting of God to be rejected and the mock-houses, as Amos calls them in the seventh chapter, to be exterminated. Oh, if we would but pray aright, what could we not accomplish! As it is, we pray much and obtain nothing; for our prayers never reach God. Woe to unbelief and distrust! The Peace of God “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.”

[38] Note the beautiful logic and order of Paul’s teaching. The Christian is first to rejoice in God through faith and then show forbearance or kindness, to men. Should he ask, “How can I?” Paul answers, “The Lord is at hand.” “But how if I be persecuted and robbed?” Paul’s reply is, “In nothing be anxious. Pray to God. Let him care.” “But meanwhile I shall become weary and desolate.” “Not so; the peace of God shall keep you.” Let us now consider the last thought.

[39] By the phrase, “the peace of God,” we must understand, not that calm and satisfied peace wherein God himself dwells, but the peace and contentment he produces in our hearts. It is called the “peace of God” in the same sense that the message of God which we hear and believe and speak is styled “the Word of God.” This peace is the gift of God, and is called the “peace of God” because, having it, we are at peace with him even if we are displeased with men.

[40] This peace of God is beyond the power of mind and reason to comprehend. Understand, however, it is not beyond man’s power to experience - to be sensible of. Peace with God must be felt in the heart and conscience. How else could our “hearts and minds” be preserved “through Christ Jesus”? To illustrate the difference between the peace of God and the peace comprehensible by reason: They who know nothing of fleeing to God in prayer, when overtaken by tribulation and adversity and when filled with care and anxiety proceed to seek that peace alone which reason apprehends and which reason can secure. But reason apprehends no peace apart from a removal of the evil. Such a peace does not transcend the comprehension of reason; it is compatible with reason. They who pray not, rage and strive under the guidance of reason until they obtain a certain peace by fraudulent or forcible removal of the evil. Just as the wounded seeks to be healed. But they who rejoice in God, finding their peace in him, are contented. They calmly endure tribulation, not desiring what reason dictates as peace -

removal of the evil. Standing firm, they await the inner strength wrought by faith. It is not theirs to inquire whether the evil will be short or long in duration, whether temporal or eternal; they give themselves no concern on this point, but ever leave it to God's regulation. They are not anxious to know when, how, where or by whom termination of the evil is to come. In return, God affords them grace and removes their evils, bestowing blessings beyond their expectations, or even desires.

[41] This, mark you, is the peace of the cross, the peace of God, peace of conscience, Christian peace, which gives us even external calm, which makes us satisfied with all men and unwilling to disturb any. Reason cannot understand how there can be pleasure in crosses, and peace in disquietude; it cannot find these. Such peace is the work of God, and none can understand it until it has been experienced. Relative to this topic, it is said in the epistle for the second Sunday in Advent: "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." What the apostle there terms "peace in believing" he here calls "peace of God."

[42] In this verse Paul implies that for him who rejoices in God and exercises forbearance in his life, the devil will raise up a cross calculated forcibly to turn his heart from that way. The Christian should therefore be well fortified, placing his peace beyond the devil's reach - in God. Let him not be anxious to rid himself of what the devil has forced upon him. Let him suffer Satan's wantonness until God's coming shall exterminate it. Thus, will the Christian's heart, mind and affection be guarded and preserved in peace. His patience could not long endure did not his heart exist above its conditions, in a higher peace - were it not satisfied it has peace with God.

[43] "Heart" and "mind" here must not be supposed to mean human will and understanding. We are to take Paul's explanation - heart and mind in Christ Jesus; in other words, the will and understanding resultant in Christ, from Christ and under Christ. Faith and love are meant - faith and love in all their operations, in all their inclinations toward God and men. The reference is simply to a disposition to trust and love God sincerely, and a willingness of heart and mind to serve God and man to the utmost. The devil seeks to prevent this state by terror, by revealing death and by every sort of misfortune; and by setting up human devices to induce the heart to

seek comfort and help in its own counsels and in man. Thus, led astray, the heart falls from trust in God to a dependence upon itself.

[44] Briefly, this text is a lesson in Christian living, in the attitude of the Christian toward God and man. It teaches us to let God be everything to us, and to treat all men alike, to conduct ourselves toward men as does God toward us, receiving from him and giving to them. It may be summed up in the words “faith” and “love.”

First Christmas Sermon. Christmas Eve Service. The Appearing of the Grace of God. Worldly Lusts. The Christian Life Christ's Ascension.

Text: Titus 2:11-15.

11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,
12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;
13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;
14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.
15 These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee. Titus 2:11-15

[1] It is written in the book of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 4) that the Jews, in rebuilding Jerusalem, wrought with one hand and with the other held the sword, because of the enemy who sought to hinder the building. Paul in Titus 1:9 carries out the thought of the symbol in this teaching that a bishop, a pastor, or a preacher, should be mighty in the Holy Scriptures to instruct and admonish as well as to resist the gainsayers. Accordingly, we are to make a twofold use of the Word of God: as both bread and weapon; for feeding and for resisting; in peace and in war. With one hand we must build,

improve, teach and feed all Christendom; with the other, oppose the devil, the heretics, the world. For where the pasture is not defended, the devil will soon destroy it; he is bitterly opposed to God's Word. Let us then, God granting us his grace, so handle the Gospel that not only shall the souls of men be fed, but men shall learn to put on that Gospel as armor and fight their enemies. Thus, shall it furnish both pasture and weapons.

[2] The first consideration in this lesson is, Paul teaches what should be the one theme of Titus and of every other preacher, namely, Christ. The people are to be taught who Christ is, why he came and what blessings his coming brought us. "The grace of God hath appeared," the apostle says, meaning God's grace is clearly manifest. How was it manifested? By the preaching of the apostles it was proclaimed world-wide. Previous to Christ's resurrection, the grace of God was unrevealed. Christ dwelt only among the Jews and was not yet glorified. But after his ascension he gave to men the Holy Spirit. Concerning the Spirit, he before testified (John 16:14) that the Spirit of truth, whom he should send, would glorify him. The apostle's meaning is: Christ did not come to dwell on earth for his own advantage, but for our good. Therefore he did not retain his goodness and grace within himself. After his ascension he caused them to be proclaimed in public preaching throughout the world — to all men. Nor did he permit the revelation to be made as a mere proclamation of a fact, as a rumor or a report; it was appointed to bring forth fruit in us. It is a revelation and proclamation that teaches us to deny — to reject — ungodly things, all earthly lusts, all worldly desires, and thenceforward lead a sober, righteous and godly life.

[3] In the first verse, the true essence of the text, "The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men," Paul condemns the favors of the world and of men as pernicious, worthy of condemnation, ineffectual; and would incite in us a desire for divine grace. He teaches us to despise human favor. He who would have God's grace and favor must consider the surrender of all other grace and favor. Christ says (Matthew 10:22), "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." The Psalmist says (Psalm 53:5), "God hath scattered the bones of him that campeth against thee." And Paul declares (Galatians 1:10), "If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ." Where the saving grace of God comes, the

pernicious favor of men must be ignored. He who would taste the former must reject and forget the latter.

[4] According to the text, this grace has appeared, or is proclaimed, to all men. Christ commanded (Mark 16:15) that the Gospel be preached to all creatures throughout the whole world. And Paul in many places — for instance, Colossians 1:23 — says, “The Gospel, which ye heard, was preached in all creation under heaven.” The thought is, The Gospel was preached publicly in the hearing of all creatures, much more of all men. At first Christ preached the Gospel and only in the land of the Jews, knowledge of the Holy Scriptures being confined to that nation, as Psalm 76:2 and Psalm 147:19 declare. But afterward the Word was made free to all men; not confined to any particular section. Psalm 19:4 declares, “Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” This is spoken of the apostles.

[5] But you may object, “Surely the words of the apostles did not, in their time, reach the end of the world; for nearly eight hundred years elapsed after the apostolic age before Germany was converted, and also recent discoveries show there are many islands and many countries where no indication of the grace of God appeared before the fifteenth century.” I reply: The apostle has reference to the character of the Gospel. It is a message calculated, from the nature of its inception and purpose, to go into all the world. At the time of the apostles it had already entered the greater and better part of the world. Up to that day, no message of like character was ever ordained. The Law of Moses was confined to the Jewish nation. Universal proclamation of the Gospel being for the most part accomplished at that time, and its completion being inevitable — as it is today — the Scripture phraseology makes it an accomplished fact. In the Scriptures we frequently meet with what is called “synecdoche;” that is, a figure of speech whereby a part is made to stand for the whole. For instance, it is said that Christ was three days and three nights in the grave, when the fact is he passed one entire day, two nights, and portions of two other days in that place. Matthew 12:40. Again, we read (Matthew 23:37) of Jerusalem stoning the prophets, yet a large proportion of the inhabitants were godly people. Thus, too, the ecclesiastics are said to be avaricious, but among them are many righteous men. This way of speaking is common to all languages; especially is it found in the Holy Scriptures.

[6] So the Gospel was in the apostolic day preached to all creatures; for it is a message introduced, designed and ordained to reach all creatures. To illustrate: A prince, having dispatched from his residence a message and seeing it started upon the way, might say the message had gone to the appointed place even though it had not yet reached its destination. Similarly, God has sent forth his Gospel to all creatures even though it has not so far reached all. Note, the prophet says the voice of the apostles has “gone out through all the earth.” He does not say their voice has reached the entire world, but is on the way — “is gone out.” And so Paul means the Gospel is continuously preached and made manifest to all men. It is now on the way; the act is performed though the effect is not complete. First Evil – Ungodliness

[7] The appearing of grace, Paul says, instructs us in two things: one is described as “denying ungodliness and wordly lusts.” We must explain these terms. The Latin word impietas, which the apostle renders in the Greek asebia and which in Hebrew is resa, I cannot find any one German word to express. I have made it ungcettlich wesen, “ungodliness.” The Latin and Greek terms do not fully convey the Hebrew meaning. Resa, properly, is the sin of failing to honor God; that is, of not believing, trusting, fearing him, not surrendering to him, not submitting to his providence, not allowing him to be God. In this sin, those guilty of gross outward evils are deeply implicated indeed; but much more deeply involved are the wise, sainted, learned ecclesiasts who, relying upon their works, think themselves godly and so appear in the eyes of the world. In fact, all men who do not live a life committed to the pure goodness and grace of God are “impious,” ungodly, even though they be holy enough to raise the dead, or perfect in continence and all other virtues. “Graceless” or “faithless” would seem to be the proper adjective to describe them. I shall, however, use the term “ungodly.” Paul tells us that saving grace has appeared to the graceless to make them rich in grace and rich in God; in other words, to bring them to believe, trust, fear, honor, love and praise him, and Thus, transform ungodliness into godliness.

[8] Of what use would be the appearing of saving grace were we to attempt to become godly in life through some other means? Paul here declares grace was revealed and proclaimed to the very end that we might deny ungodliness and thereafter live righteously; not through or of

ourselves, but through grace. No one more disparages divine grace, and more gainsays its appearing, than do hypocrites and ungodly saints; for, unwilling to regard their own works ineffectual, sinful and faulty, they discover in themselves much good. Measuring themselves by their good intentions, they imagine they deserve great merit independently of grace. God, however, regards no work good — nor is it — unless he by his grace effects it in us. It was for the sake of accomplishing in us all many such works, and of deterring us from our own attempts, that God manifested his saving grace to men.

[9] Now, the foremost evil of men is their godlessness, their unsaved state, their lack of grace. It includes first a faithless heart, and then all resultant thoughts, words, works and conduct in general. Left to himself, the individual's inner life and outward conduct are guided only by his natural abilities and human reason. In these his beauty and brilliance sometimes outshine the real saints. But he seeks merely his own interest. He is unable to honor God in life and conduct, even though he does command greater praise and glory in the exercise of reason than do the true saints of frequent Scripture mention. So worldwide and so deeply subtle an evil is this godless, graceless conduct, it withholds from the individual the power to perceive the evil of his way, to believe he errs, even when his error is held up to him. The prophet (Psalm 32:2) looks upon this blindness as not that of reason, or of the world, or of the flesh, but as a spiritual deception, leading astray not only the reason but the spirit of man.

[10] In fact, that ungodliness is sinful must be believed rather than felt. Since God permitted the manifestation of his grace to all men to lead them to deny ungodliness, we ought to believe him a Being who knows our hearts better than we do ourselves. We must also confess that were it not for the ungodliness and faulty character of our deeds, God would not have ordained the proclamation of his grace for our betterment. Were one to administer remedies to one not ill, he would be looked upon as lacking sense. Accordingly, God must be regarded in the same light by them who, measuring themselves by their good intentions and their feelings, are unwilling to believe all their deeds ungodly and worthy of condemnation, and that God's saving grace is necessary. To them this is a terrible doctrine. Christ (Matthew 21:32) charges the chief priests, doctors and ecclesiasts (elders) with disbelieving John the Baptist, who called them to repentance;

they refused to know their sin. All the prophets met death for accusing the people of the sin of ungodliness. No one believed the prophets. No one of the people thought himself guilty of such sin. They judged themselves by their feelings, their intentions and works; not by God's Word, not by his counsel delivered through the prophets.

[11] Paul employs a strong Greek term, *paedeusa*, meaning "to instruct" — such elementary instruction as we give children concerning a thing whereof they have no knowledge at all. The children are guided, not by their reason, but by the instructing word of their father. According to his representation, they regard a certain thing as useful or as harmful. They believe in and are guided by him. With intelligent and learned individuals, however, we explain in a way comprehensible to their reason why a certain thing is profitable and a certain other thing unprofitable. God designs that we, as childish pupils, be instructed by his saving grace. Then if we cannot feel we may yet believe that our natures are godless and faulty, and so receive grace and walk therein. Well does Christ testify (Matthew 18:3), "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven;" and Isaiah (Isaiah 7:9), "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." Divine, saving grace, then, has appeared, not only to help us, but also to teach us our need of grace. For the fact of its coming shows all our works godless, graceless, condemned. The psalmist (Psalm 119:5-8) fervently entreats God to teach him his judgments, laws and commandments, that he may not be guided by his own ideas and feelings, a thing God has forbidden (Deuteronomy 12:8), saying: "Ye shall not do...every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes." Second Evil — Worldly Lusts

[12] The other evil in man Paul terms "worldly lusts." Therein is comprehended all disorderly conduct the individual may be guilty of, touching himself and his neighbor; while the first evil — ungodliness — comprehends all wrongs toward God. Observe Paul's judicious choice of words — "lusts," "worldly lusts." By the use of "worldly" he would include all evil lusts, whether it be for goods, luxuries, honor, favors or ought of the world wherein one may lustfully sin. He does not say, however, we must deny ourselves worldly goods, or must not make use of them. They are good creatures of God. We must avail ourselves of food, drink, clothing and other necessaries of life. No such thing is forbidden; it is only the lust after

them, the undue love and craving for them, that we must deny, for it leads us into all sins against ourselves and our neighbors.

[13] In this expression is also condemned the conduct of godless hypocrites, who, though they may be clad in sheep's clothing and sometimes refrain from an evil deed through cowardice or shame or through fear of heirs punishment, are nevertheless filled with evil desires for wealth, honor and power. No one loves life more dearly, fears death more terribly and desires more ardently to remain in this world than do they; yet they fail to recognize the worldly lusts wherein they are drowned, and their many works are vainly performed. It is not enough to put away wordly works and speech; worldly desires, or lusts, must be removed. We are not to place our affections upon the things of this life, but all our use of it should be with a view to the future life; as follows in the text: "Looking for the...appearing of the glory," etc.

[14] Observe here, the grace of God reveals the fact that all men are filled with worldly lusts, though some may conceal their lustfulness by their hypocrisy. Were men not subject to such desires, there could be no necessity for the revelation of grace, no need for its benefits, no occasion for its manifestation to all men, no need it should teach the putting off of lusts. For whosoever is not subject to lusts is not called upon to forsake them. Paul's statement here has no reference to such a one. Indeed, he cannot be a human being; hence he has no need of grace, and so far as he is concerned its manifestation is not essential. What, then, must he be? Unquestionably, a devil, and eternally condemned with all his holiness and purity. Could the hypocrites, however, wholly hide their worldly lusts, they could not conceal their ardent desire to hold to this life, and their unwillingness to die. Thus, they reveal their lack of grace, and the worldliness and ungodliness of all their works. Nevertheless, they fail to perceive their graceless condition and their perilous infirmity.

[15] Further, Paul speaks of "denying," or renouncing. Therein he rejects many foolish expedients devised by men for attaining righteousness. Some run to the wilderness, some into cloisters. Others separate themselves from society, presuming by bodily flight to run away from ungodliness and worldly lusts. Yet others resort to tortures and injuries of the body, imposing upon themselves excessive hunger, thirst, wakefulness, labor, uncomfortable apparel. Now, if ungodliness and worldly lusts were but

something painted upon the wall, you might escape them by running out of the house; if they were knit into a red coat, you might pull off the coat and don a gray one; did they grow in your hair, you might have it shaved off and wear a bald pate; were they baked in the bread, you might eat roots instead. But since they inhere in your heart and permeate you through and through, where can you flee that you will not carry them with you? What can you wear under which you will escape them? What will you eat and drink where in they will not be with you? In a word, what can you do to escape yourself, since you cannot get out of yourself? Dear man, the great temptations are within you. To run away from them would necessitate, first, fleeing from your self. James says (James 1:14), “Each man is tempted, when he is driven away by his own lust, and enticed.”

[16] The apostle means, not simply that we must flee the outward temptations to sin, but, as he says, that we must “deny” them, must mortify the lusts, or desires, within ourselves. Our lusts being mortified, no external temptation can harm. By such subjection do we truly flee. If we fail to mortify our desires, it will not avail to flee outward temptations. We must remain amidst temptations and there learn through grace to deny lusts and ungodliness. It is written (Psalm 110:2), “Rule thou” — or apply thyself — “in the midst of thine enemies.” Conflict and not flight, energy and not rest, must be the order in this life if we are to win the crown.

[17] We read of an ancient father who, unable to endure temptation in a cloister, left it that he might in the wilderness serve God in peace. But in the desert one day his little water-jug overturned. He set it up, but it overturned a second time. Becoming enraged, he dashed the vessel into pieces. Then, saying within himself, “Since I cannot find peace when alone, the defect must be in myself,” he returned to the cloister to suffer temptations, from that time forward teaching that we must obtain the victory, not by fleeing worldly lusts, but by denying them. *The Christian Life*

[18] Paul goes on to show another thing wherein we are instructed of grace — the Christian’s manner of life after ungodliness and worldly lusts are denied: “We should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world.” What an excellent general rule of life he gives us! one adapted to all conditions. He offers no occasion for sects. He introduces no differing opinions of men, as the case is with human doctrines. First, he mentions “sobriety,” wherein is indicated what should be the nature of

man's conduct toward himself in all respects. It calls for the subjection of the body, the keeping of it well disciplined. In every place of our text where the term "soberness" is used, Paul has the Greek word "sophron," which signifies, not only soberness, but temperance in every recognition of the body, in every ministration to the flesh; in eating, drinking and sleeping, for instance; in apparel, speech, manner and movement. Such soberness represents what is known in German as honorable living and good breeding. The sober man knows how, in all physical relations, to conduct himself temperately, discreetly and bravely; not leading a wild, shameless, unrestrained, disorderly life, lax in regard to eating, drinking, sleeping, and to speech, manner and movement. In the earlier part of the chapter, Paul devises that aged women teach the young women to be "sober-minded" and chaste.

[19] Excessive eating and drinking truly does greatly impede our efforts to lead an honorable life. On the other hand, temperance contributes much to accomplish it. The moment one indulges his appetite to excess, he loses perfect control of himself; his five senses become unmanageable. Experience teaches that when the stomach is filled with meat and drink, the mouth is filled with words, the ears with the lust of hearing, the eyes with the lust of seeing. The whole system either becomes indolent, drowsy, dull, or else it grows wild and dissolute, all the members overleaping the bounds of reason and propriety, until no discipline nor moderation remains. The word in our text, therefore, is not inaptly Latinized *sobrius*, "soberness." In Greek, the word *sophron* is the opposite of *asotos*, just as in German *Voellerei* and *Maeszigkeit*, drunkenness and soberness are contrasting terms. Examining the Latin *sobrius*, we find it does not signify total abstinence from food and drink. *Sobrius* and *ebrius* are also contrasting terms, like the German *Trunkenheit* oder *Voellerei* and *Nuechterheit*, drunkenness or ebriety and soberness. We Germans also call that individual *nuechtern*, sober, who, though he may have eaten and drunk, is not intoxicated, but has perfect control of himself.

[20] You see now the manner of good works advocated by the apostle. He does not require us to make pilgrimages; he does not forbid certain foods; nor does he prescribe a particular garb, nor certain fast days. His teaching is not that of the class who, in obedience to human laws, separate themselves from men, basing their spirituality and goodness upon the

peculiarity of their garb and diet, their manner of wearing the hair, their observance of times; who seek to become righteous by not conforming to custom in the matter of clothing, diet, occupation, seasons and movements. They are given an appropriate name in the Gospel — Pharisei, meaning excluded or separated. In Psalm 80:13, the prophet calls them monios, signifying a solitary one. The name primarily is applied to a wild hog of solitary habits. We shall hereafter designate this class as solitary. As the psalmist complains, they make terrible havoc of God's vineyard. These Pharisees, or solitary ones, make great show with their traditions, their peculiar garb, their meats, days and physical attitudes. They easily draw away the multitude from the common customs of life to their ways. As Christ tells us (Mark 24:24), even the elect can scarce resist them.

[21] Let us learn here from Paul that no meats, drinks, apparel, colors, times, attitudes, are forbidden and none are prescribed. In all these things, everyone is given freedom, if only they be used in soberness, or moderation. As said before, these temporalities are not forbidden. Only the abuse of them, only excess and disorder therein, is prohibited. Where there is distinction and emphasis on such matters, there you will surely find human laws; not evangelical doctrine, not Christian liberty. Without soberness, or moderation, the ultimate result must be dissimulation, and hypocrisy. Therefore, make use of all earthly things when and where you please, giving thanks to God. This is Paul's teaching. Only guard against excess, disorder, misuse and licentiousness relative to temporal things and you will be in the right way. Do not permit yourself to be misled by the fact that the holy fathers established orders and sects, made use of certain meats and certain apparel, and conducted themselves Thus, and so. Their object was not peculiar eminence — therein they would have been unholy — but their conduct was of preference, and as a means for exercising moderation. Likewise do you exercise moderation as you see fit, and maintain your freedom. Confine not yourself to manners and methods, as if godly living consisted in them. Otherwise you will be solitary and deprived of the communion of saints. Diligently guard against such narrowness. We must fast, we must watch and labor, we must wear inferior clothing, and so on; but only on occasions when the body seems to need restraint and mortification. Do not set apart a specified time and place, but exercise your self-denial as necessity requires. Then you will be fasting rightly. You will

fast every day in denying worldly lusts. So the Gospel teaches, and they who follow this course are of the New Testament dispensation.

[22] Secondly, Paul says we should be “righteous” in our lives. No work, however, nor particular time, is here designated as the way to righteousness. In the ways of God is universal freedom. It is left to the individual to exercise his liberty; to do right when, where and to whom occasion offers. Herein Paul gives a hint of how we should conduct ourselves toward our neighbor — righteously. We owe him that righteousness which consists in doing to him as we would have him do to us; in granting to him all we would have him grant us. We are to do our neighbor no bodily harm, no injury to his wife, children, friends, possessions, honor or anything of his. Rather we are obligated, wherever we see he needs our assistance, to aid him, to stand by him, at the risk of our bodies, our property, our honor and everything that is ours. Righteousness consists in rendering to each one his due. What a little word to comprehend so much! How few walk in this way of righteousness, though otherwise living blamelessly! We do everything else but what saving grace reveals to us as our duty to do.

[23] The word “neighbor” must be construed to include even an enemy. But the way of righteousness is entirely obliterated. It is much more overgrown in neglect than the way of moderation, which itself is almost wholly untrodden and effaced because of the introduction of certain meats and apparel, certain movements and display. These things have been superabundantly, more than profusely, insinuated. We ape after set forms, and make fools of ourselves with rosaries, with ecclesiastical and feudal institutions, with hearing of masses, with festivals, with self-devised works concerning which is no divine command. O Lord God, how wide hell has opened her mouth (see Isaiah 5:14); and how narrow has the gate of heaven become in consequence of the accursed doctrines and devices of these solitary and pharisaical persons! The prophets unwittingly paint the picture of present-day conditions. They represent hell by the wide-open mouth of a dragon, and heaven by a closed door. Oh, the wretchedness of the picture!

[24] It is not necessary to inquire what outward works you can perform. Look to your neighbor. There you will find enough to do, a thousand kind offices to render. Do not suffer yourself to be misled into believing you will reach heaven by praying and attending church, by contributing to institutions and monuments, while you pass by your neighbor. If you pass

him in this life, he will lie in your way in the life to come and cause you to go by the door of heaven as did the rich man who left Lazarus lying at his gate. Wo to us priests, monks, bishops and Pope! What do we preach? What do we teach? How we lead the pitiable multitude from the way! The blind leading the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. Such doctrines as Paul declares in the conclusion of this lesson — these are what we should teach.

[25] In the third place, we are taught we must live “godly” lives. Here we are reminded of how to conduct ourselves toward God. Now we are fully instructed concerning our duty to ourselves, to our neighbors and to God. As before said, impiety signifies wickedness, ungodliness, lack of grace. Piety, on the other hand, means having faith, godliness, grace. Godly living consists in trusting God, in relying on his grace alone, regarding no work not wrought in us by him, through grace. If we are godly, we will recognize, honor, adore, praise and love God. Briefly in two words, to live godly is to fear and trust God. As it is written (Psalm 147:11), “Jehovah taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his lovingkindness.” See also Psalm 33:18. To fear God is to look upon our own devices as pure ungodliness in the light of his manifest grace. These being ungodly, we are to fear God and forsake them, and thereafter guard against them. To trust in God is to have perfect confidence that he will be gracious to us, filling us with grace and godliness.

[26] The individual yields to God when he gives himself wholly to God, attempting nothing of himself but permitting the Lord to work in and to rule him; when his whole concern and fear, his continual prayer and desire, are for God to withhold him from following his own works and ways, which he now recognizes as ungodly and deserving of wrath, and to rule over and work in him through grace. Thus, the individual will obtain a clear conscience and will love and praise God. Observe, they are pious and filled with grace, who do not walk by reason, do not trust in human nature, but rely only on the grace of God, ever fearful lest they fall from grace into dependence upon their own reason, their self-conceit, good intentions and self-devised works. The theme of the entire one-hundred-and-nineteenth Psalm is trust in God. In every one of its one hundred and seventy-six verses, David breathes the same prayer. Reliance upon God is a subject of such vital importance, and so numerous are the difficulties and dangers

attending human nature and reason and human doctrine, we cannot be too much on our guard.

[27] The way of God does not require us to build churches and cathedrals, to make pilgrimages, to hear mass, and so on. God requires a heart moved by his grace, a life mistrustful of all ways not emanating from grace. Nothing more can one render God than such loyalty. All else is rather his gift to us. He says (Psalm 50:14-15), in effect: “Think not, O Israel, I inquire after thy gifts and offerings; for everything in heaven and earth is mine. This is the service I require of thee: to offer unto me thanksgiving and pay thy vows. Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” In other words: Thou hast vowed that I should be thy God. Then keep this vow. Let me work; perform not thine own works. Let me help thee in thy need. For everything, look to me. Let me alone direct thy life. Then wilt thou be able to know me and my grace; to love and praise me. This is the true road to salvation. If thou doest otherwise, performing thine own works, thou wilt give thyself praise, wilt disregard me and refuse to accept me as thy God. Thou wilt prove treacherous and break thy vow.

[28] Note, such obedience to God is real, divine service. For this service we need no bells nor churches, no vessels nor ornaments. Lights and candles are not necessary; neither are organs and singing, images and pictures, tables and altars. We require not bald pates nor caps, not incense nor sprinkling, not processions nor handling of the Cross; neither are indulgences nor briefs essential. All these are human inventions, mere matters of taste. God does not regard them, and too often they obscure with their glitter the true service of God. Only one thing is necessary to right service — the Gospel. Let the Gospel be properly urged; through it let divine service be made known to the people. The Gospel is the true bell, the true organ, for divine service.

[29] Further, Paul says we are to live as he describes “in this present world.” First: the perfect life cannot be accomplished by works; our whole life, while we remain here, must be sober, righteous and godly. Christ promises (Mark 10:22), “He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.” Now, there are some who, it must be admitted, occasionally accomplish good; but occasional accomplishment is not a complete life of goodness, nor does it mean endurance to the end. Second: No one can

afford to leave this matter of a godly life until death, or until another world is reached. Whatever we would have in the life to come must be secured here.

[30] Many depend upon Purgatory, living as it pleases them to the end and expecting to profit by vigils and soul masses after death. Truly, they will fail to receive profit therein. It were well had Purgatory never been conceived of. Belief in Purgatory suppresses much good, establishes many cloisters and monasteries and employs numerous priests and monks. It is a serious drawback to these three features of Christian living: soberness, righteousness and godliness. Moreover, God has not commanded, nor even mentioned, Purgatory. The doctrine is wholly, or for the most part, deception; God pardon me if I am wrong. It is, to say the least, dangerous to accept, to build upon, anything not designated by God, when it is all we can do to stand in building upon the institutions of God which can never waver. The injunction of Paul to live rightly in this present world is truly a severe thrust at Purgatory. He would not have us jeopardize our faith. Not that I, at this late day (when we write 1522), deny the existence of Purgatory; but it is dangerous to preach it, whatever of truth there may be in the doctrine, because the Word of God, the Scriptures, make no mention of a Purgatory.

[31] Paul's chief reason, however, for making use of the phrase "in this present world" is to emphasize the power of God's saving grace. In the extreme wickedness of the world, the godly person is as one alone, unexampled as it were, a rose among thorns; therefore, he must endure every form of misfortune, of censure, shame and wrong. The apostle's thought is: He who would live soberly, righteously and godly must expect to meet all manner of enmity and must take up the cross. He must not allow himself to be misled, even though he has to live alone, like Lot in Sodom and Abraham in Canaan, among none but the gluttonous, the drunken, the incontinent, unrighteous, false and ungodly. His environment is world and must remain world. He has to resist and overcome the enticements of earth, censuring worldly desires. To live right in this present world, mark you, is like living soberly in a saloon, chastely in a brothel, godly in a gaiety hall, uprightly in a den of murderers. The character of the world is such as to render our earthly life difficult and distressing, until we longingly cry out for death and the day of judgment and await them with ardent desire; as the next clause in the text indicates. Life being subject to so many evils, its only

hope is in being led by grace. Human nature and reason are at a loss to direct it. "Looking for the blessed hope."

[32] With these words the apostle makes the godly life clearly distinct from every other life. Here is the text that enables one to perceive how he measures up to the life of grace. Let all who presume to think they live godly, step forward and answer as to whether or no they delight in this hope, as here pictured; whether they are so prepared for the day of judgment that they await it with pleasure; whether they regard it as more than endurable, as even a blessed event to be contemplated with longing and with cheerful confidence. Is it not true that human nature ever shrinks from the judgment? Is it not true that if the advent of that day rested upon the world's pleasure in the matter, it would never come? and particularly in the case of hypocritical saints? Where, then, does human nature stand? where reason? where the free will so much extolled as inclined to and potent for good? Why does free will not only flee from good but shrink from that honor to the God of salvation which the apostle here refers to as a "blessed hope" and in which hope we shall be blessed? What is to prevent the conclusion here that they who shrink from the judgment lead lives impious, blamable and devoid of grace, the evils and ungodliness of which they might, but for the approach of that day, conceal? What is more ungodly than to strive against God's will? But is not that just what the individual does who would flee from the day wherein the honor of God shall be revealed, who does not await the event with a loving and joyful heart? Mark you, then, he who desires not that day and does not with delight and with love to God await it, is not living a godly life, not though he is able even to raise the dead.

[33] "Then it must be," you say, "that few lead godly lives, particularly among those solitary, spiritual ones who above all men flee death and the judgment." That is just what I have said. These separated individuals simply lead themselves and others from the true path, obliterating the ways marked out of God. Plainly we see now how little reason and nature can accomplish; they but strive against God. And we see how necessary is saving grace. For when our own works are abandoned, God comes and alone works in us, enabling us to rise from ourselves, from our ungodly conduct, to a supernatural, grace-filled, godly life. Then we not only do not fear the day of judgment, but cheerfully, even longingly, await it,

contemplating it with joy and pleasure. This point has been further treated in the Gospel lesson for the second Sunday in Advent.

[34] True godliness, you note, is not taught by human nature or mortal reason, but by the manifest grace of God. By grace are we enabled to deny worldly lusts, even to feel aversion to them, to desire liberation from them, to be dissatisfied with our manner of life in general. More than that, it creates in us a disposition essential to godliness, a disposition to entreat God with perfect confidence and to await with pleasure his coming. So should we be disposed.

[35] Now, let us carefully weigh the words “blessed hope.” A contrast is presented to that miserably unhappy life wherein, when we attempt to walk uprightly, we are only harassed by misfortune, danger and sin. All in this life serves but to vex, while we have every reason to be encouraged in that hope. Such is the experience of them who earnestly endeavor to live soberly, righteously and godly. The world cannot long endure this class; it soon regards them as repulsive. Paul testifies (Romans 5:3): “We also rejoice in our tribulations: knowing that tribulation worketh steadfastness; and steadfastness, approvedness; and approvedness, hope: and hope putteth not to shame.” Thus, our eyes remain closed to the wordly and visible, and open to the eternal and invisible. All this transformed condition is the work of grace, through the cross, which we must endure if we attempt to lead a godly life, the life the world cannot tolerate. “And appearing of the glory.”

[36] Paul’s word for “advent” here is epiphaniam, appearing or manifestation. Similarly, he spoke above of the appearance or manifestation of grace. The word advent in the Latin, therefore, does not express all. The apostle would make a distinction between the first appearing and the last. The first appearing was attended by humility and dishonor, with intent to attract little attention and occasion no manifestation but that made in faith and through the Gospel. Christ is at present not manifest in person, but on the day of judgment he will appear in effulgent splendor, in undimmed honor; a splendor and honor eternally manifest to all creatures. The last day will be an eternal day. Upon the instant of its appearing every heart and all things will stand revealed. Such is the meaning of “the appearing of glory” mentioned, the appearance of Christ’s honor. Then there will be neither preaching nor faith. To all men everything will be manifest by experience, and by sight as in a clear day. Hence Paul adds, “Of the great God and our

Savior Jesus Christ.” Not that another and lesser God exists; but that God has reserved unto the last day the displaying of his greatness and majesty, his glory and effulgence. We behold him now in the Gospel and in faith — a narrow view of him. Here he is not great because he is only slightly comprehended. But in the last appearing he will permit us to behold him in his greatness and majesty.

[37] The words of this verse afford comfort to all who live soberly, righteously and godly. For the apostle therein declares the coming glory, not of our enemy or judge, but of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who will at that time give us perfect happiness. For the day of that glorious appearing he will make the occasion of our liberation from this world wherein we must endure so much in the effort to lead a godly life in response to his will. In view of his coming and our great and glorious redemption, we ought firmly and cheerfully to bear up under the persecution, murders, shame and misfortunes the world effects, and to be courageous in the midst of death. With these joys before us, we ought the more steadfastly to persevere in a godly life, boldly relying upon the Savior, Jesus Christ.

[38] On the other hand, the words of this verse are terrible to the worldly-minded and wicked who are unwilling to endure, for the sake of godliness, the persecutions of the world. They prefer to make their godliness go no farther than to live without friction in the world and Thus, avoid incurring enmity and trouble. But the dissolute, the reckless, the obdurate, utterly disregard those words. They never give a thought to the fact of having to appear on the final day. Like frenzied animals, they run blindly and heedlessly on to the day of judgment and into the abyss of hell. You may ask, “How shall I obtain the godliness fitted to enable me to confidently await that day, since human nature and reason flee from a godly life and cannot accomplish it?” Observe what follows, “Who gave himself for us.”

[39] The things the apostle has been so carefully presenting are laid before you to enable you to perceive and acknowledge your helplessness, to utterly despair of your own power, that you may sincerely humble yourself and recognize your vanity, and your ungodliness, impiety and unsaved state. Note, the grace appearing through the Gospel teaches humility; and being humbled, one desires grace and is disposed to seek salvation. Wherever a humble desire for grace exists, there is open to you the door of grace. The

desire cannot be without provision for its fulfillment. Peter says (1 Peter 5:5), “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.” And Christ frequently in the Gospel declares: “Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted.”

[40] So the blessed Gospel is presented to you. It permits saving grace to appear in and shine forth from you, teaching you what more is required to keep you from falling into despair. Now, the Gospel, the appearance of the light of grace, is this which the apostle here declares, namely, that Christ gave himself for us, etc. Therefore, hearken to the Gospel; open the windows of your heart and let saving grace shine forth, to enlighten and teach you. This truth, that Christ gave himself for us, is the message spoken of as proclaimed to all men. It is the explanation of what is meant by the appearing of grace.

[41] Banish from your mind, then, the error into which you may have fallen, of thinking that to hear the epistles of Paul and Peter is not to hear the Gospel. Do not allow yourself to be misled by the name “epistle.” All Paul writes in his epistles is pure Gospel. He says so in Romans 1:1 and in 1 Corinthians 4:15. In fact, I venture to say the Gospel is more vividly presented in the epistles of Paul than in the four books of the evangelists. The latter detail the life and words of Christ, which were understood only after the advent of the Holy Spirit, who glorified Christ. Thus, the Savior himself testifies. Paul, though he records no account of the life of Christ, clearly explains the purpose of our Lord’s coming, and shows what blessings his advent brings to us. What else is the Gospel but the message that Christ gave himself for us, to redeem us from sin, and that all who believe it will surely be saved? So we are to despair of our own efforts and cleave to Christ, relying upon him alone. Gracious, indeed, and comforting is this message, and readily welcomed by hearts despairing of their own efforts. “Evangelium,” or Gospel, implies a loving, kind, gracious message, fitted to gladden and cheer a sorrowing and terrified heart.

[42] Take heed to believe true what the apostle, through the Gospel, declares — that Christ gave himself for you for the sake of redeeming you from all unrighteousness and of purifying you for a peculiar inheritance. It follows that, in the first place, you must believe and confess all your efforts, impure, unrighteous; and that your human nature, reason, art and free will are ineffectual apart from Christ. Unless you so believe, you make void the

Gospel; for, according to the Gospel, Christ did not give himself for the righteous and the pure. Why should he? With righteousness and purity existent, he would be giving himself in vain. It would be a senseless giving. In the second place, you must believe that Christ gave himself for you, to put away your impurity and unrighteousness and make you pure and righteous in himself. If you believe this, it will be so. Faith will accomplish it. The fact that he gave himself for you can make you pure and righteous only through faith on your part. Peter (Acts 15:9) speaks of the cleansing of hearts by faith. Observe, Christ is not put into your hand, not given you in a coffer, not placed in your bosom nor in your mouth. He is presented to you through the Word, the Gospel; he is held up before your heart, through the ears he is offered to you, as the Being who gave himself for you — for your unrighteousness and impurity. Only with your heart can you receive him. And your heart receives when it responds to your opened mind, saying, “Yes, I believe.” Thus, through the medium of the Gospel Christ penetrates your heart by way of your hearing, and dwells there by your faith. Then are you pure and righteous; not by your own efforts, but in consequence of the guest received into your heart through faith. How rich and precious these blessings!

[43] Now, when faith dwelling within you brings Christ into your heart, you cannot think him poor and destitute. He brings his own life, his Spirit — all he is and commands. Paul says the Spirit is given, not in response to any work of man, but for the sake of the Gospel. The Gospel brings Christ, and Christ brings the Spirit — his Spirit. Then the individual is made new; he is godly. Then all his deeds are well wrought. He is not idle; for faith is never inactive. It continually, in word and act, proclaims Christ. Thus, the world is roused against Christ; it will not hear, will not tolerate, him. The result is crosses for the Christian, and crosses render life loathsome and the day of judgment desirable. This, mark you, explains the Gospel and the appearing of the saving grace of God.

[44] How can death and the day of judgment terrify the heart that receives Christ? Who shall injure such a one when the great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who orders the day of judgment, stands by with all his glory, greatness, majesty and might? He who gave himself for us, he and no other, will control that day. Assuredly he will not deny his own testimony, but will verify your faith by declaring he gave himself for your sins. And

what have you to fear from sin when the judge himself owns he has taken it away by his own sacrifice? Who will accuse you? Who may judge the Judge? Who exercise authority over him? His power outweighs that of all the world with its sins innumerable. Had he purchased your salvation with anything but himself, there might be great error in this doctrine. But what can terrify when he has given himself for you? He would have to condemn himself before sin could condemn the souls for whom he died.

[45] Here is strong, unquestionable security. But our connection with it depends upon the steadfastness of our faith. Christ certainly will not waver. He is absolutely steadfast. We should, then, urge and enforce faith by our preaching and in our working and suffering, ever making it firm and constant. Works avail nothing here. The evil spirit will assail only our faith, well knowing that upon it depends all. How unfortunate our failure to perceive our advantage! for we ignore the Gospel with its saving grace. Woe unto you, Pope, bishops, priests and monks! Of what use are you in the churches and occupying the pulpits? Now let us analyze the words, “That he might redeem us.”

[46] He gave himself to redeem — not himself, but us. Evidently, we are naturally captives. Then how can we be presumptuous and ungrateful enough to attribute so much merit to our free will and our natural reason? If we claim there is ought in us not bound in sin, we disparage the grace whereby, according to the Gospel, we are redeemed. Who can do any good thing while captive in sin, while wholly unrighteous? Our own efforts may seem to us good, but in truth they are not; otherwise, the Gospel of Christ must be false. “From all iniquity.”

[47] The word Paul uses for “iniquity” is *anomias*, the specific meaning of which is, anything not conforming to the Law, whether transgression of soul or body, the former transgression being ungodliness or impiety, and the latter worldly lusts. He is careful to add the word “all,” to make plain the inclusion of the sins of the body and the unrighteousness of soul wherefrom Christ has completely redeemed us. This teaching is a blow at the self-righteous and separate, who redeem themselves, and others as well, from certain forms of unrighteousness by means of the Law, or by their own reason and free will. In reality they do avoid the outward act of transgression, being restrained by prohibitions, or fear of pain and penalty, or expectation of reward or gain. But this is only ridding of the scum of

unrighteousness; the heart remains filled with ungodly, unregenerate inclination and worldly lusts, and neither body nor soul is righteous. But through faith Christ redeems us from all unrighteousness. He liberates us, enabling us to live godly and heavenly, a power we had not when in the prison of unrighteousness. “And purify unto himself.”

[48] Sin is attended by two evils: First, it takes us captive. In its power we are incapable of doing good, of desiring or even recognizing good. Sin Thus, robs us of power, freedom and light. The second evil attendant upon sin is the natural outcome of the first: we forsake good to engage only in iniquity and impurity, tilling with hard and heavy labor the land of wicked Pharaoh in Egypt. But when, through faith, Christ comes, he liberates from the bondage of Egypt and gives power to do good. That power is our first gain.

[49] Afterward, the effort of our entire lives should be to purge from body and soul unrighteous, unregenerate, and worldly conduct. Until death our lives should be nothing but purification. While it is true that faith instantly redeems from all legal guilt and sets free, yet evil desires remain in body and soul, as odor and disease cling to a dungeon. Faith occupies itself with purifying from these. Typical of this principle, Lazarus in the Gospel was raised from the dead by a single word (John 11:44), but afterward the shroud and napkin had to be removed. And the half-dead man whose wounds the Samaritan bound up and whom the Samaritan carried home, had to remain in the inn until he was restored. “A people for his own possession.”

[50] The thought is of ownership — a peculiar inheritance or possession. The Scriptures term God’s people his inheritance. As a landholder cultivates, nourishes and improves his inheritance, so, through the medium of our faith, Christ, whose inheritance we are, cultivates us, or impels us to daily grow better and more fruitful. Thus, you see, faith liberates from sin, but more than that, it makes us Christ’s inheritance, which he accepts and protects as his own. Who can injure us when we are the inheritance of the mighty God? “Zealous of good works.”

[51] As ungodliness is opposed by inheritance, so zeal or diligence in our efforts after good opposes worldly lusts. By inward godliness we become Christ’s heritage, and by sober and righteous living are good works

wrought. As his heritage we serve him, and by good works we serve our neighbors and ourselves; first the heritage, then the good works. For good works are not wrought without godliness, and we are taught we must be zealous — zelotae — that is, must emulate one another in doing good, or vie with one another in the effort to work universal good, disputing who was the best and who did the most good. This is the real meaning of the word zelotae. Where are these now? “These things speak and exhort.”

[52] Truly, O Lord God, it is a vital charge, this — not only to preach the principles taught in this lesson, but continually to urge, admonish and arouse the people, leading them to faith and actually good works. Though we may have taught, we must follow it up with persevering exhortation, that the Word of God may have its sway.

[53] O Pope, bishops, priests and monks now flooding the Church with fables and human doctrines, let these things sink into your minds. You will have more than enough to preach if you attempt only what this text contains, provided you continually admonish the people and enforce it. It beautifully portrays the life of the Christian. Its teaching, and only this, are you to preach and enforce. God grant it! Amen.

[54] Note, the office of a minister calls for two things — teaching and exhortation. We must teach the uninformed, and must admonish the already informed lest they go backward, grow indolent or fall away entirely instead of persevering against all temptations. The Armor Furnished by the Text

[55] First, the text gives us authority to maintain that without grace no good can be wrought and all human efforts are sinful. This principle is established by Paul’s statement, “Grace hath appeared.” Evidently, previous to the advent mentioned, no grace existed among men. If no grace existed, plainly there was only wrath. Therefore, without grace, there is in ourselves nothing but unregeneracy and wrath, instead of good.

[56] Again, Paul’s reference to saving grace clearly indicates that whatever is devoid of grace is already condemned and beyond the power of procuring help and salvation. Where, then, is free will? Where are human virtues, human reason and opinions? All are without saving grace, all are condemned, sinful and shameful before God, even though precious in our sight.

[57] Still more impressive is the phrase “to all men.” None are excepted. Manifestly, then, until recognition of the Gospel, naught but wrath ruled in all men. The apostle says (Ephesians 2:3), “We were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” Here he repels with safe armor, and stops the mouths of, all who boast of reason, works, opinions, free will, light of nature, etc., as efficacious without grace. He makes them all corrupt, impious, ungodly and devoid of grace.

[58] Further, Paul declares the grace of God appeared to “all men” to enable them to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts.” Who can stand before the armor he uses? What is the inevitable conclusion but this: without the grace of God, the works of all men are ungodliness and worldly lusts? For were there godliness, or spiritual aspirations, in any individual, there would be no reason for “all men” to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; neither would the saving appearance of grace be called for in all cases. In this way, mark you, we should use the Scriptures as armor against false teachers. Not only are they for the exercise of our faith in our daily living, but for the open defense and battle of faith against the attacks of error.

[59] Before the testimony of this text, all hypocrites, all ecclesiastics, must lie prostrate in defeat, no matter how much they may have fasted, prayed, watched and toiled. These exertions will avail naught; ungodliness and worldly lusts will still survive in them. Though shame may cause them to conceal evil expression, the heart is still impure. Could our works, apparel, cloisters, fasting and prayers render us godly, the apostle might more properly have said that a prayer or a fast, a pilgrimage or an order, or something else, had appeared teaching us to be godly. But emphatically it is none of these; it is the appearing of saving grace. This, this alone, nothing else, renders us godly.

[60] The danger and error of human laws, orders, sects, vows, and so on, is easily apparent. For they are not grace; they are merely works, by their false appearance leading the whole world into error, distress and misery. Under their influence, the world forgets grace and faith, and looks for godliness and happiness in these errors.

[61] Again, Paul’s admonition to us to look for the blessed and glorious appearing of the great God establishes the fact of another life beyond this. Plainly, it is evident that the soul is immortal; yes, that even the body must

rise again. We say in the creed, “I believe in the resurrection of the body and in the life everlasting.”

[62] Further, it may be logically inferred from Paul’s language — “the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” — that Christ is true God. Clearly, then, it follows that the Being to come in glory on the judgment day is the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

[63] Should one in a caviling spirit apply to the Father alone the reference here to “the great God,” his theory would not hold. For this glorious appearing is shared by the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Were Christ not true God, the glory and splendor of God would not be attributed to him. Since mention is made of the splendor, the glory, the work, of “the great God and our Savior” the latter must be God with the former. Through the mouth of Isaiah, God has more than once said, “My glory will I not give to another,” and yet here he shares it with Christ. Hence Christ can be no other than God. The glory of God is his. Yet he is a person distinct from the Father.

[64] Once more, a strong argument against human doctrine is afforded us in Paul’s words, “These things speak and exhort.” Had Paul designed anything further to be taught than the things he mentions, he surely would have said so. Our bishops and popes today think they have done enough when they permit these Paul’s injunctions to be written in books and on slips of paper, enforcing them by no commands of their own; but the fact is, their own voices should be heard in constant preaching and enforcing of the Gospel. Woe unto them!

Second Christmas Sermon. Early Christmas Morning Service. God's Grace Received and Good Works to Our Neighbor. The Good Samaritan.

Text: Titus 3:4-8.

4 But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,

5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. Titus 3:4-8

[1] This epistle selection inculcates the same principle taught in the conclusion of the Gospel lesson pertaining to contentment, good will and love for our neighbor. The substance of the text is: Why should we be unwilling to do for others what has been done for us by God, of whose blessings we are far less worthy than anyone can be of our help? Since God has been friendly and kindly disposed toward us in bestowing upon us his loving kindness, let us conduct ourselves similarly toward our neighbors, even if they are unworthy, for we too are unworthy.

[2] It is necessary to a ready understanding of this epistle that we know the occasion of these words. In the verses immediately preceding, Paul says to Titus, his disciple: “Put them in mind to be in subjection to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready unto every good work, to speak evil of no man, not to be contentious, to be gentle, showing all meekness toward all men. For we also once were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.” Note that Paul here indicates the relation we sustain to God and man. He would have us obedient to magistrates and kind to neighbors. Though our neighbors may be blind, erring and wicked, yet we should be charitable in our judgment and cheerfully endeavor to please them, remembering God’s similar attitude toward us when we were as they.

[3] The word “appeared,” implying the revelation of the Gospel, or Christ’s appearance to the whole world, is sufficiently defined in the preceding epistle lesson. Though in that case it refers to the birth of Christ, little depends on the circumstance so far as the meaning of the word is concerned. Paul does not employ here the little word “grace” used there, but he described the God of grace with two other pleasing words — “kindness” and “love.” The first is, in Greek, “Chrestotes” (friendliness), implying that friendly, lovable demeanor which makes the individual attractive and gives his society a gracious influence moving everyone within its circle to love and affection. Such a one is capable of bearing with all men. He is not inclined to neglect any nor to repel with harshness. In him everyone may repose confidence. All men can approach him and deal with him. He resembles Christ, whom the Gospel portrays as always friendly to everyone, repelling none but gracious unto all.

[4] God, too, shows himself to us through the Gospel as wholly lovable and kind, receiving all, rejecting none, ignoring our shortcomings and repelling no soul by severity. The Gospel proclaims naught but grace, whereby God sustains us and through which he kindly leads us, regardless of our worthiness. This is the day of grace. All men may confidently draw near to the throne of his mercy, as it is written in Hebrews 4:16. And we read in Psalm 34:5: “They looked unto him, and were radiant; and their faces shall never be confounded.” That is, God will not permit us to ask in vain, or to come unto him and go away empty and ashamed.

[5] The second Word is, in Greek, Philanthropia (Philanthropy) — love of mankind. Avarice is the love of money. David (2 Samuel 1:26) refers to “the love of women.” But naturalists term certain animals — the dog, the horse, the dolphin — philanthropic or humane, because they have a natural love and fondness for man; they adapt themselves to his service as if endowed with reason enabling them to understand him.

[6] It is an attitude of love for mankind the apostle here attributes to our God. Moses has done likewise in Deuteronomy 33:2-3, where he says of God: “At his right hand was a fiery law for them. Yea, he loveth the people.” This quotation indicates that God does more than show himself through the Gospel with a kindly bearing, desiring to draw men unto himself, and tolerant of their shortcomings; he would give them of himself, would bestow his presence, and he extends his grace and friendship.

[7] These two words descriptive of God, “kindness” and “love,” are indeed pleasant and consoling. They represent him as offering grace, following us, ready to receive most graciously all who draw near to him and desire him. What more could he do? Note now why the Gospel is termed a gracious, comforting message concerning God revealed in Christ. What can be conceived more gracious to a poor, sinful conscience than what these words convey? Oh, how wretchedly the devil, through the laws of the Pope, has perverted for us these pure words of God!

[8] These two words are to be accepted with their full and broad import. No distinction of person, as prevails among men, is to be made: for divine love and kindness is not secured by human merit; it is of God’s grace alone and given to all that bear the name of man, however insignificant. God loves not what is characteristic of one person, but of all. He is partial not to one, but kind to all. Therefore a man’s honor is perfectly maintained, and no one can boast of his worthiness, or need despair because of his unworthiness. All mankind may be equally comforted in the unmerited grace God kindly and humanely offers and applies. Had there ever been a meritorious individual or a work worthy of consideration, it surely would have been found among the doers of “works of righteousness.” But Paul rejects especially these, saying, “not by works of righteousness which we have done.” How much less reason have we to think the kindness and love of God has appeared in consequence of man’s wisdom, power, nobility, wealth and the color of his hair! The grace which cancels all our boasted

honor, ascribing glory alone to God who freely bestows it upon the unworthy, is pure as well as great.

[9] This epistle instills the two further principles of believing and loving — receiving favors from God and granting favors to our neighbors. The entire Scriptures enforce these two precepts, and the practice of one requires the practice of the other. He who does not firmly believe in God's grace assuredly will not extend kindness to his neighbor but will be tardy and indifferent in aiding him. In proportion to the strength of his faith will be his willingness and industry in helping his neighbor. Thus, faith incites love, and love increases faith.

[10] Now we see how utterly we fail to walk in faith when we presume to arrive at goodness and happiness by any other good works than those done to our neighbor. So numerous are the new works and doctrines daily devised, everything like a correct conception of a truly good life is wholly destroyed. But the fact is, all Christian doctrines and works, all Christian living, is briefly, clearly and completely comprehended in these two principles, faith and love. They place man as a medium between God and his neighbor, to receive from above and distribute below. Thus, the Christian becomes a vessel, or rather a channel, through which the fountain of divine blessings continuously flows to other individuals.

[11] Mark you, the truly godlike are they who receive from God all he offers through Christ, and in return accredit themselves by their beneficence, performing for others the part God performs for them. Psalm 82:6 is in point here: "I said, Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High." Sons of God are we, through the faith that constitutes us heirs of all divine blessings. But we are also "gods" through the love that makes us beneficent toward our neighbor. The divine nature is simply pure beneficence, or as Paul here says, kindness and love, daily pouring out blessings in abundance upon all creatures; as we everywhere witness.

[12] Take heed, then, to embrace the message of these words presenting the love and kindness of God to all men. Daily exercise your faith therein, entertaining no doubt of God's love and kindness toward you, and you shall realize his blessings. Then you may with perfect confidence ask what you will, what your heart desires, and whatever is necessary for the good of yourself and your fellow men. But if you do not so believe, it were far

better you had never heard the message. For by unbelief you make false these precious, comforting, gracious words. You conduct yourself as if you regarded them untrue, which attitude is extreme dishonor to God; no more enormous sin could be committed.

[13] But if you possess faith, your heart cannot do otherwise than laugh for joy in God, and grow free, confident and courageous. For how can the heart remain sorrowful and dejected when it entertains no doubt of God's kindness to it, and of his attitude as a good friend with whom it may unreservedly and freely enjoy all things? Such joy and pleasure must follow faith; if they are not ours, certainly something is wrong with our faith. This act of faith the apostle in Galatians terms "receiving the Holy Spirit" in and through the Gospel. The Gospel is a message concerning the love and mercy of God so gracious as to bring with it to preacher and hearer the presence of the Holy Spirit; just as the rays of the sun bear in themselves, and transmit, heat.

[14] How could Paul have presented words conveying more love and graciousness? I venture to assert I have never read, in the entire Scriptures, words more beautifully expressive of the grace of God than these two — chrestotes and philanthropia, friendliness and philanthropy. They represent grace not only as procuring for us remission of sins, but as God ever present with us, embracing us in his friendship, ever ready to help us and offering to do for us according to all we desire; in short, as a good and willing friend, to whom we may look for every favor and accommodation. Picture to your imagination a sincere friend and you will have an idea of God's attitude toward you in the person of Christ, though a very imperfect representation of his superabundant grace.

[15] Now, if you steadfastly believe, if you rejoice in God your Lord, if you are alive and his grace satisfies, if your wants are all supplied, how will you employ yourself in this earthly life? Inactive you cannot be. Such a disposition of love toward God cannot rest. Your zeal will be warm to do everything you know will be to the praise and glory of a kind and gracious God. At this point there is no longer distinction of works. Here all commands terminate. There is neither restraint nor compulsion, but a joyful willingness and delight in doing good, whether the intended achievement be insignificant or difficult, small or great, requiring short service or long.

[16] Your first desire will be that all men may obtain the same knowledge of divine grace. Hence your love will not be restrained from serving all to the fullest extent, preaching and proclaiming the divine truth wherever possible, and rejecting all doctrine and life not in harmony with this teaching. But take note, the devil and the world, unwilling that their devices be rejected, cannot endure the knowledge of what you do. They will oppose you with everything great, learned, wealthy and powerful, and represent you as a heretic and insane. Mark you, you will be brought to the cross for the sake of the truth, as was Christ your Lord. You will have to endure the extremity of reproach. You must endanger all your property, friends and honor, your body and life, until thrust out of this life into eternity. In the midst of these trials, however, rejoice, cheerfully enduring all. Regard your enemies with the utmost charity. Act kindly, ever remembering you yourself were once as they are in the sight of God. Faith and love certainly can do it. Note this: the truly Christian life is that which does for others as God has done for itself.

[17] Such is the apostle's meaning when he tells us the kindness of God did not appear unto us, or save us, because of our righteousness. His thought is: If we, though unworthy, were received through mercy, to enjoy the favors of God in spite of our great demerits and the enormity of our sins, why should we withhold our favors from others, whose merits have claims upon us? Let us not withhold; no, let us rather be children of God, doing good even to our enemies and to evildoers: for so God has done, and still does, to us, evil-doers and his enemies. This teaching is in harmony with Christ's (Matthew 5:44-46): "Love your enemies...that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?"

[18] Paul not only forcibly rejects us for our evil deeds, but goes so far as to say, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done." He means the works regarded by ourselves as good — our righteousness in our own eyes and in the eyes of others — but which only render us more unfit to receive God's grace because they are in themselves deceitful and because we commit a twofold sin in looking upon them as good and in relying upon them; an attitude to provoke God's displeasure.

[19] Similarly do our enemies, who while in the wrong yet maintain, in opposition to us, their faultlessness, for the most part provoke us to anger. Yet we are not to refuse them kindness. God, solely for his mercy's sake, refused not kindness to us in similar errors, when we foolishly imagined all we did was right. As he dealt not with us according to our imagined righteousness, so should we in return not deal with our enemies according to their merits or demerits, but assist them from pure love, looking for thanks and reward, not from them, but from God. Let this be sufficient for a summary of this epistle.

[20] Now let us consider the words Paul employs to define and advocate grace. In the first place he exalts it to the rejection of all our righteousness and good works. We are not to conclude it is a trivial thing he is rejecting here. It is man's best earthly achievement — righteousness. Were all men to concentrate their united efforts to attain wisdom and virtue by their natural reason, knowledge and free will — as we read, for instance, of the illustrious virtues and wisdom of certain pagan teachers and princes, Socrates, Trajan, and others, to whom all the world gives written and oral applause — were all men so to do, yet such wisdom and virtue are, in the sight of God, nothing but sin, and altogether reprehensible. The reason is, they are not attained in the grace of God; the achievers know not God and have not honored him in the effort, for they consider they have wrought by their own abilities. Righteousness is not taught otherwise than by grace, in the Gospel. Paul boasts that he once led a life altogether irreproachable, and superior to the lives of his intellectual equals (Galatians 1:14), wherein he presumptuously thought he did right in persecuting the Christians who rejected that sort of piety. But after he had learned to know Christ, he declared he regarded his righteousness but filth and refuse that he might be found, not in his own righteousness, but in Christ and in faith, as he further shows in Philippians 3:9 and Galatians 1:14.

[21] So he discards all boasted free will, all human virtue, righteousness and good works. He concludes they all are nothing and are wholly perverted, however brilliant and worthy they may appear, and teaches that we must be saved solely by the grace of God, which is effective for all believers who desire it from a correct conception of their own ruin and nothingness.

[22] Now, it is essential that we accustom ourselves to interpret rightly the Scripture teaching of two kinds of righteousness. There is a human righteousness, to which Paul here and often elsewhere refers, and a divine righteousness — or divine grace — which justifies us through faith. Paul so expresses it in the conclusion of this epistle: “That, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” You see, the grace of God, and righteousness, become ours; we say “righteousness of God” because he gives it, and “our righteousness” because we receive it. In Romans 1:17 Paul tells us that the Gospel declares the righteousness of God is obtained through faith; “as it is written, The righteous shall live by faith.” And it is stated of Abraham in Genesis 15:6: “And he believed in Jehovah; and he reckoned it to him for righteousness.” So the Scripture conclusion is, no one is justified before God except the believer; witness the quotation just given and that other by Paul from Habakkuk 2:4, “The righteous shall live by his faith.” So faith, grace, mercy and truth are one thing, wrought in us by God, through the Gospel of Christ; as it is written: “All the paths of Jehovah are lovingkindness and truth.” Psalm 25:10.

[23] We walk in “the paths of Jehovah,” and he is in us when we observe his commandments. To be God’s, the way must proceed in divine mercy and truth; not in our own ability or strength, for such are, in the eyes of God, ways of wrath and falsehood. He says (Isaiah 55:9): “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways.” In other words, “Your ways are earthly and ineffectual; you must walk in my heavenly ways if you are to be saved.” “But according to his mercy he saved us.”

[24] How are these words, reading as if we were already saved, to pass criticism? Are we not still on earth, in the midst of afflictions? I answer: The statement is made in just this way to emphasize the power of divine grace and the character of faith as opposed to the erring self-righteous, who essay to obtain salvation through their works, as if it were not right at hand. But salvation is not so to be attained. Christ has saved us once for all, and in a twofold manner: First, he has done all that is necessary for our salvation — conquered and destroyed sin, death and hell, leaving no more there for anyone to do. Secondly, he has conveyed all these blessings unto us in baptism. He who confidently believes Christ has accomplished these things,

immediately, in the twinkling of an eye, possesses salvation. All his sins and the reality of death and hell are removed. Nothing more than such faith is necessary to salvation.

[25] Take note, God pours out upon us in baptism superabundant blessings for the purpose of excluding the works whereby men foolishly presume to merit heaven and gain happiness. Yes, dear friend, you must first possess heaven and salvation before you can do good works. Works never merit heaven; heaven is conferred purely of grace. Good works are to be performed without any thought of merit, simply for the benefit of one's neighbor and for the honor of God; until the body, too, shall be released from sin, death and hell. The true Christian's whole life after baptism is but a waiting for the manifestation of the salvation already his. He is certainly in full possession of the eternal life yet concealed in faith. When faith is removed by fulfillment, salvation is manifest in the believer. This takes place at physical death. It is written (1 John 3:2-3): "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And everyone that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

[26] Therefore, let not the work-righteous who disregard faith mislead you, placing your salvation far ahead of you and compelling you to obtain it by works. It is within you, dear friend; it is already obtained. Christ says (Luke 17:21): "The kingdom of God is within you." Hence the life we live after baptism is but a tarrying, a waiting and longing for the manifestation of what is within ourselves, an apprehension of that for which we are apprehended. Paul declares (Philippians 3:12), "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus"; that is, that he may see the blessings given in the shrine of faith. The apostle is eager to behold the treasure that baptism has granted and sealed to him in faith. In this same third chapter of Philippians Paul says: "Our citizenship is in heaven" — that is, now — "whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory." In Galatians 4:9, when saying, "Now that ye have come to know God," he recalls the words and adds, "or rather to be known by God." While both these things are in point, there is a difference in their meaning: we are known of God, already apprehended;

but we do not yet know and apprehend him. Our knowledge is hidden and withheld in faith. Again, the apostle tells us (Romans 8:24-25) we are saved in hope; that is, our salvation is not yet manifest. “Hope that is seen is not hope,” he says, “for who hopeth for that which he seeth? But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” And Christ (Luke 12:35-36) commands: “Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may straightway open unto him.” Paul also said in the preceding epistle lesson (Titus 2:12-13): “We should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.”

[27] These and similar passages prove we are even now saved and that a Christian should not seek works as a means of salvation. The delusive doctrine of works blinds the Christian’s eyes, perverts a right understanding of faith and forces him from the way of truth and salvation. Salvation by grace is implied in the words, “According to his mercy he saved us,” and again in the latter part of the lesson where it reads, “that we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” We are heirs — though the fact is unrevealed in faith — and wait in hope for the manifestation of our inheritance.

[28] The life of waiting we must live after we are baptized is designed to subdue the flesh and to display the power of grace in the conflict against the flesh, the world and the devil; and Thus, ultimately to enable us to serve our neighbors, by our preaching and example bringing them also into the faith. Though God might convert men through angels, he desires to accomplish it by human beings — by us, so that faith might be established and completed in a more congenial way through a kindred agency. Were angels constantly to dwell with us, faith would cease here. The instrumentality of angels would not be so congenial as that of our fellow-creatures, whom we are familiar with and understand. If we all were taken to heaven immediately after baptism, who would convert the others and bring them to God by means of the Word and a good example?

[29] The fact that we expend so much by reason of Purgatory and, forgetful of faith, presume to secure ourselves against Purgatory or to liberate us from it by good works, unquestionably indicates we are under

the influence of the devil and of Antichrist. We proceed as if our salvation were not already secured but we must gain it in some other way than by faith; and this even though plainly in contradiction of the Scriptures and of the principles of Christianity. He who does not receive salvation purely through grace, independently of all good works, certainly will never secure it. And he who makes his good works serve his own advantage, seeking to profit himself and not his neighbor thereby, performs no good work. All his doctrine is without faith and is such harmful error and deceit that I wish Purgatory had never been instituted or introduced into the pulpit, for it is very destructive of Christian truth and true faith. So great has been the devil's influence, nearly all institutions, cloister ceremonials, masses and prayers have reference simply to Purgatory, leading us to the pernicious inference that through works we must improve our condition and secure salvation. So the blessings of baptism and faith must be obscured, and Christians must ultimately become pure heathen.

[30] O Lord God, what abominable wickedness! When we should, like Christ and Paul, teach Christians to consider themselves, after baptism or absolution, ready for death at any hour and waiting for the manifestation of the salvation already theirs, we by relying on Purgatory afford them indolence-fostering security. In such security they consider only this life, deferring and procrastinating in the matter of salvation until they come to their deathbeds, there to effect sorrow and repentance and to presume, by ceremonials, soul masses and bequests, to liberate themselves from Purgatory. They will surely become conscious of their mistake. Now follows: "Through the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

[31] How beautifully the apostle in these strong words extols the grace of God bestowed in baptism! He refers to baptism as a washing, whereby not our feet only, not our hands, but our whole bodies are cleansed. Baptism perfectly and instantaneously cleanses and saves. For the vital part of salvation and its inheritance, nothing more is necessary than this faith in the grace of God. Truly, then, are we saved by grace alone, without works or other merit. So, eternally pure love, praise and gratitude for, and honor unto, divine mercy shall possess us; we will not boast of nor delight in our own powers or achievements: as has already frequently and sufficiently been declared.

[32] The righteousness of man, however, is a different sort of cleansing, simply a washing of garments and vessels, as recorded of hypocrites in Matthew 23:25. Externally they appear clean, but internally remain full indeed of filth. Paul terms baptism not a bodily cleansing, but a “washing of regeneration.” It is not a superficial washing of the skin, a physical cleansing; it converts the whole nature, destroying the first birth, that of the flesh, with all inherited sin and condemnation. This verse clearly indicates that salvation is not to be secured by works, but is an instantaneous gift. In physical birth we are given, not one member alone — hands or feet — but the entire body and the life; our life operates, not to effect birth, but because we are born. Similarly works do not render us pure and godly or save us: we are first made clean and godly, and receive salvation; then we freely perform good works to the honor of God and the benefit of our neighbor.

[33] This, mark you, is the true knowledge of the pure grace of God. Thus, we learn to know God and ourselves, to praise him and reject ourselves, to seek consolation from him and despair of ourselves. This doctrine is an occasion of much stumbling to them who presume to compel men to seek salvation by laws, commands and works.

[34] For the sake of conveying a clearer understanding of this washing and this regeneration, Paul adds the word “renewing,” because the individual is a new man, with a new nature. He is a new creature, with an altogether different disposition. He loves in a different way, and speaks, acts and lives in a manner unlike his former self. The apostle says (Galatians 6:15): “For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision” — that is, no work of the Law has significance — “but a new creature.” The thought is: It will not do to patch up, or mend, the life here and there with works. An entirely new disposition is necessary; the nature must be changed. Then works will follow spontaneously.

[35] Concerning this birth, Christ also declares (John 3:3): “Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Here we are taught that works will not answer; the individual must himself die and obtain a different nature. This takes place in baptism when he believes, for faith is this renewing. The damned will also be born again in the last day, but theirs will be a birth without a renewing. They will remain unclean, as here in the old Adamic life. So, then, this washing, this regeneration, makes new creatures.

[36] Much is said at various places in the Scriptures relative to the new birth. God refers to his Word and Gospel as the womb (matricem and vulvam) of the new birth: “Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, that have been borne by me from their birth, that have been carried from the womb” (Isaiah 46:3), or under my heart, as women speak of bearing children. Whosoever believes the Gospel, is conceived and born of God. But more on this subject at some other time.

[37] We see how all these sayings overthrow works and presumptuous human mandates, and make clear the nature of faith, how the individual instantaneously and fully receives grace and is saved, works not aiding him in the matter but following as a result. Salvation by grace would be perfectly illustrated were God to produce from a dry log a live, green tree, the tree then to bring forth natural fruit. God’s grace is powerful and effective. It does not, as visionary preachers presume to teach, lie dormant in the soul; nor is it an accessory to works, as the paint is an accessory to the wood. No, not so; it carries, it leads, drives, draws, changes. It affects all in man, making itself felt. Though concealed, its works are manifest. Words and works show where it is present, as the leaves and the fruit indicate the nature of the tree.

[38] To make faith no more than an aid or ornament to works, as the sophists Thomas and Scotus, and the people, erroneously and perversely do, is a doctrine wherein faith falls far short of its real significance. For it not only aids in the accomplishment of works, but effects them unaided. Indeed, more than that, it changes and renews the whole being. Its object is to alter the character of the individual rather than to accomplish works by him. It claims to be a washing, a regeneration, a renewing, not only of works, but of the whole man.

[39] Note, Paul here freely and fully preaches the grace of God. He does not say God has saved us by works. He loudly proclaims that God has saved us by a regeneration and a renewing. To patch up with works is unavailing; conversion of our whole nature is necessary. Therefore, believers must suffer and die before grace can manifest itself and reveal its nature. Observe, David says in this connection: “The works of Jehovah are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein,” Psalm 111:2. Who are these, his works? We are, sought out through grace in baptism. We are great works, new works, new born. It is indeed great that man is instantly saved,

forever liberated from sin, death and hell. Hence, David says, “They are sought out of all them that have pleasure therein” or desire what God designs to accomplish through them, and God does all that man desires. But what can man desire more than to be saved, to be delivered from sin, death and hell?

[40] Finally: the apostle terms this washing a “regeneration,” a “renewing of the Holy Spirit,” to fully express the power and efficacy of grace. This washing is a thing so vitally important it must be effected, not by a creature, but by the Holy Spirit. How completely, O holy Paul, thou dost reject the free will, the good works and the great merits of presumptuous saints! How high thou exaltest our salvation, at the same time bringing it so near to us! yes, even within ourselves. How plainly and purely thou dost preach grace. Let works, then, be here or there, to renew the man, to change the life, is impossible except by the washing of regeneration of the Holy Spirit.

[41] That fact is plainly evident in the self-righteous. None are more intolerant, presumptuous, proud and faithless than they. In their old Adamic nature, which they clothe and adorn with good works, they remain intractable, unrenewed and obdurate, hardened and immovable; their evil nature is unchanged. They possess only outward works. Oh, they are a people of pernicious influence, and in the sight of God wholly destitute of grace, though they imagine themselves his nearest friends.

[42] Paul’s teaching here accords with that of Christ in John 3:5, where he says, referring to the washing of regeneration: “Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Note here, the water answers to the washing; to be born again, to regeneration and renewing; and the Spirit, to him whom Paul mentions as the Holy Spirit.

[43] Note here also the apostle’s apparent ignorance of the sacrament of confirmation. He teaches, as does Christ, the giving of the Holy Spirit in baptism; in baptism we are indeed born of the Holy Spirit. True, we read (Acts 8,17) how the apostles laid their hands upon those who had been baptized, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. This incident has been construed to sanction confirmation, but its real purpose was to invoke the Holy Spirit as external evidence, and the gift of diverse tongues for the preaching of the Gospel. But in course of time the ceremony was

abandoned. It no longer exists except in ordination or consecration to the ministerial or preaching office. Even there it is deplorably abused. But more of this at some other time. “Which he poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Savior.”

[44] Observe, the Holy Spirit is not merely given, but “poured out”; not only that, but “abundantly poured out.” The apostle seems unable to sufficiently magnify grace and its works, while we, alas, estimate it so low in comparison to our works. It would be absurd for God to pour out upon us the Holy Spirit in such measure and yet to expect from us, and in us, something whereby we might be justified and saved; as if the superabundant divine works were insufficient.

[45] Were such the case, Paul here must have spoken inconsiderately and might justly be accused of falsehood. But so bountifully does he represent to us the measure of grace, clearly no one can rely too much upon the washing of regeneration; it is of unlimited importance. No one can place too much confidence in it; there is always occasion for more. For God has embraced, in the Word and in faith, blessings too great for mortal life to comprehend or to receive were they to manifest themselves. As revelation begins, the individual dies; he passes out of this life, swallowed up in the blessings he now by faith apprehends in very limited measure. Thus, more than abundantly are we justified and saved without works if we only believe. Peter says: “Through Christ he hath granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature.” 2 Peter 1:4. He does not say “will be granted” but “hath granted.” And Christ says: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:16. Notice, all who believe have eternal life. That being true, believers certainly are just and holy without works. Works contribute nothing to justification. It is affected by pure grace richly poured out upon us.

[46] “But,” you say, “how is it, then, the Scriptures so frequently speak of salvation for them who do good? For instance, Christ says (John 5:29): ‘And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.’ And Paul declares (Romans 2:7-8) that honor and glory are the reward of them who do good; indignation and wrath, of evil-doers. And he makes many

similar declarations.” I answer: How are these passages to be interpreted? Not otherwise than as they read — without additions: He who does good shall be saved; he who does evil shall be damned. The difficulty lies in our error in judging according to external appearances in the matter of good works. The Scriptures teach not that way, but that no one can do good until he is himself good. He does not become good through works, but his works are good because he is good. He becomes good through the washing of regeneration and in no other way. This is the meaning of Christ’s words (Matthew 7:17): “Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.” And (Mark 12:33). “Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt.”

[47] True, the self-righteous perform works similar to those of the regenerated; indeed, their works are frequently the more brilliant. They pray, fast, contribute money, erect institutions, make pilgrimages and conduct themselves with great ostentation. But Christ calls their works “sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:15) wherein move ravening wolves. None of the self-righteous are really humble, mild, moderate and good in their hearts. This fact is revealed when one crosses them and rejects their works. Then they bring forth their natural and identifying fruits: temerity, impatience, arbitrariness, obstinacy, slander and many other evil propensities.

[48] Therefore it is true that he who does good shall be saved — his salvation shall be revealed; but he could do nothing good were he not already saved in the new birth. The Scriptures sometimes have reference to the external conduct of the good, and at others to their inner nature that prompts the outward works, teaching present salvation because of the inner nature, and a future salvation if good is done; that is, if the individual remains steadfast, his salvation shall be revealed in the future.

[49] The works we performed in our old, unregenerate state, our Adamic nature, the apostle in this lesson rejects when he says “not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves.” These may be good works, but not before God, who looks first for personal goodness and afterward for the works. In Genesis 4:4-5, he had respect first unto Abel, and then unto his offering; and first rejected Cain, and then his offering. Cain’s offering, however, was in external appearance good like that of Abel.

[50] Paul significantly adds “through Jesus Christ our Savior.” The intent is to shelter us all under Christ, as young chickens are gathered under the wings of the hen. Christ himself says (Matthew 23:37): “O Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”

[51] In the phrase above is taught the nature of true, living faith. Such is the character of faith that it is not sufficient to salvation for you to believe in God after the manner of the Jews and many others, upon whom, however, he conferred many blessings and temporal advantages; but it is through Jesus Christ you must believe in God. In the first place, you must not doubt that he is your gracious God and Father, that he has forgiven all your sins and has saved you in baptism. In the second place, you must know, too, that all this has not been effected without cause — without satisfaction having been rendered to his righteousness. There is no reason for mercy and grace to operate upon and in us, to aid us to obtain eternal blessings and salvation. Justice must first be satisfied to the fullest extent. Christ says (Matthew 5:18) “One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law till all things be accomplished.” Whatever is promised of the grace and goodness of God must be understood as only for those who perfectly fulfill his commands. He says (Micah 2:7) in reply to the Jews, when they presumed they were great in the sight of God and continually cried “Peace, peace!” and “Why should God be so angry? Why should his benign Spirit have departed from us?” — he replies, “Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?” No one, therefore, can attain God’s abundant grace unless he shall have rendered full satisfaction to God’s commands.

[52] Now, enough has been said to show our works of no value in God’s sight, and ourselves unable to fulfill the least of his commands, to perform a single work. How much more impossible is it, then, for us to render full satisfaction to his justice and become worthy of his grace! Even though we were able to keep all his commandments and to make full satisfaction to his justice, yet we would not for that reason be worthy of his grace and of salvation. He would not be under any obligation to confer them upon us. He might require it all as obligatory upon his creatures, who must serve him. Whatever he grants is of pure grace and mercy. This Christ clearly taught in the parable in Luke 17:7-10: “But who is there of you, having a servant

plowing or keeping sheep, that will say unto him, when he is come in from the field, come straightway and sit down to meat; and will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank the servant because he did the things that were commanded? Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do.”

[53] Now, if through grace and not of necessity heaven is given to those who do all they are under obligation to do; if to such — provided, such there be — heaven is given not by merit but through divine and gracious promises like that of Matthew 19:17, “If thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments”: shall we then presume upon our wretched good works? Why extol them as if their nature and not the pure promise, the gracious Word of God, makes them worthy of the kingdom of heaven?

[54] In the first place, God has given a Being to fully satisfy divine justice for us all. In the second place, he has, through this same Being, poured out his grace and his rich blessings. So, then, notwithstanding grace is received by us without price and without merit on our part — indeed, in spite of great demerit and unworthiness — yet it is not bestowed without cause and deserved merit somewhere. As Paul teaches (Romans 5:18), we fell into sin not of our own act or deserving, it being born in us from Adam in our natural birth; and on the other hand, in the new birth we enter into grace and salvation through Christ, without our merit or works.

[55] Hence the apostle is careful in every place where he mentions grace and faith to add “through Jesus Christ,” that no one may be able to say, “I believe in God and am satisfied with that.” No, beloved friend, your belief must include a knowledge of how and through whom you believe. You must know that God requires you to fulfill all his commandments, to satisfy his justice, before he accepts your faith unto salvation; and that though you were able to render full satisfaction you would still have to await salvation through grace alone, and not receive it on account of any duties you perform, but rather your pride and presumption must fall to the ground before God.

[56] Observe the advantages you have in Christ. Through him grace and salvation are conferred upon you, he having rendered full obedience to all the commandments of God, and satisfied God's justice, in your stead and for you. Grace and salvation are conferred upon you because he is worthy. This is true Christian faith. No faith is sufficient but the Christian faith, the faith that believes in Christ and accepts solely through him the two principles — satisfaction of divine justice, and the gracious bestowal of eternal salvation. Paul, speaking of Christ (Romans 4:25), says, "Who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification." Not only was he given to put away sin and to fulfill the commandments of God, but also to render us worthy, through him, of possessing righteousness and of being children of grace. Again, Paul says of Christ (Romans 3:25), "Whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood." It is not just "faith" but "faith in his blood." With his blood, and in our nature, he has rendered full satisfaction and become for us a throne of grace. We receive absolution and grace at no cost or labor on our part, but not without cost and labor on the part of Christ.

[57] We must, then, shelter ourselves under his wings (Matthew 23:37) and not fly afar in the security of our own faith, else we will soon be devoured by the hawk. Our salvation must exist, not in our righteousness, but, as I have often said, in Christ's righteousness, which is an outspread wing, or a tabernacle, to shelter us.

[58] Our faith and all we may have received from God is insufficient to salvation, wholly inadequate, unless faith rests beneath the wings of Christ and firmly trusts that not we but he can render, and has rendered, full satisfaction to the justice of God for us; and that grace and salvation are not conferred upon us because of our faith but because of the will of Christ. The pure grace of God, promised, procured and bestowed upon us in Christ and through Christ, must be perfectly recognized. This is the teaching implied in John 14:6, "No one cometh unto the Father but by me." Christ's sole effort in the whole Gospel is to draw us out of ourselves into himself; he spreads out his wings and calls us together beneath their shelter. To emphasize the grace of Christ is also Paul's design in the conclusion of this lesson, where he says: "That, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying."

[59] He does not say “justified by our faith” but “justified by the grace of Christ.” Christ alone has favor with God. No one but he has done the will of God and merited eternal life. In view of the fact that he did it not for his own sake but for ours, all believers should be so perfectly one with Christ that all he has done for them will, through him and his grace, be regarded as if the believer himself had accomplished it. See what an inexpressibly beneficent thing Christian faith is — what inconceivably great blessings it brings to all believers!

[60] Let us learn from this epistle how precious is the Gospel that proclaims these benefits, and what injury and destruction of souls they affect who silently ignore the Gospel and preach the works of the Law, yes, their own human doctrines. Guard, then, against false preachers and also against false faith. Rely not upon yourself, nor upon your faith. Flee to Christ; keep under his wings; remain under his shelter. Let his righteousness and grace, not yours, be your refuge. You are to be made an heir of eternal life, not by the grace you have yourself received, but, as Paul says here, by Christ’s grace. Again, it is said in Psalm 91:4, “He will cover thee with his pinions, and under his wings shalt thou take refuge.” And in the Song of Solomon 2:14, “O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the steep place.” That is, in the wounds of Christ the soul is preserved. Observe, true Christian faith does not take refuge in itself, as the sophists dream, but flees to Christ and is preserved under him and in him.

[61] It has been sufficiently stated that we are heirs of eternal life in hope, and that grace, regardless of works, instantaneously confers salvation, inheritance and all; yet, as said, “in hope.” They are not revealed until death. Then we shall see what, in faith, we have received and possess. The Armor of This Epistle

[62] This epistle lesson forcibly and in express terms contends against all humanly-devised righteousness, as well as against all human powers and free will. These are plain words, “Not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us.” In fact, the words of the whole lesson oppose the righteousness of man. Paul attributes all efficacy to the washing of regeneration, to the renewing of the Holy Spirit, to Jesus Christ and his grace. In the face of such thunderbolts, how can there remain in us the least trace of presumption?

[63] It matters not how brilliant may be secular and ecclesiastical laws; how attractive the station of priests, monks and nuns; how dazzling the titles of gentlemen of honor and ladies of uprightness, even if the wearers of them could raise the dead: without faith in Christ all is vain. Such hypocrisy as that just mentioned blinds and misleads the whole world, and obscures for us the holy Gospel and the Christian faith. These brilliant works and attractive stations of men assist as little in procuring our salvation as do the works of beasts or the common trades of mankind. Indeed, they perniciously obstruct salvation. Therefore, you should guard against wolves in sheep's clothing, and learn to cleave to Christ in true and firm faith.

Third Christmas Sermon. Christmas Morning Sermon. The Divinity of Christ. Our Heavenly Home.

Text: Hebrews 1:1-12.

The Divinity of Christ

[1] This is a strong, forcible, noble epistle, preeminently and emphatically teaching the great article of faith concerning the Godhead, or the divinity of Christ. The presumption that it was not written by Paul is somewhat plausible, because the style is unusually ornamental for him. Some are of the opinion it was written by Luke; others by Apollos, whom Luke represents as “mighty in the Scriptures,” opposing the Jews. Acts 18:24 and 28. Certain it is, no epistle enforces the Scriptures with greater power than does this. Hence it is evident the author was an eminent apostolic individual, whoever he was. Now, the object of the epistle is to establish and promote faith in the divinity of Christ, and, as already stated, scarce any portion of the Bible more strongly enforces this article of our creed. We must, therefore, confine ourselves to its words and treat it in regular order, item by item.

[2] In the first place, it was the apostle’s design to bring the Jews to the Christian faith. As we shall learn, he presses them so closely they cannot deny that Christ is true God. Now, if he is God and the Son of God, and if he himself has spoken unto us and suffered for us, justice necessarily demands our faith. We have much more reason to believe in him than had the fathers who in time past believed when God spoke simply through the prophets.

[3] Paul contrasts the ancient preachers and disciples with those of later times. The prophets and Christ are the preachers, the fathers and ourselves the disciples. The Son, the Lord himself, speaks unto us; his servants the prophets spoke unto the fathers. If the fathers believed the servants, how much more readily would they have believed the Lord himself! And if we believe not the Lord, how much more reluctant would we have been to believe the servants! Thus, he makes one condition argue for the other: our unbelief contrasted with the faith of the Fathers is an awful disgrace; again, the faith of the fathers in contrast with our unbelief is deserving of very great honor. Our disgrace is yet greater when we recall the fact that God spoke to the fathers, not only once, but at different times, and not only in one way, but in different ways; and yet they always believed; while we are not induced by their example to believe, even in one instance, the message of the Lord himself. Observe, Paul proceeds with a powerful discourse in the effort to convert the Jews, yet the attempt avails nothing. “By diverse portions (at sundry times) and in diverse manners,”

[4] To me the particular and unlike meaning of these two phrases is this: “By diverse portions” implies the succession of many prophets, and that all prophecies were not made through one man nor at one time; “in diverse manners” signifies that through each individual prophet, to say nothing of the many, God spoke in different ways at different times. For instance, at times he expressed himself in plain, definite terms; and at other times figuratively or through visions. Ezekiel portrayed the four evangelists by the four beasts. Isaiah sometimes clearly states that Christ shall be a king; at other times he alludes to him as a rod and a branch from the stem of Jesse; again, as excellent fruit of the earth.

[5] Thus, the prophets speak of Christ in “diverse manners.” This latter phrase, moreover, may also be understood as implying that God spoke in various ways when he gave the people of Israel temporal aid. His leading them out of Egypt by Moses was one way of speaking, and his bringing them through the Red Sea another. In his directions to David concerning warfare and other matters he spoke in a still different way. Not one declaration, but diverse declarations, were made. The objects accomplished differed. But faith was always the same — at all times and with every method.

[6] How beautifully and gently the apostle invites and persuades the Jews when he reminds them of the fathers and the prophets, and of God himself! They had unbounded confidence in the record of these as they were in time past. But now they will not believe in God. They will not take to heart the fact of his speaking to the fathers, not once only, but often; not in one way, but in different ways. Yet they know well, and must confess that such was the case. They will not believe him now when he speaks at another time and in another way — a way he never before employed nor will again. The manner of speaking they ardently desire, will never be granted. God has never yet, not even in former time, spoken in a manner designated by them. That would be but to obstruct faith and frustrate God's design. We must leave to him the time, person and manner of speaking, and be concerned only about faith.

[7] The phrase “at the end of these days” is significant. From now to the end no other manner of preaching is to be adopted. This is the last time he purposes to speak, and the last method he will employ. He has commanded — left on record — that this Word, and only this, is to be preached until the end. Paul says (1 Corinthians 11:26): “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come.” He also arrests their expectation when he says “in these days;” they are not to look for other days to come. The days when he speaks for the last time and in the last manner are already at hand. “In his Son.”

[8] Here Paul begins to extol Christ, the last teacher, speaker and apostle: with forcible and well-grounded Scriptural evidence he shows Christ as the real Son of God and Lord over all. We must first learn to truly understand the character of Christ, that he exists in a twofold nature — divine and human. This is a point where many err. Sometimes it is to manufacture fables from his words. Men apply to the divine nature the sayings really uttered with reference to his humanity; Thus, are they deluded by certain passages of Scripture. It is of the utmost importance first to determine which of the statements concerning Christ pertain to his divine nature and which to his human side. This settled, all else will be easily plain.

[9] But first we must answer the inquiry liable to be made, “If the voice of God today is the last message, why is it said that Elijah and Enoch shall come, opposing Antichrist?” I answer: Concerning the advent of Elijah, I hold that he will not come in a physical manner. [As to the coming of Elijah

I am suspended between heaven and earth, but I am inclined to believe it will not take place bodily. However, I will not contend hard against the other view. Each may believe or not believe it, as he likes. Editions, A, C, D, E.] I well know St. Augustine has somewhere said, “The advent of Elijah and of Antichrist is firmly fixed in the belief of all Christians.” But I also know there is no statement of Scripture to substantiate his assertion. Malachi’s prophecy concerning the coming of Elijah (Malachi 4:5) the angel Gabriel makes refer to John the Baptist (Luke 1:17), and Christ does the same even more explicitly where he says (Mark 9:13): “But I say unto you, that Elijah is come, and they have also done unto him whatsoever they would, even as it is written of him.” Now, if John is the Elijah of the prophecy, as the Lord here says he was, the prediction of Malachi is already fulfilled. And there is nothing more prophesied concerning the coming of Elijah. The statement the Lord made just previously to the one quoted, “Elijah indeed cometh first, and restoreth all things,” may be fairly interpreted to mean that Christ, referring to the office of John, practically says: “Yes, I well know Elijah must first come and restore all things, but he has already come and accomplished it.”

[10] This view is demanded by the fact that immediately after his reference to the coming and office of Elijah, Christ speaks of his own sufferings: “It is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at naught.” If this prophecy concerning Christ was to be fulfilled after the coming of Elijah, then certainly Elijah must have already come. I know of nothing more to expect concerning the coming of Elijah unless it might be that his spirit will be manifest again in the power of the Word of God, as now seems probable. For I have no longer any doubt that the Pope, with the Turks, is Antichrist, whatever you may believe.

[11] To return to Christ: We assert it is essential firmly to believe Christ true God and true man; and that the Scriptures — including Christ’s own words — sometimes have reference to the divine nature of Christ and at other times to his human nature. For instance, the declaration (John 8:58), “Before Abraham was born, I am,” relates to his divinity; but the statement (Matthew 20:23), “To sit on my right hand, and on my left hand, is not mine to give,” recognizes his humanity, which could not help itself even on the cross. Yet some expounders have desired here to show their great skill by abstruse interpretations made to oppose the here tics. It is his human nature

that says: "The Father is greater than I." (John 14:28). Also: "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." (Matthew 23:37). Again, the passage (Mark 13:32) reading, "Of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father," has reference to the man Christ.

[12] The explanation which some have made, "The Son knew not; that is, he did not choose to reveal," is superfluous. What is the advantage of that addition? The humanity of Christ, like that of any other holy mortal man, did not, at every moment, consider and utter, did not desire and note, how some made him a man with almighty power; they improperly combine the two natures and their operation. As he did not always see, hear and feel all things, so likewise he did not at every moment contemplate in his heart every matter; he recognized things as God moved him to do, as he brought them before him. Being filled with grace and wisdom, he was able to judge and to teach as occasion demanded; the Godhead, who alone sees and knows all things, was personally present in him. Finally: All reference in the Scriptures to the humiliation and exaltation of Christ must be understood of the man; for the divine nature can neither be humiliated nor exalted. "Whom he appointed heir of all things."

[13] These words refer to Christ's human nature. We must believe in his supremacy in that respect as well as in his divinity. All creatures are subservient to the man Christ. As God, he creates all. As man, he creates nothing, yet all creation is subject to him. David says (Psalm 8:6), "Thou hast put all things under his feet."

[14] Christ is our Lord and our God. As God, he creates us; as Lord, we serve him and he rules over us. The apostle refers to him in this epistle as true God, and also Lord over all. Though having two different natures, he is one person. What Christ does and suffers, essentially God does and suffers. In this case only one nature is involved. To illustrate: I speak of a "wounded man" when but a single limb is injured. The soul is not wounded, nor is the body as a whole; only a part of the body. But I speak as I do because body and soul constitute one person. Now, as I must recognize a difference between body and soul when I speak, so must I recognize the two natures of Christ. Again: It is not a misstatement if in the night I say I have no knowledge of the sun, when at the same time I have a thorough mental

knowledge of it; for I have no physical vision. Similarly, Christ knows nothing concerning the last day, and at the same time has full knowledge of it. “Through whom also he made the worlds.”

[15] Observe, by this same Son who in his human nature is “appointed heir of all things” — by him as God, the worlds were made. He is but one person, yet with two natures of unlike operation. There is one Christ, of two natures. The terms Paul here employs are in recognition of Christ’s highest nature. Now, the apostle plainly speaks of the Son who is appointed heir when he says that by him the world is made. If everything is made by him, he could not himself have been created. Consequently, it is plain that he is true God. For anything not created and yet existing must be God, Again, whatsoever is made must be a creature and cannot be God; for it does not exist of itself but derives its existence from its Creator. Now, all things are made by Christ, and he is not created. Hence he must have his existence from himself; not from any creature nor any creator.

[16] Furthermore, if he is a Son he is not alone, his existence necessitates a Father. Through the Son God made the world, but God cannot himself be that Son. Consequently, there must be two distinct persons, the Father and the Son, yet (because) the divine nature is only one; for there cannot be more than one God. Conclusively, then, Christ with the Father is true God. In one divine substance with him, he is Creator and Maker of the world. The only difference is, one is the Son and the other the Father. And Christ is not created by the Father, as the world was created; essentially, he was begotten in eternity. Nor is he inferior to the Father. He is the same in every respect except that he is begotten of the Father, and the Father not begotten of him.

[17] If these things are beyond the grasp of our reason, reason must surrender as a captive to these and like Scripture words and believe. Could we comprehend this mystery by human reason, there would be no faith. Clearly enough, the words, “Through whom also he made the worlds,” make mentions of two Beings. And it is not less clear that the uncreated one through whom all things were made, also must be God. Just how this can be, the Scriptures do not teach. It must be received by faith. The Scriptures speak after this fashion: “The world is created through Christ, by the Father, in the Holy Spirit”; and though the meaning is not wholly clear, and easy of comprehension, there is good reason for the language. It is employed more

by way of intimation than explanation — to imply that the Father derives not his substance from the Son, but the Son from the Father; and that the latter is the first original person in the Godhead. In the statement that the Father made the world through Christ, not Christ through the Father, the intent is to teach the Father's title to the first person; he from whom, through Christ, all things have existence. John speaks in the same way (John 1:3), "All things were made through him." And Paul again (Colossians 1:16), "All things have been created through him, and unto him;" and (Romans 11:36), "For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things.

[18] Note the aptness of the language where Christ is termed an "heir," in reference to his humanity. For who should be more entitled to inherit the estate of God than his Son? He with the Father created it — created all creatures. But Christ is man and Son, and because of his Sonship he inherits; in both natures is he Son. But as to the origin of the apostle's particular language, we shall learn that in the Gospel. "Who being the effulgence [brightness] of his glory and the very image of his substance [person]."

[19] Paul uses these figures to express with all possible clearness the fact that Christ is a person distinct from the Father, yet one, real, true God. But the German and Latin words are not just equivalent to the Greek terms employed by the apostle. The apostle speaks of Christ as the effulgence proceeding from the glory of the Father. Just as the illumination of the morning sun, the sun's vital substance, is not a part of the effulgence, but the whole effulgence of the whole sun, proceeding from the sun and yet inherent in it. By the figure, "the effulgence of his glory," is conveyed as in a word the birth of the Son, the unity of his nature and the Father's, and the distinction of the persons. Christ, without limit of time, is eternally begotten of the Father, and ever proceeds, with that unweariedness represented by the sun in the morning rather than at midday or evening. But Christ is not the person of the Father, as the effulgence is not the sun. He is with and in the Father; not existing before nor after, but co-eternal with him and a part of him, as the effulgence is with and a part of the sun.

[20] The apostle terms the Father's effulgence "Doxa," (glory) properly implying honor or glory. Therefore, the divine nature is unqualified glory and honor, having all in itself and deriving nothing from another. It has the

right to boast of and glory in itself. Now, Paul says Christ is complete light, the full effulgence of God's honor. That is, he too has in himself the unlimited Godhead and has equal right with the Father to boast and glory. The only exception is, he derives his authority from the Father and not the Father from him. He is the effulgence proceeding from the paternal honor, he is God begotten and not God begetting, yet God complete and perfect as the Father is.

[21] The Scriptures, you will observe, do not so speak of the saints, though they are also an honor to God; that is, they were created for his honor. But Paul says Christ is the brightness of the paternal honor; the words force the conclusion that the brightness constitutes the Father's honor, else it would not be the effulgence of his honor. But what shall I say by way of explanation? These words are more easily understood by the heart than explained by tongue or pen. They are in themselves clearer than any commentary renders them, and in proportion as they are explained are they obscured. The substance of the clause is this: the whole Godhead is in Christ, and to him as to God all honor is due; yet he does not derive his Godhood from himself, but from the Father. The apostle implies two persons but one God; for the Holy Spirit is not mentioned here. When we have advanced far enough to comprehend two persons existent in one God, we will readily believe in the third person.

[22] In the other figure the apostle styles Christ an image or sign of the substance of God. Despite its clearness I still claim the privilege of speaking plainly and clearly. An image created after the likeness of a person is not an image of the substance or nature of that person. It is not a being; it is mere stone or wood. It is an image formed from stone or wood substance in the likeness of man. But if I could handle the substance of the person as the potter handles clay and make therewith an image of the individual which should also perfectly contain his substance or nature, that would, as you perceive, be an essential image, or a likeness of the human substance. But such would be a creature. An image necessarily is constructed from a different substance than the thing imaged, and differs in nature. Here the Son is such an image of the Father substance, that the Father's substance is the image itself. If we may so express it, the image is made from the Father's substance. The image is not only like the Father resembling him, but fully contains his whole substance and nature; as it may be said of "the

effulgence of his glory,” that the effulgence is constituted of the glory, and not only like it but embodying it perfectly, making the effulgence and the glory identical.

[23] Now notice, as I say an image of man is formed of wood or stone, so I say Christ is a divine image: as truly as the former is but a material image, so truly is the latter God. Paul calls Christ the image of the living and invisible God. In the wooden image, this perfection is lacking. Though a wooden image, it is not an image of the wood but of an individual; it does not represent the wood, but the individual. Though the individual be faithfully reproduced in the wood, yet he himself is not wood; his substance is something different from the substance imaging him. In all cases the image differs in substance from the person imaged. It is impossible to furnish an image actually the substance of the individual. But in this verse we have an image and one imaged who are identical in substance, except that the Father is not an image. The Father is not fashioned from nor like the Son; but the Son from the Father, and is like the Father, in one simple, truly divine substance with him.

[24] Such perfection is also wanting in the sun and its effulgence. The sun has its own splendor, and the same is true of its effulgence, but the effulgence derives its splendor from the sun. But in the figure before us, effulgence is splendor; of the splendor, if we may so speak, the effulgence is constituted. The splendor is essentially and perfectly the effulgence itself, with this difference that the effulgence has not its origin in itself but in the paternal splendor.

[25] You will notice the verse is even now clearer than the explanation. “The image of his substance,” “the effulgence of his glory” — these Paul’s sayings are clear enough. The tongue should be silent here to allow the heart to reflect. The Hebrew mode of speaking is thus: *Pauperes sanctorum*, i. *pauperes sancti*; *Virtus Dei*, i. *virtus Deus*; *Sic*, *character substantiae*, i. *character substantia*, *subsistens et impsemet Deus*; *Sic*, *splendor gloriae*, i. *splendor gloria ipsa*.” Latin scholars may easily comprehend this, but for the Germans and the common people it suffices to call the likeness made from gold an image of gold. Similarly, they are to call Christ an image of God the Father because he is wholly of God in character, and there is no God beside him, though at the same time his Godhead and image have origin from the Father as the first person; but the two are one God. This is

not true of creatures. The golden image represents not a golden nature, but the wholly different nature of the individual. Though it is a golden image, it does not image the nature of gold. Another image is necessary to represent the nature of gold; as, for instance, a golden color, or something else not truly gold. But in our text the image is also the substance of the imaged, and no other image is requisite than its own substance. It is faith that is called for here and not keen speculation. The words are clear enough; they are positive and forcible. He who will not in them recognize the divinity of Christ, will not recognize it in any way. Christ is not here termed a common image in the ordinary sense of the word; the word used is “Character” — an image more characteristic than a portrait or any other likeness. Again, he is called *apaugasma* — an actual brightness resembling nothing but the glory from which it proceeds. “And upholding all things by the word of his power.”

[26] For a third time Christ is represented as God. First, it is stated that the worlds were made by him; second, he is called the brightness and the image of God; and here he upholds all things. If he upholds all, he is not himself upheld. He is supreme; hence he must be God. To uphold all things is to support and maintain them. Not only are all things made by him, as stated in the preceding verse, but they are perpetuated and preserved by him. As Paul says in Colossians 1:17: “In him all things consist.” The word “upholding” is well chosen. Christ neither coerces nor restrains nor disturbs the peace; he gently sustains, permitting all creatures to enjoy his tender goodness. As it is written in the Wisdom of Solomon, Song of Solomon 8:1: “Wisdom reacheth from one end to another mightily; and sweetly doth she order all things.”

[27] I am not fully decided as to the intent of the phrase “by the word of his power.” Were these the words of uninspired man, I would think the writer in error; for Christ is himself the Word, as the Gospel teaches, and acts in obedience to no word. Did they refer to the person of the Father, it would be perfect harmony with the Scripture teaching; for the Father made all things through his Word and upholds them in that Word. As said in Psalm 33:6, “By the word of Jehovah were the heavens made.”

[28] I withhold my view to give place to another and better one. I merely venture the opinion that the apostle’s purpose in this manner of speaking may be to emphasize the unity of the persons in one Godhead. Since they

are one God, we may understand here reference to the Father; God's action is the action of each of the three persons. God upholds all things by his Word; Christ, or the Word here mentioned, is really God.

[29] There are other places in the Scriptures where we have a sudden change of person. For instance, Psalm 2:6-7: "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will tell of the decree: Jehovah said unto me, Thou art my Son." There the first verse represents the Father speaking concerning the Son: and the second verse, the Son concerning the Father. The reason for the sudden change of persons in this brief passage is, the two persons are one God. It may be that when our text declares that one is the image of God, the reference is to Christ; and that when it states one upholds all things by his word, reference is to the Father, no designation being made because the two are one God without distinction.

[30] If this is not a satisfactory conclusion, we might regard the expression in this light: we might understand the term "word" as having somewhat the significance of an event or act. For instance, in the Gospel (Luke 2:15) we read of the shepherds saying: "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing [word — event] that is come to pass" — let us see the event which has taken place there. So, in this phrase declaring Christ upholds all things by the word of his power, we might understand "by the act of his power." By the operation of his power are all things preserved; and all existence and power are derived not from the things themselves but from the active power of God. Further, power and the Word are not to be divorced; they are identical. We may say of an efficient word that its nature and substance are the operating power. Now, each may adopt the view to him most plausible. "When he had by himself made purification of our sins."

[31] Here the apostle touches upon the Gospel proper. Whatever we may be taught concerning Christ is without significance to ourselves until we learn we are the beneficiaries of the doctrine. What would be the advantage to us of preaching were it designed alone for Christ's benefit? The fact is, these words concern only us; they have to do with our salvation. Let us, then, joyfully listen. The language is incomparably beautiful, telling that the supreme Christ, the heir of all things, the effulgence of God's glory and the image of his substance; who upholds all things, not by extraneous power, not with assistance, but by his own power, his own act; who, in short, is all

in all — that he has come to serve us, has poured out his love for us and made purification for our sins.

[32] The apostle says “our,” “our sins;” not his own sin, not the sins of unbelievers. Purification is not for, and cannot profit, him who does not believe. Nor did Christ effect the cleansing by our free will, our reason or power, our works, our contrition or repentance, these all being worthless in the sight of God’, he effects it by himself. And how? By taking our sins upon himself on the holy cross, as Isaiah 53:6 tells us.

[33] But even this answer does not sufficiently explain how he cleanses us “by himself.” To go further: When we accept him, when we believe he has purified us, he dwells within us because of, and by, our faith, daily continuing to cleanse us by his own operation; and nothing apart from Christ in any way contributes to the purification of our sins. Note, he does not dwell in us, nor work our cleansing through himself, by any other way than in and through our faith.

[34] Hearken, then, ye deceivers of the world and blind leaders of the blind; ye Pope, ye bishops, priests, monks, learned and idle talkers; who teach the purification of sins by human achievements, and that satisfaction for sins may be made by men; who issue indulgences and vend devised purifications of sins. Listen to the teaching here: Purification of sins is not affected by human effort, but solely in Christ and through himself. Christ is communicated to us, not through any work of ours, but through faith alone, as Paul teaches in Ephesians 3:17 that “Christ dwells in your hearts through faith.” Plainly, then, the purification of sins is faith, and he who believes that Christ has purged his sins, unquestionably is cleansed through that faith and in no other way. Appropriate, then, is Peter’s expression in Acts 15:9, “cleansing their hearts by faith.”

[35] Having once possessed faith, and purification being affected in us by Christ, we are then to perform good works, hating our sins and repenting of them. Under these conditions our works are really good. Before faith is present, they avail naught; rather they induce false confidence and trust. So heinous an evil are our sins, and so enormous is the cost of their purification, it was necessary that one exalted as we here read Christ was, must intervene to purge them by himself. What could the poor, vain attempts of us who are creatures, and besides sinful, feeble, corrupt

creatures, accomplish where the demand was of such magnitude? One might as reasonably presume to burn heaven and earth with an extinguished brand. Our sins can be expiated only by a price commensurate with the God they offend. "Sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; having become by so much better than the angels, as he hath inherited a more excellent name than they."

[36] This statement refers to the human nature of Christ wherein he effected the purification of our sins; at the same time, it is true the cleansing was an achievement of the Son of God. We must not, in making distinction of natures, try to make a distinction of persons. Again, we may truly say the Son of God sits on the right hand of the Majesty, though the passage is to be accepted only in the human sense, for in his divine nature he is himself the only Majesty, in unity with the Father, upon whose right hand he sits. But we will abandon these comments which but obscure and keep to the clearer language of the text.

[37] To "sit on the right hand of the Majesty" certainly implies a likeness to that Majesty. Wherever it is said that Christ sits at the right hand of God, there is fundamentally established his title to true God; for no one but God himself is like God. So, to say that the man Christ sits on the right hand of God is equivalent to saying he is true God. Psalm 110:1 declares, "Jehovah saith unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand." That is, Jehovah said to Christ the man: Be like me; in other words, thou shalt be recognized not simply as man but as God. It is with this thought the apostle cites the psalmist. Again, it is written (Psalm 8:6), "Thou hast put all things under his feet." That is, thou hast made him equal with thyself. Not that Christ was not God until all things were put under his feet. But his humanity was not yet God and equal with God. For as soon as he began to be man, he began to be God. The Scriptures refer to Christ in terms more appropriately significant than we are accustomed to use. So far at times is the person lost sight of in the nature, or the natures so strongly distinguished, few rightly comprehend the words. I have myself frequently erred in passages of this character, attributing to the nature that which concerns the person, and vice versa. In Philippians 2:6-8 we read: "Who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of

men; and being found in fashion as a man.” This passage, however, is obscure.

[38] To return to our text: Note, the apostle now begins to cite the Old Testament for Scripture testimony that Christ is God. Up to this time he has given us his own views and used his own language, based on his interpretations of Scripture. He has told us Christ is far superior to the angels for he has become God and has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. His whole design is to show the man Christ, becoming God, being recognized and glorified as God. “For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?”

[39] This quotation is from the Second Psalm (Psalm 2). To make plainer the apostle’s allusion to Christ, we cite the entire Psalm, as follows: “Why do the nations rage, and the peoples meditate a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Jehovah, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens will laugh: The Lord will have them in derision. Then will he speak unto them in his wrath and vex them in his sore displeasure: Yet I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will tell of the decree: Jehovah said unto me, Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. Now therefore be wise, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve Jehovah with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the son, lest he be angry, and ye perish in the way, for his wrath will soon be kindled. Blessed are all they that take refuge in him.”

[40] We see plainly, the reference here is to Christ, against whom raged the Jews, with Pilate, Herod and the chief priests. To Christ, God says, “Thou art my Son.”

[41] The Jews endeavor to evade this passage of the apostle by introducing wild interpretations. Unable to deny that the Psalm refers to a coming king and anointed one — or Christ, as “anointed” implies — they assert the allusion is to David, who was also a Christ. For they term all kings “messiahs” or “christs” — anointed ones. But their position will not

hold. David never inherited the heathen, nor did his kingdom extend to the uttermost parts of the earth, as recorded of the king mentioned in the Psalm. Again, in no instance in the Scriptures is it said to any man, “Thou art my Son.”

[42] Even when the Jews do admit the Psalm’s allusion to the Messiah they resort to two evasions. They maintain he is yet to come, that Jesus Christ is not the Messiah. Further, that despite being called the Son of God, he is not God. For, they say, it is written of the children of God in general (Psalm 82:6): “I said, Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High”; and many times in the Scriptures the saints are called the children of God (Genesis 6:2; Psalm 89:27; Matthew 5:45; 1 John 3:2); Paul, too, in various places calls us children of God, and we in return call him Father, as in the Lord’s Prayer.

[43] How shall we reply to them? Shall we leave the apostle unsustained, as if he had not given good, clear Scripture proof? To do so would be unjust. In the first place, we have the testimony of experience that Jesus is he of whom the Psalm speaks; in Christ the prophecy is fulfilled and become history. He was persecuted by kings and rulers. They sought to destroy him and only brought derision upon themselves in the attempt. They were themselves destroyed, as the Psalm says. Throughout the world Christ is recognized Lord. No king, before nor since, has ruled or can rule in equal extent. Now, if in Christ the Psalm is fulfilled, it cannot be made to refer to any other.

[44] Admitting the saints are called “gods” and “the children of God,” the apostle’s reasoning based on the fact that nowhere is it said to any angel, much less to any man, “Thou art my Son,” sufficiently proves that Christ is God. He must be peculiarly God’s Son, having a relation unshared by men and angels. The fact that God does not include him among other sons but especially distinguishes him, indicates his superiority. He cannot be superior to angels without being true God, for angels are the highest order of beings.

[45] Further, God begets all other children through some agency. For instance, James 1:18: “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth.” Angels are not begotten but are created. The Son, however, God did not create; he begot him through himself. He says: “I, myself — by myself I

have begotten thee this day.” Such language is not employed with reference to any other. This personal bringing forth of a single Being embraces a natural birth. True, God says of Solomon (1 Chronicles 22:10), “He shall be my son;” but he does not make to him the personal declaration, “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” David begat Solomon, but the one referred to was begotten by God alone.

[46] Again, God says “this day;” that is, in eternity. Natural birth cannot be effected in a day, as witness the human species as well as the animals. To specify concerning this particular birth, God adds “this day.” He begets his Son instantaneously — eternally; begetting and bringing forth are simultaneous. God does not say, “I begat thee a year ago;” it is now — “Thou art my Son, I have begotten thee.” Essentially, then, it is a transcendental birth, a birth of an exalted nature and incomprehensible to man.

[47] According to Hosea 11:1, God says he called his son out of Egypt. This verse, like the Psalm, implies the Son of God. The Jews assert the reference is to the people of Israel, but Matthew (Matthew 2:15) applies it to Christ. But however, this may be, nowhere in the Scriptures do we find it said to any man, not even to a renowned king, “Thou art my Son.” Much less do we find where God says to any man, “I myself have begotten thee — this day have I begotten.” Hence it is plainly evident from the Psalm that Jesus is the Christ and the true, natural Son of God.

[48] Mark you, so much emphasis does the apostle lay upon Scriptural authority, we are under no obligation to accept anything the Bible does not assert. Were not this true, his argument, “Unto which of the angels said he at any time,” etc., would not be conclusive. The Jews might say, “Notwithstanding God did not in the Scriptures make such assertion to the angels, he may have otherwise asserted it; for the Scriptures do not record everything.” Now, if in the purpose of God we are under no obligation to accept anything not presented in the Scriptures, we are also to reject all doctrines not taught therein.

[49] This conclusion operates against the presumption of the Pope and his followers, who shamelessly assert we must accept more than the Scriptures present. They claim it is not conclusive reasoning to say of a certain thing, “It is not in the Scriptures, therefore it is not authentic.” They

oppose the apostle's teaching even to greater extent than do the Jews, introducing their councils, teachers and high schools. Beware of their error. Be certain you have full Scripture authority for all you accept. Of whatever is not in the Scriptures, ask as does the apostle here, "When did God ever assert it?" "And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son."

[50] The Papists also impair the force of this passage. Apparently the purpose of their teaching is but to weaken the point of the Scriptures. They assert the verse has two meanings: first, it refers to Solomon as a figure of Christ; second, to Christ directly. But to admit the Scriptures to be of uncertain meaning would be immediately to make them not conclusive. The Jews might maintain that reference is to Solomon primarily. Then the apostle apparently would be overthrown and would establish nothing. So we should firmly hold that Christ alone is here spoken of, even as the preceding verse presents a Son peculiar and above all other sons. If the word was not spoken to angels, much less was it to Solomon. The apostle says this Son has obtained a more excellent name than the angels; therefore, by no means can the reference be to Solomon.

[51] We are not to be content merely to accept the apostle's statement; we are under obligation to show how he clearly and conclusively establishes his position. Know, then, he cites 2 Samuel 7:14 and Psalm 89:26. The books named are prophetic. In the passages adduced the reference is to Christ alone; not to Solomon. But in 1 Chronicles 22:10, a historical book, reference is had to Solomon alone: "He shall be my son, and I will be his father." Even the Jews admit the true Christ is alluded to in Psalm 89:26-27: "He shall cry unto me, Thou art my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. I also will make him my first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth." Likewise, is the reference to Christ in verse 6: "Who among the sons of the mighty is like unto Jehovah [the Lord]?" The meaning is: Among the sons of God is one who is God, and no one is like unto the Lord.

[52] Though the passages in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles are in harmony, yet such are the circumstances forming the setting in the first passage, the word cannot be understood to refer to Solomon. The two texts must be two different declarations to David, one concerning Christ and one concerning Solomon. In the first instance (Psalm 7:12), God says to David: "When thy

days are fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, that shall proceed out of thy bowels.”

[53] Now, Solomon was not set up king subsequent to David’s death, but while David yet lived. 1 Kings 1:30ff. David well knew the declaration was made concerning Christ. It is for that reason he expressed heartfelt praise to God, saying (2 Samuel 7:19): “O Lord Jehovah, thou hast spoken also of thy servant’s house for a great while to come.” While he himself lived, David ordained Solomon his successor. He says (Chronicles 22:8-10): “The word of Jehovah came to me saying... A son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest... He shall build a house for my name;” not thou who “hast shed blood abundantly.” In the passage from Samuel nothing is said about the shedding of blood. There God says he will build a house for David. Further argument for the idea advanced is found in the fact that in 2 Samuel 7:14-15 God freely unqualifiedly promises: “If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men; but my lovingkindness shall not depart from him.” He freely promises his grace for the things so bitterly bewailed in Psalm 89.

[54] As Psalm 132:12 shows, the promise made concerning Solomon is made only upon the condition, “If thy children will keep my covenant,” etc. This David indicates in 1 Kings 2:4, and God makes it known to Solomon in the following chapter, verse 14. The passage from Samuel, then, should be understood particularly to refer to Christ, but not that from Chronicles. This is clearly and conclusively proven. “And when he again bringeth in the firstborn into the world he saith, and let all the angels of God worship him.”

[55] Here we have cited a third passage from Psalm 97 (Psalm 97:7), which clearly speaks of the kingdom of God, whereof Christ in the Gospel teaches. In this kingdom Christ reigns; he is Lord. It had its beginning after his ascension and is completed through the preaching of the Gospel; for it plainly alludes to preaching. It reads: “Jehovah reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad. Clouds and darkness are round about him [that is, he reigns in faith concealed]: righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his adversaries round about. His lightnings lightened the world [these are his miracles]: the earth saw and trembled. The mountains [the great rulers, and the proud] melted like wax at the presence of Jehovah, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. The heavens [the apostles] declare his

righteousness [faith], and all the peoples have seen his glory [for the Gospel is everywhere preached]. Let all them be put to shame that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods. Zion heard and was glad and the daughters of Judah rejoiced, because of thy judgments,” etc. [Edition A gives the whole of Psalm 97].

[56] Experience and its fulfillment explain this Psalm. It was completely fulfilled in Christ. He is preached in all the world and reigns in the kingdom of God, which is not true of any other king. The apostle prefaces his quotation with the words, “And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world,” meaning that in the Psalm the Spirit speaks of the second coming of Christ into the world through the Gospel. He came first in bodily form. Through the instrumentality of his crucifiers he was driven out in death. But afterward, in his resurrection and in the Word, he reentered the world and now reigns with authority. Nevermore will he die nor be driven out. It is of this second entrance the Psalm speaks.

[57] The author of the epistle practically says. “I grant God has other sons, but it is the first-born son whom he brings into the world a king and whom the angels worship, which the angels would not do, nor would be commanded to do, were he not true God.”

[58] True, we read of David and many others being worshiped, but not by angels. No angel ever yet adored any but God. This passage proves that he whom angels reverence must be God. For since even men worship on earth only what is superior to themselves, and with angels only God is superior, that king whom ministers herald in the world and angels worship must be God. That the apostle does not cite the whole Psalm literally is of no significance. The language of the Psalm is: “Worship him, all ye gods,” while the apostle says, “Let all the angels of God worship him.” The meaning, however, is the same. The thought is of future action — the angels shall worship him. If so, he must be God. The angels are his, though he is himself man. Note, however, in the Hebrew the passage reads: “Worship him, all ye ‘Elohim’; that is, all ye gods. The term is given to angels, and to saints in general, because they are the children of God. “And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels’ winds [spirits], and his ministers a flame of fire.”

[59] The apostle's intent here is to show that in the Scriptures the angels are not spoken of in terms that make possible a reference to them in the statements, "Thou art my Son," "He shall be my Son," "All the angels shall worship him." They are simply appointed messengers sent forth of God into the world. Although to them he has committed much, he does not constitute any among them Lord; they are characterized as wind and a flame of fire. He terms them "spirits," "winds" and "a flame of fire" because in such form do they execute his bidding, moving with the ease and swiftness of the wind, and having the brilliance of lightning or a flame of fire, as much Scriptural evidence testifies. Yet no one of them is withal Lord of the world and heralded everywhere in the manner the king here mentioned is proclaimed Lord over all things. Even the Jews must confess that. "But of the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; and the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

[60] This fourth quotation is from Psalm 45:6-7. To me it most clearly and forcibly proves Christ to be God. Even the Jews cannot oppose that interpretation. Let us consider: In the first place, it is universally acknowledged the Psalm refers to Christ, even were we to grant he is yet to come, as the Jews erroneously presume. In the second place, the first sentence, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever," necessarily relates to the true God to whom throne and government belong. Though saints are sometimes termed "gods," as we learned from Psalm 82:1, yet government and throne are the prerogative of none but the one true and actual God. Is not this indisputably plain? So, then, this God upon the throne who reigns eternally is our true God.

[61] Then the succeeding sentence is spoken of the same God: "Thou hast loved uprightness... therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee... above thy fellows." What is implied? That the God upon the everlasting throne, who reigns eternally, is anointed by his God above all his fellows. He who here anoints must certainly be the true God; and also the anointed must be actual God because of his throne and eternal reign. Now, God does not anoint himself; the anointed is subordinate to the one anointing. "To anoint" here implies, to infuse the Holy Spirit, with his graces; something to be exercised only upon a creature.

[62] Note that indisputably the first part of the passage makes the king in question true God, and the latter part true man. In his humanity he has fellows, for he is the head of all believers, and they are partakers of the Spirit he possesses abundantly and above all others. But in his divinity, he has no fellows; for there is only one God — one God but not one person. The passage forces the conclusion that there are two persons, one who reigns and another who anoints and whose divinity will not admit of his being himself anointed. Hence, we must conclude the King is the Son of God; his title is ascribed because he is God. His eternal throne is the kingdom introduced after Christ's ascension. Yet he has fellows, is anointed, and deservedly anointed because he loves righteousness; things wholly characteristic of actual man.

[63] The rod or scepter of the Son's kingdom is the Gospel. It is a scepter of uprightness because it is aggressive for the right and taking a straight course. This declaration stands opposed to human doctrines, which abound in intricacies and perplexities and yet contribute nothing to salvation. It is another reminder that we are to accept nothing in all Christendom but the scepter of Christ's kingdom, He would have his kingdom ruled by no other scepter than that righteous one, the Gospel.

[64] It is necessary to use the word "God" twice in the latter part of the verse — "God, thy God" — because our language has but one word for that meaning. The Hebrew tongue has many, employing here these two, Elohim and Elohe.

[65] In the Old Testament are many similar passages, mysteriously used but unquestionably conclusive upon this matter; for instance, Genesis 19:24: "Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven," What can it mean — "Jehovah...from Jehovah," — but that two persons are indicated, the Father and the Son? Again (Zechariah 3:2), "Jehovah said unto Satan, Jehovah rebuke thee, O Satan." Observe here, God himself speaks of another God. And again, in Psalm 68, where frequent mention is made of God, it is stated (Psalm 68:18): "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led away captives." With respect to ascension, however, reference is only to the man Christ. Again, in the same Psalm (Psalm 68:28) we have, "Thy God hath commanded thy strength." Further, it says God commands the power of God. And there are many similar passages. "And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the

foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands; they shall perish; but thou continuest: and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a mantle shalt thou roll them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.”

[66] How this quotation testifies that Christ is God is not at once apparent. As written, it easily seems to refer to God as one person. But we must take into consideration the entire Psalm. The Psalm speaks of the future kingdom of God, direction of which the Scriptures assign to Christ. Among the various passages concerning Christ’s kingdom is a portion of this last- cited Psalm (Psalm 102:12-16): “But thou, O Jehovah, wilt abide forever; and thy memorial name unto all generations. Thou wilt arise and have mercy upon Zion; for it is time to have pity upon her, yea, the set time is come. For thy servants [the apostles] take pleasure in her stones and have pity upon her dust. [That is, through the Gospel. Reference is to Christ, whose servants the apostles are, bringing the stones of Zion the elect — to grace, through their preaching. Such servants no earthly king ever had.] So the nations shall fear the name of Jehovah, and all the kings of the earth thy glory. For Jehovah hath built up Zion; he hath appeared in his glory.”

[67] The Psalm concludes with, “And thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth,” etc. The psalmist’s evident conclusion is: The King whose servants have favored the stones of Zion, who is proclaimed worldwide and commands the fear of the heathen and all the kings of the earth, is the God who created the earth and is in himself unchangeable. No earthly king has ever been proclaimed among all the heathen as Christ has been proclaimed. Christ, then, is true God and true man. What further comment the subject demands I leave for keener minds.

[68] So we see this whole epistle lesson is simply armor to clearly maintain the article of faith that Christ is God, and Lord over all things even in his humanity. We note with amazement the perfect clearness of the Scripture teaching and that the defect is in ourselves, unperceived. Well does Luke speak (Luke 24:32) of Christ’s opening the understanding of the disciples to comprehend the Scriptures. It was not the Scriptures he opened, but their understanding; the former is plain, but our eyes are not fully open.

St. Stephen's Day. Stephen an Example of Christian Faith, Zeal and Love. Building Churches. Authority of Laymen to Preach Belief and Baptism Saves.

Text: Acts 6:8-14 and Acts 7:54-60.

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. Acts 6:8-14

54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Acts 7:54-60

[1] It is necessary to the understanding of this epistle lesson to introduce something of what is omitted and to present in connection with the narrative the things which gave rise to it. The dispute arose from Stephen's assertion that whatsoever proceeds not from faith does not profit, and that men cannot serve God by the erection of churches, or by works independent of faith in Jesus Christ. Faith alone renders us godly; faith alone builds the temple of God — the believing hearts. The Jews opposed the doctrine of faith, adducing the law of Moses and the temple at Jerusalem. For the Bible makes frequent mention of Jerusalem as God's chosen city, toward which his eyes are always directed, a city called the house of God. Such argument they presumed to be conclusive.

[2] Stephen, however, opposes them by citing Isaiah 66:1-2: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: what manner of house will ye build unto me? and what place shall be my rest? For all these things hath my hand made, and so all these things came to be, saith Jehovah." This statement is clear and forcible beyond gainsaying. It shows God does not dwell in houses made with hands, for the essential elements of these are, in the first place, of his own creating and belong to him. Further, if heaven nor earth can contain him — and he here asserts that heaven is not his house but his throne, and the earth not his habitation but his footstool — how can he be expected to dwell in a house made by men? Solomon speaks to the same purpose in 1 Kings 8:27, referring to the house he has himself built.

[3] Defeated by the power of this passage from Isaiah, and similar citations they could not gainsay, the Jews proceeded to misconstrue Stephen's words, making out that he declared Jesus would destroy the temple and change the customs of Moses. Yet Stephen had no intention of giving such impression. He simply asserted that we are saved not by the Law or the temple, but by faith in Jesus Christ; and that having faith we

may rightly observe the Law, whether there be temple or not. Stephen's purpose was merely to remove the Jews' false confidence in their own works and in the temple.

[4] Similar to them, the Papists of today, when they hear it claimed that works are not effectual and that faith in Christ must precede and must be of sole efficacy, cry out that good works are prohibited, and God's commandments blasphemed. Were Stephen a preacher of today he might not, it is true, be stoned, but he would be burned, or dismembered with tongs, by the enraged Papists.

[5] Stephen replies to the false accusation of the Jews. Beginning with Abraham, he goes on through the Scriptures, showing how, previous to the time of Solomon who built a house for God, neither Abraham nor any other of the patriarchs ever built a house for his service, but they were not for that reason the less regarded of God. Then Stephen adds the quotation from Isaiah. He says: "But Solomon built him a house. Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands; as saith the prophet, The heaven is my throne, and the earth the footstool of my feet: what manner of house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?"

[6] After these words he rebukes them, saying: "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed them that showed before of the coming of the Righteous One; of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers; ye who received the law as it was ordained by angels and kept it not."

[7] Now follows the latter part of our lesson, beginning, "Now when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." Evidently, then, the dispute was in regard to faith and good works. But how is it with the Papists, who have not the least semblance of grounds for their position other than their own human laws and doctrines? If they could produce for themselves a shadow of support such as the Jews had in adducing that God gave the law of Moses and chose the temple at Jerusalem, they would instantly raise a cry of, "By divine right" (*de jure divino*), as in fact did their forefathers the Jews. Building Churches Does Not Secure God's Favor

[8] This epistle text seems to be not at all difficult; it is plain. It presents in Stephen an example of the faith of Christ. Little comment is necessary. We shall examine it briefly. The first principle it teaches is, we cannot secure the favor of God by erecting churches and other institutions. Stephen makes this fact plain in his citation from Isaiah.

[9] But if we are to take this position and maintain it, we must incur the same risk Stephen did. Such position calls for the doing away with the bulls of the Pope, with innumerable indulgences, laws of the ecclesiasts and incessant preaching about churches, altars, institutions, cloisters, chalices, bells, tables, candles and apparel. Thus, would the holiness of the Pope and his adherents be offended, and not without reason. For in consequence, luxuries of kitchen and cellar would be diminished, and all temporal possessions as well. In course of time idleness, voluptuousness and ease would have to give place to labor, poverty and unrest. The clerical order would be obliged to study and pray, or support themselves like other people do. Such a course would not be agreeable to them. The holy Christian Church would be despised, as were Christ and the apostles. Her officials could no longer live in royal pomp, waging war, plundering, and shedding blood, all under the pretext of honoring God and exalting the holy Church. For this have the most holy fathers in God done, and still do.

[10] We must not, however, be led to conclude it is wrong to build and endow churches. But it is wrong to go to the extreme of forfeiting faith and love in the effort, presuming thereby to do good works meriting God's favor. It results in abuses precluding all moderation. Every nook and corner is filled with churches and cloisters, regardless of the object of church building.

[11] There is no other reason for building churches than to afford a place where Christians may assemble to pray, to hear the Gospel and to receive the sacraments; if indeed there is a reason. When churches cease to be used for these purposes they should be pulled down, as other buildings are when no longer of use. As it is now, the desire of every individual in the world is to establish his own chapel or altar, even his own mass, with a view of securing salvation, of purchasing heaven.

[12] Is it not a miserable, a deplorable, error and delusion to teach innocent people to depend on their works to the great disparagement of

their Christian faith? Better to destroy all the churches and cathedrals in the world, to burn them to ashes — it is less sinful even when done through malice than to allow one soul to be misled and lost by such error. God has given no special command in regard to the building of churches, but he has issued his commands in reference to our souls — his real and peculiar churches. Paul says concerning them (1 Corinthians 3:16-17): “Ye are a temple [church] of God If any man destroyeth the temple of God, him shall God destroy.”

[13] But observe the holiness of the Papists. The foundation of every soul is disturbed by their error, and the real Church of God is overthrown. This fact does not deter the Papists; indeed, they willingly contribute to the overthrow of the Church. By their doctrine of works they affect nothing else but the destruction everywhere of the true Church. Then they proceed to substitute for it church buildings, of wood and stone. They misuse the conscience until it believes the trivial defacement by knife of such wood and stone is a profanation of the whole church, and the expense and labor of reconsecration must be incurred. Are not the individuals who have no conscientious scruples about the destruction of the actual Church, who even convert that great sin into eternal merit, and at the same time are extremely conscientious about the vain juggling of their own church building — are they not raving, raging, foolish and fanatical? yes, frantic, infuriated? I continue to assert that for the sake of exterminating the error mentioned, it would be well to overthrow at once all the churches in the world, and to utilize ordinary dwellings or the open air for preaching, praying and baptizing, and for all Christian requirements.

[14] Especially is there justification for so doing because of the worthless reason the Papists assign for building churches. Christ preached for over three years, but only three days in the temple at Jerusalem. The remainder of the time he spoke in the schools of the Jews, in the wilderness, on the mountains, in ships, at the feasts and otherwise in private dwellings. John the Baptist never entered the temple; he preached by the Jordan River and in all places. The apostles preached in the marketplace and streets of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Philip preached in a chariot to the eunuch. Paul preached to the people by the riverside; in the Philippian jail and in various private dwellings. In fact, Christ commanded the apostles

(Matthew 10:12) to preach in private houses. I presume the preachers mentioned were equally good with those of today.

[15] But it must be that costly buildings with magnificent arches are required for the false preachers and diabolical teachers of today, though the Word of God could find in all Bethlehem no inn wherein to be born. Should we not, then, with Stephen cry unto these unreasonable creatures: “Ye stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit. Ye are betrayers and murderers of innocent, harmless Christian souls. Though having received the commandments from the apostles, ye have observed none of them”? I suppose, should we do so, their hearts would be ready to burst with rage and they would gnash their teeth, saying we had blasphemed against God and spoken against the holy place; yes, had profaned all churches. O God, the blind leaders, and murderers of souls, who rule under the accursed popery!

[16] You see now some reason why lightning strikes the costly Papist churches more frequently than it does other buildings. Apparently, the wrath of God especially rests upon them because there greater sins are committed, more blasphemies uttered and greater destruction of souls and of churches wrought than take place in brothels and in thieves’ dens. The keeper of a public brothel is less a sinner than the preacher who does not deliver the true Gospel, and the brothel is not so bad as the false preacher’s Church. Even were the proprietor of the brothel daily to prostitute virgins, godly wives and nuns, awful and abominable as such action would be, he would not be any worse nor would he work more harm than those papistical preachers.

[17] Does this astonish you? Remember, the false preacher’s doctrine effects nothing but daily to lead astray and to violate souls newly born in baptism — young Christians, tender souls, the pure, consecrated virgin brides of Christ. Since the evil is wrought spiritually, not bodily, no one observes it; but God is beyond measure displeased. In his wrath he cries, through the prophets, in unmistakable terms, Thou harlot who invitest every passerby! So little can God tolerate false preaching. Jeremiah in his prayer (Lamentations 5:11) makes this complaint, “They ravished the women in Zion, the virgins in the cities of Judah.” Now, spiritual virginity, the Christian faith, is immeasurably superior to bodily purity; for it alone can obtain heaven.

[18] The false doctrines and works of the Papists are destructive not only of faith, but also of Christian love. The fool may always be known by his cap. Many a man passes by his poor neighbor who has a sick child or wife, or is otherwise in need of assistance, and makes no effort to minister to him, but instead contributes to endow some church. Or else while health remains, he endeavors to heap up treasures, and when he comes at last to his deathbed makes a will bequeathing his estate to some certain institution. He will be surrounded by priests and monks. They will extol his act, absolve the religious man, administer the Sacrament and bury him with honors. They will proclaim his name from the pulpit and during mass and will cry: "Here is worthy conduct indeed! The man has made ample provision for his soul. Many blessings will hereafter be conferred upon him." Yes, hereafter but, alas, eternally too late.

[19] But no one while he is living warns of the man's sins in not administering to the wants of his neighbor when it lies in his power to relieve; in passing him by and ignoring him as the rich man did Lazarus in the Gospel. And he does not himself recognize his sins. Hence, they must remain unconfessed, unrepented of and unabsolved, however many bulls, indulgences and spiritual fathers may have served. This neglect is the very sin concerning which Christ on the day of judgment will say: "I was... naked, and ye clothed me not." Matthew 25:43. The religious one will then reply, "I heaped up treasures to establish an institution for thee, in obedience to the Pope's decree, and hence he has absolved me from all my sins." What can individuals such as he expect to hear but the sentence: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire"? For by their works they destroy the Christian faith, and for the sake of mere wood and stone despise Christian love.

[20] Let us, therefore, beloved friends, be wise; wisdom is essential. Let us truly learn we are saved through faith in Christ and that alone. This fact has been made sufficiently manifest. Then let no one rely upon his own works. Let us in our lifetime engage only in such works as shall profit our neighbors, being indifferent to testament and institution, and direct our efforts to bettering the full course of our neighbors' lives.

[21] It is related of a pious woman, St. Elizabeth, that once upon entering a cloister and seeing on the wall a fine painting portraying the sufferings of our Lord, she exclaimed: "The cost of this painting should

have been saved for the sustenance of the body; the sufferings of Christ are to be painted on your hearts.” How forcibly this godly utterance is directed against the things generally regarded precious! Were St. Elizabeth so to speak today, the Papists assuredly would burn her for blaspheming against the sufferings of Christ and for condemning good works. She would be denounced as a heretic, though her merits were to surpass the combined merits of ten saints. God’s Commandments Cannot Be Fulfilled by Man’s Works

[22] Stephen not only rejects the conceptions of the Jews in regard to churches and their erection, but also denounces all their works, saying they have received the Law by the disposition of angels and have not kept it. So the Jews in return reprove Stephen as if he had spoken against the temple and, further, blasphemed the law of Moses and would teach strange works. True, Stephen could not rightly have charged them with failure to observe the Law, so far as external works are considered. For they were circumcised, and observed the rules in regard to meats, apparel and festivals, and all Moses’ commands. It was their consciousness of having observed the Law that led them to stone him.

[23] But Stephen’s words were prompted by the same spirit that moved Paul when he said (Romans 3:20ff) that by the deeds of the Law no one is justified in the sight of God, faith alone being the justifier. Where the Holy Spirit is not present to grant grace, man’s heart cannot favor the Law of God; it would prefer the Law did not exist. Every individual is conscious of his own apathy and disinclination toward what is good, and of his readiness to do evil. As Moses says (Genesis 8:21), “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” Man, then, being unwilling, he has no real delight in doing the works of the Law. Lacking right motive, he is constrained to works through fear of punishment, of shame and hell, or else through gainful motive and hope of salvation; not through love of God and desire to honor him. All works so wrought are sheer hypocrisy, and in God’s sight are not good. But the Holy Spirit is promised to the believer in Christ, and through Christ’s grace the Spirit produces in the heart a desire for good. Under its influence the individual voluntarily and without expectation of reward performs his good works for the honor of God. Through faith and the Spirit he is already justified and in a saved condition, a state he could never have attained by any works. In accordance with this principle, we

may readily conclude that all who lack faith and grace fail to observe the Law, even though they torture themselves to death with its requirements.

[24] When Stephen declares the Jews always resist the Holy Spirit, he means to imply that through their works they become presumptuous, are not inclined to accept the Spirit's aid and are unwilling their works be rejected as ineffectual. Ever working and working to satisfy the demands of the Law, but without fulfilling its least requirement, they remain hypocrites to the end. Unwilling to embrace the faith whereby they would be able to accomplish good works, and the grace of the Spirit that would create a love for the Law, they make impossible the free, spontaneous observance of it. But the voluntary observer of the Law, and no other, God accepts.

[25] Stephen calls the Jews "stiff-necked, uncircumcised in heart and ears" because they refuse to listen and understand. They continually cry, "Good works, good works! Law, Law!" though not effecting the least thing themselves. Just so do our Papists. As their forefathers did, so do the descendants, the mass of this generation; they persecute the righteous and boast it is done for the sake of God and his Law. Now we have the substance of this lesson. But let us examine it a little further. An Example of Godly Zeal and Christian Love

[26] First, we see in Stephen's conduct love toward God and man. He manifests his love to God by earnestly and severely censuring the Jews, calling them betrayers, murderers and transgressors of the whole Law, yes stiff-necked, and saying they resist the fulfillment of the Law and resist also the Holy Spirit himself. More than that, he calls them "uncircumcised in heart and ears." How could he have censured them any more severely? So completely does he strip them of every creditable thing, it would seem as if he were moved by impatience and wrath.

[27] But who today would the world tolerate were he to attempt such censure of the Papists? Stephen's love for God constrained him to his act. No one who possesses the same degree of love can be silent and calmly permit the rejection of God's commandments. He cannot dissemble. He must censure and rebuke every opposer of God. Such conduct he cannot permit even if he risks his life to rebuke it. Love of this kind the Scriptures term *zelum Dei*, a holy indignation. For rejection of God's commands is a slight upon his love and intolerably disparages the honor and obedience due

him, honor and obedience which the zealous individual ardently seeks to promote. We have an instance of such a one in the prophet Elijah, who was remarkable for his holy indignation against the false prophets.

[28] We must infer from Stephen's example that he who silently ignores the transgression of God's commands, or any sin, has no love for him. Then how is it with the hypocrites who applaud transgression? and with calumniators and those who laugh and eagerly listen to and speak about the faults of others?

[29] That the Pope in his absurd laws enjoins the Papists against censuring governors, is not sufficient reason for any man to refrain from administering proper reproof. Whom does Stephen censure here? Is it not the governors of Jerusalem? Yet he was just an ordinary man; not ordained, not clothed with the priestly office. His example teaches the right of every Christian to justly censure the Pope and the governors. Indeed, he is under obligation to do so. Then let no one be content to think he has not such privilege. Especially should spiritual sins be rebuked. Stephen's reproof was not directed against gross sins, but against hypocrisy; for the Jews in unbelief resisted the Holy Spirit. Thus, they wrought more harm than comes from gross sins. By their laws and their works they misled themselves and the multitude.

[30] Similarly do the Pope, the bishops and all the Papists deserve public censure as stiff necked and uncircumcised hypocrites, resisting the Holy Spirit and dishonoring all God's commandments, betraying and murdering Christian souls; thereby being betrayers and murderers of the Christ who bought them with his own blood.

[31] We have just had occasion to state that Stephen was a layman, an ordinary Christian, not a priest. But the Papists sing his praises as a Levite, who read the epistle or the Gospel lesson at the altar. The Papists, however, pervert the truth entirely. It is necessary for us, therefore, to know what Luke says in Acts 4 and 5. He tells how the Christians in the inception of the Church, at Jerusalem, made all their possessions common property and the apostles distributed to each member of the congregation as he needed, But, as it happened, the widows of the Grecian Jews were not provided for as were the Hebrew widows; hence arose complaint. The apostles, seeing how the duty of providing for these things would be so burdensome as to

interfere in a measure with their duties of praying and preaching, assembled the multitude of the disciples and said: "It is not fit that we should forsake the Word of God, and serve tables. Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word." Acts 6:2-4. So Stephen, in connection with six others, was chosen to distribute the goods. Thence comes the word "deacon," servant or minister. For these men served the congregation, ministering to their temporal wants.

[32] Plainly, then, Stephen was a steward, or an administrator and guardian of the temporal goods of the Christians his duty was to administer them to those in need. In course of time his office was perverted into that of a priest who reads the epistle and Gospel lessons. The only trace left of Stephen's office is the slight resemblance found in the duty of the nuns' provosts, and in that of the administrators of hospitals and of the guardians of the poor. The readers of the epistle and Gospel selections should be, not the consecrated, the shorn, the bearers of dalmatics and brushers of flies at the altar, but ordinary godly laymen who keep a record of the needy and have charge of the common fund for distribution as necessity requires. Such was the actual office of Stephen. He never dreamed of reading epistles and Gospels, or of bald pates and dalmatics. Those are all human devices. The Authority of Laymen to Preach

[33] As to the question that may arise whether an ordinary layman may be allowed to preach: Though Stephen was not appointed to preach — the apostles, as stated, reserved that office to themselves — but to perform the duties of a steward, yet when he went to the marketplace and mingled among the people, he immediately created a stir by performing signs and wonders, as the epistle says, and he even censured the rulers. Had the Pope and his followers been present, they certainly would have inquired as to his credentials — his Church passport and his ecclesiastical character; and had he been lacking a bald pate and a prayerbook, undoubtedly he would have been committed to the flames as a heretic since he was not a priest nor a clergyman. These titles, which the Scriptures accord all Christians, the Papists have appropriated to themselves alone, terming all other men "the laity," and themselves "the Church," as if the laity were not a part of the Church. At the same time these people of boasted refinement and nobility

do not in a single instance fill the office or do the work of a priest, of a clergyman or of the Church. They but dupe the world with their human devices.

[34] The precedent of Stephen holds good. His example gives all men authority to preach wherever they can find hearers, whether it be in a building or at the marketplace. He does not confine the preaching of God's Word to bald pates and long gowns. At the same time he does not interfere with the preaching of the apostles. He attends to the duties of his own office and is readily silent where it is the place of the apostles to preach. True, order must be observed. All cannot speak at once. Paul writes in the fourteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 14) that one or two are to be permitted to speak, and that if a revelation be made to a listener the speaker is to keep silence. That such was the practice of the apostles is evident from Acts 15, where we read how, after the discourses of certain Pharisees, Peter preached, and when he ceased Barnabas and Paul followed, and lastly James. Each spoke in his turn. To a very slight extent the custom still exists in the debates of colleges, but at present, sermons are only idle talk about Dietrich of Bern or some dream of the speaker.

[35] A sermon proper should be conducted as a dissertation upon any subject at the social board. Christ, therefore, instituted the Holy Supper as an occasion where we might treat of his Word as we sit at table. But now all is perverted, and divine order is superseded by arrangements merely human. But let this suffice on this point.

[36] In the second place, Stephen's conduct is a beautiful example of love for fellowmen in that he entertains no ill will toward even his murderers. However severely he rebukes them in his zeal for the honor of God, such is the kindly feeling he has for them that in the very agonies of death, having made provision for himself by commending his Spirit to God, he has no further thought about himself but is all concern for them. Under the influence of that love he yields up his spirit. Not undesignedly does Luke place Stephen's prayer for his murderers at the close of the narrative. Note also, when praying for himself and commending his spirit to God he stood, but he knelt to pray for his murderers. Further, he cried with a loud voice as he prayed for them, which he did not do for himself.

[37] How much more fervently he prayed for his enemies than for himself! How his heart must have burned, his eyes have overflowed and his entire body been agitated and moved with compassion as he beheld the wretchedness of his enemies! It is the opinion of St. Augustine that Paul was saved by this prayer. And it is not unreasonable to believe that God truly heard it and that from eternity he foresaw a great result from this dispensation. The person of Paul is evidence of God's answer to Stephen's prayer. It could not be denied, though all may not have been saved.

[38] Stephen aptly chooses his words, saying, "Lay not this sin to their charge;" that is, make not their sin unremovable, like a pillar or a foundation. By these words Stephen makes confession, repents and renders satisfaction for sin, in behalf of his murderers. His words imply: "Beloved Lord, truly they commit a sin, a wrong. This cannot be denied." Just as it is customary in repentance and confession simply to deplore and confess the guilt. Stephen then prays, offering himself up that abundant satisfaction may surely be made for sin.

[39] Note how great an enemy and at the same time how great a friend true love can be; how severe its censures and how sweet its aid. It is like a nut with a hard shell and a sweet kernel. Bitter to our old Adam nature, it is exceedingly sweet to the new man in us. Example of Comfort and Encouragement

[40] This epistle lesson, by the example given, inculcates the forcible doctrine of faith and love; and more, it affords comfort and encouragement. It not only teaches; it incites and impels. Death, the terror of the world, it styles a sleep; Luke says, "He fell asleep." That is, Stephen's death was quiet and painless; he departed as one goes to sleep, unknowing how — unconsciously falls asleep.

[41] The theory that the Christian's death is a sleep, a peaceful passing, has safe foundation in the declaration of the Spirit. The Spirit will not deceive us. Christ's grace and power make death peaceful. Its bitterness is far removed by Christ's death when we believe in him. He says (John 8:51), "If a man keep my word, he shall never see death." Why shall he not see it? Because the soul, embraced in his living Word and filled with that life, cannot be sensible of death. The Word lives and knows no death; so the soul which believes in that Word and lives in it, likewise does not taste death.

This is why Christ's words are called words of life. They are the words of life; he who hangs upon them, who believes in them, must live.

[42] Comfort and encouragement are further increased by Stephen's assertion, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." Here we see how faithfully and lovingly Christ watches over us, and how ready he is to aid us if we but believe in him and will cheerfully risk our lives for his sake. The vision was not given solely on Stephen's account; it was not recorded for his profit. It was for our consolation, to remove all doubt of our privilege to enjoy the same happy results, provided we conduct ourselves as Stephen did.

[43] The fact that the heavens are open affords us the greatest comfort and removes all terror of death. What should not stand open and ready for us when the heavens, the supreme work of creation, are waiting wide for us and rejoicing at our approach? It may be your desire to see them visibly open to you. But were everyone to behold, where would faith be? That the vision was once given to man is enough for the comfort of all Christians, for the comfort and strengthening of their faith and for the removal of all death's terrors. For as we believe, so shall we experience, even though we see not physically.

[44] Would not the angels, yes all creatures, lend willing assistance when the Lord himself stands ready to help? Remarkably, Stephen saw not an angel, not God himself, but the man Christ, he who most delights humanity and who affords man the strongest comfort. Man, especially when in distress, welcomes the sight of another man in preference to that of angels or other creatures.

[45] Our artful teachers who would measure the works of God by their own reason, or the seas with a spoon, ask: "How could Stephen look into the heavens when our vision cannot discern a bird when it soars a little high? How could he see Christ distinctly enough to recognize him for a certainty? A man upon a high steeple appears to us a child, and we cannot recognize his person. They attempt to settle the question by declaring Stephen's vision must have been supernaturally quickened, permitting him to see clearly into infinite space. But suppose Stephen had been under a roof or within a vault? Away with such human nonsense! Paul when near Damascus certainly heard the voice of Christ from heaven and his hearing

was not quickened for the occasion. The apostles on Mount Tabor, John the Baptist (Luke 3:22) and again the people (John 12:29) — these all heard the voice of the Father with their ordinary hearing. Is it not more difficult to hear a voice from a great distance above than to see an object in the same place? The range of our vision is immeasurably wider than the scope of our hearing.

[46] When God desires to reveal himself, heaven and everything else requisite are near. It matters not whether Stephen were beneath a roof or in the open air, heaven was near to him. Abnormal vision was not necessary. God is everywhere; there is no need that he come down from heaven. A vision, at close range, of God actually in heaven is easily possible without the quickening or perverting of the senses.

[47] It matters not whether or no we fully comprehend how such a vision is effected. It is not intended that the wonders of God be brought within our grasp; they are manifested to induce in us belief and confidence. Explain to me, ye of boasted wisdom, how the comparatively large apple or pear or cherry can be grown through the tiny stem; or even explain less mysterious things. But permit God to work; believe in his wonders and do not presume to bring him within your comprehension.

[48] Who can number the virtues illustrated in Stephen's example? There loom up all the fruits of the Spirit. We find love, faith, patience, benevolence, peace, meekness, wisdom, truth, simplicity, strength, consolation, philanthropy. We see there also hatred and censure for all forms of evil. We note a disposition not to value worldly advantage nor to dread the terrors of death. Liberty, tranquility and all the noble virtues and graces are in evidence. There is no virtue but is illustrated in this example; no vice it does not rebuke. Well may the evangelist say Stephen was full of faith and power. Power here implies activity. Luke would say, "His faith was great; hence his many and mighty works." For when faith truly exists, its fruits must follow. The greater the faith, the more abundant its fruits.

[49] True faith is a strong, active and efficacious principle. Nothing is impossible to it. It rests not nor hesitates. Stephen, because of the superior activity of his faith, performed not merely ordinary works, but wrought wonders and signs publicly — great wonders and signs, as Luke says. This is written for a sign that the inactive individual lacks in faith, and has no

right to boast of having it. Not undesignedly is the word “faith” placed before the word “power.” The intention was to show that works are evidence of faith, and that without faith nothing good can be accomplished. Faith must be primary in every act. To this end may God assist us. Amen.

St. John's Day. Exhortation to Piety and Righteousness. He is the Vine, We are the Branches.

Text: Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 15:1-8.

1 He that feareth the Lord will do good; and he that hath the knowledge of the law shall obtain her.

2 And as a mother shall she meet him, and receive him as a wife married of a virgin.

3 With the bread of understanding shall she feed him, and give him the water of wisdom to drink.

4 He shall be stayed upon her, and shall not be moved; and shall rely upon her, and shall not be confounded.

5 She shall exalt him above his neighbors, and in the midst of the congregation shall she open his mouth.

6 He shall find joy and a crown of gladness, and she shall cause him to inherit an everlasting name.

7 But foolish men shall not attain unto her, and sinners shall not see her.

8 For she is far from pride, and men that are liars cannot remember her.
Exhortation to Piety and Righteousness (Ecclesiasticus 15:1-8)

[1] This lesson, apparently, is not designed to teach. Rather, its purpose is to present the advantages of right conduct. It does not enumerate certain works and the manner in which they are to be performed, but holds up the benefit accruing from right living. Its object is to admonish us and incite us to perform the duties we already recognize. Paul (Romans 12:7-8) classifies all discourse under two heads, doctrine and exhortation. Doctrine presents things we do not already know or possess. Exhortation recites and impels us

to obey doctrine, and encourages to patience and perseverance. While the latter feature of discourse is less difficult than the former, it is no less necessary and profitable.

[2] He who would incite one to action, would arouse, encourage, admonish him, must present good reason for action. This may be accomplished by reference to the need and the advantages, the pleasures and honors, consequent upon a certain course, or to the disaster and disgrace following neglect of it. Such is the method employed in this lesson. It points out numerous advantages and honors coming to them who fear God and love righteousness. Its message we will now consider.

[3] No definition of righteousness and the fear of God is given here. We have frequently stated, however, that to fear God is not to depend upon ourselves, upon any goodness within us, nor to rely upon our honor, our power, our wealth, strength, advantages or skill — no, not even upon our good works and piety. We must be careful not to sin in any of these things. We are to fear — yes, we know — that should God deal truly and justly with us, we should a thousand times be lost. Therefore, we must not in any way exalt ourselves above the most insignificant individual on earth. We must be humble and gentle in all our conduct and purposes. No arrogance may we show toward anyone; we must be gentle and affable. Humility will render our works good. Peter says (1 Peter 5:5), “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.” Whatsoever is done in that grace, then, is rightly done.

[4] As we have heard, righteousness is simply faith. We experience faith in the following way: In the first place, being unable to stand before God’s judgment, man is filled with fear in all his nature and actions. Fear impels him to seek something outside himself whereon he may confidently build and stand. He finds that to be nothing else but the pure mercy of God, promised in Christ and revealed in him. Such reliance, such confident faith, renders us just and righteous before God. As Paul says (Romans 1:17), “The righteous shall live by faith.”

[5] In proportion as one distrusts himself, his own abilities, and feels he is in all things a sinner before a just God, will he find consolation outside himself, in the grace of God, and Thus, become righteous in all his works. The two must be kept together; where judgment is, fear must be; where

grace exists, confidence is found. Judgment produces fear; grace begets trust and confidence. Through judgment, fear divests us of self with all its powers. But confidence invests us with God and his every attribute. Not our merits, then, but the blessings of God have praise. This teaching is endorsed by Psalm 147:11: "Jehovah taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his lovingkindness."

[6] If man's faith be right, he will conduct himself toward his neighbor in the way he believes God deals with himself. He will do all from pure grace, forgiving his neighbor, forbearing, endeavoring to alleviate his wretchedness, ministering to him, showing hospitality, denying him nothing, risking body, life, property and honor for his sake and conducting himself in all respects as God has done toward him. For faith tells him that God has dealt with him purely in grace, regardless of his demerits, and he is confident God will verify his faith in him. As God pours blessings upon him in disregard of his shortcomings, so will the individual pour all possible favor upon his neighbor, notwithstanding that neighbor may be an enemy and destitute of all merit. He is satisfied the favors he bestows will not impoverish him, for in proportion as he bestows will God pour out upon him; the more he does for his neighbor, the more will God bless him.

[7] Such, you perceive, is the true faith, the faith that justifies before God. It is the Christian's righteousness, which receives blessings from above and delivers them below. We find a beautiful illustration of it in the piece of land Caleb, the holy father, gave to his daughter Achsah (Judges 1:13-15), from which issued beautiful fountains of water. The land was watered by springs above and springs below: hence it was very fertile and very valuable. As already stated, we cannot say too much concerning this faith.

[8] The word "Achsah" means ornaments, or jeweled shoes. The lovely Maggie in scarlet shoes, the little daughter of God, is the believing soul. The soul that trusts may be likened to the maiden who trips fearlessly along in her beautiful scarlet and golden shoes. Paul says (Ephesians 6:15), "Having your feet shod" — with what? "With the preparation of the gospel of peace." Note that when the heart, through faith, enters the Gospel and lives in the Word, it is Achsah, Maggie in her beautiful shoes. Solomon also speaks concerning the bride (Song of Solomon 7:1), "How beautiful are thy feet in sandals, O prince's daughter!"

Motives to Fear God and Love; Righteousness.

Now let us consider what is offered to incite and urge us to fear God and to love righteousness. First : “He will do good.”

[9] All the world talks about doing good, but if you would know how, listen: Do not as the fools who consider various works with intent to choose such as are in their own conceptions good, and to reject such as they deem bad, Thus, making a distinction of the works themselves. Do not so. Let works be alike; regard one the same as another. Fear God and be just — as already advised — and then perform the duty that presents itself. Then all will be well done, it matters not if it be the duties of a hostler or a teamster.

[10] The text is unalterable: “He that feareth the Lord will do good” — no matter what he may do. His works are good, not because of their character, but because of the fear that inspires them. Here, you see, is great comfort. Immediately you abound in good works, and your whole life is good, if you fear God. Whether it be eating or drinking, walking or standing, seeing or hearing, sleeping or waking — all your works are good. Who would not, by such advantage, be incited to fear God? Note, they who fear God are the lambs of God, for whom everything is useful, all their works are profitable.

[11] But they who make distinction of works, the nice saints with their choice, selected deeds, really perform no good works. Why? Because they do not fear God. Attaching great value to their own efforts, they do not trust in him. Consequently, these same highly-prized works are evil. It is a fixed truth that his works are good who fears God, but the unbeliever’s works are evil. “He that hath the knowledge of the law shall obtain her.”

[12] He who holds to righteousness will obtain her. The thought here is the same as in the first incentive, but differently expressed. To have a knowledge of the Law, to adhere to righteousness, is to persevere in faith. The individual of steadfast faith will apprehend righteousness — will make it his own. Having attained to the heritage of righteousness, being enabled to dwell in it, all his deeds, his whole life, will be right. Therefore, he who would do right and live in righteousness must believe; he must persevere in faith, and then perform, without distinction, such works as present themselves. Endowed with the prerogative faith, it is unnecessary for him to

inquire how his works shall be good. They are good to begin with. They are performed without distinction. Righteousness is already apprehended. For he perseveres in faith.

[13] But, whatever the works of the unbelieving, righteousness will flee from them because they neglect faith. They may catch at righteousness as a dog snaps at flies, still it will elude them. Paul says of the Jews (Romans 9:31), "Israel, following after a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law." Like the Jews are those unbelieving ones who pursue their shadows, chasing after righteousness with their works. It flees from them. They cannot apprehend it for they did not first permit themselves to be made righteous in faith and then adhere to that righteousness. So doing, they would have been righteous in all works; the shadow would have followed of itself. Second: "As a mother shall she meet him."

[14] What is meant here? It is a Hebrew expression. The Hebrews are wont to speak of a child of wisdom, child of wickedness, child of wrath, child of condemnation; so here the thought, child of righteousness. The child of sin, of unrighteousness, must have a disgraceful mother, of whom he must be ashamed and in whom he cannot rejoice. But the child of righteousness has an honorable mother. Of her he may boast and in her he can rejoice. A human mother, if she be a reputable woman, is an honor, a glory and comfort to her child. On the other hand, if she be disreputable, she is a disgrace to the child. One can hardly suffer a more stinging reproach than to be reminded of a mother's disgrace or to be accused of illegitimate birth or ill-breeding.

[15] Now, the wise man intends to say that Righteousness deals affectionately with her own, as a mother meets the wants of her child. The mother is always ready to do for her child to the full extent of her knowledge and power. Solomon designs Thus, to illustrate the security, comfort, peace, joy and glory the heart experiences before God, through faith. The human mother caresses and kisses her child; she supports and carries it, always ready to meet its wants and grant its desires. The kindness of a mother toward her child is unsurpassed anywhere. Similarly, Righteousness embraces and supports man, meeting his wants in every way and purposing to have him rest in peace and security of heart. Man is entitled to this great privilege of confidence and may boast of it before

God, for he has an honorable mother. Third: “And receive him as a wife married of a virgin.”

[16] What do these words imply? The meaning is similar to that of the preceding phrase. The object is to illustrate the anxious care Righteousness manifests for her child. Solomon represents Righteousness as having affections like those of a new bride, one never before a wife. He means to say, “Precisely as a virgin in her new wifhood feels toward her bridegroom, so is the attitude of Righteousness toward her child.” I shall leave the description of the bride’s affections to those who have experienced them. It is well known, however, that nothing surpasses the desire, love and concern of a young bride for her bridegroom. The Scriptures abound with references to the love of brides. Sirach says “a wife married of a virgin,” meaning one just married and for the first time knowing love for a husband. A widow becoming again a wife has not such feeling toward her second bridegroom.

[17] Note how carefully and thoughtfully the wise man makes his admonition. Does he not present a vivid picture, a burning incentive to faith and godliness? What simile could he have introduced more expressive of affection than these of a virtuous mother’s love for her child and a new bride’s love for her bridegroom? Woman is naturally more affectionate than man. Now, we cannot by works obtain such favor, affection and care on the part of Righteousness for us. We must conceive it in the heart. Faith enables the conscience to feel in Righteousness all the security, desire and love that a child finds in its mother or a husband in his new bride. Fourth: “With the bread of [life and] understanding shall she feed him.”

[18] Or, “She shall feed him with life and understanding.” To explain the process: Just as natural bread sustains the body and also nourishes and increases it in growth until it becomes hale, robust and strong to labor; so, too, righteousness nourishes man, making him daily increase in the Spirit and grow in the knowledge of things divine and human. We know this from experience. Without experience the passage would not be intelligible. He who is nourished by righteousness improves his mind with everything coming under his observation. He grows in knowledge and increases in life and wisdom, especially when contemplating the Scriptures.

[19] Solomon had learned much, as his Proverbs and Canticles show. He puts the word “life” before the word “understanding,” for without life understanding would be of no significance. It is not that knowledge which is the product of the heathen and of natural reason, knowledge of temporal things — not this sort would Solomon have us regard; but the knowledge faith gives, concerning spiritual and divine things, knowledge making the soul alive before God. This sentence contains all necessary teaching in regard to salvation. Fifth: “And give him the water of wisdom to drink.”

[20] The import of this clause is similar to the foregoing sentence. It refers to the increase of the Spirit. Particularly does it present saving knowledge and exclude worldly knowledge, the knowledge of men, which is not profitable. This figure of drinking is to be understood similarly to the figure of eating. Man draws wisdom from everything he observes. All things in heaven and earth afford him pasture, but particularly the Scriptures. From them alone he derives meat and drink in a real, saving knowledge. Sixth: “He shall be stayed upon her.”

[21] Hitherto Solomon has been enumerating the blessings and advantages righteousness gives us to enjoy in ourselves and in times of peace. Now he enumerates its blessings in times of conflict, in contentions with enemies. He says, “He shall be stayed upon her.” That is, righteousness will throw about us protections enabling us not only to receive blessings but to guard them against all attempts to wrest them away. At the same time, he recognizes here that he who fears God and would be godly must encounter labor, conflict and many misfortunes. Crosses are bound to come. As Paul tells us (Acts 14:22), “Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.”

[22] Thus, Solomon meets the timid and faint-hearted who would readily be won by the great inducements presented, and would accept the benefits offered, were it not for their fear of having to risk property, honor, bodies, lives and all they have. Solomon does not deny the condition; he does not make any effort to relieve their minds on that point nor to offer flimsy comfort. But he strengthens them, admonishes them against viewing the matter from that standpoint and affords them the consolation that if they cleave to righteousness it will give courage and stability to endure all ill so Seventh: “And shall not be moved.”

[23] Another expression of the thought in “He shall be stayed upon her.” With ability to overcome all things, what more is to be desired? The self-righteous have not that ability. They do not stand securely — have no firmness. They only yield and vacillate, for they rely upon their own efforts. Their achievements may be easily taken away and themselves with them. But the believing righteousness of the Christian hangs upon the immovable lovingkindness of God. They who rely upon that lovingkindness cannot be moved even though they be deprived of everything else. Eighth: “And shall rely upon her.”

[24] That is, righteousness will sustain man’s honor. Solomon here acknowledges the pious believer must suffer many evils, and also endure shame and scandal. It is a peculiarity of the Christian’s sufferings that he not only has to endure the evils common to all men, but shame and scandal as the worst of evildoers, just as Christ suffered. Such unmerited sufferings are called sufferings of Christ, or crosses. It is not so much temporal dishonor, but spiritual dishonor, disgrace of the conscience before God. All the martyrs were put to death, not for committing crime against the State, but as being extreme enemies and blasphemers of God. Lest anyone be deterred from Christianity by fear of spiritual dishonor, Solomon makes this declaration for the comfort and encouragement of all believers, an assurance of preservation, and of their ability to maintain their honor before God and the world. Ninth: “And shall not be confounded.”

[25] This is the same as the last clause only more clearly expressed. Righteousness may, it is true, permit her child to be overtaken by shame and disgrace, but merely to test her power. [But she never leaves him helpless and prostrate, if he only cleaves to her. Editions A, B, C.] As the Wisdom of Solomon 10:12 says: “In a sore conflict she gave him the victory; that he might know that godliness is stronger than all.” The heart must be continually tempted. As sure as existence, it must experience disgrace. So sensible of shame will it be, it will tremble and waver as if God were to leave it in disgrace. But in this promise it finds help to maintain a firm confidence. So sustained, it overrides shame; all this the self-righteous can by no means do. Tenth: “She shall exalt him above his neighbors.”

[26] The Christian’s temptations and conflicts only give him distinction and elevate him in the minds of the people. Paul (1 Corinthians 11:19) says that by heresies the approved Christians are made manifest. Conflicts serve

to distinguish the Christian, to raise him in the estimation of men unto great eminence and honor. In contrast with him, the self-righteous go on unnoticed, without experience, untried, dwelling in their own element and uninformed of the blessings and workings of God. Eleventh: “And in the midst of the congregation shall she open his mouth.”

[27] So the Christian’s experience makes him a good preacher and teacher. Faith helps him to a right understanding of all things, and conflict gives him the personal experience which brings perfect assurance. Therefore, he may speak with the utmost confidence and may instruct all men. Well may Tauler say the experienced Christian is able to judge and to teach the world. Without trials no one can ever become a successful preacher. He must remain a mere babbler, unknowing what to say or to what end to speak. As Paul has it (1 Timothy 1:7): “Desiring to be teachers of the law, though they understand neither what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm.” He calls them useless babblers. Twelfth: “And shall fill him with the Spirit of wisdom and understanding.”

[28] Solomon previously, in the third verse said, “With the bread of understanding shall she feed him, and give him the water of wisdom to drink.” The reference there is simply to receiving the gifts of God, while not yet exposed to temptations and trials. But after the Christian has experienced temptations, has been tried and proven, he shall have something more than the gifts of wisdom and understanding; the Giver of these gifts, the Holy Spirit himself, will fill him and render him wholly perfect. Not that the Holy Spirit did not before exist in the individual; assuredly where the gifts of the Spirit are, there he surely is. But while the individual is not exposed to temptations, he has not yet come to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit. He will not reach that position until he is tried and proven. Then, though previously endowed with gifts, he will be filled with the Spirit. His gifts will not, as before temptation, serve only himself; from the period of his trial they will render him useful to others, enabling him to bring to men the same grace he possesses. Formerly he was chiefly useful in a temporal way, in distributing favors to his neighbors, as mentioned. He was prompted by faith and the gifts received. His was not, however, a spiritual usefulness, but a temporal one. After his experience in temptation, the Spirit enters and effects something more than his being fed with the bread of wisdom and understanding as before; he enables him to

open his mouth — to feed others with that bread, Thus, rendering them spiritual service. Before Christ's sufferings the apostles were merely the Lord's guests, eating of his understanding and drinking of his wisdom, and leading pious lives. But no one was affected but themselves. After his resurrection, however, they became hosts; they fed others and rendered them godly through the Spirit of wisdom and understanding that filled them after their temptation. Thirteenth: "With a garment of honor shall she clothe him."

[29] Righteousness will give the Christian an eminent reputation and a great name, far and wide; as God said to David: "I have made thy name great." Righteousness will adorn the Christian until the world shall honor him for his wisdom and knowledge. "Honor" here means "glory," which is a great and glorious name and distinction among men. Such honor Solomon terms a garment, for it adorns more than do ornaments and jewels. Fourteenth: "He shall find joy and a crown of gladness."

[30] Up to this time Solomon has spoken of the blessings the Christian shall enjoy in this life. Now he concludes with the blessings reserved to the future life — eternal joy and gladness. Here is the treasure Righteousness reserves for the Christian, an everlasting treasure. Fifteenth: "And she shall cause him to inherit an everlasting name."

[31] Not merely during life, but after death, will the Christian's name be perpetuated in honor. After such remembrance the self-righteous vainly strive. For they do not fear God and rely upon the righteousness of faith.

[32] Note these precious fruits, these great blessings, so well calculated to give comfort and to constrain us to persevere in faith and in the fear of God. I have gone over this subject hastily, giving it the briefest consideration. An extended sermon might have been preached on each point, if one wished to develop it with the aid of Scripture passages.

[33] We must not, however, infer from what has been presented that we are to fear God — believe in him — simply to secure the blessings named. That idea is deceptive. The passage is not written to induce us to seek these blessings; it is merely an assurance that such blessings await the believer. They alone shall receive them who do not seek them; that is, who fear God without seeking their own honor, and who constantly rely upon the grace of

God. To them the blessings come unsought. The self-righteous with all their pretense cannot obtain them.

[34] This epistle lesson harmonizes beautifully with the Gospel selection. Here Righteousness receives the individual as a virtuous mother receives her child, or the bride her bridegroom. Thus, too, Christ took John to his breast as the beloved disciple. In both selections the nature of faith is commended and illustrated.

Sunday after Christmas. The People of Law and of Grace. Justification by Faith.

Text: Galatians 4:1-7.

1 Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;

2 But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. Galatians 4:1-7

[1] This text is very characteristic of the apostle Paul. It is not generally understood. Not because of any obscurity in itself, but because the doctrine of faith, a doctrine it is very necessary to understand if we are to comprehend Paul, for his energetic and zealous mind is, in all his epistles, occupied with the subject of faith — because, I say, this doctrine is almost obsolete in the world, today. A lengthy exposition is necessary to make it plain. To gain space to treat the subject clearly, we will let this suffice for the introduction. Man's Justification

[2] We must know it is one thing to handle the subject of good works and another that of justification; just as the nature or personality of an individual is one thing and his actions or works another. Justification has reference to the person and not to the works. It is the former, not the latter, which is justified and saved, or is sentenced and punished.

[3] Therefore, it is settled that no one is justified by works; he must first be justified by other means. Moses says (Genesis 4:4-5), "Jehovah had respect unto Abel and to his offering." First, he had respect to Abel the person, and then to his offering. Abel being godly, just and acceptable in person, his offering was acceptable. The sacrifice was accepted because of the person, and not the person because of the sacrifice. "But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." In the first place, God had not respect unto Cain the person; hence later he respected not his offering. From this quotation we may conclude it is impossible for any work to be good in God's sight unless the worker first be good and acceptable. Conversely, it is impossible for any work to be evil before God unless the worker first be evil and not acceptable.

[4] Now, let it be sufficiently proven for the present that there are two kinds of good works; some precede, and others follow justification. The former merely appear to be good and effectual; the latter are really good.

[5] Now, this is the point of contention between presumptuous saints and God. Right here carnal nature contends, even rages, against the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures everywhere treat of this contention. Therein God concludes all man's works, previous to his justification, evil and ineffectual; he requires justification and goodness on the part of the individual first. Again, he concludes that all persons in the state of nature and of the first birth are unjust and evil. As said in Psalm 116:11, "All men are liars." And in

Genesis 6:5, “Every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil continually.” Hence the natural man can perform no good work, and all his attempts will be no better than Cain’s.

[6] Here Madam Huldah with her scornful nose — human nature — steps in and dares to contradict her God and to charge him with falsehood. She hangs upon herself her old frippery, her straw armor — natural light, reason, free will and human powers. She introduces the heathenish books and doctrines of men, and proceeds to harp upon these, saying: “Good works do precede justification. And they are not, as God says, the works of Cain. They are good to the extent of justifying. For Aristotle taught that he who does much good will thereby become good.” To this doctrine Madam firmly cleaves, perverting the Scriptures and presuming that God must first respect the works and then the doer. This satanic doctrine universally reigns at present in all the high schools and other institutions, and in the cloisters. Its advocates are but Cain-like saints, disregarded of God.

[7] In the second place, Madam Huldah, basing her position simply on works and attaching very little importance to the justified individual, proceeds still further and attributes all merit and supreme righteousness to the works following justification. She quotes James 2:26, “Faith apart from works is dead.” Not understanding this statement, she undervalues faith. Consequently she continues to hold to good works, presuming to require of God acceptance of the doer for the sake of the works. So the two continually strive against one another. God respects the individual, Cain the works. God rewards the works for the sake of the doer; Cain would have the doer crowned because of his works. God will not yield his just and righteous position, and the young nobleman Cain will never while the world stands allow himself to be convinced of his error. We must not reject his works, slight his reason or look unto his free will as powerless; for so he will become angry with God and slay his brother Abel, a fact to which all history gives abundant testimony.

[8] Do you ask: “What then am I to do? How shall I make myself good and acceptable in person to begin with? How secure that justification? The Gospel replies: “Hear Christ and believe in him, utterly despairing of yourself and resting assured you will be changed from Cain to an Abel and then present your offerings.” Just as faith is proclaimed without merit or work on your part, it is also bestowed regardless of your works, without any

of your merits. It is given of pure grace. Note, faith justifies the individual; faith is justification. Because of faith God remits all sins, and forgives the old Adam and the Cain in our nature, for the sake of Christ his beloved Son, whose name faith represents. More, he bestows his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit changes the individual into a new creature, one with different reason and different will, and inclined to the good. Such a one, wherever he is, performs wholly good works, and all his works are good; as taught in the preceding epistle lesson.

[9] Then nothing else is necessary to justification but to hear and believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior. But that is not a work of the natural man; it is a work of grace. He who presumes to attain justification by works, only obstructs the way of the Gospel, of faith, grace, Christ, God and all good. On the other hand, nothing but justification is necessary to render works good. The justified man and none other does good; all he does, being justified, is good, without distinction of works. Therefore, the order of man's salvation, the beginning and the sequel, is first to hear and then believe God's Word as supreme, and then to act. Thus, shall man be saved. He who perverts this order and acts accordingly is certainly not of God.

[10] Paul prescribes this order where he says (Romans 10:13-15): "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" Christ teaches us to pray the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest; that is, faithful preachers. When they come they preach the true Word of God. Hearing it, we are enabled to believe, and such faith justifies us and renders us godly; then we call upon God and do only good. Thus, are we saved. So then, the believer shall be saved, but he who works without faith shall be damned. Christ says (Mark 16:16), "He that disbelieveth shall be condemned;" here works avail nothing.

[11] Now, observe what people commonly do and say. "Yes," they tell you, "I expect to become godly. Yes, we must be godly." But if they are asked what we are to do to accomplish it, they go on to say, "Indeed, we must pray, fast, attend Church, abstain from sin, and so on." One will enter a monastery, another some order. One will become a priest, another will don a hair-garment. One will punish himself in a certain way, and another in

another way. They are like Cain and do the works of Cain. Personally, they are as at first — without justification. They but assume an external change, an alteration of works, clothing, condition and habits. They are really apes, assuming the habits of saints but remaining unholy. Unmindful of faith, they rush along with their good works toward heaven — as they imagine — torturing themselves. Relative to them, Christ in the Gospel (Luke 13:24) says: “Strive to enter in by the narrow door: for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” And why not? Because they do not recognize the narrow door. It is faith. Faith humbles one, reduces him to nothing, until he must despair of all his good works and cleave only to God’s grace; for that he must forsake all else. But the Cain-like saints imagine good works to be the narrow door. Hence they do not humble themselves. Nor do they despair of their good works; no, lading themselves with the cumbersome bundles of their collected deeds, they strive to pass through the door. They will pass as the camel with his great hump passes through the eye of the needle.

[12] Mention faith to them and they scoff and laugh, saying: “Are we Turks or heathen that we must first learn what faith is? Is it possible that our multitude of monks, nuns and priests do not know? Who can be ignorant of what believing is when even they who openly sin know its meaning?” As if having finished with faith, they imagine they must henceforth devote themselves to works. As before said, they regard faith of slight importance; for they do not understand that it is our sole justifier. To accept as true the record of Christ — this they call faith. The devils have the same sort of faith, but it does not make them godly. Such belief is not Christian faith; no, it is rather deception.

[13] In the preceding epistles we have heard that to be a Christian it is not enough simply to believe the story of Christ true — the Cain-like saints possess such faith — but the Christian must without any hesitancy believe himself one to whom grace and mercy are given, and that he has really secured them through baptism or through the Holy Supper. When he so believes, he is free to say of himself: “I am holy, godly and just. I am a child of God, perfectly assured of salvation. Not because of anything in me, not because of my merits or works, am I saved; it is of the pure mercy of God in Christ, poured out upon me.” To such extent will he appreciate God’s precious mercy, he cannot doubt that it renders him holy and

constitutes him a child of God. But he who doubts, disparages to the utmost his baptism and the Holy Supper, and censures as false God's Word and his grace in the sacraments.

[14] The Christian should entertain no fear — he should not doubt — that he is righteous and a child of God through grace. Rather he needs to entertain anxiety as to how he shall endure steadfast to the end. There is where all fear and anxiety are due. For while he assuredly is given to possess full salvation, it may be somewhat doubtful whether or no he will steadfastly retain it. Here we must walk in fear. True faith does not hang upon works nor rely upon itself; it relies only upon God and his grace. Grace cannot forsake the individual so long as reliance continues. But he knows not how long it will continue. Should temptation force him to lose his confidence, grace also will fail. Solomon (Ecclesiastes 9:1) says: "The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God; whether it be love or hatred, man knoweth it not; all is before them." He does not say it is uncertain at present, but in the future, because man knows not whether he will withstand the attacks or temptation.

[15] When the Cain-like saints hear the doctrine of faith, they cross themselves, both with hands and feet, and exclaim: "God forbid! How could I call myself holy and righteous? How could I be so egotistical and presumptuous? No, no; I am a poor sinner." You see how they make faith of no value to themselves, and so must regard as heresy all doctrine based upon it. Thus, they do away with the whole Gospel. These are they who deny the Christian faith and exterminate it from the world. Paul prophesied concerning them when he said (1 Timothy 4:1): "In later times some shall fall away from the faith." The voice of faith is now silenced all over the world. Indeed, faith is condemned and banished as the worst heresy, and all who teach and endorse it are condemned with it. The Pope, the bishops, charitable institutions, cloisters, high schools, unanimously opposed it for nearly four hundred years, and simply drove the world violently into hell. Their conduct is the real persecution by Antichrist, in the last times.

[16] Tell them what the prophet says in Psalm 86:2: "Preserve my soul; for I am godly"; and Paul's words in Romans 8:16: "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God;" and they reply: "Yes, but the prophet and the apostle did not mean by these statements to establish a doctrine or leave an example of what others may

claim. They were enlightened and their holiness was revealed to them.” Similarly, they construe every passage relating to the subject as not doctrinal in design, but exhibiting a remarkable miracle, a special prerogative of certain individuals not to be possessed by every believer. This explanation is a mere invention of their own minds. Themselves unbelievers, tasting not the Spirit, they think no one else should so believe or taste. By such conduct — their own fruits — they may be clearly identified as thorns and thistles; not as Christians, but as enemies and destroyers of Christians, and persecutors of the Christian faith.

[17] Such, however, is the character of their own faith, they are led to believe they are made godly and holy through their works, and that therefore God must save them. Note, in their opinion, to become godly through works is Christianity; but to become godly through divine grace is heresy. Apparently their works are of greater importance and value than the grace of God. Their faith can rely upon works, but not upon God’s grace. Since they reject the rock and build upon the sand, they but get their deserts when they fall into the error of their own works and torture themselves to death, to the devil’s advantage. It is all because they will not rely upon the grace of God and render him reasonable service.

[18] They who possess the Christian faith must in consequence of it be confidently happy in God and his grace. They will even delight in good works. The prayers the Cain-like ones offer, and the costume they affect, are not good works. Only such works as minister to the profit of a neighbor are good, as we said in the last Gospel lesson. Yes, Christians will readily suffer everything, for they doubt not God’s presence with them, and his favor. These are they who honor God and are useful to man.

[19] But the Cain-like people profit not God, the world, nor themselves. They are mere useless burdens to the earth, harmful to themselves and everyone else. Lacking faith, they do not serve nor honor God. They do no work that contributes in any way to the benefit of their neighbor’s body or property, his honor or his soul. Their works are exclusively their own, consisting in certain gestures, apparel and meats and performed in honor of certain places and times. Tell me, how does it benefit me for you to affect a large bald pate or to wear a gray cowl? Who profits by your fasting on a certain day and observing a certain other day as holy? by your abstaining from particular meats, and secluding yourself in a certain place, to read and

mutter so much every day? So doing, you simply murder yourself to please the devil, leaving a pernicious example, that others may follow in the same life and conduct as if it were good, and consistent with the principles of Christianity. Having not a Christian belief, you cannot pray in a Christian manner. Hence your fasting is not, as it should be, a mortification of the body; it is performed as a good work. Such a life is nothing else than the idolatry of Baal and of Moloch formerly practiced among the Jews, who tortured, burned and otherwise murdered their children for the devil's honor.

The Use and Necessity of the Law

[20] Perhaps you ask, "If it is true that we are justified not by works, but by hearing of Christ and believing in him as ours personally, what is the need and use of the commandments? Why has God so urgently taught them? I answer: We come now to this our epistle lesson. It tells us the object of the commandments. The Galatians first learned the Christian faith from Paul. Afterward, being perverted by certain false teachers, they turned back to their works, imagining they must become righteous through the deeds of the Law. In our lesson Paul recalls them from their works unto faith, and with multiplied terms points out to them the two kinds of works of the Law. His conclusion is: the works preceding justification — or faith — are unprofitable and merely constitute us servants; but faith makes us children of God — his sons — whereupon really good works must follow.

[21] But we must acquaint ourselves with Paul's language, his distinction between the servant and the child. The self-righteous he terms a servant. Concerning that individual much has been said heretofore. The believer in Christ he calls a child. The believer is and will be justified by faith alone — without works. This distinction is based upon the fact that the self-righteous one does not serve in the same spirit that actuates the child and heir conscious of his own inheritance. He renders his service in the spirit of a day-laborer upon another's property. Although the works of the two may be precisely of the same character, the spirit that moves them — the conscience, and faith makes a difference. The child confidently expects to remain heir to the estate. The servant, recognizing his ultimate dismissal, does not await inheritance. As Christ declares (John 8:35): "The bondservant abideth not in the house forever: the son abideth forever."

[22] Now, the Cain-like saints have not, as they themselves confess, the Christian faith which would assure them of being the children of God. They protect themselves from that awful heretical presumption by making the sign of the cross. So they continue to hang in doubt. As they believe, so is it with them. They are not children of God and never will become his happy children in the way they are going, notwithstanding they may perform the requirements of the Law, may faithfully put it into practice. Observance of the Law will constitute them servants, and servants will they continue to be securing no more than a temporal reward — a competence on earth, and rest, honor and pleasure. We see this in the spiritual orders, where all the wealth, power, pleasure, honor and favors of the world are enjoyed. Here is the reward of the self-righteous. They are servants and not children; therefore in the hour of death they will all be cast out from the eternal inheritance which they refused in this life to believe in and to receive through faith. You see, so far as the works are concerned, there is scarcely a difference between the child and the servant. Faith, however — the spirit of service — makes the distinction.

[23] The apostle's design is to make plain the fact that, lacking faith, the Law, with all its works, constitutes us simply servants. Only faith can make us children. Not the Law, nor the works of the Law, nor human nature can create faith within us; the Gospel alone brings it. It is present when we give ear to the Gospel, the Word of grace, which Word is accompanied by the Holy Spirit when preached and heard in quiet sincerity. Witness the example of Cornelius and his family (Acts 10:44), who received the Holy Spirit simply upon hearing Peter preach.

[24] The Law was given merely to reveal to man his graceless and servile condition and his lack of filial affection; to show him how he serves God without faith and confidence, and a free, spontaneous spirit. The self-righteous saints confess to their utter want of confidence; and, if they would but make further confession, they must admit that they prefer to have no Law, and do not submit to it from choice. Destitute of faith as they are, their whole conduct is regulated by restraints. They must acknowledge the Law powerless to yield them any higher perfection. Let them learn from the Law their condition as servants and not as children and be led to come out of their servitude into the prerogative of the child, regarding their own efforts

ineffectual. Thus, through faith and the grace of God they may attain their rightful place in life.

[25] Such is the right way to view the Law; such is the use we are to make of it. It is calculated simply to convict and vanquish all who presume to fulfill it without faith. For these, being servants, undertake its requirements with no free, spontaneous spirit and with no reliance on grace. The Law is designed to try men, to teach them by defeat in the conflict with it how unwilling, how faithless, they are, and Thus, lead them to seek help elsewhere and not to presume by their own strength to meet its demands. A voluntary spirit is necessary, and only the child of God can fulfill the Law. The Law is an enemy to the unwilling and to servants.

[26] But the self-righteous go so far as to acknowledge their utter lack of faith, yes, they reject the faith which would constitute them children; they are sensible of their unwillingness, and really prefer freedom from the Law; yet they presume by their own works to render themselves godly; they desire to remain servants instead of children, but at the same time to cleave to the inheritance, so perverting all order. Though, as we said, the purpose of the Law is to bring them into conflict and teach that they are servants lacking a voluntary spirit, and to lead them to despair of their own efforts and cleave to faith, which would afford grace and constitute them children — notwithstanding all this, they pervert the Law to the extent of undertaking to fulfill its demands by their works. Thus, they frustrate the end of the Law and its true meaning, striving against faith and grace, to which the Law points, even urges, them. So they remain forever a blind, perverse, laboring and servile people. Such is the teaching of Paul where he fearlessly says (Romans 3:20), “By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified in his sight.” Why not? He answers (Romans 7:7), Because the Law effects only the knowledge or experience of sin.

[27] Beloved, how does the Law do this? Study a Cain-like individual and you will see. In the first place, only with great pains and labor does he perform all his works in obedience to the Law. Yet, as he readily confesses, he does not believe himself a child of God and holy. Indeed, as before said, he condemns such faith as the most abominable presumption and heresy. He continues in doubt, expecting to become a child through his own works.

[28] You see plainly, that individual is not good nor righteous, for he is destitute of faith, in fact is an enemy to faith. Being an enemy to faith, he is an enemy to righteousness. Consequently, his works are not meritorious, no matter how admirable they may appear judged by the standard of the Law. So you see Paul is right when he says, “By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight.” In God’s sight the doer must be good before his works are good. True, his works may justify him before men, who judge according to the deeds performed and not according to the doer’s spirit — the state of his heart. While men judge individuals by their works, God judges the works by the individual. The first commandment of the Law demands that we have one God and honor him, that is, trust and confide in him, build upon him. This is true faith, whereby we are made children of God. Thus, the Law clearly reveals the sin of the Cain-like — their unbelief. In like manner you experience whether you believe or not. Without such a law no one could experience or know this. Note, this is what Paul calls a knowledge of sin by the Law.

[29] You cannot extricate yourself from unbelief, nor can the Law do it for you. All your works in intended fulfillment of the Law must remain works of the Law and powerless to justify in the sight of God, who regards as just only believing children. For only these fulfill the first commandment and hold him true God. Though you torture yourself to death with works, yet they will not afford your heart the faith this commandment requires. Indeed, as before stated, works neither know nor tolerate faith. They do not recognize that the Law requires faith. Therefore, he who puts his trust in works must continue the devil’s martyr and a persecutor of faith and the Law through those very works wherein he trusts, until he comes to himself, knows himself and, despairing of himself and his works, gives honor to God; until, perceiving his own worthlessness, he ardently desires pure grace, driven to it by God, through the Law. Then faith and grace come to fill the empty heart, to feed the hungry soul. Then follow really good works. These works are not of the Law; they are works of the Spirit of grace, in the Scriptures styled the works of God — works he produces in us. All not produced in us by God through grace, all that we perform of ourselves without grace, is really wrought of the Law and avails nothing to justification. Rather it is evil and opposed to God, because of the unbelief in which it is wrought.

[30] In the second place, one like Cain never performs his duty willingly and voluntarily unless he is hired and is permitted to exercise his own pleasure, to have his own desires. He is precisely like the servant who will not do his duty unless he is driven or is given his own way. Now, servants that have to be driven or coaxed or flattered are very disagreeable. Likewise, the Cain-like are displeasing, and by no means acceptable in the sight of God. For they perform no work of the Law unless driven by fear of punishment and of hell; or only after being coaxed and given their own way; or again, unless they do it to secure from God a competence to use as they desire. You see they are not actuated by heartfelt love for the Law, but by the expectation of reward or fear of punishment. Being with all their hearts enemies to the Law, evidently they would prefer that the Law did not exist. If the doer be evil, the work is also evil. It is merely extorted by fear, or secured by conceding the doer his own pleasure in the matter; just as entreaty and persuasion move one to action.

[31] The Law teaches us to recognize the unwillingness and perversity of our minds. They are wholly sinful before God. Where is the holiness in performing with the hands required duties when our hearts are unkindly disposed toward the Law and the Law-giver? Indeed, ill will toward the Law is very sinful. Note, what Paul calls knowing sin by the Law, is coming into conflict with it, feeling and experiencing the perversity of our hearts and in consequence shuddering, despairing of ourselves, and eagerly striving after grace. Grace removes disinclination and generates a willing, cheerful spirit, a spirit giving us sincere good-will for the Law and enabling us to perform our duties voluntarily, without constraint, our only motive being pure delight in righteousness and the Law, while we are uninfluenced by expectation of reward or by fear of punishment. Thus, of the slave, the child is made; of the bond-servant, an heir. The faith of Christ alone can create such a spirit, as sufficiently stated before. Now let us consider the epistle. "So long as the heir is a child, he differeth nothing from a bondservant, though he is lord of all."

[32] Paul introduces a figure from material life. As we know, a minor, a child, who is heir to an estate left from parents or bequeathed by will, is reared in restraint like a servant so far as control of the estate is concerned. He is powerless to exercise his own pleasure in regard to it. He is kept under restraint and discipline, being permitted to derive from the estate only

enough for food and raiment, notwithstanding the property is really his own. In the matter of his own possessions, he is but as a stranger and a servant.

[33] Similarly, in spiritual matters God made a testament when he gave Abraham the promise (Genesis 22:18) that in his seed, Christ, should all the nations of the earth be blessed. This testament was afterward established by the death of Christ; and after his resurrection it was published through the Gospel. The Gospel is merely a revelation, a manifestation, of this testament wherein it is declared to the world that in Christ, the seed of Abraham, grace and blessing are willed and given to all men and may be received by everyone if only he believes it.

[34] Before this testament was opened and published, children of God were under the Law, burdened and constrained by its works. Nevertheless, their works did not justify; rather they were servile and unprofitable. But because God's children were predestined to a future faith which should constitute them children, they were unquestionably heirs of the grace and blessing conveyed in the testament; though not then in possession of it and able to appropriate it, but, like others without faith, servile and occupied with works. Just so, it is the case now, and always has been, that many believe, and acknowledge faith, after having been previously overwhelmed with works and in ignorance of faith; after having been, with hypocrites, occupied in works. From the fact of their now apprehending faith and receiving the inheritance, they certainly must have been all the time heirs and predestined of God, though in ignorance of the fact, and though servants, self-righteous and Cain-like.

[35] So some who are now occupied with works and whose holiness is like Cain's, who are servants as he was, are nevertheless future heirs and children, because they will yet believe. Faith will enable them to lay aside their servility, to surrender their works and to obtain the great blessing, the vast inheritance, of justification. And being justified, righteousness and salvation are theirs without works, Then will they voluntarily do all their works to the honor of God and the benefit of their neighbors, without expectation of reward or intent to secure righteousness or a reward. For they are in possession of the inheritance and blessing; they have what Christ has bequeathed to them in his testament and caused to be opened, proclaimed and distributed through the Gospel, all of pure grace and mercy.

[36] Abraham and every other patriarch, you will observe, recognized God's testament or covenant. It was delivered to them just as much as to us, although not at that time read and proclaimed to the world as after Christ's ascension. They obtained the very same thing that we and all God's children obtain, and through the very same faith. The grace, the blessing, the testament, the faith — all are the same; the Father is one and the same God of us all.

[37] Note, Paul everywhere teaches justification, not by works, but solely by faith; and not as a process, but instantaneous. The testament includes in itself everything — justification, salvation, the inheritance and great blessing. Through faith it is instantaneously enjoyed, not in part, but all. Truly is it plain, then, that faith alone affords such blessings of God, justification and salvation — immediately and not in process as must be the case with works — and constitutes us children and heirs who voluntarily discharge their duties, not presuming to become godly and worthy by a servile spirit. No merit is needed; faith secures all gratuitously — more than anyone can merit. The believer performs his works gratuitously, being already in possession of all the Cain-like saints vainly seek through works and never find — justification and divine inheritance, or grace. “But is under guardians and stewards until the day appointed of the father.”

[38] These guardians and stewards are they who bring up the heir on his father's estate, restraining him from a wild and vagabond life. Though they withhold from him control of the inheritance, they are necessary and benefit the heir in various ways. In the first place, as stated before, they keep him at home on the estate, to better fit him for enjoyment of it. Secondly, the fact of his being carefully and closely restrained will inspire in him stronger desire for control of the inheritance; when he arrives at the age of discretion, he will yearn for freedom and be unwilling to continue under others' control.

[39] The same is necessarily true of everyone still occupied with works under the Law, and a servant. The Law is his guardian, his steward. He is under its control as one in constraint of another. The Law is designed, in the first place, to train him and keep him in bounds; to restrain him externally, through fear of punishment, from committing evil works; to save him from becoming wholly dissolute, from risking everything and altogether shutting himself out from God and his salvation, as do the profligate. The Law is

intended, in the second place, to teach man to know himself; to bring him to reason, where he may recognize his unwilling allegiance to the Law, how he performs no work willingly as a child, but by constraint as a bondservant. The Law gives him experience as to his shortcomings; it shows him his lack of a free, new and ever-willing spirit — a spirit the Law and its works cannot give. Indeed, the more he works, the more unwillingly is it done; and the harder is it to work, for he is influenced by a grudging spirit.

[40] Being made aware of his unwilling attitude, he sees that his works are only an external observance of the Law, while in his heart he is an enemy and opposer of the Law, so far as cheerful obedience is concerned. Hence he truly is constantly at heart a sinner against the Law, and externally a saint according to the Law; in other words, a real Cain, an egregious hypocrite. Manifestly to himself, his works are works of the Law, but his heart is a heart of sin. His heart being not disposed to the Law, it is disposed to sin, while merely his hands are constrained to observe the Law's requirements.

[41] Very aptly has Paul styled works without faith "works of the Law." For the Law forces them; they are simply compulsory works. Now, the Law demands the heart also. It desires a willing obedience. A willing obedience may be said to be not only "a work of the Law," but "a heart of the Law"; not only "hands of the Law," but "will, spirit and all the powers of the Law." As Psalm 1:1-2 declares: "Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of Jehovah; and on his law doth he meditate day and night." Such a spirit the Law demands, but it does not create it; nor is human nature able of itself to produce it. Hence the Law oppresses the soul and condemns it to hell as disobedient to God's commandments. Anguish and distress of conscience follow, but there is no help. This is the time appointed of the Father. Now the child of God will crave grace and help. He will confess his wretchedness, weakness and guilt. He will let go his claim to security in works, and despise himself. For he recognizes that between himself and public sinners there is no difference except as to external conduct. In his heart he is as much opposed to the Law as any other sinner; in fact, his heart may be even more embittered toward it. For the sinner of actual practice may find less desire to sin and may become somewhat inimical to sin, in consequence of the resulting unpleasantness and injury he must meet. The child of God, hindered and restrained by its tutor the Law, may really burn

and rage in his desires and lusts for sin, though he dare not commit the deed. Thus, in expression he may be more righteous than the public sinner, but in heart more wicked.

[42] Now, it is easily apparent to everyone that to give our hands to the Law and our whole hearts to sin, is a very unequal division of service; for the whole heart means vastly more than the works of the hands. What is such a proceeding but giving the chaff to the Law and the grain to sin, or the shell to God and the kernel to the devil? This explains how, as taught in the Gospel, the sin of the public transgressor is but a mote, while that of the secret offender is a great beam.

[43] Now, where circumstances are such that Cain does not see this beam and does not learn to know himself in this sense of the Law, but continues obdurate and blind in his works, disregarding his inner wickedness — where such is the case, he proceeds very inconsistently to judge with malice the world in general, despising sinners as did the Pharisee in the Gospel — presuming to regard himself godly in contrast with others. If any attempt to rebuke him, and justly to condemn his conduct, he rages and raves, kills Abel and persecutes all men, claiming that he does it for the sake of good works and righteousness, to the praise of God. He expects to merit much as a persecutor of blasphemers, heretics, offenders and wicked ones who would lead him astray and lure him from good works. Right here all Scripture denunciations of these venomous spirits come in. Christ calls them serpents and a generation of vipers. Matthew 23:33. They are like Cain and will continue like him. Servants are they and will remain servants.

[44] But the prospective Abels and future children learn to recognize themselves by the Law, to discover how little heartfelt delight they have for that Law. Ceasing to rely upon their own presumption, they let go their hold and with this knowledge are completely helpless in their own eyes. Just here the Gospel comes in. Here is where God gives grace to the humble. These children of God lay hold of the testament and believe. With and in this faith they receive the Holy Spirit. He gives to them a new heart, a heart delighting in the Law and hating sin, and doing right voluntarily and cheerfully. Works of the Law are now superseded by hearts of the Law. This is the time appointed of the father for the heir to come into his own — no longer to be a servant nor under a guardian. Now we understand what Paul

means by the words: “So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage under the rudiments [elements] of the world.”

[45] The apostle uses a word familiar to us — “rudiments.” But we are not to understand here the four rudiments or elements of nature — fire, water, air and earth. That is not its Scriptural meaning. That use of the term originated in heathen philosophy, and in such sense it would be entirely inadmissible in the Scriptures. The apostle means by “rudiments” the literal characters — the letters — of the Law. In both the Latin and the Greek languages, letters are termed the “rudiments” of the language. Similarly, Paul says (Hebrews 5:12), “When by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God.” And (Colossians 2:8): “Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” Again (Galatians 4:9-10), “How turn ye back again to the weak and beggarly rudiments, whereunto ye desire to be in bondage over again? Ye observe days, and months, and seasons, and years.”

[46] It is in a rather contemptuous sense that Paul terms the Law “rudiments,” or letters; it is “weak and beggarly” because it can afford no relief. It renders us likewise weak and beggarly, for it demands service of the heart and mind; and the heart and mind are not present. Hence the conscience grows weak and beggarly, confessing it has not and cannot have what it should have. As the apostle expresses it (2 Corinthians 3:6), “The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

[47] Some understand by “rudiments” not the letter of the law, but the ceremonials and outward forms of worship incident to the religious life, and which we early teach children. In that connection, “rudiments” implies the first crude, childish forms of worship.

[48] Paul qualifies “rudiments” by the phrase “of the world,” because the self-righteous, while boasting obedience to the Law, observe it only in external and worldly things, such as days, meats, apparel, places, persons, vessels and the like. These are all creatures of this world, and such, practically, is the extent of the works of the Law. [Therefore, we rendered the meaning in German by *aeusserliche Satzung*, outward or worldly laws. Editions of 1540 and 1543.]

[49] But faith, independent of the world, hangs upon God, his Word and his mercy; and justifies us, not by works or any other wordly thing, but by the eternal, invisible grace of God. To the Christian, one day is like another; and meats, places, apparel and all worldly things are alike. They neither help nor hinder his salvation and justification, as they do in the case of Cain and the self-righteous. Therefore, the Christian gives no heed to the rudiments of this world, but regards the fullness of the eternal blessings. So, though the Christian has to do with external, temporal affairs, yet he is indifferent to worldly things. He is free to disregard them. All are alike to him — persons, places, days, meats, apparel, etc. He makes no particular choice. Doing the duty that presents, he is unconcerned about what does not. His external conduct does not represent something select and peculiar.

[50] The Cain-like take a different course. They must make some distinction — must be recognized by some peculiarity. They eat no meat, wear nothing black, pray not in houses, observe days. One is bound to one custom, another to another. Yet these are all temporal and transitory things. The observers are servants of the rudiments of this world. Nevertheless, their practices are styled holy orders, good morals and real ways to salvation. Upon this point Paul says (Colossians 2:20-23): “If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances, Handle not, nor taste, nor touch (all which things are to perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility.”

[51] From this quotation and from our foregoing arguments, clearly all orders, institutions and cloisters, now styled ecclesiastical positions, are directly opposed to the Gospel and to the freedom of Christian life; and they who are bound by them are in greater danger than are actual worldlings. The things they devise are mere rudiments of this world. They pertain only to apparel, persons, conditions, times, forms, meats and vessels — solely worldly and temporal things. Adhering to these as having power to make them pious and spiritual, faith is excluded and they are not Christians. Their whole life is but sin and corruption.

[52] These ecclesiasts have more need than anyone else to guard against such dazzling devices. They have especial need to adhere steadfastly to faith, the righteousness of which is beyond the world and worldly things.

The glitter and show of works tear away from faith with greater violence than do gross, open sins, and place the doers in the condition to which Paul here refers when he says, “So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world.” When we were ignorant of faith and occupied with the works of the Law, we performed — yet unwillingly and as servants — works relating to temporal things, presuming thereby to become righteous and saved. It was a false idea and made of us children and servants. The mere works would have been harmless had it not been for the idea that excluded faith and the doctrine of godliness only through grace, and had all temporal things been left optional. “But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

[53] Now, since the law cannot effect justification nor faith, and human nature with all its works cannot merit them, Paul introduces him who merited faith in our stead, and who is master of justification — and justification was not secured without price; it cost much, even the Son of God himself. Him Paul introduces, saying: “When the fullness of the time was come”; that is, at the expiration of the time when we were children and servants. The apostle follows a usage of the Scriptures in speaking of the expiration of the time as its “fulfillment.” For instance, Acts 2:1: “When the day of Pentecost was [fulfilled] fully come”; that is, when it was completed. And Exodus 23:26, “The number of thy days I will fulfill,” meaning, “I will not shorten them; I will give their full measure.” Also Luke 1:57; Now Elizabeth’s time was fulfilled that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.”

[54] Hence the learned doctors erred in interpreting this passage by Paul to mean that the time of fulfillment was the time of grace following Christ’s birth. This is directly contrary to the apostle, who does not say, “the time of the fulfillment,” but “the fulfillment of the time,” meaning the previous time appointed of the Father for the heir, — the period of his guardianship.

[55] Like as the time of the bondservant was fulfilled for the Jews by the bodily advent of Christ, so is it still daily fulfilled for the individual when he is enlightened by faith, and his period of servitude in legal works terminates. Christ’s bodily advent would have been to no purpose had it not effected a spiritual advent, the advent of faith. The purpose of the former

appearance was the establishment of the latter one. Christ came spiritually to all who, whether previously or subsequently, believed in his bodily advent. Hence, because of their faith, he was always present with the ancient fathers; but he has not yet come to the Jews of today because of their unbelief. Everything, from the beginning of the world to the end, depends on that bodily advent. Faith therein terminates the state of servitude whenever, wherever and in whomsoever it exists. Therefore, the time is fulfilled for each individual when he begins to believe in Christ as the promised one now come. What We Are to Believe Concerning Christ

[56] So rich in meaning is this verse, I am not sure I shall be able to do it justice in my explanation. It is not enough merely to believe that Christ is come; we must believe also what Paul here states: that he is sent of God and is the Son of God; that he is true man; that his mother was a virgin; that he alone has fulfilled the Law, and not for his own sake but for our good — to secure grace for us. These points we will examine in order. On the first point John's entire Gospel insists, as we said on the selection for Christmas. John continually proves Christ the Son of God and sent of the Father. He who does not believe that Christ is true God is lost; witness John 8:24: "Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." And (John 1:4) "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." And again (John 14:6): "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." And the reason that we must believe if we would be saved, is this:

[57] The soul cannot, and should not, be content with anything but the Highest Good — its Creator and the fountain of its life and salvation. Now, God chose to be himself that one on whom the soul should rely and believe. No one but God deserves the creature's confidence. Therefore, he himself came to earth as man, gave himself for man, and draws man unto himself, inviting him to believe in him. No necessity on God's part demanded that he come to earth as man; the necessity was ours — it was for our benefit. Now, if we were not to cleave by faith unto Christ as true God, God would be robbed of the honor due him, and we of life and salvation. It is our duty to believe in God only, who is the Truth; without him we cannot live or be saved.

[58] The apostle says, "God sent his Son." The fact of sending necessitates previous existence of the Son. Christ must have existed before he manifested himself on earth in human form. Again, if he is a Son, he

must be greater than an angel. Being more than man and more than angels, the highest creatures, he must be true God. To be the Son of God is to be superior to an angel, as said in the Epistle for Christmas day. Further, Christ being sent by God, and being God's Son, he must be a distinct person from him who sends. Thus, Paul teaches here the existence of one God in two persons, Father and Son. We shall speak later of the Holy Spirit.

[59] For the second point: We are also to believe Christ to be true, natural man, and the Son of man. Paul says he was born of a woman, or made of a woman. Now, he who is born of a woman must be truly a natural man. A woman can bear only according to her nature — bear true man. In John 6:53, Christ says: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves." Eating and drinking here means simply believing that Christ, the Son of God, had a true flesh-and-blood nature, like other men. This is also the testament or covenant of God to Abraham (Genesis 22:18), "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." To be the seed of Abraham, Christ must surely have Abraham's flesh and blood — must be his natural child.

[60] No one, then, must presume by his own devotion, his own efforts, to institute a way of approach to God. It is futile to call on God in the manner of the Jews and the Turks. We must approach him through the seed of Abraham, and be blessed through that seed, according to God's covenant. God will not make a special way for you. He will not, because of your service, annul his covenant. You must abandon your own efforts and cleave to the seed he mentions, to that flesh and blood; otherwise you will be lost with all the spiritual skill and wisdom you may have gained from God. Christ says (John 14:6), "No one cometh unto the Father, but by me."

[61] Because of the exalted and incomprehensible character of the divine nature, God has for our good manifested himself in the most familiar form — in our own nature. In this character he awaits us. Here, and nowhere else, he may be found. Whosoever calls upon him in this relation will be heard at once. Here is the throne of grace, where no one who comes is excluded. But they who permit Christ to dwell here in vain, and presume in some other way than through his humanity to serve and call upon God, the Creator of heaven and earth, may see their sentence already pronounced in Psalm 18:41, where it is said of such: "They cried, but there was none to save; even unto Jehovah, but he answered them not."

[62] In the third place, we must believe that Christ's mother was a virgin. The apostle makes this plain when he declares the Son of God was made of a woman — not of manlike other children. He alone among men is born of woman only. The apostle is not disposed to say "born of a virgin," because "virgin" is not naturally consistent here. But "woman" represents a state in nature — the natural instrumentality for bearing fruit, for bringing forth children. The mother of Christ is truly woman by nature, who brought forth the divine fruit; yet from herself alone, not by man. Therefore, she is a virgin woman — not simply a virgin.

[63] Paul attaches more importance to the birth of Christ than to Mary's virginity. He passes over in silence her virginity, merely a peculiar personal grace that benefited none but herself, and points out her womanhood, advantageous not only to herself but to her fruit. Her virginity ministers not so much to Christ as does her womanhood. She was selected in her virginity not for her own sake, but for Christ's sake. He chose to be born of a virgin that he might be born without sin. A sinless birth was impossible except through the instrumentality of a virgin woman who was able to conceive and bring forth without the aid of man.

[64] Such seems to be included in God's covenant, declaring that all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in the seed of Abraham. From the fact of a blessing being promised, it is evident that men must be under a curse because of their physical birth in sin resulting from Adam. Should this seed of Abraham be a blessing to all, it could not itself be under a curse; therefore, the Savior could not come of Adam's birth, which is altogether under the curse.

[65] Further, to verify the testament or covenant of God who cannot lie, Christ must be the natural child of Abraham — his flesh and blood. But to what is such reasoning leading us? Christ is to be a natural child, born of flesh and blood, and yet not to be a child of carnal birth. The inconsistency of the reasoning is removed by the fact that a woman alone, independent of man, was chosen to affect the birth. Thus, it was possible for a real, natural child, one truly the seed of Abraham, to be born sinless, of a woman, and productive of abundant blessings. In him, then, mankind, under the curse in consequence of its own sinful birth, may be blessed. Thus, the requirements of God's covenant are fully met; the carnal birth of Adam with its

inordinate desire is avoided, and a physical birth in spiritual manner really effected.

[66] If to Mary, the holy virgin, is due great honor for her virginity, infinitely greater honor is due her for her womanhood. For her procreative powers were instrumental in the fulfillment of God's covenant, and in making the blessed seed of Abraham the blessed fruit of her womanhood. Her mere virginity would have been insufficient to accomplish it; in fact, entirely futile.

[67] In the fourth place, we must believe that none but Christ has fulfilled the law. He says (Matthew 5:17), "Think not that I came to destroy the law... but to fulfill." Such, too, is the meaning of the covenant that says the whole world is condemned and shall be blessed in Abraham's seed. Genesis 22:18. Now, if all men are condemned and unblessed, the individual cannot be good; he is only Cain-like. Consequently, his works cannot be good, as said before. God does not regard the works, but the persons — Abel and Cain. And the works of the law render no one righteous.

[68] The fact that Christ rejects all works of the Law and demands that the person first be good and blessed, may seem to teach that he rejects good works and designs to destroy the Law altogether. But in reality, Christ teaches us to perform good works. For the very purpose of correcting error on this point, he says (Matthew 5:17): "Think not that I came to destroy the Law" because I reject the works of the Law. Rather I design its fulfillment through men's faith in me, which first renders the individual good and then enables him to do really good works. Similarly, Paul says, rejecting all works of the Law and exalting faith alone: "Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law." Romans 3:31. Of us at the present day also it is said that we forbid good works when we condemn the practices of the cathedrals and cloisters in the matter of works. Nevertheless, our actual desire for the people is that they first embrace true faith whereby they may become personally good, and be blessed in Christ the seed of Abraham, and Thus, be enabled to do good works contributing to the mortification of the body and to the good of mankind. To this end the things wrought in cathedrals and cloisters contribute nothing, as already fully stated.

[69] Observe, no one is able to fulfill the Law until he first is liberated from it. We must become accustomed to Paul's peculiar phraseology in his reference to some being "under the Law" if we would know who is really under it and who is free. All who perform good works simply because commanded, and from fear of punishment or expectation of reward, are under the Law. Their piety and good deeds result from constraint, and not from a willing spirit. The Law is their master, their driver, and they its bondservants and captives. Such is the attitude of all men without Christ the blessed seed of Abraham. Our own experience and the voice of everyone's conscience teach this. Were it not for the restraint of Law — the fear of punishment or the expectation of reward — were each individual left to his own inclinations and there were no punishment or reward, he would do evil and neglect good, particularly under the influence of temptation and allurements. But when the Law with its threats and its promises interposes, man abstains from evil and endeavors to do good; not from love of good and hatred of evil, but through fear of punishment or hope of reward. Thus, the Cain-like saints are under the Law, controlled by it, like servants.

[70] But they who are liberated from the Law do good and avoid evil, regardless of the threats and promises of the Law — not from fear of punishment or expectation of reward. They act voluntarily, from love for the good and hatred of the evil, because they delight in the Law of God. Even were there no Law, they would not have it otherwise, and be prompted by the same spirit to do good and abstain from evil. Such are really children. Human nature cannot create that spirit; it has origin with the seed of Abraham. The blessing of Christ gives the willing disposition. Willingness is the result of his grace and of the influence of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, "not under the Law" does not mean liberty to do evil and to neglect good as we feel inclined. It means doing good and avoiding evil, not in consequence of fear, not from the restraints and requirements of the Law, but from pure love and a willing spirit. Freedom from the Law involves a spirit which would voluntarily do only good, as if the Law did not exist and our nature were prone to do good. It is a freedom paralleled by that of the body, which willingly eats, drinks, assimilates, sleeps, moves and performs all-natural functions. No law, no compulsion, is necessary. It acts voluntarily and seasonably, without fear of punishment or expectation of reward. It may truly be said that the body is under no law, still it performs its functions; it acts spontaneously.

[71] Mark you, we must have within ourselves a ready, natural willingness that will incline to good and recoil from evil. This is spiritual liberation, or redemption from the Law. Thus, is explained Paul's words (1 Timothy 1:9): "Law is not made for a righteous man." From his own impulse the righteous man inclines to good and abstains from evil; it is with no fear of penalty or hope of recompense. Again, we read (Romans 6:15), "We are not under law, but under grace." That is, we are children, not bondservants; we incline to good readily, without constraint. Again (Romans 8:15), "Ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." The Law produces a spirit of fear; a servile, Cain-like spirit. But grace produces a free, filial, Abel-like disposition, through Christ the seed of Abraham. To that spirit, Psalm 51:10, has reference: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Again, in Psalm 110:3, it is said concerning the people of Christ: "Thy people offer themselves willingly... in holy array."

[72] Thus, Christ fulfilled the Law and did all, of his own free will; not because of the compelling or restraining power of the Law. No other has ever fulfilled it, nor will any fulfill it, except in and through him. So, Paul here says that Christ was "born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law."

[73] In the fifth place, we are to believe that Christ's motive was to benefit us. He desired to make children of us servants. What is meant by the phrase "that he might redeem them that were under the law"? Unquestionably, that he might redeem us from under the Law. But how does Christ effect that? As said before, not by the threats or the rewards of the Law, but by bestowing a voluntary spirit; a spirit prompted neither by compulsion nor restraint; a spirit that regards not the terrors nor the rewards of the Law but proceeds as if no Law existed and all action were voluntary, as was the case with Adam and Eve before the fall.

[74] But what is the process whereby Christ gives us such a spirit and redeems us from under the Law? The work is affected solely by faith. He who believes that Christ came to redeem us, and that he has accomplished it, is really redeemed. As he believes, so is it with him. Faith carries with it the child-making spirit. The apostle here explains by saying that Christ has redeemed us from under the Law that we might receive the adoption of

sons. As before stated, all must be affected through faith. Now we have discussed the five points of the verse. How Christ Was Under the Law

[75] The question, however, still arises: How can Christ be under the Law if to be “under the Law” is to be prompted to obedience only by its restraints and compulsion, and if no one under the Law can fulfill it since God requires a voluntary conformity to its demands? I answer: The apostle seems to make a distinction when he says that Christ was put, or made under the Law; that is, he voluntarily placed himself under the Law. Again, with his voluntary consent, the Father placed him under the Law, though properly he was not subject. We, however, were made subject against our desires. We, as Paul says, were naturally and essentially in forced subjection. While Christ was voluntarily, not by nature, under the Law, we were by nature, not voluntarily, in subjection.

[76] There is a marked difference between being placed under the Law and being of choice under the Law; just the difference there is between volition and the compulsion of nature. Acting according to the pleasures of the will differs materially from obeying the impulses of nature. What is performed by pleasure of the will may be omitted; it is not compulsory. But what is wrought in obedience to the impulses of nature is of necessity; it is not optional. One may go to the Rhine or not, as he pleases; but he must eat, drink, assimilate, sleep, grow and advance in years regardless of his will. Christ put himself under the Law voluntarily, when he had power to refrain. But we were by nature under it; there was no alternative. We could not voluntarily obey and suffer the Law as if under no constraint, as before stated. But Christ, independent of any obligation to obey the Law, observed it voluntarily; he acted as if there were no law for him.

[77] To illustrate: Peter, the apostle (Acts 12:6-7), lay captive in the prison of Herod, bound with chains to two soldiers, while the keepers stood guard at the door. The angel of God entered the prison in a brilliant light, awoke Peter and led him past all the keepers and out the door, leaving the chains in the prison. This event is an illustration of how Christ liberates us from the Law. Let us analyze it. Peter was an inmate of the prison not willingly; he was kept there by force. He knew not how to deliver himself. The angel also entered the prison, but willingly. He was not compelled to be there. He was not there for his own sake, but for the sake of Peter. And he knew how to deliver himself. Now, Peter, when he followed the angel

obediently, was liberated. The prison represents the Law, in which our consciences are unwillingly held captive. For no one voluntarily effects the good required by the Law or omits the evil it forbids. Man acts through fear of punishment or hope of reward. The fear or threat and the reward, or rather the expectation of reward, are the two chains that hold us in prison under the Law. The keepers are the teachers of the Law, who explain it to us. Thus, we remain — yes, unwillingly lie — in the Law. Christ is the angel who voluntarily approaches us in prison — approaches us under the Law; he does willingly the works we unwillingly perform. His motive is to benefit us; he would attach us to himself and liberate us. Christ well knows how to liberate, for he is himself independent of will. Then, mark you, if we cleave to him and follow him, we too shall be liberated.

[78] But how is this done? We cleave to Christ and follow him when we believe that he affects all for our benefit. Such faith introduces the Spirit. Having faith, we too shall perform the requirements of the Law voluntarily, unfettered and liberated from the prison of the Law. The two chains, fear of punishment and hope of reward, will no longer restrain us. All our acts will be spontaneous, prompted by pure love and a cheerful spirit.

[79] To further understand how Christ was put under the Law: Observe, he placed himself in subjection in a twofold manner. In the first place, he put himself under the works of the Law. He permitted himself to be circumcised and to be presented and purified in the temple. He was submissive to his father and mother, and all those things, when no obligation required. For he was Lord over all laws. He acted voluntarily in this respect, unprompted by fear of punishment or expectation of reward as far as he was himself concerned. When we consider the question of mere external works, we can perceive no difference between his conduct and that of individuals actuated by compulsion and restraint. His liberty and free will were concealed from men, just as the imprisonment and unwillingness of others were not apparent. Thus, Christ acts under the Law, though properly not under the Law. He conducts himself like those in bondage to it, but he is himself free. His will being free, he is not under the Law. In the matter of works, which he voluntarily performs, he is subject. But we, both as to our wills and to our works, are under the Law; for we effect works by constraint of will.

[80] In the second place, Christ willingly put himself under the penalty of the Law. He did more than perform the works of the Law to which he was not obligated; he willingly and innocently suffered the penalty threatened and inflicted of the Law upon all who fail of observance. Now, the Law adjudges to death, condemnation and eternal punishment every transgressor of its commands. Paul, quoting from Deuteronomy 27:26, says: “Cursed is everyone who continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them.” Galatians 3:10.

[81] We have now made sufficiently plain the fact that no individual out of Christ is able to keep the Law; all of that class are under the Law, like servants, and fettered and constrained. Consequently, the disregarder of the Law deserves its judgment and penalties. He who is under the Law in the first respect — in the matter of works — must also be subject in the second respect — the matter of punishment. Now, first, all our works are sinful because not performed from a willing spirit but rather in opposition to our will. And second, we are adjudged to death and condemnation. Christ Redeems Us But Christ intervenes before sentence is executed upon us. He interposes, approaching us as we are under sentence. He suffers the penalty — death, curse and condemnation; just as if he had himself violated the entire Law, and deserved the full penalty resting upon the transgressor. At the same time he has not broken the Law; he has fulfilled it, and that without obligation. He is doubly innocent. First, even had he observed no Law — and such was his privilege — he was under no obligation to suffer. Second, he observed the Law from superabundant willingness and was liable to no penalty. In contrast, our guilt is also of twofold character. First, we, under obligation to keep the Law, failed so to do; consequently we should justly suffer its calamities. Second, even had we observed it, it would be right that we should suffer whatever God designs.

[82] Note, the Son of God is put under the Law in that he redeemed us who were under it. For us, for our good, he affected all; not for himself. He purposed to manifest toward us only love, goodness and mercy. As Paul has it (Galatians 3:13), “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us.” In other words: For us, Christ put himself under the Law and complied with its demands, designing every believer of this fact to be redeemed from under the Law with its curse.

[83] Mark you, then, the priceless blessing for the believing Christian: To him are attributed as his own all the works and sufferings of Christ. He may rely upon them as if they were his — wrought by himself. For, to repeat, Christ affected all, not for himself, but for us. Christ needed not any of the things he wrought. He accumulated the treasure that on it we might confidently rest. Further, such faith will be accompanied by the Holy Spirit.

[84] What more should God do? How can the heart avoid being free, joyous and cheerfully obedient in God and Christ? What work can it encounter or what suffering endure to which it will not respond singing and leaping in love and praise for God? When such is not the case, there is certainly some defect in our faith. For the greater our faith, the greater our freedom and happiness; the less our faith, the less our joy. Note, this is the Christian redemption, the Christian freedom from the Law and its curse — sin and death. Not that the Law and death shall be removed, but they shall become as if they were not. The Law shall not lead us to sin, nor death to shame. But faith shall guide us into righteousness and eternal life.

[85] This is an occasion to admonish the poor Cain-like saints, the ecclesiasts, if that is possible in their condition. Were they to observe their orders, laws, ceremonies, prayers, masses, clothing and meats as Christ observed the Law, these might be retained. For example, if they assigned the Christian faith its true place and allowed it to control the heart; if they confessed that they did not become pious and were not saved through their orders, stations and works, but alone through faith in Christ; and if then they considered their works and laws optional, needed only for the mortification of the body and the benefit of the neighbor; then these ordinances might be retained. But the impression at present is that such practices are essential to piety and eternal salvation. This is nothing but a delusion and very sinful. It drives people to perdition by severe martyrdom, and it merits eternal martyrdom; because full, child-like faith is opposed by servile and compulsory works. Faith cannot tolerate such stupid works; it alone makes us pious and forever happy. With the believer all works are optional; he cheerfully suffers all that God sends and does as his neighbor's need requires. These are the works of faith, these and no other. Faith inquires not about masses, appointed fasts, particular clothing, special meats, rare positions, persons or works; nay, faith rejects all these as hindrances to its liberty.

[86] Let this suffice on that verse. We were compelled to treat the subject at length because so little is known concerning the doctrine of faith, a knowledge of which is necessary to a right understanding of Paul. Now follows: “And because ye are sons [children], God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

[87] Here we see that the Holy Spirit is communicated, not through works, but through faith; for as it reads, the Spirit is given to men because they are children and not servants. Children believe; servants only work. Children are free from the Law; servants are under it. The foregoing explanations make all this plain. It may be necessary, however, for us to consider in some measure the sense in which Paul uses the words “child” and “servant,” “free” and “bond.” Works performed under compulsion are the works of servants and works wrought of free will are the works of children.

[88] Why does Paul tell the Galatians the Holy Spirit was given them because they were children, when the fact is, the Holy Spirit creates children from servants, and must be essentially present before they can become children? I reply: He speaks in the same future sense characteristic of verses three and four, where we read that before the time was fulfilled we were under the rudiments. Here the reference is to children prospectively, in the sight of God. The Holy Spirit was sent to transform the servants into the children they were designed to be.

[89] Paul speaks of the Spirit as the Spirit of the Son of God. Why not the Spirit of God? Because he would emphasize the point he is making. Being children of God, God sends them the Spirit of Christ, himself a child, giving them the right to cry, with him, “Abba, Father.” In other words, God sends you his Spirit, who dwells in his Son, that you may be brethren and heirs with him, crying as he cries, “Abba, Father.” The unspeakable goodness and grace of God are extolled in the fact that through faith we share with Christ the full blessings, having all he has, and all he is — also his Spirit.

[90] These words also establish the doctrine of a third person — the Holy Spirit in the Trinity. For not only does the Spirit dwell in Christ as he does in men, but he also is Christ’s, deriving his divine substance from him just as he does from the Father. Otherwise the language of Paul — “the

Spirit of his Son” — would be false. No creature can claim the Holy Spirit as his own spirit; he is the Spirit of God alone. Creatures are the property of the Holy Spirit; though one might, it is true, say “my Holy Spirit” in the sense in which we say “my God,” “my Lord.” The Son is God, then, because the Spirit of God is his Spirit.

[91] But let everyone be certain that he feels the Holy Spirit’s presence in himself and hears his voice. Paul says: When the Holy Spirit is in the heart he cries, “Abba, Father.” Again (Romans 8:15), “Ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” We recognize that voice when the conscience, without doubt or wavering, is firmly persuaded, fully satisfied, that our sins are forgiven and that we are children of God; and when, having such assurance of salvation, we may with joyous and confident heart approach God and call him our beloved Father. But we must be as certain as we are that we live, and must prefer death in any form, yes, hell with all its pangs, to being deprived of the Spirit or to distrusting him. It would be unreasonable doubt of the unbounded achievements of Christ and of his unlimited sufferings were we not to believe that he freely wrought all for us, and not to let this fact incite us to confidence and strength in him equal to the force wherewith sin or temptation terrifies or dissuades us.

[92] True, conflict may arise here. The individual may have a fearful feeling that he is not a child of God. He may imagine God to be a judge over him, angry and austere. Such was the case with Job, and many others. In such conflict, filial confidence must gain the victory, however it may tremble and quake; otherwise all will be lost.

[93] Now, the Cain-like individual, hearing this doctrine, blesses himself, and crossing his hands and his feet, and affecting great humility, he exclaims: “Guard me, O God, against such abominable heresy and presumption! Shall I, a poor sinner, be so bold as to say, I am a child of God? No, no; I humbly confess myself a poor sinner”; and so on. Ignore such a one. Guard against him as the worst enemy to Christian faith and to your salvation. We, too, know full well what poor sinners we are. But it does no good to contemplate what we are and what we do. Rather we are to consider what Christ is and what he has accomplished and still accomplishes for us. The point is not our nature, but the grace of God, which is as high above us as the heaven is above the earth, or as far

removed as the east is from the west. Psalm 103:11-12. If you regard it a wonderful thing to be a child of God, think it not a small thing that the Son of God came to earth, was born of a woman and was subject to the Law, for the very purpose of enabling you to be a child of God.

[94] All the works of God are wonderful and of mighty import. Hence, they fill us with joy and courage, giving us fearlessness and ability to endure anything that may befall us. But the principles of the Cain-like are narrow, productive only of quaking hearts, which are wholly incapable of endurance and action, hearts that tremble at the sound of a driven leaf, as Leviticus 26:36 has it.

[95] Let us, then, heed closely the text. We must perceive the cry of the Spirit in our hearts. It is truly the cry of our own hearts; why, then, should we not recognize it? Paul uses the term “crying” when he might as easily have referred to the Spirit as “whispering,” “speaking” or “singing.” But the first word is more forcible. The Spirit calls, or cries, with power; that is from our full heart, a heart that always lives and moves in true, child-like confidence. As said in Romans 8:26, “The Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Again (Romans 8:16), “The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God.” Then why should not our hearts perceive that crying, intercession and witness-bearing?

[96] How preciously effective temptations and afflictions are in this direction! They drive us to cry; they rouse the Spirit. But we fear and flee at sight of the cross. Consequently, we never feel the Spirit, and we continue Cain’s subjects. If we do not recognize the Spirit’s cry, we must reflect, and must not cease to pray until God hears us; for we are like Cain and our condition is perilous. We are not to expect, however, that no voice but the Spirit’s will cry within us. The voice of murder will cry, to impel us to desire the Spirit’s voice and to exercise ourselves to hear it. So has it ever been with men. Our sins will also cry: they will produce in our conscience strong tendencies to despair. But the Spirit of Christ must, and shall, outvoice that cry. He will create in us a confidence stronger than the tendency to despair. John says (1 John 3:19-22): “Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our heart before him: because if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemns us not, we have boldness toward God; and

whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight.”

[97] The Spirit calling and crying within us is simply a powerful assurance, a perfect confidence, from the depths of the hearts of loving children toward God their beloved Father.

[98] Note how far above mere human nature is the life of the Christian. Human nature is not capable of such a cry, of such confidence in God. It only fears and cries murder upon itself. It exclaims, “O wo, wo, is me!, Thou austere and intolerable judge? Just as Cain cried to God (Genesis 4:13-14): “My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the ground; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth; and it will come to pass that whosoever findeth me shall slay me.” Such exclamations are necessarily characteristic of Cain-like saints. Why? Because they rely upon themselves and their works, and not upon God’s Son, who was sent to earth, was born of a woman and put under the Law. They do not believe that salvation through him was designed for them; nor are they concerned about it. They are occupied merely with their own works, endeavoring by such means to help themselves and to secure the grace of God.

[99] In persecuting faith and defaming and condemning it as heresy and presumption, the unbelievers conduct themselves as their father Cain did to his brother Abel. Thus, in themselves they slay Christ their brother. His innocent blood will not cease to cry toward heaven against them, as the blood of Abel cried against Cain. God will inquire after Abel; he will demand of each of them, “Where is Christ your brother?” Then the disordered Cain will go on to dissemble, saying: “What do I know about him? Am I my brother’s keeper?” For it is the same thing to say: “Shall I be presumptuous enough to regard myself righteous and holy and a child of God merely through Christ? No, no; I will work until I become righteous myself, without his aid.” Mark you, Thus, the crying blood of Abel continued to be upon Cain; and the crying blood of Christ will continue upon all believers, still demanding vengeance and wrath. But as for the believers, the blood will, through the Spirit of Christ, cry for pure grace and reconciliation.

[100] The apostle places a Hebrew word in apposition with a Greek word; he says Abba, Pater (Father). In the Hebrew, Abba means “father”; hence the prelates in certain cloisters are called “abbots.” In former times the holy hermits gave their chiefs the name Abba, Father. These terms were introduced also into the Latin and German. Abba, Pater is equivalent to “Father, Father.” In full German, Mein Vater, Mein Vater; or Lieber Vater, Lieber Vater — My Father, My Father, or Dear Father, Dear Father.

[101] But why does Paul duplicate the word to express the cry of the Spirit? Permit my opinion. In the first place, for the sake of emphasizing the cry. The earnest suppliant frequently makes repetition of his cry. So strenuous must be our appeal and so great our confidence that sin, the cry of Cain, has not power to suppress them.

[102] In the second place, it seems to be Scripture usage to indicate certainty and assurance by duplicating words and phrases. Joseph tells King Pharaoh (Genesis 41:32) that by repetition God indicates it is assured and done even as the words teach. So here the Spirit twice cries “Father” to give us the assurance that God is and will be our Father; to make us not only hopeful of great things, but certainly confident.

[103] In the third place, the apostle may have purposed to show the Spirit’s persistence. The first word, Abba, marks the beginning of the Spirit’s cry. But at that point great conflict will arise. The devil will assail us unceasingly and we must persevere. The addition of the word Father so teaches. We must not cease to cry; as we have begun, we are to continue. So doing, we will come to know what confidence is; the utmost assurance will possess us. Paul may also have designed by employing the word Abba, a somewhat unfamiliar Hebrew word, and supplementing it with Father, a native and familiar Greek term (he was addressing the Greeks and wrote in their own language) — he may also have designed to teach that we hardly know the meaning of confidence at the first. But confidence grows with exercise. In time, seemingly it becomes a part of the believer’s nature and he feels at home with God his Father. “So that thou art no more a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through Christ.”

[104] Christ having come and having been recognized, Paul says, you are no more a bondservant. As before stated, there is a remarkable difference between a child and a servant. Their dispositions are altogether

unlike. The child has freedom and is willing; the servant is constrained and is unwilling. The child is ruled by faith; the servant, by works.

[105] Plainly, then, in the sight of God no one by works can accomplish anything toward his salvation. Salvation must be obtained and enjoyed before works are begun. Having salvation, works will follow spontaneously, to the honor of God and to the benefit of our neighbor. They will not be in any wise prompted by fear of punishment or expectation of reward. This is implied in the words: "If a son, then an heir through Christ."

[106] Now we have made it sufficiently plain that faith alone, faith before any works are done and without them, constitutes us children. If it makes us children, it makes us heirs; a child is an heir. When the inheritance is already possessed, can it be first secured through works? It is an inconsistent conclusion that the inheritance bequeathed through grace is already possessed, and at the same time is still to be sought and obtained first through works and merits, as if it were not present or not given. The inheritance is simply eternal salvation. We have frequently asserted that through baptism and faith the Christian instantaneously possesses all, but does not yet behold it visibly. He possesses it only in faith, for in this life he could not bear the open manifestation of such blessings. As Paul says (Romans 8:24-25), we are already saved, but in hope; we do not yet see our salvation, but we wait for it. And Peter tells us (1 Peter 1:4-5) that our salvation is reserved in heaven ready to be revealed in the last time.

[107] For this reason, the Christian ought not to be influenced, like a servant, by a desire to secure advantage for himself, but by a longing to benefit others in their need. Truly, he must live and act, not for himself, but for his neighbor here on earth. So doing, he will most assuredly live and work for God. Through faith he has sufficient for himself; he is rich, well filled and happy forever.

[108] Paul adds "through Christ" to avoid the implication that the inheritance is bestowed upon us without any merit or cost whatever. Although it costs us nothing, and although it is bestowed without merit on our part, yet Christ was placed under great obligations. For the sake of that inheritance he was put under the Law for us; he paid the cost to secure, or to merit, the inheritance for all who believe in him. When we confer an unmerited favor upon a neighbor, it costs him nothing. But what we bestow

on him freely, of our pure goodness, as Christ bestows blessings upon us, costs us labor and substance.

[109] The unlearned may be somewhat confused by Paul's assertion that men are no longer servants, but children, and when the fact is, there are few believers in Christ, few children, while the world is filled with heretics and Cain-like people. But we must remember he speaks in a doctrinal connection. His meaning is: Before Christ came, and before the preaching of the Gospel whereby children are made, only the Law was preached — the Law which can make only servants with its work. The Gospel being preached at the present time, we have no need for the servant-maker, the Law. All who aforesaid were, through the Law and its works, servants like Cain, now may become, through faith, righteous and saved without works. Therefore, to say there are no more servants, but children, is practically saying that now no servile doctrine is to be taught; now we become children, not servants. Only faith and the Gospel are to be preached. Only they are to be our doctrine. This doctrine imparts the Spirit and teaches us to confide in God and to serve only our neighbor. Thus, the whole Law is fulfilled.

[110] In this manner Paul calls the Galatians again from the teachers who had led them back to the Law and its works. Similarly, the Pope with his foolish laws has for a long time misled the people through his bishops, priests and monks, and has exterminated the Christian faith — conduct foretold in the Scriptures concerning Antichrist. Then let him who would be saved, shun the Pope and his adherents, and all church orders, as he would Lucifer's own servants and apostles.

New Year's Day. The Law and Its Works. Faith. Unity in Christ God Saves Us.

Text: Galatians 3:23-29.

23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Galatians 3:23-29

[1] This, too, is really a Pauline Epistle lesson concerning faith as opposed to works, and taken in connection with the preceding lesson is easily understood. What is said there concerning the servant is true here concerning the pupil. Paul employs the two figures to teach us the office of the Law and what it profits. We must, therefore, again refer to the Law and its works, to the fact that works are of twofold origin. Some are extorted by fear of punishment or prompted by expectation of pleasure and gain; others are spontaneous, cheerful and gratuitous, not performed to escape punishment nor to gain reward, but inspired by pure kindness and a desire for what is good. The first class are the works of servants and pupils; the second class, of children and free heirs.

[2] The youth under a tutor follows not his own will; but, from fear of the rod, his master's will. While under control of his master, his real character cannot be detected. Were he free, his true self would be apparent, for he would manifest his natural disposition and his works would be his own. The works he performs under restraint and coercion are not really his own, but those of the tutor who forces them. Were he not under control of the tutor, he would do none of them, but rather things quite the reverse.

[3] In this homely but apt illustration Paul presents at once the province of the Law and the limitation of free will, or human nature, with a clearness not to be surpassed. It plainly teaches the meaning, operation and end of the Law, and the extent of human nature's power. We note that constraint has a twofold effect upon the youth: First, fear of his tutor preserves him from many evils into which he would otherwise fall; he is withheld from indulging in a wicked, licentious life, in becoming utterly dissolute. Second, his heart is filled with hatred toward the tutor who curbs his will. This is the situation with him: the greater his external restraint from evil, the greater his inward hatred of him who restrains. His character is in the scales; when one side goes up, the other goes down. While outward sin decreases, inward sin increases. We know from experience that those youths most strictly reared are, when given liberty, more wicked than young men less rigidly brought up. So impossible is it to improve human nature with commandments and punishments; something else is necessary.

[4] Likewise, so long as man is in his natural state and destitute of grace, he does not what he would, but what his tutor - the Law - obliges him to do. It must be confessed by all - that were it not for hell and the Law's penalties, no one would do good. Now, man's works being not wrought of free will, they are not his own; they are the works of the coercive and restraining Law. Well may the apostle declare them not our works, but the "works of the Law," because what we do against our will is not our achievement, but that of the constraining power.

[5] For instance, should one forcibly make my hand the instrument to slay another, or to bestow alms upon a destitute individual, it would not be my deed, though performed by my hand, but the deed of him who forced the action. Consequently, I would be neither injured nor benefited in the least by the act. Likewise, the works of the Law render no one righteous, notwithstanding man performs them. For, so far as our will is concerned,

we do them merely from fear of the Law's penalty. The will would much prefer to do otherwise and would if not constrained by the coercive and menacing Law. Such works are not our own, then. Notwithstanding, everyone must be saved through his own act.

[6] Further, one may not, or may think he does not, do works through fear of punishment; he is, however, inspired by the promises and inducements of the Law. And that motive is as wrong, if not more so, than the other. Such a position implies that if heaven were not promised, if they knew there were no reward, no effort would be made. The deeds wrought from this latter motive are, therefore, likewise not our own; they are the works of the Law with its inducements in the nature of favors and rewards. They are more dangerous and less easily recognized than the former kind, being subtler and bearing greater resemblance to true, spontaneous works.

[7] But tribulation will prove them. They will appear in their true character when they are rejected as to merit, when gratuitous service is required, service uninfluenced by hope of reward, service rendered only for the honor of God and for the benefit of one's neighbor. Then human nature utterly fails is powerless. Then is evident the fact that it does no good work of its own, nothing but the extraneous works of the Law; just as the irrational animal obeys in fear of the lash, or labors for the sake of its food. How many righteous individuals, men of honorable character, think you, would there be today if neither heaven nor shame, punishment and hell were before them? Not one. Order is preserved through fear of punishment or expectation of gain. The works of the Law, then, are all deceptive. As the Scriptures declare: "All men are liars." Psalm 116:11. "Surely every man at his best estate is altogether vanity." Psalm 39:5. The Office of the Law

[8] Thus, too, we find with all men two effects of the Law: First, by that tutor they are secured against shameful, dissolute conduct. Under the discipline of the works of the Law, they maintain an honorable outward life. Secondly, in their hearts they really become enemies to the Law with its penalties; and the more severe the chastisement, the greater their hatred. Who is not an enemy to death and hell? And what is that but being an enemy to the Law that imposes such punishment? And what is enmity to the Law but enmity to righteousness? But is not the enemy of righteousness an enemy of God himself? Then do we not arrive at the ultimate conclusion that we are not only unjustified, but we also hate righteousness, love sin,

and are enemies to God with all our hearts, however beautiful and honorable our outward conduct - our works - may appear?

[9] Now, unquestionably God desires to be loved with the whole heart. The commandment (Deuteronomy 6:5) reads, "Thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart." God wills that our good works should be really our own, not those of our tutor the Law, or of death, hell or heaven. That is, we are not to act from a fear of death or hell, or for the sake of enjoying heaven, but from a willing spirit, a desire and love for righteousness. He who does a good deed through fear of death and hell, does it not to the honor of God. It is a work of death and hell, for they have extorted it. Because of these, he has wrought; otherwise he would not have done the deed. Therefore, he remains a servant, a slave, of death and hell, so long as these inspire his works. Now, if he remains their servant, he must die and be condemned. To him apply the proverbs, "He that fears hell, enters it" and "Trembling will not deliver from death."

[10] But you say, "What must be your conclusion, for who then can be saved? Who does not tremble and fear death and hell? Who executes his works, or leads an honorable life, without fear?" I reply: Yes, but who, being filled with such fear and with a hatred of God's Law and his righteousness, loves God? Where is human nature here? Where is free will? Still you refuse to believe in the absolute necessity of God's grace; still you will not admit the conduct of all men sinful, and false; still you cannot be persuaded that works do not make one righteous.

[11] Here, indeed, is evident the necessity for the Law, and the purpose it serves - God's design in it - its office being twofold: First, to preserve discipline among us; to impel us to an honorable outward life, a life in which we can dwell together without devouring one another as we would were Law, fear and punishment lacking, and as formerly was the case with certain heathen. This is why God did not, in the New Testament dispensation, abolish the secular sword. He established its place, though he did not make use of it. And it is not necessary for his followers to employ it otherwise than to restrain bold and dissolute conduct; and to enable men to live together in peace, to maintain themselves and to rear their families. Without it, all countries would be demoralized, and overrun with murderers and robbers. No woman or child would escape violence. The sword and the Law preserve men and impel them to a quiet, peaceful, and honorable life.

But they do not through these restraints become righteous; their hearts are not made better. Their hands are restrained and bound, that is all. Their works, their apparent righteousness, is not their own; it is of the sword, which extorts it by inspiring the fear of punishment.

[12] Similarly, God's Law impels us, through fear of death and hell, to forsake many evils. Like a tutor, it holds us to an honorable outward life. But by the Law no one becomes righteous before God. The heart remains an enemy to its tutor, hates his chastisements and would prefer freedom.

[13] Second, God's design in the Law is to enable man to know himself; to perceive the false and unjustified state of his heart; to discover how far he is from God and how utterly impotent his own nature is; to disdain his own goodness and to recognize it as nothing in comparison to what is necessary to the fulfillment of the Law; to be humbled in consequence of such knowledge and come to the cross, yearning for Christ, longing for his grace, despairing of himself and placing all his hope in Christ. Christ will then give him a different spirit and change his heart. No longer will he fear death and hell, no longer look for life and heaven. For, being voluntarily and unselfishly devoted to the fulfillment of the Law, he will maintain a clear and confident conscience toward it during his whole life and even in the hour of death. He will be equally uninfluenced by fear of death, hope of heaven or any other motive. We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrews 2:15) how Christ made atonement that he "might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." These words make it evident enough that we must have no fear of death, and that they who live in fear of it are servants, nor will they be saved. Now, neither our own nature nor the Law can liberate us from that fear. Indeed, they but increase it. Christ alone has freed us from it. If we believe in him, he will give us that free, undaunted spirit which fears neither death nor hell, which seeks neither life nor heaven, but voluntarily and joyfully serves God.

[14] Therefore, we see, first, how dangerous are the doctrines which urge the attainment of righteousness only through commandments and laws. These things but separate man farther from God, from Christ; yes, from the Law and all righteousness. The effect of the inculcation of such doctrines is simply to render man's conscience continually more fearful, timid, dejected and wretched, and to teach him ever to fear death and hell, and only them;

until eventually his heart is filled with naught but despair, and he must become, in any aspect, a martyr of the devil.

[15] Secondly, we see three attitudes toward the Law; that is, mankind conducts itself in three ways with reference to it. Some disregard it utterly, and boldly oppose it by a dissolute life. To them it is practically no Law. Others because of the Law refrain from such a course and are preserved to an honorable life. But while outwardly they live within the Law's prohibitions, inwardly they are enemies of this their tutor. The motive of all their conduct is the fear of death and hell. They keep the Law only externally; rather, it keeps them externally. Inwardly they neither keep it nor are kept by it. The third class observe it both externally and with the heart. This class are the tables of Moses, written upon outwardly and inwardly by the finger of God himself.

[16] The first class are righteous neither without nor within; the second are only outwardly pious and not in heart; but the third are thoroughly righteous. Upon this point Paul says (1 Timothy 1:8), "But we know that the Law is good, if a man use it lawfully." But in what way is it lawfully used? I answer, "Law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless" (1 Timothy 1:9). And what are we to understand by that? Simply that he who would preach the Law aright must be governed by these three classes. He must not by any means preach the Law to the third class as an instrument of righteousness; this were perversion. But to the first class such preaching is in order. For them is the Law instituted. Its object is that they may forsake their dissolute life and yield themselves to the preserving power of their tutor. However, it is not enough for them to be guarded and kept by the Law; they must learn also to keep it. So, in addition to the Law, and beyond it, the Gospel must be preached, through which is given the grace of Christ to keep the former. There is a considerable difference between observing the Law and being preserved by it; between keeping and being kept. The first class neither keep it nor are kept; the second are kept; and the third keep it.

[17] These three attitudes of mankind toward the Law are prefigured in certain acts of Moses. First, where he broke the tables when the Jews worshiped the golden calf. Exodus 32:19. The breaking of the tables, and the people's consequent failure to receive them, suggest the first class, who do not receive the Law at all, but break it. Second, Moses brought other

tables, which were received by the people and the skin of his face shone, but Aaron and the Israelites could not endure the shining of Moses' face, and he was compelled to cover it with a veil when he would speak to them. Exodus 34:30-33. Here is suggested the second class, who receive the Law but only for outward observance. With them it is too bright for inward obedience; they are afraid of it.

[18] Hypocrites make for themselves a veil, as Paul explains (Corinthians 3:13-15) - the arrogance of their works, of their external righteousness. They will not look the Law squarely in the face and see how futile is their righteousness. As Paul says, to this very day the veil is upon their hearts. Then, too, Moses leads the people no farther than to the Jordan, slays only two kings - Sihon and Og - and gives only two and a half tribes of Israel their portion of the land. Here is illustrated half-hearted righteousness; insignificant, outward righteousness. Then, there in the wilderness of Moab, Moses dies; the Law can go no farther.

[19] Now, third: Joshua succeeds Moses and leads the whole multitude dryshod through the Jordan, into all parts of the promised land. There is now no Moses, no Law; only Joshua, Christ, who leads by faith and fulfils all Moses' commandments. Thus, is suggested the class to whom no Law is given, as Paul says, and who become righteous, not through works, but through grace; that is, their good works are not performed through constraint of the Law. Moses is not in evidence with them. With all this explanation, Paul should, I think, be easily understood in this lesson. Let us now consider it. "But before faith came, we were kept in ward under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed."

[20] Paul does not say, before faith came we were righteous and kept the Law. On the contrary, he says that the Law kept us. Under it we were locked up - preserved - that we might not boldly and independently rush into wickedness. At the same time, the restraint did not render us really and inwardly righteous. Nor was it designed to be permanent. It led to the faith to be revealed in the future, a faith which was to set us free; not free to do the evil from which the Law shut us up, but free to do the good to which the Law impelled us. The "shutting up," the confinement, of the Law should teach us to desire faith and to recognize the evil tendencies of our nature; for faith is a spiritual freedom, liberating only the heart.

[21] To illustrate: Suppose you were confined in a prison, where you were very reluctant to remain. Your captor might release you in either of two ways: First, he might give you physical freedom by destroying the prison and letting you go where you desire. Secondly, he might make you mentally free by bestowing many blessings upon you in this prison - illuminating and enlarging it, making it pleasant in the extreme, adorning it richly and to an extent rendering it more desirable than any royal palace, more to be desired even than a kingdom; and by so reconciling you to your surroundings, so altering your mind, that you would not, for all earthly possessions, be removed from that prison, but would pray for its preservation that you might continue therein, it being to you no longer a prison, having become a paradise. Tell me, which form of freedom would be the better? Would not the latter be preferable? The former liberation would leave you but a beggar, as before. But in the latter case, your mind being free, you would possess all you might desire.

[22] Thus, mark you, has Christ given us spiritual freedom from the Law. He did not abrogate, did not destroy, the Law. But he changed the heart which before was unwillingly under the Law. He so benefited it and made the Law so desirable that the heart has no greater delight and joy than in the Law. The heart would not willingly have the Law fail in one tittle. Again, as the prisoner makes his prison narrow and oppressive for himself by his unwillingness, so, too, are we enemies to the Law and make it disagreeable to ourselves because unwillingly we are shut up from evil and impelled to good.

[23] Thus, in this verse the apostle beautifully presents both the fruit and the office of the Law. To the inquiry, wherein is the Law good? he answers: Though it truly does not make us righteous, but rather increases our sinfulness and provokes our human nature by its commands and prohibitions, yet it has a twofold office. First, it locks us up, secures us, against breaking out violently into an openly shameless life, as do the class who will not permit themselves to be Thus, restrained. For this reason it is much better that the Law should exist. Without it, who could withstand the encroachments of his fellows? According to Paul (Romans 13:4), the secular sword is borne for a terror, not to the righteous, but to the evildoers.

[24] Second, constraint of the Law leads to a future faith by revealing to man his wickedness and his dislike for what is good; by teaching him to

know himself, to humbly confess his evil nature, to acknowledge its guilt and to desire the grace of God - grace that does not abrogate the Law, which he now recognizes as right, good and holy, but produces another heart in him, a heart to love that right, good and holy Law. Note, this is the true meaning and best office of the Law. It is truly necessary that the Law should exist, to bring man Thus, to know himself and to implore the grace of God.

[25] Over this office of the Law, however, a contention arises between the true and the false saints. False saints will receive the Law only so far as its first office goes. They presume that in submitting to its restraint and preservation they are become righteous. They will not learn from it to perceive their wicked nature, but deem human nature inherently good and truly capable of loving the Law. The true saints deny this doctrine; and indeed it is false. The Word of God and the universal experience of men declare otherwise. And he who does not falsify nor dissemble will confess himself naturally without delight in the Law of God; much more without delight in the punishment of sins, in death and hell, which the Law presents. The intensely abominable filth of their hearts, great and deep, the self-justifiers palliate by covering it with the figleaves of their own works in the Law, as Adam and Eve covered their shame. But the sin in the heart of Adam and Eve was not made less by the covering; so, too, by works of the Law, by self-justification, no one is made better, but rather is made worse. It was because of this very filth that Christ rejected and dispersed the congregations of the synagogues.

[26] It is now plain to whom Paul addresses the words of this verse the -work-righteous, who would become godly through the Law and its work, who consider the first office of the Law sufficiently effective to make them righteous. This doctrine gives rise to a class who might be styled "Absalomites." For as Absalom remained hanging by his head, in an oak tree, suspended between heaven and earth (2 Samuel 18:9), so this class hang between heaven and earth. Shut up by the Law, they do not touch the earth; they are restrained from the things their evil nature ardently desires. On the other hand, since the Law, powerless to improve their nature, only irritates and provokes it, making them enemies to the Law, they are not godly and so do not reach heaven.

[27] Zechariah (Zechariah 5:9) saw two women, between heaven and earth, carrying an ephah to Babylon, while in the vessel sat a woman called Impietas - unbelief, or ungodliness. This vessel, the ephah, represents the self-justifiers, vacillating between open vice and true piety. Unbelief sits within. The two women bearing it are Fear and Reward; from fear of punishment or in quest of reward are all their works performed. These two carry and maintain the unbelievers in their self-righteousness; such is the significance of the wings like a stork, or vulture, which the prophet mentions. Wings, in the Scriptures, signify oral preaching, because speech is swift. The false saints preach only of fear and reward. They would make men righteous merely by terror and allurements, but they only increase men's sin. Men become greater enemies to the Law because of its terrors, and for the sake of its allurements are only the more desirous to accomplish their own designs. Therefore, these false saints are simply wings for the stork, the vulture, that devours the chickens - that murders souls.

[28] But the true saints do not remain midway between heaven and earth. They, too, hear of the terrors and the persuasions of the Law; but they recognize their own proneness to regard the threats and enticements rather than the purpose of the Law, and so are made aware that truly they are not pure nor righteous. They fall down in confession, crying, "Grace, grace, O Lord God!" To them Christ comes, bringing true liberty through his Spirit. Thus, they become altogether of heaven.

[29] This, mark you, is what is meant by being "kept in ward under the Law and shut up unto the faith, which should afterwards be revealed." Not only were the Jews Thus, shut up before the revelation of faith, but they are still shut up, as are all who attempt to become righteous through the works of the Law and because of fear of its threats or hope of its rewards, and like reasons. If they be not directed to the faith, if they fail of faith, it being not made known to them, the works of the Law must but render them more wicked, and they will ultimately fall into despair or obdurate presumption, and so pass beyond the reach of help. So perilous is it to fail of making a right use of the Law and of Thus, arriving at faith. "So that the Law is become our tutor [schoolmaster] to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."

[30] Observe the import of these words: no one is justified by the Law and its works. If we could be justified by the Law, faith would be

unnecessary, and Paul's statement here - we are justified by faith - would be false. In this matter of justification, faith and works utterly exclude each other. If justification be ascribed to faith, it must not be attributed to works, to the Law, to human nature. If it be ascribed to works, it must not be attributed to faith. If one theory be true, the other must be false. They cannot both be true. The power and virtue of the Law cannot consist in anything but the making of sinners or the permitting men to remain sinners. Whatever does not justify, certainly makes sinners or permits them so to remain. But since the purpose of the Law is to deal with sins and sinners, it must do something more than permit sinners to remain as they are. What kind of an agency would that be which has no effect upon the object of its operation?

[31] What, then, can the Law accomplish if it does not justify us, and neither makes us better nor leaves us as we are? Wonderful indeed must be its province to help, when it neither justifies nor leaves the sinner as it finds him. Necessarily it must increase sin. Paul says (Romans 5:20), "The law came in besides, that the trespass might abound." As before said, this result is in consequence of the Law's shutting up the sinner, restraining his hands from committing open wickedness and awakening in his heart only increased hatred for and opposition to the Law; just as a pupil's indignation arises in proportion as he is chastised, or his will is crossed, by his tutor. His hatred or unwillingness is simply an increased development of his restrained evil will, and it never would have been called forth had not that will be opposed.

[32] Before the introduction of the Law, man sins voluntarily, of his own evil nature, with no thought of the Law. But the advent of the Law with its threats and constraint irritates his human nature and excites his aversion; he begins not only to love sin but to hate righteousness. Note, this is the province of the Law concerning the sinner and his sins. Paul says the Law increases sin; so far is it from justifying any man. Blessed is he who recognizes this truth. The self-righteous do not at all perceive it. They assign to human nature no such wickedness and no enmity toward the Law; they find much to commend in human nature. Hence they understand not a syllable of the words of Paul, who never speaks of the Law otherwise than as arousing sin; and, if we would but confess it, such is the testimony of our own hearts.

[33] The apostle says, “Unto Christ.” That is, until Christ, the Law is our tutor. No leave is given to embrace any other faith than the faith in Christ. The Law directs us only to Abraham’s seed, Christ, on whom all saints from the beginning have believed, as stated in the preceding epistle lesson.

[34] Therefore, it is of no benefit to the Jews and the Turks to believe in God the Creator of heaven and earth; he who does not believe in Christ, neither believes in God. Even were Christ truly not God - a thing impossible - still they who should fail of belief in him would not be believers in God; for God has promised his grace in Abraham’s seed. Abraham’s seed being Christ, as the Jews, the Turks and all the world acknowledge, he who disbelieves in Christ, also disbelieves the promises of God. Hence he is not a believer in the God who created heaven and earth, for no other God is the author of the promise to Abraham, and in the name of no seed of Abraham except Christ has the blessing gone forth, and the faith been preached, in all the world.

[35] Outside of Christ, then, no Law, no belief, can secure blessing and justification. God will keep his promise made to Abraham, the promise to bless all the world in his seed, and in no other. God will not establish a new and peculiar faith for each person and neglect or recall his promise. So then, faith in Christ justifies, as Paul says (Romans 10:4): “For Christ is the end of the Law unto righteousness to everyone that believeth.” What is implied? Simply that all believers in Christ are justified and receive his Spirit and his grace, through faith. Here the Law ends for them because they are no longer under it. This is the final meaning of the Law; for it follows: “But now that faith is come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

[36] The preceding verses make plain enough what is meant by being under the Law, or under a tutor; yet, the doctrine of faith and the expression “under a tutor or under the Law” having become obsolete, enough cannot be said in explanation. To be under a tutor, to be subject to the Law, is, briefly, to be a dissembler; to do many good works and yet not be pious; to lead a good life without ever being righteous; always to teach without learning, and to preach without understanding. The reason for such deficiency is, the character of those under the Law does not permit them to do good voluntarily and through love, without fear of punishment or hope of reward. Therefore are they servants, driven by the Law. And since it ever continues to rule and to drive, they remain always its debtors and subjects.

The Law demands a joyous, free and ready will. This its subjects have not, nor can they have it of themselves. Faith in Christ alone produces it. Where such a spirit exists, the Law ceases its demands. It is satisfied fulfilled. The pupil then being able to accomplish the requirements of his tutor, the tutor dismisses him, demanding no more. He is no longer his tutor, but his good friend and companion. Faith Liberates from the Law

[37] Similarly, faith liberates us from the Law. Not a physical liberation, effected by separating us from the Law, by removing us forever from its jurisdiction: but freedom in the sense that we satisfy the demands of the Law; we satisfy it by knowing and possessing the Holy Spirit, who brings us to love the Law. The Law did not desire works. Works could not appease it. It desired love. Only our love could satisfy it. Without love it would not release us - would not be remunerated. Destitute of love, we must, even with all our works, remain its debtors and our consciences know no peace. The Law continually chastises us as sinners and transgressors, and threatens us with death and hell, until Christ comes and bestows his Spirit and his love, through the faith preached in the Gospel. Then we are freed from the Law. No longer it demands, no longer chastises, but lets the conscience rest. No more it terrifies with death and hell. It has become our kind friend and companion.

[38] The tutor's release of the pupil does not mean the death or departure of the tutor, but spiritually, that the child has been changed, and can do what the father wished the tutor to teach him. Likewise, the Law releases us, not by its passing, not by being abrogated, but spiritually; and because a change has been effected in us and we have the experience God designed us to have through the Law.

[39] Hence I have called the figure of the pupil and tutor a beautiful and striking illustration whereby we may rightly understand the Law, and the work of grace in ourselves. The first office of the Law, that of shutting us up and producing outward piety, is so well established, so emphasized by all teachers and books, and besides so closely approaches human nature, that it is difficult for us to recognize its second office, of magnifying inward sin. I may well liken the two offices to a pair of scales, one empty and the other full. So the Law, when producing external piety, increases inward sin. It imposes as much sin inwardly, by arousing hatred and rebellion, as it corrects externally by works; and much more. According to Paul (Romans

7:13), through the Law sin becomes exceeding sinful, sinful beyond measure. And the experience of every man must lead him so to confess. "For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus."

[40] He who is under the Law, and works unwillingly, is a servant, as the preceding sermon declares. But whosoever has faith and cheerfully works, is a child; for he has received the Spirit of God, through Christ. Now, the apostle names Christ, referring to the faith that believes and abides in Jesus Christ. No other faith is effective, no other faith is the right faith, let one believe in God as he will.

[41] Some there are, particularly among our modern high school men, who say: "Forgiveness of sins and justification depend altogether on the divine imputation of grace; God's imputation is sufficient. He to whom God does not reckon sin, is justified; to whom God reckons sin, is not justified." They imagine their position is verified in the testimony of Psalm 32:2, quoted in Romans 4:8, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin." Were their theory true, the entire New Testament would be of no significance. Christ would have labored foolishly and to no purpose in suffering for sin. God would have unnecessarily wrought mere mockery and deception; for he might easily, without Christ's sufferings, have forgiven sins have not imputed them. Then, too, a faith other than faith in Christ might have justified and saved a faith relying on God's gracious mercy not to impute sin.

[42] In contrast to this deplorable theory, this abominable error, it is the holy apostle's practice to speak always of faith in Jesus Christ, and he makes mention of Jesus Christ with a frequency surprising to one unacquainted with the important doctrine of faith in him. In fact, it is said that every second word in Paul's epistles is "Jesus Christ." But these pagan doctors of divinity have maliciously rooted it out, have silenced it for us, by their abominable and hellish dreams of such perversion.

[43] Hence our learned university doctors no longer know Christ. They do not recognize the need of him and his benefits, nor understand the character of the Gospel and the New Testament. They imagine Christ to be a mere Moses, a teacher who institutes laws and commandments showing how men may be righteous and lead a faultless life. Then they proceed with

free will and the workings of human nature, designing therewith to fit themselves for grace, Thus, basely storming heaven.

[44] Now, if God confers his grace because of their works, their careful preparation, Christ must be without significance. What need have they of Christ if they can obtain grace in their own name and by their works? And this doctrine they teach openly; indeed, they defend it with their utmost power and with the Pope's bulls, condemning a contrary teaching as the very worst heresy. Therefore I have warned, and still warn, all men that the Pope and the universities have cast Christ and the New Testament farther out of the world than ever did the Jews or Turks. Hence the Pope is the true Antichrist, and his high schools are the devil's own taverns and brothels. What does Christ signify if by effort of my own human nature I can obtain God's grace? Or, having grace, what more will I desire?

[45] Let us, therefore, guard against the hellish poison of this false doctrine and not lose Christ, the consoling Savior. He must be retained above all things. True, Psalm 32:2 and Romans 4:8 do say, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin." But Paul introduces the statement as testimony to the fact that it is only believers to whom Christ does not reckon sin; free will and the works of human nature are not considered. He cites Abraham, whose faith in the divine promise concerning his seed was counted to him for righteousness. Although it is of pure grace that God reckons not to us our sins, yet he would not so forgive were not his Law and his standard of righteousness already completely satisfied. The gracious reckoning had first to be bought for us from the divine righteousness. It being impossible for us to purchase forgiveness, God ordained in our stead one who took upon himself all our deserved punishment and fulfilled the Law for us, Thus, averting from us God's judgment and appeasing his wrath. So it is true that grace is given us gratuitously - without cost to ourselves - and yet the gift to us cost another much, and was obtained with a priceless, an infinite, treasure - the Son of God himself. It is supremely essential, therefore, to possess him who has accomplished the purchase for us. Nor is it possible to obtain grace otherwise than through him.

[46] Note, from the time of Adam to Abraham's day, no one was saved except through faith in the woman's seed, who should bruise the serpent's head. And after Abraham no one was saved except through faith in his seed.

And now no one can be saved otherwise than through faith in the seed of Abraham now come. Oh, you are not sufficient of yourself to come to God; you may not attempt to come without this Mediator - through yourself and of your own energy, as the Jews, the Turks and the Papists teach you may. Who will reconcile you with God in the first place? Christ says (John 14:6), "No one cometh unto the Father, but by me." In the time of the famine the Egyptians desired to make their complaints to Pharaoh, the king himself, but he referred them to Joseph, saying (Genesis 41:55): "Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do." Similarly, God hears, and aids to salvation, no one of us; we must all come to Christ, who is made Lord over all things, and with whom is the throne of grace. He has obtained salvation for us. Consequently, it is in vain to seek it elsewhere. Yes, if we were devoid of sin, as was Adam before the fall, we would have no need of Christ; we might come before God in our own merits. But in the time of famine - since the fall - we must have a Joseph, one who is without sin and who yet will receive us needy sinners when we come to him in earnest. Error of the Papists

[47] Consequently the Papists do not believe and teach otherwise of human nature than that it is still undefiled as it was before the fall of Adam. They do not believe it is wholly corrupted in sin, and the enemy of God. God is an enemy to sin; so is sin an enemy to God, as Paul teaches in the fifth and eighth chapters of Romans. The Papists, then, certainly do not believe what Moses writes concerning the fall of Adam (Genesis 3), or else they regard the fall merely a passing disgrace, not affecting our nature, not making it sinful nor subjecting it to God's wrath. Because they do not believe Moses and have no need of Christ, and in Thus, rejecting the Old Testament and the New condemn the entire living Scriptures, God has justly permitted them to become disciples of Aristotle, that dead and condemned heathen; permitted them to be a retreat for the devil. Through the laws of the Pope and the doctrines of men, the devil fills them with his pollution to constant overflowing, wherewith they contaminate the whole world. But they ever remain in darkness, attempting, while lacking faith in Christ, to force acceptance with God by their prayers and fasts, their masses, study and preaching.

[48] Even if they do name and confess Christ, they simply mean that God has superfluously made him Lord, a Lord who requires us to obey God

in that we regard himself as Lord; that, independent of Christ's dominion, free will may, by its natural powers, obtain the grace of God; that for them Christ's kingdom is not an essential, but is the mere wantonness of God in desiring Christ to be Lord after the fashion of earthly kingdoms; and that they confess him, not because confession is necessary to their salvation, since man may be saved otherwise than through his kingdom, but because God wills and commands obedience to the King. Consequently, with the Papists Christ is really no Savior. In the depths of their hearts he is a tyrant and a taskmaster, and unnecessary to human nature in its effort to obtain grace; rather, he is to human nature an added burden, for it must then obey not only God as heretofore, but Christ with his commandments.

[49] Of olden time, many prophesied that in Antichrist's day all heretics would unite in the extermination of the whole world. And today, under the rule of the Pope and the Turk, heresy has full sway. In the rejection and condemnation of Christ and the entire Scriptures, a rejection leaving nothing but the name, is easily proven that all heresies, errors and darkness existing from the beginning of the world, now reign. I often have fears for the condemnation of all men of the present age except those who die in their cradles. Yet no one sees and deplors the awful wrath of God overhanging us.

[50] Mark you, Paul's essential reason for always emphasizing faith in Christ is the fact that he clearly foresaw this virulent doctrine, the doctrine presuming to treat with God independently of Christ, as if God and human nature were harmonious, as if righteousness might love sin and grant its desires. Let us, therefore, beloved friends, be wise and learn Christ aright, namely: Of first importance, we must hear the Gospel and believe in Christ; believe in him not merely as a Lord to whom honor is due, but as that one who offered himself in place of our sinful nature, who took upon himself all the wrath of God merited by ourselves with our works, and overcame; believe that the fruit of that conquest he did not reserve unto himself, but assigned it to us, for our own; and that all who believe in him as such a conqueror shall thereby surely be redeemed from God's wrath and received into his favor. So we see how great the need and benefit of Christ is to us, and recognize the fallacy of the position that one may, by his own natural powers, earn God's grace; yes, recognize it as a device of Satan himself. For if human nature can obtain grace, Christ is unnecessary as an

intercessor, a mediator. But, he being essential, human nature can obtain only disgrace; the two are inconsistent - man his own mediator, and Christ the mediator for man. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ."

[51] Note the beautiful order in Paul's reasoning. "But after that faith is come we are no longer under a tutor." Why not? "For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus." But how are we become the children of God? "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ." Christ is the child of God; therefore, he who clothes himself in Christ, God's Son, must be the child of God. He is clothed with divine adoption, which unquestionably must constitute him a child. Now, if a child, he is no longer under the Law, where are none but servants. For the child himself, while under the Law, like a pupil under a tutor, is but as a servant. Such is the word of Paul, as stated in the following and the preceding epistle lessons.

[52] But what is meant by "putting on Christ?" The faithless will readily reply, "It means to follow Christ, imitating his example." But in the same way I might put on Peter, or Paul, or any saint, and Thus, nothing special would be said of Christ. We will let faith speak here; it is faith which Paul so beautifully suggests in the words "put on." Naturally, until baptism the individual has never followed Christ. In baptism he begins to follow. Therefore, Christ must be "put on" before he can be followed. And essentially there is a marked difference between putting on Christ and following his example. Reference is to a spiritual putting on - in the conscience. This is affected by the soul receiving as its own Christ and all his righteousness, and confidently relying on these as if it had itself earned them; just as one ordinarily receives his apparel. This spiritual reception is the putting on; such is the nature and character of true faith.

[53] Unquestionably Christ is given to us in a way that makes his righteousness, all he is and all he has, stand as our surety; he becomes our own. The believer in this doctrine will enjoy the blessing, as Paul teaches (Romans 8:32): "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?" Again (1 Corinthians 1:30), "Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." Note, he who Thus, believes in Christ puts on Christ. Faith, then, is something great enough to

justify and save man. It affords him all the blessings in Christ, giving the conscience comfort and security. Thus, man rejoices in Christ and is inclined to work all good and avoid all evil; he no longer fears death or hell, or any evil, richly clothed as he is in Christ. This is satisfying the Law and being no more under it. In connection with Christ as the garment, the Holy Spirit is in the soul, and the individual is a wholly different person. The soul is clothed in the adoption of God. It must, therefore, be a child.

[54] Now, no saint can, in God's sight, be Thus, put on. It is necessary for every soul to put on Christ for himself. Man has nothing to give to another to put on. After receiving Christ, after putting on the garment of his righteousness, there follows imitation of Christ's example. Man treats his neighbor as Christ has treated him. He gives and helps his neighbor with all the good he has and can command; he permits himself to be put on - clothes his neighbor with what he possesses. But the garment of Christ's righteousness wherein he is himself clothed, he cannot give to his neighbor. No man can confer his faith upon another; he cannot give another man faith like his own. True, man may pray for his neighbor to be clothed with Christ as he is. But everyone must believe for himself. Christ alone must clothe us all with himself.

[55] He who has not this faith, to believe that Christ with all his blessings is his - he does not yet rightly believe. He is not a Christian and is not in heart cheerful and happy. Only faith renders Christians willing, joyous, secure, saved and children of God. Where faith is, the Holy Spirit must dwell. What a beautiful, rainbow-hued and priceless garment is this Christ's righteousness, which combines in its magnificent and profuse decorations, its jewels and ornaments, all virtue, grace, wisdom, truth, righteousness and every blessing in Christ! Well may Paul exclaim (2 Corinthians 9:15), "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift." And well may Peter say (2 Peter 1:4) that through Christ great and precious gifts are given to us. Christ is the coat of many colors which Jacob made for Joseph, Thus, favoring him above his other children (Genesis 37:3); for Christ alone is full of grace and truth. Again, Christ is the precious garment of Aaron the high priest wherein he served God; concerning that figure much might be said. Paul's words here suggest these historical things.

[56] Further, while we put on Christ - receive him - he also puts on or receives us and all we have as if his own. Now, he finds in us nothing good;

he finds naught but sins. These he assumes. He removes them from us as disfigurements from his glorious garment. More, he intercedes for us before God, bearing our sins and saving us from eternal punishment. Paul says in Romans 8:34 that Christ maketh intercession for us before God. Psalm 41:4 testifies: "I said, O Jehovah, have mercy upon me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee." And Psalm 69:5: "O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee." All this testimony has reference to us personally. Paul so construes it in Romans 15:3, where, quoting from Psalm 69, he speaks of how Christ bore our sins and neither rejected us nor regarded his holiness too good for us. He says, "But, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell upon me."

[57] Now, we are pleased with the message that Christ is a garment for us, and that he intercedes for us as his garment; but with great reluctance do we suffer him to purify us. However, if we would be his garment, we certainly must suffer him to purify us. He cannot and will not appear in impurity. In the days of the martyrs, when he had but lately clothed himself with us, he began with zeal to purify the garment with death and various forms of suffering. Then he sat, as Malachi 3:3 says, and purified the sons of Levi, as a fuller purifies garments. When Christ effects much suffering, indications are favorable for good. Wherever his garment is in evidence, he unceasingly purifies with various forms of suffering. Where suffering is not present, there his garment is not. "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus."

[58] Of course Paul does not mean that physically there is no Jew and Greek, no man and woman. He means, as related to the subject he is handling. But of what is he speaking? Not of the natural body, but of faith, justification, and Christ - how, through faith, we become children of God in Christ, a change effected in the soul, in man's conscience; not in his flesh and blood, not through his members, but through the Word of the Gospel. In this sense there is no difference in persons, whether they be Jews or Greeks, bond or free, male or female. According to the customs of men, physically the Jew is bound by a different law and a different manner of life from the Greek; the bond from the free; the male from the female. The Jew is circumcised, the Greek is not; the male covers not his hair, but the female wears a veil. Then, too, everyman serves God in his own way; hence the

saying, Many countries, many customs. These customs, however, as well as all things external and not of faith, are powerless to render one righteous and pious before God. Neither do they hinder justification. Faith may exist equally well with all classes of persons, differing not with any custom and distinctions.

[59] The trouble is, one falls into certain habits, adopts certain customs, and adheres to them in the endeavor to become righteous and just; in the attempt to aid the soul in putting off its sins and securing salvation. In such case all is perverted. Christ is denied, God is lost, faith and the Gospel are abandoned, works and the Law rule again, and the conscience is misled into thinking that to fail of observing customs means manifestly to be lost, while observance might effect salvation. This is the most pernicious error existing among men. Against it the apostle vehemently warns. It is impossible for Christian faith to live in connection with such a misguided conscience. The individual will never - he cannot - be justified and saved by anything in heaven or earth except Christ. All temporal manners, laws, labors, customs, and all persons but Christ, are fitted to serve the earthly life and to profit mankind. Works Cannot Save

[60] What defect of the Jews, then, prevents their being saved? According to Paul (Romans 9:32), they seek salvation by works and not by faith. They would have none but Jews admitted to heaven. But God designs that none but Christians, whether Jews or Greeks, male or female, shall enter there. The Jews think observance of the Law will save them, and failure to observe it will condemn them. God, however, intends that he who believes in Christ shall be saved, and he who believes not shall be damned. Mark 16:16. Moreover, without faith no one can keep the Law, as stated above, and as Paul testifies again in the sixth chapter and thirteenth verse: "Not even they who receive circumcision do themselves keep the Law." Why not? Because they do not observe the Law willingly, but merely through fear of its threats and hope of its rewards. Since the Jews think it necessary for them to be Jews, to undertake observance of the Law strictly according to the manner of their sect, Thus, cleaving to Judaism with its laws, while the conscience is fettered, they must eternally perish. For, according to Paul, the conclusion is, there is no Jew nor Greek; but only Christ and Christians.

[61] Now, were they first to believe in Christ and then, if they feel so disposed, to remain Jews in custom, following or omitting the practice of circumcision and observing such laws as they see fit, not presuming thereby to become righteous and to be saved, but to be saved only through the grace of Christ, as were their fathers and the patriarchs, according to Peter's statement (Acts 15:11) - were the Jews so to proceed, observance of the Law would be no detriment to them. But they will not do thus. So firmly do they cleave to the works, the terrors and the allurements of the Law, they even condemn and persecute all who teach otherwise, who preach faith. Their predecessors, upon this same point of Law-observance, persecuted and killed the prophets under the plea of exterminating, for the sake of God and his Law, deceivers of the people and blasphemers of the Law and of the service of God as commanded by Moses.

[62] But note, the Jews of our day are yet more rude and arbitrary. The ancient Jews had at least the plausible excuse that they were bound by the Law of God. But our Jews - the Pope and his followers - drive us to observe things of their own invention, to laws merely human and even forbidden of God. They make a great cry about the noble virtue of obedience, teaching that without it salvation is impossible to any, but with it everyone may be saved; obedience, however, not of God's Law, but of their own laws and inventions. If we but notice their conduct, we see plainly that their expectation of attaining righteousness and salvation is based, not upon Christian faith, but upon their works, upon the observance of their own laws, as Carthusians, Franciscans, Augustinians, Benedictines, preachers, prebendaries, vicars and so on. They even acknowledge that they regard their orders and positions as the proper medium for attaining righteousness and salvation. Plainly enough, then, their consciences cleave to works and not to the grace of Christ. Reading the words of Paul, "There is neither Jew nor Greek," they yet say, "There are, nevertheless, Carthusians, Franciscans, Benedictines, Augustinians, preachers of this and that order."

[63] At the mention of faith in Christ, the Papists exclaim: "We know, indeed, that faith in Christ is essential, but that only through him can we become righteous and be saved, we do not believe." And they demand: "What would be the use of good works at all then? Our orders and positions would be vain. You would abolish good works and the service of God. Away with such a cursed heretic! Fire here! Fire! Heretic! Heretic! Shall it

be that St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Benedict, St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Anthony, have all so erred? What are you thinking about? Where did you get that diabolical faith?" Now, is not that the manner of our saintly Jews? What, then, shall we do with them? We must take the attitude of Paul when he said to the Galatians and repeated the statement (Galatians 1:8-9): "Though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema."

[64] So we also say: "Our preaching and the foundation of our faith, is that by faith alone, independently of the Law and of works, justification and salvation stand. And were the whole world Carthusians and taught otherwise, let it be accursed. Were the entire world barefooted friars, preachers, Augustines, Benedicts, and taught otherwise, let it be accursed. Or, again, if there were one whole world of holy Augustines, another of holy Francises, a third of holy Dominics, a fourth of holy Benedicts, a fifth of holy Anthonys, a sixth of St. Pauls, a seventh of angelic Gabriels what then? If they teach otherwise, let them be accursed. The Word of God must stand, and emphatically Christ alone must remain. What more do you want?"

[65] Christ said of such sects as the Papists (Matthew 24:24) that many false Christs and prophets should arise who would say, "Lo, here is the Christ," or "here," and these were not to be believed. They would perform signs, he said, calculated to deceive even the elect, if that were possible. Two things for a long time prevented my understanding this passage as having reference to these sects and orders. The first thing was the fact that they are so numerous; they fill the world. Had their numbers been less, I would not have hesitated to believe that the words were spoken of them. But I imagined God would not permit so many to err. I did not perceive the plain import of the text, that many shall err; for even the elect, the minority, will err with the majority. The other reason why I understood not was, there are holy persons among the sects; such as Benedict, Bernard, Augustine, Francis, Dominic and many of their followers. I thought no error could exist in their case. I failed to perceive Christ's meaning, that the elect should stumble, should be tempted by error, though they should not continue therein.

[66] Gideon was a man strong in faith, and by faith wrought great things. Yet he was misled when he made an ephod (Judges 8:27) - when he instituted a special form of divine service and a peculiar form of apparel.

Many evils later resulted from that act. According to the Scriptures, his whole race was exterminated. Why, then, should it be surprising that St. Benedict, St. Francis, St. Dominic, should err? Who can with certainty say they did not?

[67] It is possible that in their case, as is generally true in the legends of saints, the people overlooked the worthiest practices and true order of the beloved saints and seized upon the things wherein the saints as men stumbled. Their infirmities are exalted for their strength, and their strength is suppressed. Everyone is disposed to follow what is weakest and most insignificant; the worst rather than the best.

[68] Yet, if the Papists would make use of these orders and positions as things optional, not as a means of attaining righteousness and salvation, but merely as a medium of bodily exercise, of service to their neighbors and of honor to God; and if they would leave their righteousness and salvation to be secured by faith alone if they would so do, their orders and positions would not be an intolerable injury to them. However, these things would not even then be without offense to the illiterate mass, who are led to think them the true way, to the disparagement, if not the destruction, of their faith. For faith is sensitive and precious. It is easily injured, especially by hypocritical works and practices so showy as these of the Papists.

[69] No doubt the holy fathers, in their relation to their disciples, made free and proper use of the orders; yes, with intent to increase the faith of their disciples. Otherwise the fathers would not have been really holy. But the blind Papists only mimic them. In following, they lose sight of the kernel and retain the shell; they do the works of the fathers but forget their faith. They boastfully desire the appearance of observing the position and the orders of these holy men, and of following their example, when in reality they observe but the shadow of the fathers' religion. They are true apes, mimicking everything they see and yet remaining apes. They do not practice anything like Christian liberty. This is evident from their protest: "Shall we not become righteous and be saved through our positions, our orders, our works? If salvation depends on faith alone, something all men have, what sought we in the cloisters? Why did we become monks? Why are we priests? What avail the masses we hold and the prayers we offer? We might as well have continued laymen." You see, their own words prove them unbelievers and not Christians, and show their unwillingness to unite

with all Christians; a unity to which Paul here refers, saying that all the baptized have put on Christ and are one in him. The Papists seek ways peculiar to themselves and superior to the ways of Christians. Christ is not good enough for them to put on; he is not sufficient to justify and to save them.

[70] They pervert Paul's statement and say, "All the baptized are not one in Christ. Not only are there Jews and Greeks, but also Carthusians, barefooted friars, preachers, priests and similar orders. And these orders are true means of salvation." Thus, they seek to find first in their own works the salvation and righteousness which should have been already theirs through baptism - in faith - as other Christians enjoy. Forgetting their Christian duties and Christian name, they assume instead human works and human names. No longer are they called Christians, but Carthusians, Benedictines, barefooted friars, and so on.

[71] Paul's reference here to the bond and the free is derived from the ancient custom - formerly common in Germany, but no longer so making of servants bondmen whom their masters had the right to sell, and the right to deal with as they would with their beasts. They who are not such bondmen spiritually, are here called by the apostle "free." Well might the occupants of the cloisters be called servants and bondmen, for they give themselves into the possession of men. Would God they might take some thought for themselves and let their spiritual existence be a willing incarceration; not to obtain righteousness and salvation by their bondage, but to use it as a medium for exercising these things already received through faith.

[72] As little as the fact that you are a man, or a woman contributes to or impedes your salvation, just so little is your salvation affected by your being a Carthusian or a priest, your performing certain external works and various duties, or your assuming different orders or ranks. Again, to be a woman renders you neither righteous nor wicked, even if you do all the works appropriate to a woman. Faith in Christ, independently of your womanhood and its duties and works, renders you righteous. Being a nun does not make you spiritual nor pious. It does not save you, even though you observe most minutely all the regulations and laws, and perform all the works, pertaining to the order of nuns; indeed, not though you alone were to fulfill the combined works, the united duties, of all nuns. Faith in Christ secures to you the blessings of righteousness and salvation - faith which

knows neither nuns nor monks, laymen nor priests, shoemakers nor tailors, fasts nor prayers, any more than it knows Jews and Greeks, male and female, bond and free. Faith is in all and above all, without distinction of orders and ranks, of persons and works, of gestures, customs and meats, of days, places and occupations. In short, upon none of these things depend righteousness and salvation. Unity in Christ

[73] But Christians may indeed cleave to righteousness and eternal life - may believe in Christ and unite in him - no matter how different their external pursuits. Paul says, "Ye all are one man in Christ Jesus." And Psalm 133:1 reads, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." Again: "God setteth the solitary in families." Psalm 68:6. Faith is the same experience in all and renders all alike righteous. Such is not the case with sects and orders. There each individual adopts his own way; consequently, he follows a bypath. Where cloisters have no prelate to teach the true faith they would better be destroyed. They are only gates to perdition. It was better to leave them and learn faith elsewhere than to remain in them an hour. Continence is possible without them. Oh, the numberless snares and scandals! How many noble souls who could be easily helped must be unmercifully strangled and stifled. Woe, woe, woe! to you pontiffs, bishops and all who are entrusted with the oversight of these multitudes. Here the words of Christ apply (Matthew 24:19): "Woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days."

[74] Paul says, "Ye all are one" - just the same as one man. He would not give the idea of multitude; his meaning is: "Ye are not many, but one. Notwithstanding your number and differences externally, notwithstanding your differences of position and occupation, things upon which righteousness and salvation do not depend; inwardly, in the matter of salvation and righteousness, ye are one. True, in the eyes of men the layman differs somewhat from the priest, the monk from the nun, the man from the woman; but before God there is neither layman nor priest, monk nor nun, man nor woman. One is like another in faith." A proverb of Scripture, one generally employed by the apostles, reads, "There is no respect of persons."

[75] The teaching of this passage fulfils the figures in Exodus 16:18, relative to the gathering of the manna by the children of Israel. One gathered more, another less, yet afterward when they measured it by the

omer, which contained the amount one was permitted to eat daily, they received an equal share, each his omer. According to the text, "He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack." So, should it be with us. In the matter of faith, we receive alike one Christ in one omen of faith, even though one individual may hear more of the Gospel than another; so should we share in love. The advantages and blessings of all Christians ought to be common. Thus, does the apostle (Corinthians 8:15) explain this same figure, that he who gathered much should help him who had little or nothing, and the one having little was to be supplied by the possessor of much. In such case burdens would be equal, as they were in the beginning, with the apostles.

[76] As Christ treats us in the matter of faith - manifesting his love, pouring out his blessing upon us, making us all like himself and himself - like us so must we follow him in sharing our possessions with our neighbor - if we would be Christians. Is our faith right, we certainly will so act, with willing hearts. So then, all blessings are one, and all Christians one person; and the Law is wholly fulfilled. But if we are unwilling to conduct ourselves in this Christlike way, we have not faith and we have not Christ. It is easily evident that faith is now everywhere prostrate and there are no Christians. Every corner is filled with masses and divine services sheer idolatry.

[77] But you will say: "By your doctrine you will suppress all the cloisters and other institutions, and give occasion for all occupants to leave them speedily, and to forsake their positions." I reply: These are not my words, nor my doctrine. You can see that. Go to Paul, Christ, God, about the matter. Ask them why they denounce these institutions, these practices. Among the children of Israel was likewise a singular people, called people of Baal and of Moloch. All the country and the towns were filled with their self-devised and peculiar worship. Jeremiah 2:28 and Hosea 10:1 testify that their altars and gods equaled the number of the towns. All men desired to serve God in that way. Therefore God permitted the country to be destroyed. The holy King Josiah, in his dissatisfaction with these idolaters, cut off and destroyed all their forms of worship. 2 Kings 23:5. He did not fear the Pope's ban; he was not afraid of having it said that he had destroyed the worship of God, as Rabshakeh charged the holy King Hezekiah with doing on a similar occasion. 2 Kings 18:22. This doctrine, however,

destroys no cloisters or institutions, but teaches their right and Christian use.

[78] Mark how Paul guards either alternative, purposing to keep us squarely in the middle track. He says, "There can be neither Jew nor Greek," etc. Should a Jew, with reference to this subject, say, "If being a Jew avails nothing before God, I will let that go and take the opposite course; I will become a Greek"- should he think thus, he finds Paul meeting him on the other side. "No," Paul says, "to be a Greek avails nothing either." Should the Greek conclude "I will no longer be a Greek, I will become a Jew," Paul says, "No, it avails nothing to be a Jew." Does the woman say, "Would I were a man since it avails not to be a woman," and does the bound say, "Would I were free since bondage avails not," Paul meets them with, "To be male or female, bond or free, serves not." What, then, does avail? Just to turn not to either side, but to pass over, pass above, Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female, into faith and Christ. The way of the Jew, the Greek, are earthly ways; the way of faith is the heavenly way. Paul says also (1 Corinthians 7:18): "Was any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Hath any been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised." What is this but teaching that on one hand a Jew should not say, "Circumcision profiting nothing, uncircumcision must avail, and I will now obtain righteousness thereby," and on the other hand the Gentile must not declare, "Uncircumcision profiting nothing, if I would be saved I must be circumcised." "No," Paul says, "neither proceeding is right"; and then he concludes (1 Corinthians 7:19): "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God." In other words, First believe in Christ. Believing, the commandments of God will be honored. First be righteous and saved; then, be circumcised or uncircumcised, Jew or Greek, male or female, bond or free, do what you will, the efficacy is the same.

[79] In like manner, a nun, priest or monk should not say: "My state avails nothing, I will leave it and become a layman." No, Paul says, to be a layman also avails nothing. On the other hand, if the layman says: "O, that I were a priest, monk or nun, for my state as a layman is a secular, unsaved one," Paul says, no, the state of a monk, nun or priest likewise avails nothing. It is as secular and unsaved as that of a layman. What, then, does avail? To ascend above yourself, above layman, above monk and nun,

above the spiritual and the secular states. To believe in Christ and do to your neighbor as you believe Christ did to you, is the only true way to godliness and salvation. There is none other.

[80] By way of a crude illustration: Suppose a lad learning the trade of shoemaking were to engage with a master foolish and knavish enough to teach him that such trade is the medium for obtaining righteousness and salvation; and suppose the boy were to believe him and to prosecute his trade under the impression that he will surely be saved thereby, and only so can he be saved, and were to forsake faith, love and all other means of salvation - how would you look at the case? Would you not pity the boy? Would not the master incur your displeasure? Now, how would you help the boy? Would you say: "My dear son, the trade of shoemaking does not render you righteous. It avails nothing in heaven. You must become a tailor"? That would be but to lead him from one hell to another. You would be just about as godly as that master. Just so do they do who advise a priest to become a monk, or a monk to enter some more difficult order. They Thus, cast souls and consciences from one frying pan into another. The way to help the boy is to say to him: "My dear son, neither shoemaking nor tailoring counts in this matter. You must believe in Christ and then treat your neighbor as you believe Christ has treated you. Then you may be a shoemaker, a tailor, as you please." Now you have liberated his soul. Now his conscience will have joy and peace. He will thank God and you. He will not need to abandon his trade; no, he may follow it with more pleasure and freedom than before. Christ does not release our hands from labor, our persons from office, our bodies from position or rank. He redeems the soul from a false experience and the conscience from a false faith. He is a redeemer of consciences; a bishop of souls, as Peter says (1 Peter 2:25). Yet he permits our hands to continue their labors; he allows us to retain our offices and positions.

[81] So, too, do thou, O priest, monk or nun. Believe not those who teach you that your position, your rank, is a means whereby to become righteous and be saved. They are but blind leaders of the blind; messengers of the devil and murderers of souls. Learn first that the true way is to believe in Christ and to serve your neighbor. Then remain steadfast where you are.

[82] You will say, “But I took clerical orders because I wanted to be righteous and to be saved thereby. Otherwise I would not have taken the step. I believe not one in a thousand entered this station with any other intention. If people knew your teaching to be true, certainly no one would enter the clerical ranks, and in thirty years’ time every cloister and similar institution would pass of itself, needing not to be destroyed.” I Answer: Think you, then, that Christ spoke irresponsibly or foolishly when he said the false Christs would deceive many, even the elect if it were possible (Matthew 24:24)? Peter also prophesies (2 Peter 2:2) that many shall follow these damnable sects. Is it astonishing that Christ spoke the truth? Will you believe the inventions of your own mind rather than the words of Christ?

[83] Mark you, then, where the clerical state is not made use of to further faith and love in the way mentioned, I would, not only that my doctrines should be the means of destroying the cloisters and other institutions, but I would they already lay in ashes. If you can, through the doctrine of faith, liberate your conscience and your soul and at the same time make use of your clerical state, not as a supposed means of obtaining righteousness and eternal life, but as a medium for exercising your faith over your body, and for serving your neighbor if you can do thus, then remain in your order; you need not to flee from it. But if you cannot do this, if your conscience remains captive, it were better you tore your caps and pates, forsook your masses and prayers forever and became a swineherd, if you could not do better. For nothing in heaven or on earth should keep us from liberating our souls, from freeing our consciences.

[84] Should one reproach you as an apostate, a turncoat, a vagabond monk, endure it, thinking of Christ’s words (Matthew 7:3) about one with a beam in his eye rebuking another with a mote in his. You are an apostate from men, they from God; you forsook men for God, they forsook God for themselves and for men.

[85] Be careful, however, not to deceive yourself and forsake your position from wrong motives. Your old Adam nature is very ready to adorn itself, and will take a yard if you allow it a finger-breadth. You may deceive men, but you cannot God. If you leave your station merely for the purpose of a free life, and to be liberated from your order, and not solely because you seek to liberate your conscience, you have not followed my teaching. I have not Thus, advised you. This I desire you to understand. According to

the doctrine you can remain in your orders and maintain a liberated conscience. Recall the illustration of the boy shoemaker I gave you. But, if you are so weak that you cannot maintain a free conscience, it is better to be far from your order.

[86] In short, one of two things is offered: you must either cast aside your theory or you must get out of the order altogether. Faith will not tolerate the idea of your obtaining righteousness and salvation by the religious life of your order or position. But since faith tolerates the order, it is better to forsake the idea than the order. Otherwise, later the remorse of conscience, because of the forsaken order (if the idea is not dead) might equal a desire of having remained in the order. Aim must be directed solely at the head of the serpent - the false idea. With that disposed of, with men divested of the idea of righteousness and eternal life attainable through works and orders, all danger and dread would be dissipated.

[87] The serpent protects her head with extreme care. Christ teaches us to be likewise careful of our heads where he says (Matthew 10:16), "Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." The serpent will expose all the rest of her anatomy, will risk all, to preserve her head, wherein is her life. We should likewise be careful of our head - faith - and risk all for it, whatever the consequences, for in that is our life. The evil spirit seeks to destroy faith by its showy orders and stations. Further, when we bruise the head of the serpent, when we destroy our own ideas, which are our false faith resting upon works, all else is harmless to us. Christ called the Pharisees a generation of vipers (Matthew 12:13) because of their tenacious adherence to their works and their opinions. Were we to secure our heads as do serpents and were we as wise in our ways as are the children of the world in theirs, the simplicity of the dove would naturally follow; we would embrace no external works, positions or orders.

[88] The greatest fault, however, is not that of Pilate, but of Caiaphas who delivered Christ into Pilate's hands. Caiaphas represents the Pope, the bishops, and the doctors of the high schools, whose duty as shepherds is to prevent destruction, yet who, like wolves, themselves devour the sheep. While they should preserve the faith, they exterminate it. Not only do they permit the rise of orders and stations, but they institute these things. They establish and exalt them. They repose the head of the serpent upon silken pillows and feed her to fullness. They have introduced into the world two

principles and inculcated them into men's hearts to the extent of making it impossible for the Christian faith to live. One is, "The clerical state represents perfection." By this claim they have effected such disparity between themselves and ordinary Christians that almost exclusively they have been regarded the Christians, and the common people unworthy, even reprobate, domestics Thus, they have commanded everybody's gaze and attention. All men have come flocking into the order, desiring to be perfect and scorning as unprofitable the common walks of life; until they have come to think that no one can become righteous and be saved unless he embraces a clerical order.

[89] Thus, faith has been neglected for works and orders, as if on these depend not only our righteousness and salvation, but the perfection of our character. The fact is, however, all depends on faith. By faith alone do we attain righteousness and perfection. What a banner the infernal Satan hoisted at this point! With the introduction and establishment of the doctrine of works he unquestionably scaled the citadel of Christianity. Blindly the frantic multitude ever goes on about perfection, knowing nothing whatever of piety even, not to mention perfection, and thinking to become perfect by works and orders.

[90] Further, they have left an ample loophole for themselves by saying: "Actual perfection and a state of perfection are different things. Man may be in a state of perfection and yet not be perfect. That is, he may be a clergyman and still not be holy. They of the clerical order generally, are in a state of perfection, yet none of them have become perfect." The clergy also quote St. Thomas of Aquin, who teaches that perfection is not necessary; that it is sufficient to be in a state of perfection and looking toward that end. Therefore the multitude today accepts the principle that one may occupy a perfect state and not be perfect; and that perfection is not necessary - only the striving for it. Blind, frantic, foolish and mad, emphatically so, are the people. Do we not all know that a monk may wear a cap and pate and at the same time be a rogue at heart? In a state of perfection, he is yet not perfect. A "state of perfection" now means monk, cap and pate. But let these erring teachers lead the blind. Christ says they are blind leaders of the blind. If St. Thomas Aquinas was holy - which I doubt - he surely attained his holiness in an extraordinary way, judging from his pernicious and poisonous doctrines.

[91] The other principle of the Papists is: “The Gospel consists of two things, *consilia et praecepta*, counsels and commandments. In the entire Gospel Christ has presented but one counsel chastity; and this may be observed as well in the laical state by any individual having sufficient grace. But the clerical order has instituted twelve counsels in the Gospel, proceeding according to their own pleasure with reference to the Gospel. They have made a division of the world into two classes, their own lives to be directed by the counsels and the lives of the laity by the commandments. They have assumed to live superior to the commandments of God. Consequently, the life of the ordinary Christian, the life of faith, has become repulsive. All men gaze after the clerical ranks, despise the commandments and run after the counsels.

[92] In the end they find the counsels to be human laws relating to clothing and pates, to meats, to singing and reading, and so on. Thereupon neglect of the commandments of God follows neglect of faith; both are exterminated and forgotten. Today to be perfect and to live according to the counsels is to put on black or white or gray or marked caps; to bawl in the churches; to shave the head; to eat no eggs, meat or butter, but at the same time to fare sumptuously and to live an idle, extravagant life.

[93] Such a result, mark you, Satan has desired to accomplish through the two principles mentioned. The first exterminates faith and the whole New Testament, Christ included. The second destroys the commandments and the entire Old Testament, with Moses. The people who teach these principles are they concerning whom all Scripture testifies that in the end of the world they shall reign under Antichrist. Two principles more pernicious and virulent were never advanced on earth - principles that so speedily and forcibly expel from the knowledge of the world the entire Scriptures of God, until none know what commandment or Gospel is. The Gospel does not present commandments; it shows the impossibility of fulfilling them, and teaches faith in Christ, through which they are fulfilled. I would that all the cloisters were supplied with ministers who preach the true doctrine of faith, or else that the cloisters were laid in ashes. For there is no medium condition, as there is with the laity; the layman does not regard the works of his station as productive of righteousness and salvation. The clergy, however, cannot sustain themselves without that false doctrine. There is no alternative; right or wrong they must put their trust in their works. Now, let

this suffice here in the matter of the sects. Alas, that their corruption warrants so much comment. I hardly know if it will be of use that we understand again the plain words of Paul: "And if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise."

[94] How is it that all who put on Christ, who are his, are in consequence the seed and the heirs of Abraham when perhaps they are not of Jewish descent? It is clear enough from the explanation of the preceding verses that all who, through baptism and faith, put on Christ are his and he is theirs. Now, being all one in Christ and one with him - spiritually, not bodily - they must be all that Christ is and possess all he possesses. Christ being Abraham's seed, they must through him also be Abraham's spiritual seed. In the same manner in which they possess Christ are they Abraham's seed. They possess Christ not bodily, in flesh and blood; but spiritually, in faith. Hence they are not bodily, but spiritually, his seed.

[95] Note here, the apostle ascribes to Abraham three kinds of seed. First, there are those only physically his children, having in him a flesh-and-blood origin, merely by the law of nature. With them God has no more dealing than with the heathen, as illustrated in the case of Ishmael. Although of Abraham's flesh and blood, even his first-born son, Ishmael nevertheless was not in the Scriptures reckoned among Abraham's children. Again, Esau was Isaac's natural son, and Abraham's flesh and blood. Later many of Israel, all of them Abraham's flesh-and-blood children, were destroyed in the wilderness. And subsequently many others have been condemned. The Jews are for the most part still under condemnation. Believers the True Seed of Abraham

[96] Second, there are those both physically and spiritually Abraham's children, having not only the flesh and blood but the spirit and faith of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the patriarchs, the prophets and all the blessed of the people of Israel. These are the true seed, with whom God deals. This seed he delivered from Egypt, led into the land of Canaan and favored with blessings innumerable, as the Scriptures testify. For the sake of this class, he tolerated among them the seed merely physical, permitting the latter to enjoy similar temporal blessings. They to whom Abraham was a spiritual father through the faith of Christ, were his spiritual children, irrespective of their natural relationship. Of this class of seed, Christ is the head. In him Abraham himself, as well as all his seed, his brethren and joint-heirs, is

blessed. Now, this text refers to the seed spoken of in Genesis 12:3 and Genesis 22:18, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." The prophecy is fulfilled in Christ. This class are wholly with Christ and in Christ, and Christ is with them and in them, one seed. Christ is blessed of God. Joint seed with Christ are blessed through him. The heathen are blessed through the apostles, and the Jews through Christ, which Jews are joint-seed with Christ.

[97] Third, there are those who have not a flesh-and-blood origin in Abraham, but possess his spiritual character his faith in Christ his seed. This class is represented by ourselves and all gentiles who are Christians in the true faith. While unbelief is powerful enough to separate even natural flesh-and-blood children from Abraham's relationship, until the Scriptures do not recognize them as Abraham's seed and the children of God; on the other hand, faith is more powerful, even unto constituting them true seed of Abraham who are not of his flesh and blood but who merely have the faith of Abraham, partaking of his spiritual character. Concerning this matter St. Paul speaks in Romans 4:13, Romans 9:8 and Galatians 3. This class of seed is indicated in the promise God makes to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

[98] If the nations are to receive this blessing, they must become like the seed of Abraham. Abraham and his seed have naught but the blessing. If the inheritance, the chief good, the blessing, is possessed alike by Abraham's seed and by all the nations of earth, all must alike be reckoned heirs, seed and children of Abraham, whether deriving physical existence from him or not. Therefore, the conclusion is that Abraham's seed are only the believers. In the Scriptures believers are reckoned as his seed. To this inference are we forced by God's promise that Abraham's seed shall be blessed and shall be a blessing to others. According to the words of the promise, the blessing must be to all who are seed and heirs of Abraham. Now, no one is blessed unless he believes. The unbeliever remains under the curse. Well may Paul, then, call the spiritual seed of Abraham the seed of the promise (Romans 4:13 and Romans 9:8). That is, they are not the seed of the flesh, but of faith. They are so designated in the promise. He says (Romans 9:8): "It is not the children of the flesh that are children of God; but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed." With this statement accords John 1:13:

“Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

[99] Now you understand the apostle’s meaning here when he says, “If ye are Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise.” In other words: “Ye are not the natural seed of Abraham. That would profit you nothing; it profits no one. But ye are his promised seed. Upon that all efficacy depends.” Abraham has no seed other than the promised blessed seed God grant these whether or no of flesh-and-blood origin in him. We must understand Abraham’s seed in a scriptural, not in a natural, sense. The Scriptures regard not natural origin. They recognize alike all who are blessed and who believe, whether natural seed or not. Yet God foresaw there would undoubtedly be children of the blessing among the natural seed; not children in consequence of their nature, but for the sake of election through grace.

[100] You must properly comprehend the phrase “Abraham’s seed and heirs” in the light of the preceding epistle, as opposed to self-righteousness, recognizing that righteousness is not obtained by works, but must precede and induce them. The heir does not work to obtain the inheritance. He does not seek the inheritance as a reward. He already possesses it, and appropriates it with his works. Likewise the believer is already righteous and just, and saved besides, without works through the grace conferred by faith. The works performed subsequent to believing are but the exercise of his inheritance.

[101] Further, in believing, you must feel yourself an heir. You must confidently regard yourself a child of God. If you doubt on this point, you are not a child; you are not an heir; you do not rightly believe. You must not doubt your heirship, whether in life or death. What is the Christian life but the beginning of eternal life? However, at your least intimation that you are a child of God, your acknowledgment of your faith, Caiaphas, as if doing God great service, will rend his garments and exclaim over you “He blasphemeth God!” And all will say with him: “He is worthy of death. We have a law, and according to this law he shall die. He has made himself a child of God. Crucify him! Crucify him! He is a heretic and a deceiver.” (See John 19:7,15.) Look for this to be said of you; prepare for it. For so it must be.

Epiphany. The Conversion of the Heathen. The True Light. The Light of the World.

Text: Isaiah 60:1-6.

1 Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee.

2 For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.

3 And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

4 Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side.

5 Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.

6 The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD. Isaiah 60:1-6

[1] This epistle lesson is an exhortation to faith. It also proclaims the future worldwide preaching of the Gospel and the gathering of Christians from all nations. The prophecy is clearly intelligible and requires but little explanation.

[2] The reference to the Gospel as a light, a brightness, a glory of the risen Jehovah, implies a distinction between the light of the Gospel and that of the Law. This distinction should be carefully marked, to avoid confounding the Gospel and the Law and terming "Gospel" what is Law

and “Law” what is Gospel. In the Advent and the preceding epistle lessons we found the Gospel to be a proclamation of life, a doctrine of grace, a joy-giving light, promising and presenting Christ with all his blessings. But the Law is a proclamation of death, a doctrine of wrath, a sorrow-yielding light, for it reveals our sins, demanding a righteousness we cannot produce. The conscience, recognizing that it deserves death and eternal wrath, is filled with sorrow and unrest. But this prophecy of Isaiah touches the wretched conscience in a cheering way. It reanimates it, fills it with joy and liberates it from the Law and from sin.

[3] So we may designate the two lights as the light of the Lord and the light of the servant. 2 Corinthians 3:13. The light of the Lord arose in Christ, and the light of the servant in Moses. Aaron and the children of Israel could not endure the light the brightness of Moses’ face. He was obliged to cover it with a veil. But on Mount Tabor the face of the transfigured Christ was not intolerable. Rather, so delightful and pleasing was it that Peter in a transport of joy exclaimed: “Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, I will make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Matthew 17:4. There the light of Moses’ face was not intolerable but pleasing. The Gospel renders agreeable the Law, the tutor, which before was repugnant and intolerable to human nature. This we have already heard. So Isaiah says: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come.”

[4] Plainly the injunction is addressed to one not risen, one who lies sleeping or is dead. I think Paul refers to this passage when he says (Ephesians 5:14): “Wherefore he saith, Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee.” Undoubtedly, Christ is the light of which Isaiah here speaks, and which, through the Gospel, shines in all the world, enlightening those who rise who desire him. That Jerusalem is mentioned here and not by Paul is of no significance: In the text of Isaiah “Jerusalem” is not found. Some one added it in the epistle, because Jerusalem, or the people of Israel were addressed by the prophets.

[5] Now, who are the sleepers and the dead? Unquestionably, all who are under the Law. They are dead because of sin. Particularly are they dead who disregard the Law and live independently of restraint. The self-righteous, who recognize not their wants and defects, are the sleepers. Both classes have little regard for the Gospel. They remain sleeping and continually die.

The Spirit must awake them to recognition and acknowledge the light. But the third class, they who feel the power of the Law and the torments of the conscience, thirst after grace and sigh for the Gospel. They rest not until it comes and is given them. Then they proclaim it. Isaiah is one of these. In such manner do the sleepers and the dead awake and receive the Gospel light.

[6] So Isaiah says, in effect: "Permit yourself to be enlightened; or, Let there be light. Allow the light to fall upon you. Thou dead one, crawl not into the grave of thy filthy life that is, cease to love and to follow thine evil course of conduct that the light of the Gospel may fall upon thee and abide in thee. And thou sleeper, awake! Seek not the bed of careless and lethargic security, and of presumptuous reliance upon thine own self-righteousness. Let the true light have some claim upon thee." It is necessary frequently to admonish both classes. The great hindrance of the class represented by the dead is an unrestrained life; and a secure self-righteousness will scarcely allow the sleeping class to recognize and accept the blissful light of the Gospel.

[7] "Thy light is come." Why does Isaiah say "thy light" when God's light is meant, as will later appear? I answer, it is at the same time God's light and Jerusalem's light and the light of us all. It is God's in that he gives it; ours in that we are enlightened by it and enjoy its rays. Similarly, Christ speaks of the sun as the Father's (Matthew 5:45), "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good." Again, he says (John 11:9), "If a man walks in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world." That is, God's sun enlightens the world. Again, referring to himself, he declares (John 8:12), "I am the light of the world." Further, the light Isaiah refers to is particularly the light of Jerusalem and the children of Israel, because of the promise. He was promised only to Abraham and his seed. So, Mary sings in her Song of Praise (Luke 1:55), "As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever." In this sense, it is not the light of the heathen, unto whom no promise was made. Yet it is said they are to receive it. So the words of the promise imply, and so Isaiah here teaches.

[8] Undoubtedly the prophecies of Isaiah, and of the other prophets, concerning Christ almost universally have origin in the promise God made to Abraham (Genesis 22:18), "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." These words clearly indicate that Christ, the seed of Abraham,

is to be made known in all the world. For Christ to accomplish this in person was impossible; it must be done through the instrumentality of preaching. Not only was it necessary to proclaim the Gospel, but also to explain the character of the preaching to show it a proclamation of blessings and of grace, intended for the blessing of the whole world. There is evident, too, the conclusion that the seed of Abraham is true man as well as God; that he must be born of a virgin; that his kingdom cannot be temporal or of this world; and that he must die and shortly rise from the dead to Lordship over all creatures. All this apparently is briefly but explicitly concluded in this divine promise. Did time admit, it were easy to trace, in a way comprehensible to any man, the source of the prophecies to this fountain-head promise. Hence, Abraham laughed in his heart when the promise was made to him (Genesis 17:17), for he understood it. Christ indicates as much where he says concerning the patriarch's feeling (John 8:56,) "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad." "And the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee."

[9] We have frequently spoken of the little word "glory." It means honor, brightness, splendor. The Gospel is simply a grand report, a noble cry, having origin in a glorious reality; it is not a mere empty proclamation. A glorious being is to be compared to a sun or a light. The sun is a fountain of light, so to speak, and its luster is the glory, the diffusion, the distinction of that light. The luster may be called the natural expression of the sun, the sole medium whereby the sun is recognized in the world through which it is diffused. Similarly, the glory of an individual is the fountain, the sun, the foundation, of his glorious reputation. His reputation is the luster of his glory. It is the medium whereby he is proclaimed, extolled, recognized as glorious. This much, you will perceive, is implied in the word "glory" honor, renown, brilliancy.

[10] Thus, the Gospel is God's glory and our light. It is our light in that it reveals to us God, ourselves and all else. It is God's glory in that it is the medium whereby his work all his glorious doings are proclaimed, extolled, recognized and honored in the whole world.

[11] But, carrying the analogy to a finer point, it might be necessary to say that the Gospel is not the actual brightness of the light, nor is it the light itself. It is the rising of the brightness, the approach of the light. It is simply a manifestation of the light and brightness which existed from eternity. As

said in John 1:4, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." The light did not arise, nor was it openly manifested, except through the Gospel. Therefore, the Gospel is an expression, a cry, of divine brightness and glory. The Scriptures, in Psalm 29:3, in Psalm 68:33 and often elsewhere, call it the voice of God. It is called "Gospel" good message because it reveals and proclaims divine blessings, divine glory and divine honor or brightness. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork." Psalm 19:1. And what do we understand by proclaiming and revealing, except the proclaiming of the Gospel through the heavens the preaching of it by the apostles? What is the brightness, the work, of God but the great and glorious riches of his goodness and grace poured out upon us? Paul says (Titus 2:11), "The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men." How has it appeared? Through the preaching of the Gospel. Such seems to be the import of the words of Isaiah, "Thy light is come, and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee." That is, the light and glory of God are revealed are preached to you. Christ is the light and the glory, according to the words, "And the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee," or is revealed. Again, verse 20 of this chapter, "Jehovah will be thine everlasting light."

[12] Now, the light and the glory are God himself. For Christ says (John 8:12), "I am the light." We heard before, in the epistle for Christmas, that Christ is the effulgence of divine glory. Plainly, then, Isaiah is not here speaking of the rising of Christ in the sense of his coming birth. He refers to the rising of the Gospel after Christ's ascension. Through the Gospel Christ is spiritually risen and glorified in the hearts of all believers, bringing them salvation. The Scriptures make more frequent reference to his rising in this sense than they do to the birth of Christ. The Gospel is the important feature. On account of it was Christ born. Upon it Paul bases his teaching. He says that God beforetime promised the Gospel concerning his Son, through his prophets, in the holy Scriptures.

[13] We learn from our text here what the Gospel is and what is its message. It is the coming of light, the rising of divine glory. It speaks only of divine glory, divine honor and fame. It exalts only the work of God his goodness and grace toward us. It teaches the necessity of our receiving God's work for us, his grace and goodness, even God himself, if we would secure salvation. The Gospel produces in us a twofold effect. First, it rejects our natural reason, our human light. It conclusively shows them to be mere

darkness. Had we within ourselves light instead of darkness, it would not be necessary for God to send the light to rise upon us. Light enlightens, not light, but darkness. This epistle lesson forcibly expels and severely condemns all natural wisdom, all human reason, heathen arts and the doctrines and laws of man. Conclusively, these are absolute darkness, since it is necessary for the light to come. So we should guard against all human doctrines and the conceits of reason as darkness rejected and condemned by God, and should wake and arise to behold only this light, to follow it alone.

[14] Second, the Gospel casts down all the glory of and pride in our own works, our efforts, our free will. We cannot draw comfort nor derive honor from these. On the contrary, they but contribute to our shame in the sight of God. If there were in ourselves anything worthy of honor and glory, vainly would the divine honor and glory rise upon us. Since the latter are called for, clearly there is in us nothing but what is productive of our shame. Paul says on this point (Romans 3:23), "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." In other words, "Men may, it is true, have their own nature and their self-righteousness, and from these derive temporal honor, praise and glory before their fellows, as if not sinners. But before God they are sinful, destitute of divine glory and unable to boast possession of him and his blessings."

[15] Now, no one can be saved unless he has within himself the glory of God and be able to comfort himself solely with God and his blessings, and to glory in these. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." Jeremiah 9:24, and 2 Corinthians 10:17. Such is the rising of divine glory. So, the Gospel condemns all our efforts and exalts only the goodness and the grace of God in other words, God himself. It permits us to console ourselves only with him and to glory in no other. As Psalm 144:15 has it, "Happy is the people whose God is Jehovah." No one else is called happy. Accordingly, it follows here in Isaiah: "For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but Jehovah will arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee."

[16] Here the prophet clearly implies that wherever Christ is not, there darkness exists, whatever the appearance of brilliance. Nor does he allow the medium devised by the high schools, which say that between darkness and Christ exists the light of nature and of human reason. They ascribe darkness only to the grossly wicked and the weak-minded. They highly

value this mediatory light, claiming it is a sufficient preparation for the light of Christ, and that although it is darkness in comparison to the light of Christ, yet it is in itself light. They do not perceive how far they err in imagining themselves enlightened. Usually the most erroneous of the schools are the most rational. “The sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light,” as Christ says in Luke 16:8. Yet they of the schools are not nearer the true light than are others. Rather they are farther from it. This could not be if the light of reason were helpful in obtaining the true light. Devils are wiser, more artful and crafty, than men; yet they are not therefore better. No, that kind of light is always at enmity with the true light. As Paul tells us (Romans 8:7): “The mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be.”

[17] Therefore, God knew of no better way to deal with the pernicious light of reason than utterly to condemn and obscure it. Paul says (Corinthians 1:19-20): “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent... Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” In this same chapter Isaiah 1:19, we have: “The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but Jehovah will be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.” What is this but a rejection of all temporal wisdom? Away with babbling about natural light. Give close heed to the words of Isaiah and to other Scriptures which teach us to flee from the light of reason as from darkness and from an enemy of the true light. Human reason is the light which teaches the Jews, and all tyrants, to persecute and torture Christ and his saints, and which cannot, even to this day, endure the true light. Human reason always claims to be in the right and to be light, when really it is darkness and condemned by the true light. Being condemned, in its rage it instigates all forms of evil.

[18] But the weak-minded may ask: “How can it be that all-natural reason teaches is darkness? Plainly, three and two are five, are they not? Again, if a man makes a coat, is he not wise to make it of cloth, or foolish to make it of paper? Is he not wise who marries a godly woman, and he foolish who marries a godless one? And are there not similar instances innumerable in human affairs? Never can you persuade me that all-natural reason is darkness. Even Christ implies that it is light, when he says

(Matthew 7:24 and 26): ‘Everyone therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock... And everyone that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand.’ Now, if the builder upon the rock is in darkness, who builds wisely? Again, Christ says of the unjust steward who had wasted his lord’s goods that he acted wisely in taking the course he did in regard to his master’s debtors. Luke 16:8. And Paul reminds the Corinthians (Corinthians 11:5, 14-15) that nature teaches us a woman should not, in the church, pray with uncovered head.”

[19] I answer: This is all true, but it is necessary to make a distinction between God and men, between spiritual and temporal things. In earthly, human affairs man’s judgment suffices. For these things, he needs no light but that of reason. Hence God does not in the Scriptures teach us how to build houses, to make clothing, to marry, to wage war, to sail the seas, and so on. For these, our natural light is sufficient. But in divine things, the things concerning God, and in which we must conduct ourselves acceptably with him and must secure happiness for ourselves, human nature is absolutely blind, staring stone-blind, unable to recognize in the slightest degree what these things are. Natural reason presumptuously plunges into them like a blind horse. But all its conclusions are, as certainly as God lives, false and erroneous. In this capacity it proceeds like a man who builds on sand, or one who would use cobwebs for garments. Isaiah 59:6. It employs sand for meal in making bread. It sows wind and reaps the whirlwind, as Hosea 8:7 has it. It measures the atmosphere with a spoon, carries light into the cellar upon a tray, weighs flames in a balance, performing all manner of perverted nonsense ever known or possible to be devised. For all its efforts are designed as service to God and they must utterly fail.

[20] Ask nature what is necessary to please God and to be saved, and it replies: “Truly, you must build churches, cast bells, institute masses, observe vigils, make chalices, pyxes, images and ornaments; must burn candles, pray so long a time, fast in honor of St. Catharine, become a priest or a monk, go to Rome and to St. Jacob, wear hair-shirts, torture yourself, and so on. Such are good works and true ways to salvation.” But if you ask for proof that these things are acceptable with God, reason is unable to give any other reply than that it thinks them acceptable. This doctrine is sheer

imagination; more, it is gloom, it is darkness. It is what Isaiah refers to as “darkness” and “gross darkness.” Into it must fall all who do not accept the divine light. It is impossible for them to do anything that shall be right in the sight of God.

[21] Nothing is more offensive to God than the presumption that gross darkness is light, and the protest that it is darkness. It persecutes or puts to death all who defend the truth at this vital point. It cannot tolerate the true light. From that error arises all idolatry. The Jews had their Baal, their Moloch, Ashtaroth, Camon Peor and numberless idols of the sort. Jeremiah tells them (Jeremiah 2:28), “According to the number of thy cities are thy gods”; and Hosea says (Hosea 10:1), “According to the abundance of his fruit he hath multiplied his altars”; and again Isaiah (Isaiah 2:8), “Their land also is full of idols.”

[22] All this the Jews meant only for divine service. They presumed thereby to serve the true God. Consequently, the prophets who denounced their conduct were slain by them as destroyers of the divine service and blasphemers against God. But their services of God were instituted according to the dictates of human nature and not according to God’s commands. In the true service of God, he himself will be the light and accepts only the worship he has instituted and commanded. We read (Leviticus 10:2) how Nabad and Abihu, sons of Aaron, were consumed by fire at the altar even though they were God-ordained priests and had transgressed no farther than to put strange, or unconsecrated, fire into their censers; a thing, however, not in accordance with the commandment of God. And just as little will God tolerate us when we style as divine service what he has not so appointed, and when we recognize it as such. What else does he who presumes so to do, but make of God an idol? He imagines him to be of his opinion, and forms in his mind his own God, presuming that God must be delighted with anything he devises. Such a proceeding is but changing God’s will and perverting his design to accord with our will and our design. It is mocking God and regarding him as man of straw, a specter or wooden image, to be changed and fashioned at our pleasure. This is a thing God will by no means allow. He will not permit us to make of him an image an idol; the first commandment makes that plain. Nor will he allow us to misuse his name, as the second commandment clearly shows. And both commandments are just and right. Hence it is impossible for us to

please God thus, according to the dictates of nature. Indeed, such conduct is in the highest degree presumptuous, and of all things the most offensive to God.

The True Light

[23] Recognizing this distinction concerning the things of God and man, there can be no difficulty in discerning between the true light and the false. Whatever is not commanded of God is to be most carefully avoided, though ordained of angels or saints. For the most part, the laws of the Pope and the orders of the ecclesiasts must be false. For in the main they are but human devices relating to outward works not commanded of God. Idolatry is more prevalent in the world today than it was in the Jews' time. Men presume to serve God in this humanly-appointed way, notwithstanding it is wholly wrong.

[24] Divine light teaches us to trust in God, to believe in him, to leave all to him, to submit readily to his workings, to accept whatever in his providence may present, bearing all and performing every duty, and to serve our neighbor throughout life. With such faith there is no difference in works; all works are alike. Having faith, well may we serve God in erecting buildings, in planting and threshing, in performing any sort of external works. These things are the proper expression of faith, of divine light. God regards them as service to him, as devotional conduct. So little, however, does human nature, man's reason, know of the truth, that it proceeds to condemn this faith as error and heresy. It accepts the works it beholds in the beloved saints and the orders but is unable and unwilling to recognize those works as wrought under the influence of the divine light the faith they condemn. Thus, they make of the examples of the saint's idols for themselves, and irrevocably persist in their blindness and idolatry. Hence Solomon gives the wholesome instruction (Proverbs 3:5), "Lean not upon thine own understanding"; again (Proverbs 3:7), "Be not wise in thine own eyes," which thought Paul expresses (Romans 12:16) as, "Be not wise in your own conceits."

[25] The introduction to the Pope's laws teaches this principle of relying not upon one's own understanding. But his object is, by these Scripture warnings to intimidate the world from rejecting his foolish laws, the right

and essential thing to do, however. His object is to lead captive the minds of men, and to have them regard him alone as wise and to follow him in disregard of the wisdom of God. His laws are mere human devices and directly opposed to the doctrine of Solomon and of Paul. He forbids everyone to think for himself, and yet abominably enforces his own opinions in all the world. Solomon means that we are to be taught neither of ourselves nor of any human reasoning or device, but only of God our Lord. Whatsoever is not taught of God we are to avoid as darkness. He cannot tolerate an assistant in teaching and doing divine things. He intends to be himself the teacher, the light, that our faith may be pure, our understanding of divine matters clear.

[25] In temporal affairs, however, one may do differently. You may learn from the carpenter, or teach yourself, how to construct a building; from a painter you may learn to paint; from a shoemaker, to make shoes; from a scribe, to write. But how to serve God, how all works become good this you must learn, not from man, but from God. God teaches you to believe in him and to love your neighbor, in all your works. Men teach you to work without faith and to love only yourself, forgetting God and your neighbor.

[27] Such, you perceive, is the meaning of Isaiah where he says, "Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples." He cannot be understood as speaking of literal darkness; the sun has continued to give its light. He has reference to a darkness opposed to that light whereof he says, "Thy light is come," and, "Jehovah will arise upon thee." Now, they upon whom Jehovah has not risen, upon whom he has not shone, are in darkness. The darkness here meant is simply unbelief, the darkness of human reason; just as the light represents Christ, or faith in Christ whereby Christ dwells in the heart, as Paul says. Ephesians 3:17. Similarly, the reference here to the earth does not mean the material earth; the material earth was not darkened through Christ. The meaning is, earthly or worldly men; men who do not believe, do not accept Christ through the Gospel; men who remain in their earthly conceptions, in the natural light of reason, as Isaiah himself explains when he says: "Gross darkness shall cover the peoples."

[28] But what is implied? We're not men in darkness previous to the advent of Christ? If he, through the Gospel, brought the light, how is it that darkness made its first appearance at that time? We must remember that

Isaiah is speaking only of the Jewish people. He divides them into two classes. One class enjoys the light and the other is overwhelmed in darkness. This was really the case. So he speaks of “the earth” and “the peoples.” David, too, says concerning them (Psalm 2:1-2), “Why do the nations meditate a vain thing against Jehovah and against his anointed?” The entire people of Israel awaited Christ. In the shadows of the Law, through Christ, they enjoyed light. But with his coming their condition apparently was reversed. The majority of them fell, entering but deeper darkness. Previous to Christ’s advent was the light of the Law, in which Christ was promised to the Jews. But when he came in fulfillment thereof, they continued to cling to that Law, to still look for his coming. In this way they seem to have lost what they once recognized, the meaning of the Law. And so it befell them as befalls one who leaves far behind him the light properly going before, or the light that once preceded him, and now goes deeper into darkness, without that light. He who has his eyes fixed on a light before him, however far away, may see where he is going. But he who leaves the light behind, who turns his back upon it, walks toward the darkness, not seeing his objective point.

[29] Such is the conduct of the Jews, who have behind them the Law shining upon Christ now come. They reject its Christ-revealing light, expecting it to shine for them upon another Christ yet to come. Thus, they are without light. Their expectation will come to naught. The Law points to no other Christ. So Isaiah declares the earth covered with “darkness” and even with “gross darkness.” He indicates that the wretched Jews are not only blind but covered with gross darkness; the light rises not upon them. The Gospel is not preached to the Jews; they are unwilling to hear it. Christ the light does not, through the Gospel, rise upon them. They remain covered in their unbelief without preaching and instruction. God says on this point (Isaiah 5:6), “I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.” In other words, no preacher shall speak to them concerning Christ. This condition, you see, is not merely experiencing the darkness of unbelief; it is being covered with that darkness, hearing no preaching whereby the light might rise. O terrible prophecy, awful example, for all rejecters of the Gospel!

[30] Yet Isaiah says, “Jehovah will arise upon thee.” Not the entire nation was blinded. From it is derived the better and greater portion of the

Christian Church the apostles, the evangelists and numerous saints. These are not in darkness, nor covered with darkness. To them Jehovah was preached, and with the result that his glory is manifest in them. Isaiah does not say merely, The glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee, but, It “shall be seen upon thee.” Not only was the glory of Jehovah revealed to the Church a revelation embracing even the unbelieving Jews but it appeared to them, and they knew him and his glory. They held these fast. Therefore, the rising of the light the Gospel was not taken from them.

[31] Apparently, we are to understand Isaiah as referring in the latter part of the text to the fruits of the preached Gospel, and in the first part to the preaching of the Gospel. The Gospel arose, admonishing men to arise. After its advent some became so hardened, so overwhelmed in darkness, that the light did not again arise upon them; it was no more preached to them. But others were enlightened and continued in that illumination. Such has ever been the case unto this day with reference to the preaching of Christ and the Gospel. Some accept it and are enlightened. Others the majority of them condemn it as error and turn from it. Consequently, they are overwhelmed in their unbelief. The Gospel is no longer proclaimed to them and they are not disposed to hear it. Truly, then, they must be concealed from the rising illumination of this light.

[32] Let no one regard this as new or strange. The Scripture is unchangeable “Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples.” If this was true of the chosen people, the Jews, the natural seed of Abraham, to how much greater degree may it be true of us heathen, descendants from one of different blood and nature! We see today that the people will permit no one to preach to them what the Pope and his followers have condemned; they will not tolerate it. Therefore, they remain covered in their darkness. They have their own preaching wherewith they foster and conceal their blindness. And it befalls them as they desire, as it befell the Jews. “And nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”

[33] When the majority of the Jews refused to cultivate the fruits of the Gospel and fruit essentially accompanies the Gospel and continued in their blindness, the Gospel expanded into all the world, gathering the gentiles in place of the blinded and fallen Jews. So says Isaiah in this verse, the accomplished fulfillment of which renders it clear. The heathen nations

embraced Christianity and by genuine faith walked in Christ the true light. Such was the increase of the Gospel fruit that even kings, the most exalted of earth, humbled themselves under the faith. The revelation of these future conditions was made that preachers might not be unduly elated over their conversion of kings, or any other, as if they had accomplished it of themselves. God foresaw it all and caused it to be revealed. Besides, he promised the Gospel.

[34] This prophecy of Isaiah had strong fulfillment in former times. Many of the nobility and of high standing among the gentiles embraced Christianity. Today, however, so perverted are these nations by the Turks and the Pope, the prophecy seems to have little bearing. And it is a remarkable fact that even other heathen nations have been led astray by the converted gentiles. But it is revealed that Antichrist shall mislead the entire Christ-restored world.

[35] What is the import of the phrase, “to the brightness of thy rising”? The prophet styles Christ the glory, or brightness, of the rising; that is, of the Gospel. For the Gospel will be continually advanced and preached; it will ever rise to oppose human doctrines, doctrines formerly in the highest degree dangerous to kings and holders of lofty positions. Upon these individuals first the evil spirit seizes with his perversions and human doctrines. Having them in his power, he can easily drag along with them the common, illiterate people. Thus, the Pope first grasped kings and princes and then the masses. He could not have accomplished it had the Gospel continued to rise. No such thing was wrought when the Gospel first arose. But now it has set, and human doctrines have come up. None today walk in God’s light. “Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: they all gather themselves together, they come to thee; thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be carried in the arms.”

[36] Now, the prophet is about to enumerate the countries where gentiles are converted to the faith. From the fact of his calling upon Jerusalem to lift up her eyes round about and see, it is easily evident he refers to spiritual sons and daughters, men and women who believe in Christ. Likewise, the assembling of these must be understood in a spiritual sense. They did not bodily come to Jerusalem, but they believed with heart and spirit in the light risen upon her and round about her. No man can come to the light upon his material feet. Otherwise all the inhabitants of Jerusalem would have been

enlightened; but the fact is, as before stated, they for the most part remained in blindness and darkness. The light being spiritual, we are forced to conclude that the children, the gathering and the future, must also be understood in a spiritual sense. Were we not to regard the light spiritual, we would have to accept the reference to the gathering of the children in a physical rather than a spiritual sense, as the words imply. But with the light spiritualized, the gathering and the coming are spiritualized, and so, too, must the children be regarded. The seed of Abraham, his natural children, did not come to the light from the mere fact of their flesh-and-blood descent; they came because they were his spiritual children, as stated in our last sermon.

[37] The clause “Thy sons shall come from far” implies spiritual children from among the heathen. The apostles Peter and Paul allude to the heathen as far away, and to the Jews as near. “Ye that once were far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ.” Ephesians 2:13. Again (Ephesians 2:17), “He came and preached peace to you that were far off, and peace to them that were nigh.” The reason for this distinction seems to be that the Jews had the Law and the promises of God concerning Christ, and the heathen had not. Now, it being impossible for the heathen to be the natural children of Abraham, or of Jerusalem, Isaiah’s allusion to them here must certainly be in a spiritual sense.

[38] Similarly, when he admonishes Jerusalem to lift up her eyes round about and see, he does not address the material city of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem is not the mother of these spiritual children. She is a murderess of mother, father and children. Isaiah refers to the spiritual mother the assembly of the apostles and of all holy Christian Jews. This assembly is the Christian Church. It is spoken of as “Jerusalem” because it originated in that city, assembling there first and thence extending throughout the world. A definite place of origin was necessary to Christianity and the spread of the Gospel. The Gospel began in Jerusalem, in the midst of its worst enemies.

[39] Isaiah’s meaning seems to be: “Look round about thee, unto the four quarters of the world. I will expand thee into all the earth, and thy children shall dwell everywhere.” The words of the text were designed to comfort the first Christians at Jerusalem in view of the fact that they were few in number, despised and in the midst of those who, when they should

have been their best friends, were their enemies, as appears later on this same chapter. It was seemingly absurd for so small a band to attempt an undertaking so vast and unusual and to defy the overwhelming masses.

[40] The Jews thought soon to check the efforts of the Christians, even to exterminate them. They began everywhere the work of persecution, expulsion and slaughter, presuming it easy to root out these poor and powerless people. Foolishly, they failed to see how they but fanned the fire already kindled, and scattered it world-wide. Their violence only helped to fulfill this God-directed prophecy of Isaiah against themselves. Their persecution drove Christians into all the world and extended the Gospel until everywhere the sons and daughters of Jerusalem were gathered to the light.

[41] To accomplish an object with eminent success through the instrumentality of an enemy is characteristic of the divine hand. By the very fact of their furious attempts to exterminate the Word and the people of God, men but destroy themselves and only further God's Word and his people. Therefore, it is good and profitable, to have enemies and persecutors for the sake of the faith and the Word of God. Incalculable comfort and benefit result. Psalm 2:1 is in point here: "Why do the nations rage, and the peoples meditate a vain thing" against Christ? The thought is, they violently strive to exterminate Christ, and fail to see that in so doing they but strengthen him.

[42] Isaiah's message here to his beloved Jerusalem is, practically: "Fear not, grieve not. Cast not down your eyes, but joyfully raise them and look about. Be not misled by the fact that your nearest relatives are your worst enemies, seeking to exterminate you and regarding you too mean to dwell among them. Let them go on in their rage. Where they kill one among you, a thousand shall rise in his place. Where they drive one away, he shall return with many thousands. If they extinguish the Gospel at one point, it will spring up in ten others. At length, without their consent and with no thanks to them, you shall everywhere have sons and daughters to fill the places of those others now become enemies. Thus, ultimately you shall be strengthened and multiplied, and your enemies shall be diminished even to extermination. Their evil designs for you shall fall upon themselves and you shall enjoy what they begrudge you. We see plainly the complete fulfillment of this prophecy. "Then thou shalt see and be radiant, and thy heart shall

thrill and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned unto thee, the wealth of the nations shall come unto thee.”

[43] By “the abundance of the sea,” we must understand, not the water of the sea itself, but the inhabitants of the country bordering on the sea. As, for instance, we might say that the whole Rhine is risen up, when we mean the people of the country adjacent to the Rhine. Scripture usage, notwithstanding there are many seas in the world, terms the Mediterranean Sea simply “the sea,” while it designates the Red Sea by its particular and full name. Geographers give the Mediterranean that name because of its position. It lies midway between the continents, west of Asia. On the left, or the north, are Spain, France, Italy, Greece and Asia Minor, as far as Cilicia. On the right, or the south, are Africa and Egypt, as far as Palestine. The sea is touched on both sides by great countries, powerful kingdoms. It has numerous islands Candia, Rhodes, Cyprus, now for the most part in control of the Turks. The Mediterranean is, as we said, in the Scriptures called “the sea.” It is west of the Jewish country; for Palestine is at the end of the sea in the east.

[44] The people of the territory bordering this sea, particularly those on the north, are scripturally given the general term “gentiles.” To those on the south and to the east the Scriptures give particular names. To the gentiles we belong, as do all on the north, or left side, of the sea. Paul, in Timothy 1:11 and elsewhere, calls himself a preacher and apostle to the gentiles. To this section of the country on the north side of the sea, he preached. To it he addressed all his epistles. He did not go south of the sea. Isaiah refers to these gentiles or nations when he says, “The abundance of the sea shall be turned unto thee, the wealth of the nations shall come unto thee.” “The abundance of the sea” is synonymous with “the wealth of the nations.” Thus, he shows we are not to understand by the former expression “water” but “peoples.”

[45] Again, “wealth of the nations” does not signify their strength, or power. Of what advantage would that be to the Church? The reference is to great multitudes. We are wont to call a large quantity of coin “a power of money”; that is, a great pile of money. Likewise, here “wealth” of the nations means a great mass or multitude of them. Again, we speak of the lord of a great country, one who rules over vast territory and many peoples, as a “mighty” lord. This prophecy of Isaiah was largely fulfilled through the

instrumentality of Paul our apostle. Through his preaching “the abundance of the sea” was converted and “the wealth of the nations” came into the faith. The latter part of this verse is designed to explain who are the sons and daughters that come from afar; namely, the abundance of the gentiles on the great Mediterranean, whom Paul converted. Thus, we have further evidence that the coming to Jerusalem is not to be literally understood. How could such a multitude, such an “abundance,” such a “wealth,” gather within the limits of that single city, to say nothing of dwelling there permanently? Isaiah says the abundance of the sea shall be “converted,” or turned about. The thought is of a facing about. The word itself is opposed to the idea of a literal gathering of the gentiles at Jerusalem. The “turning about” is the assembling. Before, they were turned to the world; now they are changed, turned to the Church.

[46] Again, Isaiah uses the Hebrew term “Hamon” when he speaks of the abundance of the sea. The word implies mass, or abundance. Undoubtedly there is a connection here with the promise God made to Abraham that he should be the father of many nations, or gentiles. For God said (Genesis 17:5): “Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for the father of a multitude of nations have I made thee.” God adds the first letter of the word “Hamon” to “Abram,” making it “Abraham,” and gives us a reason for the change that Abraham should be the father “Hamon”; that is, the father of a multitude of nations. He says with Isaiah, in effect: He shall be the father, “Hamon,” of the sea a father of a multitude of nations. Accordingly, Paul in his epistles urges the statement that through faith the gentiles are the children, the seed of Abraham, according to the promise of God. Isaiah has reference to this promise and describes its fulfillment. At first the patriarch was called “Abram,” a father of the high, or exalted father. Afterward he was named “Abraham,” a father of the abundance, or multitude, of the gentiles. In the gentiles was completed his exaltation.

[47] But why does the prophet here multiply words: “Then thou shalt see and be radiant, and thy heart shall thrill and be enlarged”? What is implied by “see,” “being radiant,” and “the heart thrilling and being enlarged”? These are terms of comforting promise. Hebrew usage makes the word “see” expressive of satisfaction of mind over accomplished desire. For instance (Psalm 54:7), “And mine eye hath seen my desire upon mine

enemies.” That is, “I see what I have long desired for my enemies, namely, their suppression and the perpetuation of the truth.” Again (Psalm 37:34): “When the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it - “then thou shalt see what thou didst desire.” And again (Psalm 35:21): “Yea, they opened their mouth wide against me; they said, Aha, aha, our eye hath seen it.” In other words, “Indeed, what pleasure! We have long desired to see it.” So here we interpret “Then thou shalt see,” etc., to mean: “You are now a poor, weak little band. Your enemies see what they desire for you. You desire to see yourselves great and numerous, but you may not yet. You must behold for a little time what you do not desire to behold. Afterward you shall see and they shall not. When the multitude of the sea shall be turned to you, then you will see what you have long desired to behold, and your enemies shall not witness what they have so ardently desired concerning you. You must have patience for a time, seeing not. You must endure apparent insignificance and bear the cross.”

[48] The expression is a natural one. Our eyes are prone to turn away from what we do not wish to see; but toward the things we desire they pleasantly and readily turn, to admire and enjoy. Hence the proverb, “Where the heart is, the eyes turn.” We may aptly say, “He does not see,” when we mean, “It does not please him.” Of all our members, the eyes are the best index of the heart’s pleasure or displeasure.

[49] The word “radiant” here also implies pleasure and comfort. For it is said of one who is successful and delighted, his countenance is radiant. Whatever is soft is pliable and yielding; but that which is dry, hard and rough is inflexible and suggestive of trouble and displeasure. Isaiah’s thought is, then: “You shall see what is pleasing to your heart, and consequently be filled with delight. Your pleasure will make you radiant to perform your duty and to endure all things joyfully, cheerfully and promptly, without trouble or unpleasantness.” This is the fruit of the Spirit, the outcome of the comfort the divine promise yields. Thereby all men are rendered mild, happy and radiant, and always content with their circumstances.

[50] In the third place, how does the statement, “Thy heart shall thrill,” or be amazed, accord with the thought of pleasure? Real pleasures, those so great as to exceed our thoughts and desires, induce a thrill of amazement in their very transcendence of our expectations. When at Peter’s preaching the

Holy Spirit fell on the gentiles on Cornelius and his company according to Luke (Acts 10:45) they “were amazed, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The gift was something they did not in the least expect. Similarly, Isaiah says that Jerusalem in her great joy shall be thrilled with amazement in heart, because of the vast multitude of gentiles joining themselves unto such a poor little persecuted flock.

[51] Fourth: “Thy heart... shall be enlarged.” Plainly, this phrase suggests true greatness, security and freedom. These things are the result of the comfort of the Spirit and the joy of heart experienced when God does for us in excess of our expectations and desires. Such is God’s way of doing, as Isaiah here teaches. And similarly, Paul says (Ephesians 3:20) that God always does “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” And Thus, did God deal with this his little flock. He permitted the small band to be persecuted and decreased until apparently it was destitute of life and influence. But almost before one might face about, Christianity had spread throughout the world and surpassed in strength and influence all its enemies. This is amazing in our eyes. “The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; and they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and frankincense and shall proclaim the praises of Jehovah.”

[52] Having mentioned the nations coming from the “abundance of the sea,” west of Jerusalem, Isaiah now refers to the nations that are to come from the east. Midian, Ephah, Sheba, the countries where men travel with camels, lie east of Jerusalem. We read (Genesis 25:2-4) that Abraham had six sons by his third wife, Keturah: Zimran, Jokshan, Medam, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. The fourth son, Midian, begat Ephah and Epher. There we have two, Midian and Ephah, of whom Isaiah here speaks. Also we read there that the second son, Jokshan, begat Sheba and Dedan. Again, we read (Genesis 10:1, 6-7) that Noah begat Shem, Ham and Japheth; that Ham begat Cush and his brethren, and Cush begat Raamah; and that Raamah begat Sheba and Dedan. These last two names are the same as those of Abraham’s sons. Now, it is doubtful, and must ever be, whether Isaiah here refers to the Sheba who sprang from Abraham, or to Ham’s descendant. That, however, is of little importance. It comes to pass on earth that nation routs nation, and one occupies the other’s territory, as private property in

cities changes hands, is bought and sold, or passes from one landlord to another. As said before, the countries east of Jerusalem are variously named; not designated by the general name “gentiles” as are the Mediterranean countries. They are called Chedar, Nabajoth, Midian, Ephah, Ishmael, Ammon, Edom, Moab, Sheba, according to their primary lords. Moses says (Genesis 25:2-6) that Abraham separated from Isaac the sons of his wife Keturah and sent them toward the east. Hence undoubtedly they occupied many of the countries mentioned, Midian, Ephah and Sheba becoming the most important.

[53] In the Latin and Greek geographies these people are called Arabs. They divide all Arabia into three parts: Arabia Deserta, Arabia Petrea and Arabia Felix; or, desert Arabia, stony Arabia and fertile Arabia. Desert Arabia lies between Egypt and Judea, east of the sea. It was through this section Moses led the children of Israel. In the Hebrew it alone is called Arabia, for the word means “desert.” Stony Arabia lies east of and touching the Jordan. It includes a large territory. But Isaiah does not here refer to either of these countries. Fertile and greater Arabia, far distant from Judea and beyond desert and stony Arabia, is called in the Hebrew “Sheba.” Whether it derives its name from the son of Abraham or from the son of Ham is immaterial. Ephah is a portion of fertile Arabia. From this Arabia, or from Sheba, came the Turk Mohammed. His sepulcher is there in the city of Mecca. The country is called fertile, or rich, from its abundance of precious gold, fine fruits and particularly frankincense, something produced nowhere else in the world. The Queen of Sheba brought frankincense with many other costly spices, to King Solomon. 1 Kings 10:2. The Sultan is today its absolute ruler, though he is not such in the eyes of all the Turks. This is the Sheba and this the Ephah to which Isaiah here refers. Their inhabitants used camels and dromedaries. Midian, however, was a neighboring country, bordering like them on the Red Sea, and lying between Egypt and fertile Arabia.

[54] The thought of Isaiah is that camels and dromedaries shall come out of Sheba and Midian, spreading in multitudes over the country, as a vast army covers the land, moving or encamped. And the idea is not of riderless droves. Caravans are indicated by the explanatory sentences: “All they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord.” In other words: “In such vast numbers shall

the inhabitants of Midian and Ephah come, the multitude of their camels and dromedaries shall cover thy country. And why speak only of Midian and Ephah, portions of Arabia? For all, every part, of fertile Arabia shall come.”

[55] It may be asked: Is the reference to actual camels and dromedaries? Did they bring material gold and incense? Did the entire inhabitants of fertile Arabia really come to Jerusalem? We must admit that we do not read of any of these things literally coming to pass. Many explain the passage as referring to the wise men who came to Jerusalem from that country after the birth of Christ, as the Gospel relates. But it cannot be said of these few that their camels covered the country in great multitude. Nor were they the entire population of Sheba; they were but a small fraction of the people. We must not interpret spiritually unless necessary. But since these events have never transpired literally, nor may we reasonably expect that they ever will; since it is a thing inconsistent with natural law that the whole population of Sheba shall actually come to Jerusalem a mighty nation assembling in one city; since the foregoing portion of the chapter has reference merely to the spiritual light of the Gospel and of faith, and to a spiritual assembling and coming, and since the gathering to the Church is not by any means to be understood to refer to Christ’s physical person considering all this, we shall maintain the same method of the interpretation, feeling satisfied that the facts force us to spiritualize this latter part of the chapter. We understand, then, the Christian Church shall see and be radiant, her heart shall thrill and be enlarged, when not only the abundance of the sea on the west shall be gathered to Jerusalem, but also the greatest and richest people of Arabia from the east. Further, many other things in the chapter inconsistent with a literal coming force the spiritual conclusion upon us. For instance, verse 7: “All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee; they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar.” Again, verse 10: “And foreigners shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee.” These things have never occurred in a literal sense, nor will they ever occur.

[56] Therefore, Isaiah’s meaning must be: “The people of the great country Arabia shall come in vast numbers to the faith of the Gospel, offering up themselves and all they possess their camels and dromedaries, their gold, incense and other things.” For true Christians will always give

up themselves and all they have to serve Christ and his followers. Note, among ourselves, the generous donations made to the Church, and how all freely and willingly surrender self and property to Christ and his. Paul mentions the same practice among the Philippians and the Corinthians. 2 Corinthians 8:1 ff.

[57] The passage includes the greatest, richest nations, the most numerous and powerful people, on earth the abundance of the sea and the wealth of the nations. In respect to numbers and power, these represent the heart of the earth's inhabitants. Arabia is regarded the richest and grandest nation of the world. The thought is, the whole world will be converted to the faith. Even were we to regard the gold, the incense and the camels in a strictly literal sense, we must still understand the "coming" and the "bringing" as suggesting the spiritual Jerusalem. As to what the spiritual interpretation is, we leave that for the Gospel to teach us. The phrase "All they from Sheba" does not imply that individually they will all become believers, but that the country as a whole will accept Christianity. There must remain, of course, some unbelieving individuals. Similarly, we may say of Germany, which has abandoned its old heathen customs, that the country is now Christian. Though only the minority are true Christians, yet for the sake of these we call the German nation Christian. Again, the Jewish people as a whole were called the people of God (Numbers 25) when many of them worshiped idols.

[58] Finally, Isaiah says, "They shall proclaim the praises of Jehovah." The true, the special, work of a Christian is to confess his sins and his shame, and to proclaim God's grace and work in himself. No man who fails to behold God's grace and this light of the Gospel, can show forth God's honor and praise. No man who clings to his own light, his own human nature, who values his own works, his own efforts, can perceive the grace of God. He continues in his old, blind dead Adam nature. He does not rise to behold the light; he prefers to sound his own praises. Isaiah exalts the people of wealthy Arabia because they are true Christians who proclaim only the praises of Jehovah, taught to do so undoubtedly by the light of grace and the Gospel.

First Sunday after Epiphany. The Fruits of Faith. Our Spiritual Service.

Text: Romans 12:1-6.

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Romans 12:1-6

The Fruits of Faith

[1] In the preceding sermons I have treated sufficiently of faith and love; and of crosses and afflictions, the promoters of hope. Faith, love and affliction bound the Christian's life. It is unnecessary that I should further discourse on these topics. As they — or anything pertaining to the life of

the Christian — present themselves, reference may be had to those former postils. It is my purpose now briefly to make plain that the sum of all divine doctrine is simply Jesus Christ, as we have often heard.

[2] This epistle lesson treats not of faith, but of the fruits of faith — love, unity, patience, self-denial, etc. Among these fruits, the apostle considers first the discipline of the body — the mortification of evil lusts. He handles the subject here in a manner wholly unlike his method in other epistles. In Galatians he speaks of crucifying the flesh with its lusts; in Hebrews and Colossians, of putting off the old man and mortifying the members on earth. Here he mentions presenting the body as a sacrifice; he dignifies it by the loftiest and most sacred terms. Why does he so? First, by making the terms glorious, he would the more emphatically urge us to yield this fruit of faith. The whole world regards the priest's office — his service and his dignity — as representing the acme of nobility and exaltation; and so it truly does. Now, if one would be a priest and exalted before God, let him set about this work of offering up his body to God; in other words, let him be humble, let him be nothing in the eyes of the world.

[3] I will let every man decide for himself the difference between the outward priesthood of dazzling character and the internal, spiritual priesthood. The first is confined to a very few individuals; the second, Christians commonly share. One was ordained of men, independently of the Word of God; the other was established through the Word, irrespective of human devices. In that, the skin is be-smear'd with material oil; in this, the heart is internally anointed with the Holy Spirit. That applauds and extols its works; this proclaims and magnifies the grace of God, and his glory. That does not offer up the body with its lusts, but rather fosters the evil desires of the flesh; this sacrifices the body and mortifies its lusts. The former permits the offering up to itself of gold and property, of honor, of idleness and pleasure, and of all manner of lust on earth; the latter foregoes these things and accepts only the reverse of homage. That again sacrifices Christ in its awful perversions; this, satisfied with the atonement once made by Christ, offers up itself with him and in him, by making similar sacrifices. In fact, the two priesthoods accord about as well as Christ and Barabbas, as light and darkness, as God and the world. As little as smearing and shaving were factors in Christ's priesthood, so little will they thus procure for anyone the Christian priesthood. Yet Christ, with all his Christians, is priest.

“Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” Psalm 110:4. The Christian priesthood will not admit of appointment. The priest is not made. He must be born a priest; must inherit his office. I refer to the new birth — the birth of water and the Spirit. Thus all Christians become priests, children of God and co-heirs with Christ the Most High Priest.

[4] Men universally consider the title of priest glorious and honorable; it is acceptable to everyone. But the duties and the sacrifice of the office are rarely accepted. Men seem to be averse to these latter. The Christian priesthood costs life, property, honor, friends and all worldly things. It cost Christ the same on the holy cross. No man readily chooses death instead of life, and accepts pain instead of pleasure, loss instead of gain, shame rather than honor, enemies rather than friends, according to the example Christ set for us on the cross. And further, all this is to be endured, not for profit to one’s self, but for the benefit of his neighbor and for the honor and glory of God. For so Christ offered up his body. This priesthood is a glorious one.

[5] As I have frequently stated, the suffering and work of Christ is to be viewed in two lights: First, as grace bestowed on us, as a blessing conferred, requiring the exercise of faith on our part and our acceptance of the salvation offered. Second, we are to regard it an example for us to follow; we are to offer up ourselves for our neighbors’ benefit and for the honor of God. This offering is the exercise of our love — distributing our works for the benefit of our neighbors. He who so does is a Christian. He becomes one with Christ, and the offering of his body is identical with the offering of Christ’s body. This is what Peter calls offering sacrifices acceptable to God by Christ. He describes priesthood and offering in these words: “Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 2:5.

[6] Peter says, “spiritual sacrifices,” but Paul says our bodies are to be offered up. While it is true that the body is not spirit, the offering of it is called a spiritual sacrifice because it is freely sacrificed through the Spirit, the Christian being uninfluenced by the constraints of the Law or the fear of hell. Such motives, however, sway the ecclesiasts, who have heaped tortures upon themselves by undergoing fasts, uncomfortable clothing, vigils, hard beds and other vain and difficult performances, and yet failed to attain to this spiritual sacrifice. Rather, they have wandered the farther from

it because of their neglect to mortify their old Adam-like nature. They have but increased in presumption and wickedness, thinking by their works and merits to raise themselves in God's estimation. Their penances were not intended for the mortification of their bodies, but as works meriting for them superior seats in heaven. Properly, then, their efforts may be regarded a carnal sacrifice of their bodies, unacceptable to God and most acceptable to the devil.

[7] But spiritual sacrifices, Peter tells us, are acceptable to God; and Paul teaches the same (Romans 8:13): "If by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Paul speaks of mortifying through the Spirit; Peter, of a spiritual sacrifice. The offering must first be slain. Paul's thought is: "If ye mortify the deeds of the body in your individual, chosen ways, unprompted by the Spirit or your own heart, simply through fear of punishment, that mortification — that sacrifice — will be carnal; and ye shall not live, but die a death the more awful." The Spirit must mortify your deeds — spiritually it must be done; that is, with real enjoyment, unmoved by fear of hell, voluntarily, without expectation of meriting honor or reward, either temporal or eternal. This, mark you, is a spiritual sacrifice. However outward, gross, physical and visible a deed may be, it is altogether spiritual when wrought by the Spirit. Even eating and drinking are spiritual works if done through the Spirit. On the other hand, whatsoever is wrought through the flesh is carnal, no matter to what extent it may be a secret desire of the soul. Paul (Galatians 5:20) terms idolatry and heresies works of the flesh, notwithstanding they are invisible impulses of the soul.

[8] In addition to this spiritual sacrifice — the mortifying of the deeds of the body — Peter mentions another, later on in the same chapter: "But ye are a royal priesthood that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Here Peter touches upon the preaching office, the real sacrificial office, concerning which it is said (Psalm 50:23), "Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth me." Preaching extols the grace of God. It is the offering of praise and thanks. Paul boasts (Romans 15:15) that he sanctifies and offers the Gospel. But it is not our purpose to consider here this sacrifice of praise; though praise in the congregation may be included in the spiritual sacrifice, as we shall see. For he who offers his body to God also offers his tongue and his lips as instruments to confess, preach and extol the

grace of God. On this topic, however, we shall speak elsewhere. Let us now consider the words of the text. Our Spiritual Service “I beseech you therefore, brethren.”

[9] Paul does not say, “I command you.” He is preaching to those already godly Christians through faith in the new man; to hearers who are not to be constrained by commandments, but to be admonished. For the object is to secure voluntary renunciation of their old, sinful, Adam-like nature. He who will not cheerfully respond to friendly admonition is no Christian. And he who attempts by the restraints of law to compel the unwilling to renunciation, is no Christian preacher or ruler; he is but a worldly jailer. “By the mercies of God.”

[10] A teacher of the Law enforces his restraints through threats and punishments. A preacher of grace persuades and incites by calling attention to the goodness and mercy of God. The latter does not desire works prompted by an unwilling spirit, or service that is not the expression of a cheerful heart. He desires that a joyous, willing spirit shall incite to the service of God. He who cannot, by the gracious and lovely message of God’s mercy so lavishly bestowed upon us in Christ, be persuaded in a spirit of love and delight to contribute to the honor of God and the benefit of his neighbor, is worthless to Christianity, and all effort is lost on him. How can one whom the fire of heavenly love and grace cannot melt, be rendered cheerfully obedient by laws and threats? Not human mercy is offered us, but divine mercy, and Paul would have us perceive it and be moved thereby. “To present your bodies.”

[11] Many and various were the sacrifices of the Old Testament. But all were typical of this one sacrifice of the body, offered by Christ and his Christians. And there is not, nor can be, any other sacrifice in the New Testament. What more would one, or could one, offer than himself, all he is and all he has? When the body is yielded a sacrifice, all belonging to the body is yielded also. Therefore, the Old Testament sacrifices, with the priests and all the splendor, have terminated. How does the offering of a penny compare with that of the body? Indeed, such fragmentary patchwork scarcely deserves recognition as a sacrifice when the bodies of Christ and of his followers are offered. Consequently, Isaiah may truly say that in the New Testament such beggarly works are loathsome compared to real and great sacrifices: “He that killeth an ox is as he that slayeth a man; he that

sacrificeth a lamb, as he that breaketh a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as he that offereth swine's blood; he that burneth frankincense, as he that blesseth an idol." Isaiah 66:3. Similarly, also: "What unto me is the multitude of your sacrifices? saith Jehovah: I have had enough of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats." Isaiah 1:11. Thus, in plain words, Isaiah rejects all other sacrifices in view of this true one.

[12] Our blind leaders, therefore, have most wretchedly deceived the world by their mass-offerings, for they have forgotten this one real sacrifice. The mass may be celebrated and at the same time the soul be not benefited, but rather injured. But the body cannot be offered without benefiting the soul. Under the New Testament dispensation, then, the mass cannot be a sacrifice, even were it ever one. For all the works, all the sacrifices of the New Testament, must be true and soul-benefiting. Otherwise they are not New Testament sacrifices. It is said (Psalm 25:10), "All the paths of Jehovah are lovingkindness and truth." "A living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God."

[13] Paul here makes use of the three words "living," "holy" and "acceptable," doubtless to teach that the sacrifices of the Old Testament are repealed and the entire priesthood abolished. The Old Testament sacrifices consisted of bullocks, sheep and goats. To these life was not spared. For the sacrifice they were slain, burned, consumed by the priests. But the New Testament sacrifice is a wonderful offering. Though slain, it still lives. Indeed, in proportion as it is slain and sacrificed, does it live in vigor. "If by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Romans 8:13. "For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Colossians 3:3. "And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof." Galatians 5:24.

[14] The word "living," then, is to be spiritually understood — as having reference to the life before God and not to the temporal life. He who keeps his body under and mortifies its lusts does not live to the world; he does not lead the life of the world. The world lives in its lusts, and according to the flesh; it is powerless to live otherwise. True, the Christian is bodily in the world, yet he does not live after the flesh. As Paul says (Corinthians 10:3), "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh"; and again (Romans 8:1), "Who walk not after the flesh." Such a life is, before

God, eternal, and a true, living sacrifice. Such mortification of the body and of its lusts, whether effected by voluntary discipline or by persecution, is simply an exercise in and for the life eternal.

[15] None of the Old Testament sacrifices were holy — except in an external and temporal sense — until they were consumed. For the life of the animal was but temporal and external previous to the sacrifice. But the “living sacrifice” Paul mentions is righteous before God, and also externally holy. “Holy” implies simply, being designed for the service and the honor of God, and employed of God. Hence we must here understand the word “holy” as conveying the thought that we let God alone work in us and we be simply his holy instruments. As said in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost... and ye are not your own... therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” Again (Galatians 6:17), “I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus.” Now, he who performs a work merely for his own pleasure and to his own honor, profanes his sacrifice. So also do they who by their works seek to merit reward from God, whether temporal or eternal. The point of error is, they are not yet a slain sacrifice. The sacrifice cannot be holy unless it first lives; that is, unless it is slain before God, and slain in its own consciousness, and thus does not seek its own honor and glory.

[16] The Old Testament sacrifices were not in themselves acceptable to God. Nor did they render man acceptable. But in the estimation of the world — before men — they were pleasing, even regarded highly worthy. Men thought thereby to render themselves well-pleasing in God’s sight. But the spiritual sacrifice is, in man’s estimation, the most repugnant and unacceptable of all things. It condemns, mortifies and opposes whatever, in man’s judgment, is good and well-pleasing. For, as before stated, nature cannot do otherwise than to live according to the flesh, particularly to follow its own works and inventions. It cannot admit that all its efforts and designs are vain and worthy of mortification and of death. The spiritual sacrifice is acceptable to God, Paul teaches, however unacceptable it may be to the world. They who render this living, holy sacrifice are happy and assured of their acceptance with God; they know God requires the death of the lusts and inventions of the flesh, and he alone desires to live and work in us.

[17] Consequently, Paul's use of the word "body" includes more than outward, sensual vices and crimes, as gluttony, fornication, murder; it includes everything not of the new spiritual birth but belonging to the old Adam nature, even its best and noblest faculties, outer and inner; the deep depravity of self-will, for instance, and arrogance, human wisdom and reason, reliance on our own good works, on our own spiritual life and on the gifts wherewith God has endowed our nature. To illustrate: Take the most spiritual and the wisest individuals on earth, and while it is true that a fraction of them are outwardly and physically chaste, their hearts, it will be found, are filled with haughtiness, presumption and self-will, while they delight in their own wisdom and peculiar conduct. No saint is wholly free from the deep depravity of the inner nature. Hence he must constantly offer himself up, mortifying his old deceitful self. Paul calls it sacrificing the body, because the individual, on becoming a Christian, lives more than half spiritually, and the evil propensities remaining to be mortified Paul attributes to the body as to the inferior, the less important, part of man; the part not as yet wholly under the Spirit's influence. "Which is your spiritual (reasonable) service."

[18] A clear distinction is here made between the services rendered God by Christians and those which the Jews rendered. The thought is: The Jews' service to God consisted in sacrifices of irrational beasts, but the service of Christians, in spiritual sacrifices — the sacrifice of their bodies, their very selves. The Jews offered gold and silver; they built an inanimate temple of wood and stone. Christians are a different people. Their sacrifices are not silver and gold. Their temple is not wood and stone; it is themselves. "Ye are a temple of God." 1 Corinthians 3:16. Thus you observe the unfair treatment accorded Christians in ignoring their peculiar services and inducing the world to build churches, to erect altars and monasteries, and to manufacture bells, chalices and images by way of Christian service — works that would have been too burdensome for even the Jews.

[19] In brief, this our reasonable service is rightly called a spiritual service of the heart, performed in the faith and the knowledge of God. Here Paul rejects all service not performed in faith as entirely unreasonable, even if rendered by the body and in outward act and having the appearance of great holiness and spiritual life. Such have been the works, offerings, monkery and stringent life of the Papists, performed without the knowledge

of God — having no command of God — and without spirit and heart. They have thought that so long as the works were performed they must be pleasing to God, independent of their faith. Such was also the service of the Jews in their works and offerings, and of all who knew not Christ and were without faith. Hence, they were no better than the service and works of idolatrous and ignorant heathen. “And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

[20] As before said, the world cannot endure the sight or hearing of this living sacrifice; therefore, it opposes it on every side. With its provocations and threats, its enticements and persecutions, it has every advantage, aided by the fact that our minds and spirits are not occupied with that spiritual sacrifice, but we give place to the dispositions and inclinations of the world. We must be careful, then, to follow neither the customs of the world nor our own reason or plausible theories. We must constantly subdue our dispositions and control our wills, not obeying the dictates of reason and desire. Always we are to conduct ourselves in a manner unlike the way of the world. So, shall we be daily changed — renewed in our minds. That is, we come each day to place greater value on the things condemned by human reason — by the world. Daily we prefer to be poor, sick and despised, to be fools and sinners, until ultimately, we regard death as better than life, foolishness as more precious than wisdom, shame nobler than honor, labor more blessed than wealth, and sin more glorious than human righteousness. Such a mind the world does not possess. The mind of the world is altogether unlike the Christian’s. It not only continues unchanged and unrenewed in its old disposition but is obdurate and very old.

[21] God’s will is ever good and perfect, ever gracious; but it is not at all times so regarded of men. Indeed, human reason imagines it to be the evil, unfriendly, abominable will of the devil, because what reason esteems highest, best and holiest, God’s will regards as nothing and worthy of death. Therefore, Christian experience must come to the rescue and decide. It must feel and prove, must test and ascertain, whether one is prompted by a sincere and gracious will. He who perseveres and learns in this way will go forward in his experience, finding God’s will so gracious and pleasing he would not exchange it for all the world’s wealth. He will discover that acceptance of God’s will affords him more happiness, even in poverty,

disgrace and adversity, than is the lot of any worldling in the midst of earthly honors and pleasures. He will finally arrive at a degree of perfection making him inclined to exchange life for death, and, with Paul, to desire to depart that sin may no more live in him, and that the will of God may be done perfectly in himself in every relation. In this respect he is wholly unlike the world; he conducts himself very differently from it. For the world never has enough of this life, while the experienced Christian is ready to be removed. What the world seeks, he avoids; what it avoids, he seeks.

[22] Paul, you will observe, does not consider the Christian absolutely free from sin, since he beseeches us to be “transformed by the renewing of the mind.” Where transformation and renewal are necessary, something of the old and sinful nature must yet remain. This sin is not imputed to Christians, because they daily endeavor to effect transformation and renovation. Sin exists in them against their will. Flesh and spirit are contrary to each other (Galatians 5:17), therefore we do not what we would. Romans 7:15. Paul makes particular mention of “the mind” here, by contrast making plainer what is intended by the “body” which he beseeches them to sacrifice. The scriptural sense of the word “mind” has already been sufficiently defined as “belief,” which is the source of either vice or virtue. For what I value, I believe to be right. I observe what I value, as do others. But when belief is wrong, conscience and faith have not control. Where unity of mind among men is lacking, love and peace cannot be present; and where love and faith are not present, only the world and the devil reign. Hence transformation by renewal of the mind is of vital importance. Now follows:

Sober Thoughts of Ourselves

“For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man a measure of faith.”

[23] Paul, in all his epistles, is careful to give this instruction to Christians. His purpose is to preserve simplicity of faith among them everywhere; to prevent sects and schisms in Christian life, which have their origin in differing minds, in diversity of belief. To make admonition the

more forcible, he refers to his apostolic office; to the fact that he was, by the grace of God, chosen and sent to teach the things he advocates. His words here mean: “Ye possess many graces, but let everyone take heed to confine his belief and opinions to the limits of faith. Let him not esteem himself above another, nor attach to the gifts conferred upon himself greater value than he accords those conferred upon another. Otherwise he will be inclined to despise the lesser gifts and emphasize the more exalted ones, and to influence others to the same practice.” Where there is not such humility, recourse is had to works and to the honoring of gifts, while faith is neglected. Thus belief prompts to do as the world does, to value what is exalted and to despise what is humble.

[24] This principle cannot be better illustrated than by the prevailing examples of our time. For instance, monks and priests have established spiritual orders which they regard highly meritorious. In this respect they do not think soberly, but extravagantly. They imagine ordinary Christians to be insignificant in comparison with them. But their orders represent neither faith nor love, and are not commanded by God. They are peculiar, something devised by the monks and priests themselves. Hence there is division. Because of the different beliefs, numerous sects exist, each striving for first place. Consequently, all the orders become unprofitable in God’s sight. The love and faith and harmony which unite Christians are dissipated. 25, Paul teaches that, however varied the gifts and the outward works, none should, because of these, esteem himself good, nor regard himself better than others. Rather, every man should estimate his own goodness by his faith. Faith is something all Christians have, though not in equal measure, some possessing more and others less. However, in faith all have the same possession — Christ. The murderer upon the cross, through faith, had Christ in himself as truly as had Peter, Paul, Abraham, the mother of the Lord, and all saints; though his faith may not have been so strong. Therefore, though gifts be unequal, the precious faith is the same. Now, if we are to glory in the treasures of faith only, not in the gifts, every man should esteem another’s gifts as highly as his own, and with his own gifts serve that other who in faith possesses equal treasure with him. Then will continue loving harmony and simple faith, and none will fall back upon his own works or merits. Of this “mind,” or belief, you may read further in the preceding postils, especially in the epistle selection for the third Sunday in

Advent. Further comment on this text will be left for the next epistle lesson, the two being closely connected.

Second Sunday after Epiphany. The Gifts and Works of Christ's Members. Our Christian Duty.

Text: Romans 12:6-16.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

9 Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

13 Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

16 Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Romans 12:6-16

[1] This lesson begins in a way that would seem to call for a portion properly belonging to the epistle for the preceding Sunday and terminates short of its full connection. Evidently it was arranged by some unlearned and thoughtless individual, with a view simply to making convenient reading in the churches and not to its explanation to the people. It will be necessary to a clear comprehension, therefore, to note its real connections.

[2] In the epistle for last Sunday, the apostle teaches that as Christians we are to renew our minds by sacrificing our bodies, thus preserving the true character of faith; that we are not to regard ourselves as good or perfect without faith, if we would avoid the rise of sects and conflicting opinions among Christians; that each is to continue firm in the measure of faith God has given him, whether it be weak or strong; that he shall use his gifts to his neighbor's profit, and then they will not be regarded special favors by the less gifted, and the common faith will be generally prized as the highest and most precious treasure, the result being satisfaction for all men. Paul next adds the simile: "For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office: so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another." Then follows our selection for today, the connection being, "And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us," etc. Paul likens the various gifts to ourselves, the different members of the common body of Christ. It is an apt and beautiful simile, one he makes use of frequently; for instance, 1 Corinthians 12:12 and Ephesians 4:16. It teaches directly and clearly the equality of all Christians; that one common faith should satisfy all; that gifts are not to be regarded as making one better, happier and more righteous than another, in the eyes of God. The latter idea is certainly erroneous, and destructive of faith, which alone avails with God. We are Born Members of Christ

[3] First, if we examine this simile, we shall find that all the members perform certain functions of the body because they are members of it; and no member has its place through its own efforts or its own merits. It was born a member, before the exercise of office was possible. It acts by virtue of being a member; it does not become a member by virtue of its action. It derives existence and all its powers from the body, regardless of its own exertions. The body, however, exercises its members as occasion requires. The eye has not attained its place because of its power of seeing — not

because it has merited its office as an organ of sight for the body. In the very beginning it derived its existence and its peculiar function of sight from the body. It cannot, therefore, boast in the slightest degree that by its independent power of seeing it has deserved its place as an eye. It has the honor and right of its position solely through its birth, not because of any effort on its part.

[4] Similarly, no Christian can boast that his own efforts have made him a member of Christ, with other Christians, in the common faith. Nor can he by any work constitute himself a Christian. He performs good works by virtue of having become a Christian, in the new birth, through faith, regardless of any merit of his own. Clearly, then, good works do not make Christians, but Christians bring forth good works. The fruit does not make the tree, but the tree produces the fruit. Seeing does not make the eye, but the eye produces vision. In short, cause ever precedes effect; effect does not produce cause, but cause produces effect. How, if good works do not make a Christian, do not secure the grace of God and blot out our sins, they do not merit heaven. No one but a Christian can enjoy heaven. One cannot secure it by his works, but by being a member of Christ; an experience effected through faith in the Word of God.

[5] How, then, shall we regard those who teach us to exterminate our sins, to secure grace, to merit heaven, all by our own works; who represent their ecclesiastical orders as special highways to heaven? What is their theory? They teach, as you observe, that cause is produced by effect. Just as if mere muscular tissue that is not a tongue becomes a tongue by fluent speaking or becomes mouth and throat by virtue of much drinking; as if running makes feet; keen hearing, an ear; smelling, a nose; nourishment at the mother's breast, a child; suspension from the apple-tree, an apple. Beautiful specimens, indeed, would these be — fine tongues, throats and ears, fine children, fine apples.

[6] What sort of foolish, perverted individuals are they who so teach? Well might you exclaim: "What impossible undertakings, what useless burdens and hardships, they assume!" Yes, what but burdens do they deserve who pervert God's truth into falsehood; who change the gifts God designed for man's benefit into acts of service rendered by man to God; who, unwilling to abide in the common faith, aspire to exalted and peculiar place as priests and beings superior to other Christians? They deserve to be

overwhelmed in astonishing folly and madness, and to be burdened with useless labors and hardships in their attempts to do impossible things. They cheat the world of its blessings while they fill themselves. It is said of them (Psalm 14:4-5): “Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon Jehovah?” — that is, they live not in faith. And continuing — “There were they in great fear”; meaning that here and there they make that a matter of conscience which is not, because they cling to works and not to faith. Each Member Content with Its Own Powers

[7] In the second place, the simile teaches that each member of the body is content with the other members, and rejoices in its powers, not being solicitous as to whether any be superior to itself. For instance, the nose is inferior in office to the eye, yet in the relation they sustain to each other the former is not envious of the latter; rather, it rejoices in the superior function the eye performs. On the other hand, the eye does not despise the nose; it rejoices in all the powers of the other members. As Paul says elsewhere (1 Corinthians 12:23): “Those parts of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor.” Thus, we see that hand and eye, regardless of their superior office, labor carefully to clothe and adorn the less honorable members. They make the best use of their own distinction to remove the dishonor and shame of the inferior members.

[8] However unequal the capacities and distinction of the individual members of the body, they are equal in that they are all parts of the same body. The eye cannot claim any better right to a place in the body than the least distinguished member has. Nor can it boast greater authority over the body than any other member enjoys. And thus, it does not essay to do. It grants all members equal participation in the body. Likewise, all Christians, whether strong in faith or weak, perfect or defective, share equally in Christ and are equal in Christendom. Each may appropriate the whole Christ unto himself. I may boast as much in Christ as Peter or the mother of God may boast. Nor do I envy Peter because he is a more distinguished member of the Christian Church than I. I am glad of it. On the other hand, he does not despise me for being a less honored member. I am a part of the same body to which he belongs, and I possess Christ as well as he does.

[9] The self-righteous are unable to concede this equality. They must stir up sects and distinctions among Christians. Priests aspire to be better than

laymen; monks better than priests; virgins than wives. The diligent, in praying and fasting, would be better than the laborer; and they who lead austere lives, more righteous than they of ordinary life. This is the work of the devil, and productive of every form of evil. Opposed to it is Christ's doctrine in our text. Under such conditions as mentioned, faith and love are subverted. The unlearned are deluded and led away from faith to works and orders. Inequality is everywhere. The ecclesiasts desire to sit in high places, to receive all honor, to have their feet kissed, and will honor and respect none but themselves. Indeed, they would ultimately intercede for poor Christians, would be mediators between them and God, attaching no importance whatever to the stations in life occupied by these. They proceed as if they alone were members of Christ, and as if their relation to him could not be closer. Then they presume by their works to constitute other members of Christ, being careful, however, to demand adequate financial return for the service. They are members of the devil; not of Christ. Each Member Serves All the Others

[10] In the third place, according to the simile each member of the body conducts itself in a manner to profit the others — the whole body. The eye prepares the way for hand and foot. The foot, in its carriage of the body, safeguards the eye. Each member ever cares for and serves the others. More beautiful figures of love and good works are not to be found than those derived from the body with its members. In the members we daily bear about with us, and with which we are continually familiar, God has described the law of love in a living and forcible manner. Upon the principle there illustrated, the Christian should act, conducting himself in a way to profit not himself but others, and having a sincere interest in them. Under such conditions, schisms and sects could not spring up among us.

[11] But we are blind; we neither see nor read the beautiful lesson taught us in our own bodies. We proceed to invent good works as a means of improving our condition and bringing ourselves into a saved state. This error is attributable to our lack of faith and of heart knowledge of Christ. Hence we are restless in soul, seeking to be liberated from sin and to become righteous. The heart in its ignorance of the sufficiency of common faith, engages in these abnormal, special works. There is where foolish individuals begin to disregard faith and love, imagining such works true ways to heaven. One takes up one thing, and another something else, and so

it goes, until there is nothing but sects. One sect condemns and rejects the other. Each, exalting itself beyond measure, claims superiority. Each Member Suffers and Rejoices with All

[12] In the fourth place, “whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it,” as Paul says. 1 Corinthians 12:26. In short, no member lives and acts for itself; all obey and serve one another, and the more honored members serve most. Each seems to say: “I desire not to be otherwise than as I am. I am satisfied to be a member of the same body with the others, and to have equal rights and honors therein. It is unnecessary for me to exert myself to share in that body, for I am already a member of it, and content. My efforts I direct to serving the body — all the members, my beloved brothers and partners. I assume no peculiarities. I would not cause discord and conflict.”

[13] Observe, this is the way all true, righteous Christians do, as we have frequently said. They who conduct themselves otherwise cannot be true Christians; they are worse — more pernicious — than heathen. They cannot refrain from instigating sects; from assuming some peculiarity, some special doctrine, wherein they proudly exalt themselves above other men. Thus they lure to themselves the hearts of the unlearned. Against this class Paul here, as everywhere, faithfully warns us.

[14] See, then, that you become a member of Christ. This is to be accomplished through faith alone, regardless of works. And having become a member, if God has appointed you a duty according to your capacity, abide in it. Let no one allure you away from it. Esteem not yourself better than others, but serve them, rejoicing in their works and their offices as you do in your own, even if they are less important. Faith renders you equal with others, and others equal with you, and so on. Christian Equality and Christian Gifts Paul’s design in this epistle is to teach equality. He would have no one “think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith.” Or, to express it differently: “Let each one regard that his work for which he has a gift, and let him perform it. But he is not consequently to esteem himself superior to others differently gifted. He should delight in their works, justly recognizing those works as of God’s grace, and knowing that God distributes the measure of faith and this his

grace not in one way, but in many ways.” Paul’s peculiar choice of words here, referring to all gifts as the grace of God and the measure of faith, is meant to teach that no man may regard his individual gift as a peculiar instance in that respect, as do they who are not of the common faith. It is the one same God, Spirit and Lord, the apostle tells us (1 Corinthians 12:5-11), who effects in this work and that, whether small or great, in you or in me, in the one same faith, love and hope.

[15] The importance, the nobleness and helpfulness of this doctrine is beyond our power of expression. The wretched condition of all Christendom, divided as it is into innumerable sects, is, alas, plain testimony that no body nor member, no faith nor love, seems longer to exist anywhere. Unity of mind in relation to the various gifts of God cannot exist in connection with human doctrines. Hence it is impossible for the orders and the doctrines of our ecclesiastical lords to stand with unity of mind; one or the other must fall.

[16] “Measure of faith” may be understood as implying that God imparts to some more of faith itself; and to others, less. But I presume Paul’s thought in employing the expression is that faith brings gifts, which are its chief blessing. These are said to be according to the measure of our faith, and not to the measure of our will or our merit. We have not merited our gifts. Where faith exists, God honors it with certain gifts, apportioned, or committed, according to his will. As we have it in 1 Corinthians 12:11, “dividing to each one severally even as he will”; and in Ephesians 4:16, “to each member according to his measure.” The same reason may be assigned for Paul’s words, “Having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us,” not “differing according to our merits.” Grace as well as faith brings these noble jewels — our gifts — to each one according to his measure. It excludes in every respect our works and our merits and directs us to make our works minister only to our neighbors. “Whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith.”

[17] The apostle enumerates several gifts, or works of Christian members, mentioning prophecy first. Prophecy is of two kinds: One is the foretelling of future events, a gift or power possessed by all the prophets under the Old Testament dispensation, and by the apostles; the other is the explanation of the Scriptures. “Greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues.” 1 Corinthians 14:5. Now, the Gospel being the last

prophetic message to be delivered previous to the time of the judgment, and to predict the events of that period, I presume Paul has reference here simply to that form of prophecy he mentions in the fourteenth of 1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 14) — explanation of the Scriptures. This form is common, ever prevails, and is profitable to Christians; the other form is rare. That reference is to this form, Paul implies in his words, “Let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.” Doubtless he means the Christian faith then arising. No other faith, no other doctrine, is to be introduced. Now, when he says prophecy must be according to the proportion of faith, it is plain enough he does not refer to the foretelling of future events.

[18] The apostle’s meaning, then, is: “They who have the gift of Scripture explanation must be careful to explain in conformity with the faith, and not to teach contrary to its principles.” “Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 3:11. Let every man be careful not to build upon this foundation with wood, hay, stubble — things unsuited to such a foundation; let him build with gold, silver and precious stones. Every doctrine, every explanation of the Scriptures, then, which leads us to rely upon our own works, and produces false Christians and self-righteous individuals, in the name of faith, is emphatically condemned. Any doctrine that teaches we are to exterminate our sins, to become happy and righteous and to obtain peace of conscience before God, in any other way than through faith alone — without works — is not in harmony with the Christian faith. For instance, all monastic life, and the doctrine of ricketing spirits from purgatory, are in conflict with faith.

[19] Paul, you will observe, does not attach so much importance to the prediction of future events; for instance, the prophecies of Lichtenberger, Joachim and others in these latter times. Such predictions, though they may gratify the curiosity of men concerning the fate of kings, princes and others of prominence in the world, are unnecessary prophecies under the New Testament dispensation. They neither teach the Christian faith nor contribute to its strength. Hence this form of prophecy may be regarded as among the least of God’s gifts. More, it sometimes proceeds from the devil. But the ability to explain the Scriptures is the noblest, the best, prophetic gift. The Old Testament prophets derived their title to the name chiefly

because they prophesied concerning Christ — according to Peter (Acts 4:25 and 1 Peter 1:10) — and because they led the people of their day in the way of faith by explaining — giving the sense of — the divine Word. These things had much more to do with their title than the fact of their making occasional predictions concerning earthly kings and temporal affairs. In general, they did not make such predictions. But the First-mentioned form of prophecy they daily delivered, without omission. The faith whereto their prophecies conformed is perpetual.

[20] It is of much significance that Paul recognizes faith as the controlling judge and rule in all matters of doctrine and prophecy. To faith everything must bow. By faith must all doctrine be judged and held. You see whom Paul would constitute doctors of the holy Scriptures — men of faith and no others. These should be the judges and deciders of all doctrines. Their decision should prevail, even though it conflict with that of the Pope, of the councils, of the whole world. Faith is and must be lord and God over all teachers. Note, then, the conduct of the Church orders who failed to recognize faith's right to judge, and assumed that prerogative themselves, accepting only power, numbers and temporal rank. But you know Pope, councils and all the world, with their doctrines, must yield authority to the most insignificant Christian with faith, even though it be but a seven-year-old child, and his decision of their doctrines and laws is to be accepted. Christ commands us to take heed that we despise not one of these little ones that believe in him. See Matthew 18:6-10. Again, he says (John 6:45), "They shall all be taught of God." Now, it is inconsistent to reject the judgment of him whom God himself teaches. Rather, let all men hearken to him. "Or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry."

[21] The office of the ministry is the second gift of God the apostle enumerates. With the early Christians the duties of this office were to serve poor widows and orphans, distributing to them temporal goods. Such were the duties of Stephen and his associates (Acts 6:5), and such should be the duties of the stewards and provosts in monasteries today. Again, this was the office of those who ministered unto the prophets and apostles, the preachers and teachers: for instance, the women who followed Christ and served him with their substance; and Onesimus, Titus, Timothy and others of Paul's disciples. They made all necessary temporal provision, that the apostles and the preachers might give themselves uninterruptedly to

preaching, teaching and prayer, and might be unencumbered with temporal affairs.

[22] But things have changed, as we see. Now we have spiritual lords, princes, kings, who neglect, not alone to preach and to pray, but also to distribute temporal goods to the poor and the widow and the orphan. Rather, they pervert the rightful substance of these to add to their own pomp. They neither prophesy nor serve; yet they appropriate the position and the name of minister, their purpose being to restrain and persecute true preachers and servants, and to destroy Christianity everywhere and spend its possessions to foster their own luxury. “Or he that teacheth, to his teaching; or he that exhorteth, to his exhorting.”

[23] We treated of these two gifts in the epistle lesson for Christmas night. Titus 2. Teaching consists in instructing those unacquainted with faith and the Christian life; exhortation, in inciting, arousing, impelling, reproving and beseeching with all perseverance, those having knowledge of the faith. We are enjoined (2 Timothy 4:2) to be urgent, to “reprove, rebuke and exhort,” that Christians may not grow weary, indolent and negligent, as too often they do, knowing already what is required of them. But prophecy must furnish the store of information for the teachers and exhorters. Scripture expositors must supply these latter. Prophesying, then, is the source of all doctrine and exhortation. “He that giveth, let him do it with liberality.”

[24] The mention here made of giving has reference to the fund contributed into a common treasury, in charge of servants and officers, for distribution among teachers, prophets, widows, orphans and the poor generally, as before stated. This was according to an Old Testament command. Beside the annual tithes, designed for the Levites, special tithes were to be set aside every third year for the poor, the widows and the orphans. There is no New Testament law for specific giving, for this is the day of grace, wherein everyone is admonished to give freely. Paul says (Galatians 6:6), “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.” Again (verse 10), “Let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith.”

[25] But giving is to be done with liberality — freely and gratuitously, to the honor of God alone, with no intent to secure favor, honor or profit; none shall dictate in the matter; and preference shall not be shown in giving much to the amiable and nothing to the uncongenial, as has been the case in the past in relation to the prebends and fiefs. These were distributed according to friendship and favor; for the sake of money, honor and profit. The same is true of nearly all paid services in the matter of purgatory and hell. Freely, freely, we are to give, being careful only that it be well pleasing to God and bestowed according to necessity. Paul, you will observe, frequently commends such liberality. It is rarely manifest, however. True gifts are made beyond measure, but they are unprofitable because not made with a free, liberal spirit; for instance, contributions to monasteries and other institutions. Not being given with liberality, God does not permit these gifts to be used for Christian purposes. Given in an unchristian manner, they must, in an unchristianlike way, be wasted; as Micah says (Micah 1:7): “Of the hire of a harlot hath she gathered them, and unto the hire of a harlot shall they return.” Reference is to spiritual whoredom — unbelief — which never acts with liberality. “He that ruleth, with diligence.”

[25] “Ruling,” or overseeing, is to be understood as relating to the common offices in the Christian Church. Paul is not speaking of temporal rulers, as princes and heads of families, but of rulers in the Church. He says (Timothy 3:5): “If a man knoweth not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” He means those who have oversight of Church officers generally; who take care that teachers be diligent, that deacons and ministers make proper and careful distribution of the finances, and that sinners are reprov'd and disciplined; in short, who are responsible for the proper execution of all offices. Such are the duties of a bishop. From their office they receive the title of bishops — superintendents and “Antistrites,” as Paul here terms them; that is, overseers and rulers.

[27] It is the especial duty of these to be concerned about others, not about themselves; the latter care is forbidden rather than enjoined. Matthew 6:25. Diligence in the connection in which it is used in the text, is prompted by love and not by self-interest. It being the duty of a bishop to readily assume oversight, to minister and control, and all things being dependent upon him as the movements of team and wagon are dependent upon the driver, the bishop has no time for indolence, drowsiness and negligence. He

must be attentive and diligent, even though all others be slothful and careless. Were he inattentive and unfaithful, the official duties of all the others would likewise be badly executed. The result would be similar to that when the driver lies asleep and allows the team to move at will. Under such circumstances, to hope for good results is useless, especially considering the dangerous roads wherein Christians must travel here, among devils who would, in every twinkling of the eye, overthrow and destroy them.

[28] Why should Paul reverse the seemingly proper order? He does not mention ruling first — give it precedence. He rather assigns to prophecy the first place, making ministering, teaching, exhorting and contributing follow successively, while ruling he places last or sixth, among the common offices. Undoubtedly, the Spirit designed such order in view of future abominations that should follow the devil's establishment of tyranny and worldly dominion among Christians. This is the case at present. Dominion occupies chief place. Everything in Christendom must yield to the wantonness of tyranny. Prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, benevolence — all must give way to tyranny. Nothing may interrupt its sway; it must not yield to prophecy, teaching or any other office.

[29] We must remember, however, that nothing takes precedence of the Word of God. The preaching of it transcends all other offices. Dominion is but a servant to arouse preaching to activity, like to the servant who wakes his master from sleep, or in other ways reminds him of his office. This principle confirms Christ's words (Luke 22:26): "He that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." Teachers and prophets, however, are to be obedient to rulers and continue subject to them; each Christian work and office must subserve the others. Thus is carried out Paul's doctrine in this epistle: that one should not esteem himself better than others; should not exalt himself over men, thinking of himself more highly than he ought to think; though one gift or office is more honorable than another, yet it must also subserve that other. While the office of ruler is the lowest, yet every other appointment is subject to it; on the other hand, in care and oversight the ruler serves all others. Again, the prophet, who holds the highest office, submits to the ruler, etc. "He that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness."

[30] The six preceding obligations devolve upon the common governing powers of the Christian Church — at present known as the ecclesiastical

order. Paul now proceeds to enumerate duties pertaining to every member of the Church. The six first-mentioned obligations are not, however, to be individualized to the extent of making but a single obligation devolve upon one individual. He who prophesies may also teach, admonish, serve and rule. And the same is true of each office. Let every man discover unto how many offices he is called, and conduct himself accordingly. He must not exalt himself over others, as if better than they, and create sects from the common gifts of God; he must continue in the common faith of his fellows, allowing mutual service and subjection in the gifts.

[31] “Mercy” implies all good deeds or benefits conferred by neighbors upon one another, aside from the regular contributions of which we have spoken. The Hebrew word the apostle uses for “mercy” is “hesed.” In Latin it is *beneficium*; in Greek, “*eleemosyna*”; and in common parlance, “alms.” It is in this sense that Christ employs the term throughout the Gospel: “When thou doest alms” (Matthew 6:2) — that is, thy good deeds, or favors; “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice” (Matthew 12:27); “He that showed mercy on him” (Luke 10:37). And there are other similar passages where the word “mercy” is equivalent to “benefit” or “favor”; for instance (Matthew 5:7), “Blessed are the merciful.”

[32] Paul would say: “Let him who is himself so favored that he may confer benefits upon others, do it cheerfully and with pleasure.” He declares (Corinthians 9:7), “God loveth a cheerful giver.” And he makes his meaning clear by another portion of the same verse, “not grudgingly, or of necessity.” That is, the giver is not to twitter and tremble, not to be slow and tardy in his giving, nor to seek everywhere for reasons to withhold his gift. He is not to give in a way calculated to spoil the recipient’s enjoyment of the favor. Nor is he to delay until the gift loses its sweetness because of the importunity required to secure it; rather he should be ready and willing. Solomon says (Proverbs 3:28): “Say not unto thy neighbor, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee.” *Bis dat qui cito dat*. He gives doubly who gives quickly. Again, *Tarda gratia non est gratia*, A tardy favor is no favor. The word “*hilaris*” in this connection does not imply joyful giving, but free, cheerful, willing and loving generosity, a generosity moved by slight entreaty. The Works of Christ’s Members “Let love be without hypocrisy.”

[33] How aptly the apostle points out the danger of error in each obligation, as well as the right course! Prophecy is carried beyond its proper sphere when it does not accord with the faith. This is the danger-point in all prophecy. The common error in ministering lies in the indolence manifested therein, and the constant preference for some other occupation. Again, the prevailing error in teaching and exhorting is in giving attention to something besides those obligations; for instance, deceiving men with human nonsense. The mistake in giving is that it is seldom done with liberality. Rulers are prone to seek quiet and leisure, desiring to escape being burdened with care and anxiety. Favors are seldom bestowed cheerfully and with a willing heart. So, too, pure love is a rare thing on earth. Not that love in itself is impure, but too often it is mere pretense. John implies as much in his words (1 John 3:18), "My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth."

[34] Now, they who harbor hatred while pretending to love, or are guilty of similar gross hypocrisies, fall far short of the spirit of this teaching. But Paul refers to those of liberated conscience, who conduct themselves like true Christians, well knowing how to teach concerning Christ; but who are careless of their works, not realizing that they neglect their neighbors and fail to assist the needy and to rebuke the wicked; who are generally negligent, bringing forth none of the fruits of faith; among whom the true Word of God is choked, like seed among thorns, as Christ says. Matthew 13:22. But we have elsewhere explained the nature of pure love. "Abhor that which is evil."

[35] While to abhor evil is one of the chief principles of love, it is rare. The principle is too often lost sight of through hypocrisy and false love. We ignore, wink at, even make light of and are undisturbed by the evil deeds of our neighbor. We are unwilling to incur his displeasure by manifesting indignation and offering rebuke for his wickedness, or by withdrawing from his society. Especially do we hesitate when we thus must endanger body or life; for instance, when the vices of those in high life demand our censure. By such weakness on our part we merely dissimulate love. Paul requires, not only a secret abhorrence of evil, but an open manifestation of it in word and deed. True love is not influenced by the closeness of the friend, by the advantage of his favors, or by the standing of his connections; nor is it influenced by the perverseness of an enemy. It abhors evil, and censures it

or flees from it, whether in father or mother, brother or sister, or in any other. Corrupt nature loves itself and does not abhor its own evil; rather, it covers and adorns it. Anger is styled zeal; avarice is called prudence; and deception, wisdom. “Cleave to that which is good.”

[36] The second feature of real, true love is that it cleaves to the good, even though found in the worst enemy, and though directly opposing love’s desire. Love is no respecter of persons. It is not intimidated by the possible danger its expression might incur. But false love will dare, even for the sake of honor, profit or advantage, to forsake the good in its friend, particularly when danger threatens or persecution arises. Much less, then, will he whose love is false cleave to the good in an enemy and stand by and maintain it. And if it necessitated opposing his own interests, he would not support his enemy’s deed, however good. Briefly, the proverb, “The world is false and full of infidelity,” and that other saying, “Fair but empty words,” clearly express the fact that the love of our corrupt human nature is false and hypocritical, and that where the Spirit of God dwells not, there is no real, pure love. These two principles — abhorring the evil and cleaving to the good — are clearly presented in Psalm 15:4: “In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honoreth them that fear Jehovah” — in other words, “Who cleaves to the good, even though it be in an enemy; and hates the evil, even though in a friend.” Try men by these two principles in their lending, their dealing and giving, reproving and teaching, tolerating and suffering, and their dissimulation and hypocrisy will be readily apparent. “In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another.”

[37] Christians exhibit perfect love when, in addition to the love they manifest toward all men, they are themselves united by a peculiar bond of Christian affection. The term “tenderly affectioned” expresses the love parents have for children, and brothers for each other. Paul would say: “Christians are not simply to manifest a spirit of mutual love, but they are to conduct themselves toward one another in a tender, parental and brotherly way.” Thus Paul boasts of doing in the case of the people of Thessalonica. 1 Thessalonians 1:11. Isaiah declares (Isaiah 66:13) that God will so comfort the apostles: “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.” And Peter says (1 Peter 3:8): “Loving as brethren, tenderhearted, humble-minded.” The nature of the brotherly love we owe our neighbors is illustrated in the love of an affectionate mother for her child. Such love

Christ has shown, and still shows, toward us. He sustains us, frail, corrupt, sinful beings that we are. So imperfect are we, we seem not Christians at all. But the love of Christ makes us his, regardless of our imperfections. “In honor preferring one another.”

[38] Christ’s love and friendship for ourselves should lead us to esteem one another precious. We should be dear to one another for the sake of the Christ within us. We may not reject any because of his imperfections. We must remember the Lord dwells in the weak vessel also, and honors him with his presence. If Christ regards him worthy of kindness and affection, and extends to him the same privilege in himself that we enjoy, we should bow before that weak one, honoring him as the living temple of our Lord, the seat of his presence. What matters to us the insignificance of the seat the Lord chooses? If it is not too humble to be honored with his presence, why should we his servants not honor it? “In diligence not slothful.”

[39] “Diligence” here implies every form of righteous work and business that occupies us. Paul requires us to be diligent, skillful and active. We are not to proceed as do they who undertake one thing today, and tomorrow another, confining themselves to nothing and soon growing weary and indolent. For instance, some readily and very zealously engage in a good work, such as praying, reading, fasting, giving, serving, disciplining the body. But after two or three attempts they become indolent and fail to accomplish the undertaking. Their ardor subsides with the gratification of their curiosity. Such people become unstable and weak. So, Paul enjoins to be “Fervent in spirit.”

[40] A weak and somewhat curious disposition may undertake with fervor, being ready to accomplish everything at once; but in the very start it becomes faint and weak, and voluntarily yields. It becomes silent when opposition, disaffection and persecution must be encountered. The fervor that does not persevere in spiritual matters is carnal. Spiritual fervor increases with undertaking and effort. It is the nature of spirit not to know weariness, Spirit grows faint and weary only by idleness. Laboring, it increases in strength. Particularly does it gain in fervor through persecution and opposition. So it perseveres, and accomplishes its projects, even though the gates of hell oppose. “Serving the Lord.” (Adapt yourselves to the time.)

[41] Some renderings read, “Serve the Lord,” for in the Greek “Kairos” and “Kyrios” sound much alike. One means “Time,” the other “Lord.” I am undecided which is preferable. “Serve the time” — “adapt yourselves to the time” — would be apt. And “Serve the Lord” would not be a bad construction. Let each choose for himself. To serve the Lord means to let all our acts be done as unto the Lord himself, in the effort to serve him, not seeking our own honor, and not neglecting our duty for fear of men or because of their favors; it means to follow the spirit of Nehemiah’s declaration when the temple was being built (Nehemiah 2:20) — We are servants of the God of Heaven. Such was the reply of the Jews to those who attempted to hinder them. Practically, the Jews said: “We do not serve ourselves. Our service is not designed for our own honor, but for the honor of the God of Heaven.” I shall, however, adhere to the rendering, “Adapt yourselves to the time.” It is equivalent to saying: Direct yourselves according to the time. That is, employ it well; be seasonable, in keeping with Solomon’s words (Ecclesiastes 3:3-4): “A time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh,” etc. There is a time for everything. The thought is, Exercise your privileges, confining yourself to no particular time; be able to do the duty that presents itself, as Psalm 1:3 suggests: “He shall be like a tree that bringeth forth its fruit in its season.”

[42] This valuable and excellent doctrine, militates against the self-righteous, who confine themselves to set times, to the extent of making the time conform to them and adapt itself to their convenience. They observe particular hours for praying, for eating, for drinking. Should you, in dire need of aid, approach one of them, you might perish before he would disengage himself to assist you. Note, the self-righteous man does not adapt himself to the time — does not rise to the occasion as he should. The opportunity to perform a work of love, he permits to pass. The time must be suited to him — which will never be. No opportunity to do good ever presents itself to this class, for they are so absorbed in themselves as to permit every such occasion to pass. Nor are they seasonable in things concerning themselves. They laugh when they should weep; they are gloomy when they should rejoice; they flatter when censure is due. All their efforts are untimely. It is their fortune to miss every opportunity in consequence of confining their endeavors to certain times. This is the way of the world. “Rejoicing in hope.”

[43] Here is an occasion, truly, when we should be timely. The ungodly rejoice when satiate with wealth, honor and ease, but are filled with gloom at a change in the weather. Their joy is untimely as well as their grief. They rejoice when they should grieve, and grieve when they should rejoice. But Christians are capable of rejoicing, not in ease and temporal advantage, but in God. They rejoice most when their worldly condition is worst. The farther earthly advantages are removed, the nearer is God with his eternal blessings. Paul enumerates joy among the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22); the flesh knows not such pleasure. In Romans 14:17, he speaks of “joy in the Holy Spirit.” “Patient in tribulation.”

[44] Throughout the Gospel we are taught that Christians must endure crosses and evil days. Hence the Gospel arms us with divine armor, and that alone. That is, it teaches us, not how to avert temporal ills and to enjoy peace, but how to endure and conquer these ills. We are not to oppose and try to avert them, but patiently to endure them until they wear themselves out upon us, and lose their power; as ocean waves, dashing against the shore, recede and vanish of their own accord. Not yielding, but perseverance, shall win here. But of this topic we have treated during the Advent season. “Continuing steadfastly in prayer.”

[45] Prayer has been sufficiently defined in the third epistle for Advent. Paul does not allude to babbling out of prayer-books, nor to bawling in the Church. You will never offer true prayer from a book. To be sure, you may, by reading a prayer, learn how and what to pray, and have your devotion enkindled; but real prayer must proceed spontaneously from the heart, not in prescribed words; the language must be dictated by the fervor of the soul. Paul particularly specifies that we are to be “steadfast in prayer.” In other words, we should not become remiss, even though we do not immediately receive what we ask. The chief thing in prayer is faith. Faith relies on God’s promise to hear its petition. It may not receive at once what it is confident of receiving; but it waits, and though for a time there may be indications of failure, yet the petition is granted. Christ gives striking illustrations of such perseverance in the parable of the wicked judge (Luke 18), and in that of the friend’s importunity (Luke 11). He everywhere teaches the necessity of faith in prayer. “Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive,” Matthew 21:22. And again, “Or what man is there of you, who, if

his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone?” Matthew 7:9. “Communicating to the necessities of the saints.”

[46] The meaning of this injunction is shamefully perverted. In our necessities we daily seek the assistance of saints. Hence the numerous institutions, altars and services to these, everywhere in the world. Paul’s teaching, however, is that we are to “communicate to the necessity of the saints.” Since we ignore the sanctified ones of this life who need our assistance, we are well rewarded by having to go to the dead to solicit aid in our necessities. Paul means the saints on earth — the Christians. He calls them saints out of respect to the Word of God and his grace, which, in faith, renders them holy without works.

[47] It would be a great shame, a blasphemy, for a Christian to deny that he is holy. It would be equivalent to denying the holiness of the blood of Christ, of the Word, the Spirit, the grace of God, and of God himself. And all these God has applied to or conferred upon the Christian to render him holy. Paul does not hesitate to call himself a saint (Ephesians 3:8): “Unto me who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given.” And (1 Timothy 5:10) he would relieve widows who washed the feet of the saints. It is also said in Psalm 86:2, “Preserve my soul; for I am godly [holy].” Peter, too (1 Peter 1:16), quoting from Moses, speaks God’s message, “Ye shall be holy; for I am holy.” The word “holy” in the Scriptures has reference only to the living. But we have had books other than the Scriptures to read. Consequently, we have been led by our seducers into the humiliating wickedness of calling holy only the dead, and regarding it the highest presumption to apply the term to ourselves. At the same time, we are all desirous of being called “Christians,” a sublimer title than “holy”; for Christ is perfect holiness, and Christians are named after Christ — after perfect holiness. The shameful abomination known as “the exaltation of saints” is responsible for the deplorable error here. The Pope’s influence has created the belief that only they are holy who are dead, or whose works have exalted them to the honor of the title. But how often is the devil exalted as a saint, and how often we regard them saints who are of hell!

[48] Paul’s design in mentioning “the necessities of the saints” is to teach and move us to do as much for Christians as we are inclined to do for the saints of heaven; to regard such ministration as precious service, for so it is. He commends to us the real saints — those in want; who are of saintly

character, though they may be forsaken, hungry, naked, imprisoned, halfdead, regarded by the world as ungodly evil-doers deserving of every form of misfortune; who, unable to help themselves, need assistance. They differ much from those saints whose help we, staring heavenward, implore. It is the poor Christians whom Christ will array on the last day, saying, “Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me.” Matthew 25:40. Then they who so ostentatiously served the blessed of heaven must stand shamed and afraid in the presence of those whom in this life they scorned to respect as they should. Nor will the saints whom they bound themselves to serve, and whom they worshipped, avail them anything. “Given to hospitality.”

[49] Now, Paul specifies concerning the “necessities of the saints” and names the treatment to be accorded them. Not only in word are we to remember them, but in deed, extending hospitality as their necessities demand. “Hospitality” stands for every form of physical aid when occasion calls for it — feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked. In the early days of the Gospel, the apostles and disciples did not sit in palaces, cloisters, institutions, and torture the people with edicts and commands as do the idolatrous bishops today. Pilgrim-like, they went about the country, having no house nor home, no kitchen nor cellar, no particular abiding-place. It was necessary that everywhere hospitality be extended the saints, and service rendered them, that the Gospel might be preached. This was as essential as giving assistance in their distresses and sufferings. “Bless them that persecute you.”

[50] Incidental to the subject of the saints’ necessities, the apostle reminds us we are to conduct ourselves in a Christian manner toward our persecutors, who, to great extent, are to blame for the distresses of the saints. It is well to observe here that we are not merely advised, but commanded, to love our enemies, to do them good and to speak well of them; such conduct is the fruit of the Spirit. We must not believe what we have heretofore been taught — that the admonition comes only to the perfect, and that they are merely counseled to bless their persecutors. Christ teaches (Matthew 5:44) that all Christians are commanded so to do. And to “bless” our persecutors means to desire for them only good in body and soul. For instance, if an enemy detracts from our honor, we should respond, “God honor you and keep you from disgrace.” Or if one infringe upon our

rights, we ought to say, “May God bless and prosper you.” On this wise should we do. “Bless, and curse not.”

[51] This is to be our attitude toward mankind generally, whether persecutors or otherwise. The meaning is: “Not only bless your persecutors, but live without curses for any, with blessings for all; wishing no one evil, but everyone only good.” For we are children of blessing; as Peter says: “Hereunto were ye called, that ye should inherit a blessing.” 1 Peter 3:9. In our blessing, all the world is blessed — through Christ. “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Genesis 22:18. It is inconsistent for a Christian to curse even his most bitter enemy and an evil-doer; for he is commanded to bear upon his lips the Gospel. The dove did not bring to Noah in the ark a poisonous branch or a thistle sprig; she brought an olive-leaf in her mouth. Genesis 8:11. The Gospel likewise is simply a gracious, blessed, glad and healing word. It brings only blessing and grace to the whole world. No curse, but pure blessing, goes with the Gospel. The Christian’s lips, then, must be lips of blessing, not of cursing. If they curse, they are not the lips of a Christian.

[52] It is necessary, however, to distinguish between cursing and censuring or reproof. Reproof and punishment greatly differ from cursing and malediction. To curse means to invoke evil, while censuring carries the thought of displeasure at existing evil, and an effort to remove it. In fact, cursing and censuring are opposed. Cursing invokes evil and misfortune; censure aims to remove them. Christ himself censured, or reproofed. He called the Jews a generation of vipers, children of the devil, hypocrites, blind dolts, liars, and so on. He did not curse them to perpetuate their evils; rather he desired the evils removed. Paul does similarly. He says of the sorcerer that he is a child of the devil and full of subtilty. Acts 13:10. Again, the Spirit reproofs the world of sin. John 16:8.

[53] But the strong argument is here urged that the saints of the Scriptures not only censured but cursed. Jacob, the patriarch, cursed his sons Reuben, Simeon and Levi. Genesis 49:7. A great part of the Law of Moses is made up of curses, especially Deuteronomy 28:15. Open cursing is commanded to be pronounced by the people, on Mount Ebal. Deuteronomy 27:13. How much cursing we find in the Psalms, particularly Psalm 109. Again, how David cursed Joab, captain of his host! 2 Samuel 3:29. How bitterly Peter curses Simon (Acts 8:20): “Thy silver perish with

thee.” Paul curses the seducers of the Galatians (Galatians 5:12), “I would they were even cut off.” And he says (Corinthians 16:22), “If any man loveth not the Lord, let him be anathema.” Christ cursed the innocent fig-tree. Matthew 21:19. And Elisha cursed the children of Bethel. 2 Kings 2:24. What shall we say to these things?

[54] I answer: We must distinguish between love and faith. Love must not curse; it must always bless. But faith has power to curse. Faith makes us children of God, and is to us in God’s place. Love makes us servants of men, and occupies the place of a servant. Without the Spirit’s direction, no one can rightly understand and imitate such examples of cursing. Cursing stands opposed to blessing — the curses of God to the curses of the devil. When the devil, through his followers, resists, destroys, obstructs, the Word of God — the channel of the blessing — the blessing is impeded, and in God’s sight a curse rests upon the blessing. Then it is the office of faith to come out with a curse, desiring the removal of the obstruction that God’s blessing may be unhindered.

[55] Were one, with imprecation, to invoke God to root out and destroy popery — the order of priests, monks and nuns, together with the cloisters and other institutions, the whole world might well say, Amen. For these the devil’s devices curse, condemn and impede everywhere God’s Word and his blessing. These things are evils so pernicious, so diabolical, they do not merit our love. The more we serve the ecclesiasts and the more we yield to them, the more obdurate they become. They rant and rage against the Word of God and the Spirit, against faith and love. Such conduct Christ calls blasphemy — sin — against the Holy Spirit — un-pardonable sin. Matthew. 12:31. And John says (1 John 5:16), “There is a sin unto death; not concerning this do I say that he should make request.” With the ecclesiasts all is lost. They will not accept any love or assistance which does not leave them in their wickedness, does not strengthen and help — even honor and exalt — them in it. Any effort you may make otherwise will but cause them to rage against the Holy Spirit, to blaspheme and curse your teaching, declaring: “It proceeds not from love and fidelity to God, but from the hate, the malice, of the devil. It is not the Word of God, but falsehood. It is the devil’s heresy and error.”

[56] In fact, cursing which contributes only to the service of God is a work of the Holy Spirit. It is enjoined in the first commandment and is

independent of and superior to love. Until God commands us to do a certain good work or obligation so to do. His will transcends all the good works to manifest our love toward our neighbor, we are under no we can do, all the love we can show our neighbor. Even if I could save the entire world in a single day and it were not God's will I should, I would have no right to do it. Therefore, I should not bless, should not perform a good work, should not manifest my love to any, unless it be consistent with the will and command of God. The measure of our love to our neighbors is the Word of God. Likewise, by the first commandment all other commandments are to be measured. We might, in direct violation of the commandments of the second table, were it consistent with God's will and promotive of his honor, obey the first commandment in killing, robbing, taking captive women and children and disobeying father and mother, as did the children of Israel in the case of their heathen enemies. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is able to, and does at times, perform works seemingly opposed to all the commandments of God. While apparently there is violation in some respects, it is in reality only of the commandments of the second table, concerning our neighbor. The Spirit's works are in conformity with the first three commandments of the first table, relating to God. Therefore, if you first become a Peter, a Paul, a Jacob, a David, an Elisha, you too may curse in God's name, and with exalted merit in his sight. "Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep."

[57] There may be a direct connection between these two commands and the injunction about "communicating to the necessities of the saints" upon which Paul has been expatiating, teaching how we are to treat our persecutors, who are largely to blame for the "necessities" of Christians. Yet I am inclined to think he speaks here in an unrelated way, of our duty to make ourselves agreeable to all men, to adapt ourselves to their circumstances, whether good or ill, whether or no they are in want. As common servants, we should minister to mankind in their every condition, that we may persuade them to accept the Gospel. Paul speaks further on this point.

[58] Now, if a fellow man has reason to rejoice, it is not for us to put on a stern countenance, as do the hypocrites, who assume to be somewhat peculiar. Their unnatural seriousness is meant to be indicative of their unrivaled wisdom and holiness, and of the fact that men who rejoice instead

of wearing, as they do, a stern look, are fools and sinners. But no, we are to participate in the joy of our fellow man when that joy is not inconsistent with the will of God. For instance, we should rejoice with the father who joys in the piety and sweetness of his wife, in her health and fruitfulness, and in the obedience and intelligence of his children; and when he is as well off as we are so far as soul, body and character, family and property, are concerned. These are gifts of God. According to Paul (Acts 14:17), they are given that God may fill our hearts “with food and gladness.” Though many such gifts and pleasures are improperly used, they are nevertheless the gifts of God and not to be rejected with a gloomy face as if we dare not, or should not, enjoy them. On the other hand, we ought to weep with our fellow man when he is in sad circumstances, as we would weep over our own unhappy condition. We read (2 Samuel 1:17; Samuel 3:33) that David lamented for Saul, Jonathan and Abner, and (Philippians 2:27) that Paul was filled with sorrow over the illness of Epaphroditus and grieved as if the affliction were his own. “Be of the same mind one toward another.”

[59] The apostle has previously (verse 10) spoken concerning unity of mind in relation to God-ordained spiritual gifts, counseling that everyone should be content as to the offices and gifts of his fellows. Now Paul speaks of the temporal affairs of men, teaching likewise mutual appreciation of one another’s calling and character, offices and works, and that none is to esteem himself better than another because of these. The shoemaker’s apprentice has the same Christ with the prince or the king; the woman, the same Christ the man has. While there are various occupations and external distinctions among men, there is but one faith and one Spirit.

[60] But this doctrine of Paul has long been dishonored. Princes, lords, nobles, the rich and the powerful, reflect themselves in themselves, thinking they are the only men on earth. Even among their own ranks, one aspires to be more exalted, more noble and upright, than another. Their notions and opinions are almost as diverse as the clouds of heaven. They are not of the same mind concerning external distinctions. One does not esteem another’s condition and occupation as significant and as honorable as his own. The individual sentiment apparently is: “My station is the best; all others are revolting.” The clumsy, booted peasant enters the strife. The baker aspires to be better than the barber; the shoemaker, than the bath-keeper. Should one happen to be illegitimately born, he is not eligible to a trade, though he

even be holy. Certificates of legitimate birth must be produced, and such is the complex state of society, there are as many beliefs as masters and servants. How can there be unity of mind concerning spiritual offices and blessings with people so at variance upon trivial, contemptible worldly matters? True, there must be the various earthly stations, characters and employments; but it is heathenish, unchristian and worldly for one to entertain the absurd idea that God regards a certain individual a better Christian than another upon the contemptible grounds of his temporal station, and not to perceive that in God's sight these conditions make no inner difference.

[61] Indeed, it is not only unchristian, but effeminate and childish, to hold such a view. A woman will win distinction for herself by handling the spindle or the needle more deftly than another, or by adjusting her bonnet more becomingly than her neighbor can; in fact, she may secure prominence by things even more insignificant. To say the least, no woman thinks herself less a woman than any other. The same is true of children; each is best satisfied with its own bread and butter and thinks its own toy the prettiest; if it And so it is with the world: one has more power, another does not, it will cry until it gets its prettiest. is a better Christian, another is more illustrious; one has more learning, another is more respectable; one is of this lineage, another that. These distinctions are the source of hatred, murder and every form of evil, so tenaciously does each individual adhere to his own notions. Yet, despite their separate and dissimilar opinions, men call themselves Christians. "Set not your mind on high things."

[62] Here Paul makes clear the preceding injunction. He would restrain men from their unholy conceits. As before stated, every man is best pleased with his own ideas. Hence foolishness pervades the land. One, seeing another honored above himself, is restlessly ambitious to emulate that other. But he acts contrary to both teachings of Paul: Comparing himself to his inferiors or to his equals, he thinks he is far above them, and his own station most honorable. Comparing himself with his superiors, he sees his pretended rank fail; hence he strives to rival them, devoting all his energies to attain the enviable position. Clinging to external distinctions, his changing notions and unstable heart impel him to such ambition and render him dissatisfied with the Christ whom all men possess alike. But what does Paul teach? Not so. He says, "Set not your mind on what the world values."

His meaning is: “Distinctions truly must there be in this life — one thing high, another low. Everything cannot be gold, nor can all things be straw. Nevertheless, among men there should be unity of mind in this relation.” God treats men alike. He gives his Word and his Spirit to the lowly as well as to the high. Paul does not use the little word “mind” undesignedly. “High things” have their place and they are not pernicious. But to “mind” them, to be absorbed in them with the whole heart, to be puffed up with conceit because of our relation to them, enjoying them to the disadvantage of the less favored — this is heathenish. “But condescend to things that are lowly.”

[63] In other words: Despise not lowly stations and characters. Say not, they must either be exalted or removed. God uses them; indeed, the world cannot dispense with them. Where would the wealthy and powerful be if there were no poor and humble? As the feet support the body, so the low support the high. The higher class, then, should conduct themselves toward the lowly as the body holds itself with relation to the feet; not “minding,” or regarding, their lofty station, but conforming to and recognizing with favor the station of the lowly. Legal equality is here made a figure of spiritual things — concerning the aspirations of the heart. Christ conducted himself with humility. He did not deny his own exaltation, but neither was he haughty toward us by reason of it. He did not despise us, but stooped to our wretched condition and raised us by means of his own exalted position.

Third Sunday after Epiphany. Christian Revenge.

Text: Romans 12:16-21.

16 Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:16-21

[This and the last sermon are one in some editions. Hence the paragraphs are numbered as one sermon. “Be not wise in your own conceits.”]

[64] The lesson as read in the Church ends here. We shall, therefore, notice but briefly the remaining portion. “Conceits,” as here used, signifies the obstinate attitude with regard to temporal things which is maintained by that individual who is unwilling to be instructed, who himself knows best in all things, who yields to no one and calls good whatever harmonizes with his ideas. The Christian should be more willing to make concession in temporal affairs. Let him not be contentious, but rather yielding, since the Word of God and faith are not involved, it being only a question of personal honor, of friends and of worldly things. “Render to no man evil for evil.”

[65] In the counsel above (verse 14) to “curse not,” the writer of the epistle has in mind those unable to avenge themselves, or to return evil for evil. These have no alternative but to curse, to invoke evil upon their oppressors. In this instance, however, the reference is to those who have equal power to render one another evil for evil, malice for malice, whether by acts committed or omitted — and usually they are omitted. But the Christian should render good for evil and omit not. God suffers his sun to shine upon the evil and upon the good. Matthew 5:45. “Take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men.”

[65] This injunction is similar to that he gives the Thessalonians (Thessalonians 5:22), “Abstain from all appearance of evil”; and the Philippians (Philippians 4:8): “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” The

reference is purely to our outward conduct. Paul would not have the Christian think himself at liberty to do his own pleasure, regardless of others' approbation. Only in the things of faith is such the Christian's privilege. His outward conduct should be irreproachable, acceptable to all men; in keeping with the teaching of 1 Corinthians 10:32-33, to please all men, giving offense neither to Jews nor to Gentiles; and obedient to Peter's advice (1 Peter 2:12), "Having your behavior seemly among the Gentiles." "If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men."

[67] Outward peace among men is here intended — peace with Christians and heathen, with the godly and the wicked, the high and the low. We must give no occasion for strife; rather, we are to endure every ill patiently, never permitting peace to be disturbed on our account. We must not return evil for evil, blow for blow; for he who so does, gives rise to contention. Paul adds, "As much as in you lieth." We are to avoid injuring any, lest we be the ones to occasion contention. We must extend friendliness to all men, even though they be not friendly to us. It is impossible to maintain peace at all times. The saying is, "I can continue in peace only so long as my neighbor is willing." But it lies in our power to leave others at peace, friends and foes, and to endure the contentions of all. "Oh yes," you say, "but where would we be then?" Listen: "Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto the wrath of God: for it is written, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord."

[68] Note, in forbidding us to return blow for blow and to resort to vengeance, the apostle implies that our enjoyment of peace depends on our quiet endurance of others' disturbance. He not only gives us assurance that we shall be avenged, but he intimidates us from usurping the office of God, to whom alone belong vengeance and retribution. Indeed, he rather deplors the fate of the Christian's enemies, who expose themselves to God's wrath; he would move us to pity them in view of the fact that we must give place to wrath and permit them to fall into the hands of God. The vengeance and wrath of God are dispensed in various ways: through the instrumentality of political government; at the hands of the devil; by illness, hunger and pestilence; by fire and water; by war, enmity, disgrace; and by every possible kind of misfortune on earth. Every creature may serve as the rod and the weapon of God when he designs chastisement. As said in Wisdom

of Solomon, Song of Solomon 5:17: “He shall . . . make the creature his weapon for the revenge of his enemies.”

[69] So Paul says, “Give place unto wrath.” I have inserted the words “of God” to make clearer the meaning of the text; the wrath of God is intended, and not the wrath of man. The thought is not of giving place to the anger of our enemies. True, there may be occasion even for that, but Paul has not reference here to man’s anger. Evidently, he means misfortunes and plagues, which are regarded as expressions of God’s wrath. Possibly the apostle omitted the phrase to avoid giving the idea that only the final wrath of God is meant — his anger at the last day, when he will inflict punishment without instrumentality. Paul would include here all wrath, whether temporal or eternal, to which God gives expression in his chastisements. This is an Old Testament way of speaking. Phinehas says (Josiah 22:18), “Tomorrow he will be wroth with... Israel.” And Moses in several places speaks of God’s anger being kindled. See Numbers 11:1, Numbers 10:33. I mention these things by way of teaching that when the political government wields the sword of punishment against its enemies, it should be regarded as an expression of God’s wrath; and that the statement in Deuteronomy 32:35, “Vengeance is mine,” does not refer solely to punishment inflicted of God direct, without instrumentality.

“But if thine enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him to drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.”

[70] This teaching endorses what I have already stated — that the Christian’s enemies are to be pitied in that they are subjected to the wrath of God. Consequently, it is not Christian-like to injure them; rather, we should extend favors. Paul here introduces a quotation from Solomon. Proverbs 25:21-22. Heaping coals of fire on the head, to my thought, implies conferring favors upon the enemy. Being enkindled by our kindness, he ultimately becomes displeased with himself and more kindly disposed to us. Coals here are benefits, or favors. Coals in the censer likewise stand for the favors, or blessings, of God; they are a type of our prayers, which should rise with fervor. Some say that coals represent the Law and judgments of God (see Psalm 18:8, “Coals were kindled by it”), reasoning that in consequence of the Christian’s favors, his enemy is constrained to censure himself and to feel the weight of God’s Law and his judgments. I do not think a Christian should desire punishment to fall upon his enemy, though

such explanation of the sentence is not inapt. In fact, it rather accords with the injunction, “Give place unto wrath”; that is, do good and then wrath — the coals — will readily fall upon the enemy. “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

[71] With this concluding counsel, it strikes me, Paul himself explains the phrase “coals of fire” in harmony with the first idea — that the malice of an enemy is to be overcome with good. Overcoming by force is equivalent to lending yourself to evil and wronging the enemy who wrongs you. By such a course your enemy overcomes you and you are made evil like himself. But if you overcome him with good, he will be made righteous like you. A spiritual overcoming is here meant; the disposition, the heart, the soul — yes, the devil who instigates the evil — are overcome.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany. Christian Love and the Command To Love.

Text: Romans 13:8-10.

8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

9 For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Romans 13:8-10

[1] This, like the two preceding epistle lessons, is admonitory, and directs our attention to the fruits of faith. Here, however, Paul sums up briefly all the fruits of faith, in love. In the verses going before he enjoined subjection to temporal government — the rendering of tribute, custom, fear and honor wherever due — since all governmental power is ordained of God. Then follows our lesson: “Owe no man anything,” etc.

[2] I shall ignore the various explanations usually invented for this command, “Owe no man anything, but to love one another.” To me, clearly and simply it means: Not as men, but as Christians, are we under obligations. Our indebtedness should be the free obligation of love. It should not be compulsory and law-prescribed. Paul holds up two forms of obligation: one is inspired by law, the other by love. Legal obligations make us debtors to men; an instance is when one individual has a claim upon another for debt. The duties and tribute, the obedience and honor, we owe to political government are of this legal character. Though personally these things are not essential to the Christian — they do not justify him nor make him more righteous — yet, because he must live here on earth, he is under obligation, so far as outward conduct is concerned, to put himself on a level with other men in these things, and generally to help maintain temporal order and peace. Christ paid tribute money as a debt (Matthew 17:27), notwithstanding he had told Peter he was under no obligation to do so and would have committed no sin before God in omitting the act.

[3] Another obligation is love, when a Christian voluntarily makes himself a servant of all men. Paul says (1 Corinthians 9:19), “For though I was free from all men, I brought myself under bondage to all.” This is not a requirement of human laws; no one who fails in this duty is censured or punished for neglect of legal obligations. The world is not aware of the commandment to love; of the obligation to submit to and serve a fellow man. This fact is very apparent. Let one have wealth, and so long as he refrains from disgracing his neighbor’s wife, from appropriating his neighbor’s goods, sullyng his honor or injuring his person, he is, in the eyes of the law, righteous. No law punishes him for avarice and penuriousness; for refusing to lend, to give, to aid, and to help his wronged neighbor secure justice. Laws made for restraint of the outward man are directed only toward evil works, which they prohibit and punish. Good works are left to voluntary performance. Civil law does not extort them by

threats and punishment, but commends and rewards them, as does the Law of Moses.

[4] Paul would teach Christians to so conduct themselves toward men and civil authority as to give no occasion for complaint or censure because of unfulfilled indebtedness to temporal law. He would not have them fail to satisfy the claims of legal obligation, but rather to go beyond its requirements, making themselves debtors voluntarily and serving those who have no claims on them. Relative to this topic, Paul says (Romans 1:14), "I am debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians." Love's obligation enables a man to do more than is actually required of him. Hence the Christian always willingly renders to the state and to the individual all service exacted by temporal regulations, permitting no claims upon himself in this respect.

[5] Paul's injunction, then, might be expressed: Owe all men, that you may owe none; owe everything, that you may owe nothing. This sounds paradoxical. But one indebtedness is that of love, an obligation to God. The other is indebtedness to temporal law, an obligation in the eyes of the world. He who makes himself a servant, who takes upon himself love's obligation to all men, goes so far that no one dares complain of omission; indeed, he goes farther than any could desire. Thus he is made free. He lives under obligation to no one from the very fact that he puts himself under obligation to all. This manner of presenting the thought would be sustained by the Spirit in connection with other duties; for instance: Do no good work, that you may do only good works. Never be pious and holy, if you would be always pious and holy. As Paul says (Romans 12:16), "Be not wise in your own conceits"; or (1 Corinthians 3:18), "If any man thinketh that he is wise among you in this world, let him become a fool, that he may become wise." It is in this sense we say: Owe all men that you may owe no man; or, "Owe no man anything, but to love one another."

[6] Such counsel is given with the thought of the two obligations. He who would perform works truly good in the sight of God, must guard against works seemingly brilliant in the eyes of the world, works whereby men presume to become righteous. He who desires to be righteous and holy must guard against the holiness attained by works without faith. Again, the seeker for wisdom must reject the wisdom of men, of nature, wisdom independent of the Spirit. Similarly, he who would be under obligation to

none must obligate himself to all in every respect. So doing, he retains no claim of his own. Consequently, he soon rises superior to all law, for law binds only those who have claims of their own. Rightly is it said, “Qui cedit omnibus bonis, omnibus satisfecit,” “He who surrenders all his property, satisfies all men.” How can one be under obligation when he does not, and cannot, possess anything? It is love’s way to give all. The best way, then, to be under obligation to none is, through love to obligate one’s self in every respect to all men. In this sense it may be said: If you would live, die; if you would not be imprisoned, incarcerate yourself; if you do not desire to go to hell, descend there; if you object to being a sinner, be a sinner; if you would escape the cross, take it upon yourself; if you would conquer the devil, let him vanquish you; would you overcome a wicked individual, permit him to overcome you. The meaning of it all is, we should readily submit to God, to the devil and to men, and willingly permit their pleasure; we are to insist on nothing, but to accept all things as they transpire. This is why Paul speaks as he does, “Owe no man anything,” etc., instead of letting it go at the preceding injunction in verse 5, “Render therefore to all their dues, etc. Love Fulfills the Law “For he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law.”

[7] Having frequently spoken of the character and fruits of love, it is unnecessary to introduce the subject here. The topic is sufficiently treated in the epistle lesson for the Sunday preceding Lent. We will look at the command to love, in the Law of God. Innumerable, endless, are the books and doctrines produced for the direction of man’s conduct. And there is still no limit to the making of books and laws. Note the ecclesiastical and civil regulations, the spiritual orders and stations. These laws and doctrines might be tolerated, might be received with more favor, if they were founded upon and administered according to the one great law — the one rule or measure — of love; as the Scriptures do, which present many different laws, but all born of love, and comprehended in and subject to it. And these laws must yield, must become invalid, when they conflict with love. Of love’s higher authority we find many illustrations in the Scriptures. Christ makes particular mention of the matter in Matthew 12:3-4, where David and his companions ate the holy showbread. Though a certain law prohibited all but the priests from partaking of this holy food, Love was empress here, and free. Love was over the Law, subjecting it to herself. The Law had to yield for the time being, had to become invalid, when David

suffered hunger. The Law had to submit to the sentence: “David hungers and must be relieved, for Love commands, Do good to your needy neighbor. Yield, therefore, thou Law. Prevent not the accomplishment of this good. Rather accomplish it thyself. Serve him in his need. Interpose not thy prohibitions.” In connection with this same incident, Christ teaches that we are to do good to our neighbor on the Sabbath; to minister as necessity demands, whatever the Sabbath restrictions of the Law. For when a brother’s need calls, Love is authority and the Law of the Sabbath is void.

[8] Were laws conceived and administered in love, the number of laws would matter little. Though one might not hear or learn all of them, he would learn from the one or two he had knowledge of, the principle of love taught in all. And though he were to know all laws, he might not discover the principle of love any more readily than he would in one. Paul teaches this method of understanding and mastering law when he says: “Owe no man anything, but to love one another”; “He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law”; “If there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”; “Love worketh no ill to his neighbor”; “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” Every word in this epistle lesson proves Love mistress of all law.

[9] Further, no greater calamity, wrong and wretchedness is possible on earth than the teaching and enforcing of laws without love. In such case, laws are but a ruinous curse, making true the proverbs, *summum jus, summa injustitia*, “The most strenuous right is the most strenuous wrong”; and again, Solomon’s words (Ecclesiastes 7:17), *Noli nimium esse justus*, “Be not righteous overmuch.” Here is where we leave unperceived the beam in our own eye and proceed to remove the mote from our neighbor’s eye. Laws without love make the conscience timid and fill it with unreasonable terror and despair, to the great injury of body and soul. Thus, much trouble and labor are incurred all to no purpose.

[10] An illustration in point is the before-mentioned incident of David in his hunger. 1 Samuel 21:6. Had the priest been disposed to refuse David the holy bread, had he blindly insisted on honoring the prohibitions of the Law and failed to perceive the authority of Love, had he denied this food to him who hungered, what would have been the result? So far as the priest’s assistance went, David would have had to perish with hunger, and the priest would have been guilty of murder for the sake of the Law. Here, indeed,

“summum jus, summa injustitia” — the most strenuous right would have been the most strenuous wrong. Moreover, on examining the heart of the priest who should be so foolish, you would find there the extreme abomination of making sin where there is no sin, and a matter of conscience where there is no occasion for it. For he holds it a sin to eat the bread, when really it is an act of love and righteousness. Then, too, he regards his act of murder — permitting David to die of hunger — not a sin, but a good work and service to God.

[11] But who can fully portray this blind, perverted, abominable folly? It is the perpetration of an evil the devil himself cannot outdo. For it makes sin where there is no sin, and a matter of conscience without occasion. It robs of grace, salvation, virtue, and God with all his blessings, and that without reason, falsely and deceitfully. It emphatically denies and condemns God. Again, it makes murder and injustice a good work, a divine service. It puts the devil with his falsehoods in the place of God. It institutes the worst form of idolatry and ruins body and soul, destroying the former by hunger and the latter by a terrified conscience. It makes of God the devil, and of the devil God. It makes hell of heaven and heaven of hell; righteousness of sin, and sin of righteousness. This I call perversion — where strictest justice is the most strenuous wrong. To this depravity Ezekiel has reference (Ezekiel 13:18-19): “Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Woe to the women that sew pillows upon all elbows and make kerchiefs for the head of persons of every stature to hunt souls! Will ye hunt the souls of my people, and save souls alive for yourselves? And ye have profaned me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that hearken unto lies.” What is meant but that the blind teachers of the Law terrify the conscience, and put sin and death in the place of grace and life, and grace and life where is only sin and death; and all for a handful of barley and a bit of bread? In other words, such teachers devote themselves to laws concerning strictly external matters, things that perish with the using, such as a drink of water and a morsel of bread, wholly neglecting love and harassing the conscience with fear of sin unto eternal death; as Ezekiel goes on to say (verses 22-23): “Because with lies ye have grieved the heart of the righteous, whom I have not made sad, and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, and be saved alive; therefore ye shall no more see false

visions, nor divine divinations: and I will deliver my people out of your hand; and ye shall know that I am Jehovah.”

[12] Mark you, it is making the hearts of the righteous sad to load them with sins when their works are good; it is strengthening the hands of the wicked to make their works good when they are naught but sin. Relative to this subject, we read (Psalm 14:5): “There were they in great fear; for God is in the generation of the righteous.” That is, the sting of conscience fills with fear where there is neither reason for fear nor for a disturbed conscience. That is feared as sin which is really noble service to God. The thought of the last passage is: When they should call upon God and serve him, they fear such conduct is sin and not divine service; again, when they have need to fear a service not divine, they are secure and unafraid. Isaiah’s words (Isaiah 29:13) are to the same effect: “Their fear of me is a commandment of men which hath been taught them.” Always the perverted people spoken of corrupt everything. They confidently call on God where is only the devil; they refrain in fear from calling on God where God is.

[13] Such, mark you, is the wretched condition of them who are blindly occupied with laws and works and fail to comprehend the design of law and its mistress Love. Note, also, in the case of our miserable ecclesiasts and their followers, how rigidly they adhere to their own inventions! Though all the world meet ruin, their devices must be sustained; they must be perpetuated regardless of bodily illness and death, or of suffering and ruin for the soul. They even regard such destruction and ruin as divine service and know no fear nor remorse of conscience. Indeed, so strongly entrenched are they in their wickedness, they will never return from it. Moreover, should one of their wretched number be permitted to alleviate the distress of his body and soul — to eat meat, to marry — he is afraid, he feels remorse of conscience; he is uncertain about sin and law, about death and hell; he calls not on God, nor serves him; all this, even though the body should die ten deaths and the soul go to the devil a hundred times.

[14] Observe, then, the state of the world; how little flesh and blood can accomplish even in their best efforts; how dangerous to undertake to rule by law alone — indeed, how impossible it is, without great danger, to govern and instruct souls with mere laws, ignoring love and the Spirit, in whose hands is the full power of all law. It is written (Deuteronomy 33:2), “At his right hand was a fiery law for them.” This is the law of love in the Spirit. It

shall regulate all laws at the left hand; that is, the external laws of the world. It is said (Exodus 28:30) that the priest must bear upon his breast, in the breastplate, “the Urim and the Thummim”; that is, Light and Perfection, indicative of the priest’s office to illuminate the Law — to give its true sense — and faultlessly to keep and to teach it.

[15] In the conception, the establishment and the observance of all laws, the object should be, not the furtherance of the laws in themselves, not the advancement of works, but the exercise of love. That is the true purpose of law, according to Paul here, “He that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law.” Therefore, when the law contributes to the injury rather than the benefit of our neighbor, it should be ignored. The same law may at one time benefit our neighbor and at another time injure him. Consequently, it should be regulated according to its advantage to him. Law should be made to serve in the same way that food and raiment and other necessities of life serve. We consider not the food and raiment themselves, but their benefit to our needy neighbor. And we cease to dispense them as soon as we perceive they no longer add to his comfort.

[16] Suppose you were to come across an individual foolish enough to act with no other thought than that food and clothing are truly good things, and so proceed to stuff a needy one with unlimited food and drink unto choking, and to clothe him unto suffocation, and then not to desist. Suppose to the command, “Stop, you have suffocated, have already overfed and over-clothed him, and all is lost effort now,” the foolish one should reply: “You heretic, would you forbid good works? Food, drink and raiment are good things; therefore we must not cease to dispense them; we cannot do too much.” And suppose he continued to force food and clothing on the man. Tell me, what would you think of such a one? He is a fool more than foolish; he is more mad than madness itself. But such is about the character of our ecclesiasts today, and of those who are so blind in the exercise of law as to act as if works were the only requisite, and to suffocate body and soul, being ignorant that the one purpose of law is to call forth the exercise of love. They make works superior to love, and a maid to her matron. Such perversion prevails to an extent distressing to think of, not to mention hearing and seeing it, or more, practicing and permitting it ourselves.

[17] The commandment of love is not a long one; it is short. It is one injunction, not many. It is even not a commandment, and at the same time is

all commandments. Brief, and a unit in itself, its meaning is easily comprehended. But in its exercise, it is far-reaching, for it includes and regulates all commandments. So far as works are enjoined, it is no commandment at all; it names no peculiar work. Yet it represents all commandments, because properly the fulfillment of all commandments is the fulfillment of this. The commandment of love suspends every commandment, yet it perpetuates all. Its whole purpose is that we may recognize no commandment, no work, except as love dictates.

[18] As life on earth apart from works is an impossibility, necessarily there must be various commandments involving works. Yet Love is supreme over these requirements, dictating the omission or the performance of works according to its own best interests, and permitting no works opposed to itself. To illustrate: A driver, holding the reins, guides team and wagon at will. If he were content merely to hold the reins, regardless of whether or no the team followed the road, the entire equipage — team, wagon, reins and driver — would soon be wrecked; the driver would be lying drowned in a ditch or a pool, or have his neck broken going over stumps and rocks. But if he dexterously regulates the movement of the outfit according to the road, observing where it is safe and where unsafe, he will proceed securely because wisely. Were he, in his egotism, to drive straight ahead, endeavoring to make the road conform to the movement of the wagon, at his pleasure, he would soon see how beautifully his plan would work.

[19] So it is when men are governed by laws and works, the laws not being regulated according to the people. The case is that of the driver who would regulate the road by the movements of the wagon. True, the road is often well suited to the straight course of the wagon. But just as truly the road is, in certain places, crooked and uneven, and then the wagon must conform to the course and condition of the road. Men must adapt themselves to laws and regulations wherever possible and where the laws are beneficial. But where laws prove detrimental to men's interests, the former must yield. The ruler must wisely make allowance for love, suspending works and laws. Hence, philosophers say prudence — or circumspection or discretion as the ecclesiasts put it — is the guide and regulator of all virtues.

[20] We read in a book of the ancient fathers that on a certain occasion of their assembling, the question was raised, which is really the noblest work? Various replies were given. One said prayer, another fasting; but St. Anthony was of the opinion that of all works and virtues, discretion is the best and surest way to heaven. These, however, were but childish, unspiritual ideas relating to their own chosen works. A Christian views the matter in quite a different light, and more judiciously. He concludes that neither discretion nor rashness avails before God. Only faith and love serve with him. But love is true discretion; love is the driver and the true discretion in righteous works. It always looks to the good of the neighbor, to the amelioration of his condition; just as the discretion of the world looks to the general welfare of the governed in the adjustment of political laws. Let this suffice on this point.

[21] But the question arises: How can love fulfill the Law when love is but one of the fruits of faith and we have frequently said that only faith in Christ removes our sins, justifies us and satisfies all the demands of the Law? How can we make the two claims harmonize? Christ says, too (Matthew 7:12): "All things, therefore, whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets." Thus, he shows that love for one's neighbor fulfils both the Law and the prophets. Again, he says (Matthew 22:37-40): "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God... thy neighbor as thyself. On these two the whole law hangeth, and the prophets." Where, then, does Paul stand, who says (Romans 3:31): "Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law." Again (Romans 3:28): "We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." And again (Romans 1:17), "The righteous shall live by faith."

[22] I reply: As we have frequently said, we must properly distinguish between faith and love. Faith deals with the heart, and love with the works. Faith removes our sins, renders us acceptable, justifies us. And being accepted and justified as to our person, love is given us in the Holy Spirit and we delight in doing good. Now, it is the nature of the Law to attack our person and demand good works; and it will not cease to demand until it gains its point. We cannot do good works without the Spirit and love. The Law constrains us to know ourselves with our imperfections, and to recognize the necessity of our becoming altogether different individuals that

we may satisfy the Law. The Law does not exact so much of the heart as of works; in fact, it demands nothing but works and ignores the heart. It leaves the individual to discover, from the works required, that he must become an altogether different person. But faith, when it comes, creates a nature capable of accomplishing the works the Law demands. Thus is the Law fulfilled. So Paul's sayings on the subject are beautiful and appropriate. The Law demands of us works; it must be fulfilled by works. Hence it cannot in every sense be said that faith fulfils the Law. However, it prepares the way and enables us to fulfill it, for the Law demands, not us, but our works. The Law constrains us — teaches us that we must be changed before we can accomplish its works; it makes us conscious of our inability as we are. On the other hand, love and works do not change us, do not justify us. We must be changed in person and justified before we can love and do good works. Our love and our works are evidence of justification and of a change, since they are impossible until the individual is free from sin and made righteous.

[23] This explanation is given to enable us to perceive the true nature of the Law, of faith and of love; to ascribe to each its own mission; and rightly to understand the Scripture declarations in their harmonious relations that while faith justifies, it does not fulfill the Law, and that while love does not justify, it does fulfill the Law. The Law requires love and works but does not mention the heart. The heart is sensible of the Law, but love is not. Just as the Law, in requiring works before faith exists, is a sign to the individual leading him to recognize his utter lack of faith and righteousness, and to conclude he is conquered, so love in its fulfillment of the Law after faith intervenes is a sign and a proof to the individual of his faith and righteousness. Law and love, then, witness to him concerning his unrighteousness or his righteousness. After faith comes, love is evidence of righteousness. Before faith, man is sensible of the Law's oppression because he knows he does not possess what the Law requires. And the Law does not require a changed heart but works. Love and works do not affect the fulfillment of the Law; they are themselves its fulfillment.

[24] Now, though faith does not fulfill the Law, it contains that which effects its fulfillment; it secures the Spirit and love whereby the end is accomplished. On the other hand, if love does not justify us, it makes manifest the faith whereby we are justified. Briefly, as Paul says here, "Love is the fulfillment of the law." His thought is: Fulfilment of the Law is

one thing, and effecting or furnishing its fulfillment another. Love fulfils the Law in the sense that love itself is its fulfillment; but faith fulfils it in the sense that it offers that by which it is fulfilled. For faith loves and works, as said in Galatians 5:6, “Faith worketh through love.” The water fills the pitcher; so does the cupbearer. The water fills of itself; the cupbearer fills with the water — effective et formaliter implere, as the sophists would say.

[25] Faith is ever the actor, and love the act. The law requires the act and thus forces the actor to be changed. The Law is then fulfilled by the act, which, however, the actor must perform. Thus Paul rejects the fancies of the sophists, who in the matter of love would make a distinction between the external work and the inner affection, saying: “Love is an inner affection that loves our neighbor when in our heart we wish him well.” Its expression in works, however, they call the fruit of love. But we will not discuss this idea. Note, Paul terms love not only an affection, but an affectionate good act. Faith and the heart are the actor and fulfiller of the Law. Paul says, “He that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law.” And love is the act, the fulfilling; for he says, “Love is the fulfillment of the law.”

[26] Another question arises: How can love for our neighbor be the fulfillment of the Law when we are required to love God supremely, even above our neighbor? I reply: Christ answers the question when he tells us (Matthew 22:39) the second commandment is like unto the first. He makes love to God and love to our neighbor the same love. The reason for this is, first: God, having no need for our works and benefactions for himself, bids us to do for our neighbor what we would do for God. He asks for himself only our faith and our recognition of him as God. The object of proclaiming his honor and rendering him praise and thanks here on earth is that our neighbor may be converted and brought into fellowship with God. Such service is called the love of God, and is performed out of love to God; but it is exercised for the benefit of our neighbor only.

[27] The second reason why God makes love to our neighbor an obligation equal to love to himself is: God has made worldly wisdom foolish, desiring henceforth to be loved amid crosses and afflictions. Paul says (Corinthians 1:21), “Seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God’s good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe.” Therefore, upon the cross he submitted himself unto death and misery, and imposed the same

submission upon all his disciples. They who refused to love him before when he bestowed upon them food and drink, blessing and honor, must now love him in hunger and sorrow, in adversity and disgrace. All works of love, then, must be directed to our wretched, needy neighbors. In these lowly ones we are to find and love God, in them we are to serve and honor him, and only so can we do it. The commandment to love God is wholly merged in that to love our neighbors.

[28] These facts restrain those elusive, soaring spirits that seek after God only in great and glorious undertakings. It stops the mouths of those who strive after greatness like his, who would force themselves into heaven, presuming to serve and love him with their brilliant works. But they miss him by passing over him in their earthly neighbor, in whom God would be loved and honored. Therefore, they will hear, on the last day, the sentence (Matthew 25:42), “I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat,” etc. For Christ laid aside his divinity and took upon himself the form of a servant for the very purpose of bringing down and centering upon our neighbor the love we extend to himself. Yet we leave the Lord to lie here in his humiliation while we gaze open-mouthed into heaven and make great pretensions to love and service to God. All Commandments Summed Up in Love “For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

[29] Love being the chief element of all law, it comprehends, as has been made sufficiently clear, all commandments. It's one concern is to be useful to man and not harmful; therefore, it readily discovers the way. Recognizing the fact that man, from his ardent self-love, seeks to promote his own interests and avoid injuring them, love endeavors to adopt the same course toward others. We will consider the commandment just cited, noticing how ingeniously and wisely it is arranged. It brings out four thoughts. First, it states who is under obligation to love: thou — the nearest, noblest, best individual we can command. No one can fulfill the Law of God for another; each must do it for himself. As Paul says (Galatians 6:5), “Each man shall bear his own burden.” And (Corinthians 5:10): “For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good

or bad.” So it is said, “Thou, thou thyself, must love;” not, “Let someone else love for you.” Though one can and should pray that God may be gracious to another and help him, yet no one will be saved unless he himself fulfils God’s command. It is not enough merely to pray that another may escape punishment, as the venders of indulgences teach; much rather, we should pray that he become righteous and observe God’s precepts.

[30] Second, the commandment names the most noble virtue — love. It does not say, “Thou shalt feed thy neighbor, give him drink, clothe him,” all of which things are inestimably good works; it says, “Thou shalt love him.” Love is the chief virtue, the fountain of all virtues. Love gives food and drink; it clothes, comforts, persuades, relieves and rescues. What shall we say of it, for behold he who loves gives himself, body and soul, property and honor, all his powers inner and external, for his needy neighbor’s benefit, whether it be friend or enemy; he withholds nothing wherewith he may serve another. There is no virtue like love; there can be no special work assigned it as in the case of limited virtues, such as chastity, mercy, patience, meekness, and the like. Love does all things. It will suffer in life and in death, in every condition, and that even for its enemies. Well may Paul here say that all other commandments are briefly comprehended in the injunction, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

[31] Third, the commandment names, as the sphere of our love, the noblest field, the dearest friend — our neighbor. It does not say, “Thou shalt love the rich, the mighty, the learned, the saint.” No, the unrestrained love designated in this most perfect commandment does not apportion itself among the few. With it is no respect of persons. It is the nature of false, carnal, worldly love to respect the individual, and to love only so long as it hopes to derive profit. When such hope ceases, that love also ceases. The commandment of our text, however, requires of us free, spontaneous love to all men, whoever they may be, and whether friend or foe, a love that seeks not profit, and administers only what is beneficial. Such love is most active and powerful in serving the poor, the needy, the sick, the wicked, the simple-minded and the hostile; among these it is always and under all circumstances necessary to suffer and endure, to serve and do good.

[32] Note here, this commandment makes us all equal before God, without regard to distinctions incident to our stations in life, to our persons, offices and occupations. Since the commandment is to all — to every

human being — a sovereign, if he be a human being, must confess the poorest beggar, the most wretched leper, his neighbor and his equal in the sight of God. He is under obligation, according to this commandment, not to extend a measure of help, but to serve that neighbor with all he has and all he controls. If he loves him as God here commands him to do, he must give the beggar preference over his crown and all his realm; and if the beggar's necessity requires, must give his life. He is under obligation to love his neighbor and must admit that such a one is his neighbor.

[33] Is not this a superior, a noble, commandment, which completely levels the most unequal individuals? Is it not wonderfully comforting to the beggar to have servants and lovers of such honor? wonderful that his poverty commands the services of a king in his opulence? that to his sores and wounds are subject the crown of wealth and the sweet savor of royal splendor? But how strange it would seem to us to behold kings and queens, princes and princesses, serving beggars and lepers, as we read St. Elizabeth did! Even this, however, would be a slight thing in comparison with what Christ has done. No one can ever equal him in the obedience wherewith he has exalted this commandment. He is a king whose honor transcends that of all other kings; indeed, he is the Son of God. And yet he puts himself on a level with the worst sinners and serves them even to dying for them. Were ten kings of earth to serve to the utmost one beggar, it would be a remarkable thing; but of what significance would it be in comparison with the service Christ has rendered? The kings would be put to utter shame and would have to acknowledge their service unworthy of notice.

[34] Learn, then, the condition of the world — how far it is, not only from Christ's immeasurable example, but from the commandment in this verse. Where are to be found any who comprehend the meaning of the little phrase "thy neighbor," notwithstanding there is, beside this commandment, the natural law of service written in the hearts of all men? Not an individual is there who does not realize, and who is not forced to confess, the justice and truth of the natural law outlined in the command (Matthew 7:12), "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them." The light of this law shines in the inborn reason of all men. Did they but regard it, what need have they of books, teachers or laws? They carry with them in the depths of their hearts a living book, fitted to teach them fully what to do and what to omit, what to accept and what to

reject, and what decision to make. Now, the command to love our neighbors as ourselves is equivalent to that other, “Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you,” etc. Every individual desires to be loved and not hated; and he also feels and sees his obligation to exercise the same disposition toward others. The carrying out of this obligation is loving another as himself. But evil lust and sinful love obscure the light of natural law, and blind man, until he fails to perceive the guide-book in his heart and to follow the clear command of reason. Hence, he must be restrained and repelled by external laws and material books, with the sword and by force. He must be reminded of his natural light and have his own heart revealed to him. Yet admonition does not avail; he does not see the light. Evil lust and sinful love blind him. With the sword and with political laws he must still be outwardly restrained from perpetrating actual crimes.

[35] The fourth thing the commandment presents is the standard by which we are to measure our love — an excellent model. Those are particularly worthy instructions and commandments which present examples. This commandment holds up a truly living example — “thyself.” It is a better model than any example the saints have set. The saints are dead, and their deeds are past, but this example ever lives. Everyone must admit a consciousness of his own love for himself; of his ardent concern for his temporal life; of his careful nourishment of his body with food, raiment and all good things; of his fleeing from death and avoiding evil. This is selflove; something we are conscious of in ourselves. What, then, is the teaching of the commandment? To do to another as you do to yourself; to value his body and his life equally with your own body and life. Now, how could God have pointed you to an example dearer, more pleasing and more to the purpose than this example — the deep instinct of your nature? Indeed, your depth of character is measured by the writing of this command in your heart.

[36] How will you fare with God if you do not love your neighbor? Feeling this commandment written within your heart, your conscience will condemn you. Your whole conduct will be an example witnessing against you, testifying to your failure to do unto others as the natural instinct of your being, more forcibly than all the examples of the saints, has taught you to do. But how will it go with the ecclesiasts in particular — the churchmen with their singing and praying, their cowls and bald pates, and all their

jugglery? I make no comment on the fact that they have never observed the commandment. I ask, however, when has their monastic fanaticism permitted them time and opportunity to perceive for once this law in their hearts, to become sensible of the example set them in their own human instinct, or even to read the precept in books or hear it preached? Poor, miserable people! Do you presume to think that God will make void this, love's commandment, so deeply and clearly impressed upon the heart, so beautifully and unmistakably illustrated in your own natures, and in the many written and spoken words as well — think you God will do this on account of your cowls and bald pates, and regard what you have been devising and performing?

[37] Alas, how shamelessly the world has ignored this beautiful and impressive commandment wherein are so skillfully presented the individual, the task, the model and the sphere of labor! And, on the other hand, how shamefully it occupies itself with the very reverse of what is taught in this commandment! Its whole practice and tendency seem to be to place our responsibility upon others; monks and priests must be righteous for us and pray in our stead, that we may personally be excused. For the noblest virtue, love, we substitute self-devised works; in the place of our neighbors we put wood and stone, raiment and food, even dead souls — the saints of heaven. These we serve; with them we are occupied; they are the sphere wherein we exercise ourselves. Instead of the noblest example — “as thyself” — we look to the legends and the works of saints. We presume to imitate such outward examples, omitting the duty which our own nature and life present and which the command of God outlines, notwithstanding such duty offers more than we could ever fulfill. Even if we could accomplish all it offers, we would still not equal Christ.

Love Works Only Good to its Neighbor

“Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.”

[38] The Ten Commandments forbid doing evil to our neighbor — “Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery,” etc. The apostle, employing similar phraseology, says that love observes all these commands, injuring none. Not only that; it effects good for all. It is practically doing

evil to permit our neighbor to remain in peril when we can relieve him, even though we may not have been instrumental in placing him where he is. If he is hungry and we do not feed him when it is in our power to do so, we practically permit him to die of hunger. We should take this view concerning any perilous condition, any adverse circumstance, with our neighbors. How love is the fulfillment of the Law, we have now heard.

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany. The Glorious Adornment of Christians.

Text: Colossians 3:12-17

12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. Colossians 3:12-17

[1] This text is also a letter of admonition, teaching what manner of fruit properly results from faith. Paul deals kindly with the Colossians. He does not command, urge nor threaten, as teachers of the Law must do in the case of those under the Law. He persuades them with loving words in view of the blessing and grace of God received, and in the light of Christ's own example. Christians should act with readiness and cheerfulness, being moved neither by fear of punishment nor by desire for reward, as frequently before stated. This admonition has been so oft repeated in the preceding

epistle lesson that we know, I trust, what constitutes a Christian. Therefore we will but briefly touch on the subject. "Put on, therefore."

[2] In the epistle for New Year's day we have sufficiently explained the meaning of "putting on"; how by faith we put on Christ, and he us; how in love we put on our neighbor, and our neighbor us. The Christian apparel is of two kinds — faith and love. Christ wore two manner of garments — one whole and typical of faith, the other divided and typical of love. Paul here has reference to the latter garment, love. He would teach us Christians the manner of ornaments and apparel we are to wear in the world; not silk or precious gold. To women these are forbidden of Peter (1 Peter 3:3), and of Paul (1 Timothy 2:9). Love for our neighbor is a garment well befitting us — that love which leads us to concern ourselves about the neighbor and his misfortunes. Such love is called the ornament of a Christian character — an ornament in the eyes of men.

[3] Observe the tender and sacred style of the apostle's admonition, a style he is wont to use toward us. He does not drive us with laws, but persuades by reminding us of the ineffable grace of God; for he terms us the "elect of God," and "holy" and "beloved." He would call forth the fruits of faith, desiring them to be yielded in a willing, cheerful and happy spirit. The individual who sincerely believes and trusts that before God he is beloved, holy and elect, will consider how to sustain his honors and titles, how to conduct himself worthily of them; more, he will love God with a fervor enabling him to do or omit, or to suffer, all things cheerfully, and will never know how to do enough. But he who doubts such attitude of God toward himself will not recognize the force of these words. He will not feel the power of the statement that we are holy, beloved, elect, in the sight of God.

[4] Let us disregard, therefore, the saints who elect and love themselves; who adorn themselves with the works of the Law; who observe fasts and discipline; who regard raiment and position, for they are unwilling to be sinners before God. Our ornaments are unlike these, and not associated with such mockeries. They are honesty, sincerity, good works, service to our neighbor. We are unfettered by laws regarding food, raiment, times, etc. We are holy in the sight of God, before whom none can be holy until he sees himself a sinner and rejects his own righteousness. But the class mentioned are holy in their own estimation; therefore, they ever remain wicked —

sinners in the sight of God. We are beloved of God because we despise ourselves, we judge and condemn ourselves and reject our selflove. The others, because they love and esteem themselves, are despicable and unacceptable in the sight of God. Again, we are chosen of God for the reason that we despise ourselves as filth. Such God chooses, and has chosen from eternity. Because the would-be saints elect themselves, God will reject them, as indeed he has from eternity. Now, this is what Paul means by these words, “A heart of compassion.”

[5] They stand for a part of the ornament, the beautiful, charming Christian jewel, that becomes us better in the sight of God than pearls, precious stones, silk and gold become us in the eyes of the world. “A heart of compassion” is evidence of the true Christian. Paul would say: “Not simply in external deed, or in appearance, are ye to be merciful, but in the inmost heart.” He refers to that sincere and whole-souled mercy characteristic of the father and mother who witness the distress of a child for whom they would readily expose their lives or sacrifice all they possess. The Christian’s mind and heart should be constantly devoted to merciful deeds, with an ardor so intense as to make him unaware he is doing good and compassionate acts.

[6] With this single phrase Paul condemns the works and arbitrary rules of hypocritical saints, whose severity will not permit them to associate with sinners. Their rigorous laws must be all-controlling. They do nothing but compel and drive. They exhibit no mercy, but perpetual reproach, censure, condemnation, blame and bluster. They can endure no imperfection. But among Christians many are sinners, many infirm. In fact, Christians associate only with these; not with saints. Christians reject none but bear with all. Indeed, they are as sincerely interested in sinners as they would be for themselves were they the infirm. They pray for the sinners, teach, admonish, persuade, do all in their power to reclaim. Such is the true character of a Christian. So, God, in Christ, has dealt with us and ever deals. So Christ dealt with the adulteress (John 8:11) when he released her from her tormentors, and with his gracious words influenced her to repentance and suffered her to depart. We read of St. Antony having said that Paphrutius knew how souls are to be saved, because he rescued a certain individual from brethren who persecuted and oppressed him for his transgression. See “Lives of the Fathers.” Were God to deal with us

according to the rigor of his laws, we should all be lost. But he mercifully suspends the Law. Isaiah says 9:4: “For the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, thou hast broken.” God now only persuades.

[7] Note how involved in the Law and in hypocrisy they still are who esteem themselves prominent saints and at the same time are intolerant of the infirmities of Christians. If they fail to find perfect holiness — a miracle of purity — in those who possess Christ and know the Gospel, then nothing is as it should be; the heavens are on the point of falling and the earth about to be destroyed. They can only judge, censure and deride, saying: “Oh, yes, he is truly evangelical; indeed, he is a visionary!” Thus, they indicate their utter blindness. With the beam constantly in their own eyes, they show how little they know of Christ. Know, then, when you meet one so ready to censure and condemn, one requiring absolute perfection in Christians — know that such a one is merely an enforcer of the Law, a base hypocrite, a merciless jailer, with no true knowledge of Christ. As, with Christians, there is no law, but all is love, so neither can there be judgment, condemnation and censure. And he who calls another a visionary is certainly a visionary ten-fold himself. In the thing for which he judges and condemns another, he condemns himself. Since he ignores mercy and all but the Law, he finds no mercy in the sight of God; in fact, he has never experienced, never tasted, God’s mercy. To his taste, both God and neighbor are bitter as gall and wormwood.

[8] But tender mercy is to be shown only to Christians and only among Christians. With the rejecters and persecutors of the Gospel we must deal differently. It is not right that my charity be liberal enough to tolerate unsound doctrine. In the case of false faith and doctrine there is neither love nor patience. Against these it is my duty earnestly to contend and not to yield a hair’s breadth. Otherwise — when faith is not imperiled — I must be unfailingly kind and merciful to all notwithstanding the infirmities of their lives. I may not censure, oppress nor drive; I must persuade, entreat and tolerate. A defective life does not destroy Christianity; it exercises it. But defective doctrine — false belief — destroys all good. So, then, toleration and mercy are not permissible in the case of unsound doctrine; only anger, opposition and death are in order, yet always in accordance with the Word of God.

[9] On the other hand, they who are mercifully tolerated must not imagine that because they escape censure and force, their beliefs and practices are right. They must not construe such mercy as encouragement to become indolent and negligent, and to continue in their error. Mercy is not extended them with any such design. The object is to give them opportunity to recover zeal and strength. But if they be disposed to remain as they are, very well; let them alone. They will not long continue thus; the devil will lead them farther astray, until finally they will completely apostatize, even becoming enemies to the Gospel. Such will be their end if they permit mercy to be lavished upon them in vain. We may not be indolent and asleep in the matter of our false doctrines, relying upon the fact that we are not despised nor constrained of men. There is particular need to be active and diligent, for the devil neither sleeps nor rests. We need beware that he does not lead us where we will never enjoy God's mercy. "Kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering."

[10] These words represent the other elements of Christian character. Kindness you will find defined in the second epistle lesson for the early Christmas service. It characterizes the conduct of the individual who is gentle and sympathetic to all; who repels none with forbidding countenance, harsh words or rude deportment. We Germans would call such a one affable and friendly disposed. Kindness is a virtue not confined to certain works; it modifies the whole life. The kindly person is obliging to everyone, not displeased with any, and is attractive to all men. In contrast are those peculiar characters who have pleasure in nothing but their own conceits; who insist on others accommodating themselves to them and their ways, while they yield to none. Such individuals are termed "uncivil."

[11] But the liberality of kindness is not to be extended to false doctrine. Only relative to conduct and works is it to be exercised. As oft before stated, love with all its works and fruits has no place in the matter of unsound doctrine. I must love my neighbor and show him kindness whatever the imperfections of his life. But if he refuses to believe or to teach sound doctrine, I cannot, I dare not, love him or show him kindness. According to Paul (Galatians 1:8-9), I must hold him excommunicated and accursed, even though he be an angel from heaven. Thus remarkably do faith and love differ and are distinct. Love will be, must be, kind even to the bitterest enemy so long as he assails not faith and doctrine. But it will not, it

cannot, tolerate the individual who does, be it father, mother or dearest friend. Deuteronomy 13:6-8. Love, then, must be exercised, not in relation to the doctrine and faith of our neighbor, but relative to his life and works. Faith, on the contrary, has to do, not with his works and life, but with his doctrine and belief.

[12] I think we must know by this time the meaning of “lowliness” of mind — esteeming oneself least and others greater. As, Christ illustrates it, occupying the lowest seat at the wedding, and this cheerfully. We are to serve even when our service is not desired, and to minister unto our enemies. So Christ humbled himself before Judas the betrayer, and before all of us. He came, not to be served, but to serve. That humbleness of mind is a rare virtue is not to be wondered at, for every Christian grace is a rarity. Particularly are graces lacking with those who, professing to know most of Christ, find something to censure in all Christians. Christianity Paul calls a mystery of God; and it is likely to continue so.

[13] “Meekness” is opposed to anger. The meek man is not easily excited to exhibit anger, to curse, smite, hate, or wish evil to any, even an enemy. To refrain thus is an art. Hypocrites — in fact, all the world — can be meek toward friends and those who treat them well. But true meekness and humility will remain only among the elect and beloved saints of God, as Paul here implies. Even among these are many deficient in all, or at least a large part, of the Christian graces. Hypocrites may thus find something to censure, something whereat to be offended, in the beloved, elect saints of God. And the true saints have occasion to exercise mercy, humility, meekness and forbearance. They whom Paul here terms elect and beloved saints of God, though slightly deficient in humility, meekness and forbearance, are not therefore unholy, not rejected and despised.

[14] Paul makes a distinction between longsuffering and forbearance, as in Romans 2:4: “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?” In “longsuffering” we have the thought here and there expressed by God in the Psalms and elsewhere by the Hebrew *arich apaim* — “slow to wrath.” God patiently bears with evil. Indeed, he repeatedly delays vengeance, apparently more ready to forgive than to punish, even under extreme provocation and having just reason to chastise. Longsuffering extends farther than patience. Patience bears evil and injustice; but longsuffering delays punishment. It does not design to punish;

it would not take hasty revenge. Unlike the revengeful, it wishes no one evil. Many we see, indeed, who suffer much and are patient but at the same time trust in a final avenging. The longsuffering Christian, however, is opposed to revenge, desiring the sinner to amend his ways. "Forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye."

[15] In this verse all law is abolished among Christians. One is not permitted to demand, through process of law, the recovery of his property. He must forgive and yield. Christ's example enjoins this principle; he has forgiven us. And what is the extent of his forgiveness? He pardons past sins, but that is not all; as John says (1 John 2:1-2), "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteousness and he is the propitiation for our sins."

[16] Note, it is the true Christian saints whom Paul describes, but he looks upon them as infirm to the extent of offending and complaining against one another. This is a state of affairs by no means becoming Christians and saints. So I say Christ's kingdom is a mystery obscure beyond the power of our preaching and teaching sufficiently to explain. Unbelievers cannot be induced to work, but believers cannot be withheld from working. Some would not believe and some would not love. It is true of Christ's kingdom that his Christians are not perfectly holy. They have begun to be holy and are in a state of progression. There are still to be found among them anger, evil desire, unholy love, worldly care and other deplorable infirmities, remains of the old Adam. Paul speaks of these things as burdens which one must bear for a neighbor (Galatians 6:2), and in Romans 15:1, he admonishes us to "bear the infirmities of the weak." Likewise Christ loved his apostles much and suffered much from them, and he still daily bears with his own.

[17] Some, enumerating the fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23, say a Christian should be gentle, meek, longsuffering, chaste; and they look upon this passage as a law commanding such fruits. Hence they refuse to recognize as Christians any who fail to possess the fruits in perfection. Now, such individuals cannot believe there is a Christ, certain as the fact is. They judge malignantly, complaining that Christians do not exist. They take offense at Christ for his superior wisdom. For Christ has given us scriptural authority for knowing Christians by their fruits. He says

(Matthew 7:16), “By their fruits ye shall know them.” Here they are emphatic.

[18] Can you locate the failure of such an individual? He fails in the fact that he understands absolutely nothing of Christ’s kingdom. For he misinterprets the passages referring to Christians. He understands the statement that Christians should be kind and meek, to mean they must never become angry, must bear anything and show impatience toward none; if they do not so, they cannot be Christians, for they have not the fruits. Dear man, what but his own blindness can lead him to such a conclusion? He fancies Christianity to be a holy order of perfection, altogether without infirmity, a perfection as in heaven among the angels. But tell me, where do the Scriptures speak thus of Christians? But whoso recognizes Christianity as a progressive order yet in its beginning, will not be offended at the occasional manifestation of ungentleness, unkindness and impatience on the part of a Christian; for he remembers that Christians are commanded to bear one another’s burdens and infirmities. He knows that the enumeration of the fruits of the Spirit is not a record of laws the observance of which is imperative or Christ will be denied. He is aware the passage is to be interpreted as meaning that Christians are to strive to be kind; that is the mark at which they aim. However, even though they have made a beginning and some progress in this virtue, they often are unkind and bear fruits directly the opposite of the fruits of the Spirit. True, the text quoted says we should be kind, but it does not say we are kind. We are tending toward it, we are in a state of progression; but during the progress much of the old and as yet untransformed nature is intermingled.

[19] Know, then, that in a mysterious way Christ is in his saints and beware of judging or condemning anyone when you have not positive assurance that he believes and teaches contrary to the Gospel. But who so does oppose the Gospel, you may safely judge to be without Christ, and under the sway of the devil. Pray for such a one and admonish him, in the hope of his conversion. But in the case of one who endorses and honors the Gospel, observe Paul’s comment (Romans 14:4): “Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? To his own lord he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be made to stand; for the Lord hath power to make him stand.” And again (1 Corinthians 10:12): “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” Christ would be at the same time hidden and revealed,

found and not found. He permits the intermingling of some infirmities with the fruits of the Spirit, that he may conceal himself, and that malicious judges may be offended. “And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness.”

[20] From longsuffering and meekness the apostle distinguishes love and other jewels of spiritual beauty whereof we have already heard, though all are comprehended in love. As faith is the chief element of Christian character, so love is chief of the fruits of the Spirit, the jewel of surpassing beauty. Therefore, Paul says, “Above all these things put on love.” Love transcends mercy, kindness, meekness and humility. Paul calls it “the bond of perfectness” because it unites human hearts; not a partial unity, based on similarity or close relationship, but a complete unity among all men and in all relations. It makes us of one mind, one heart, one desire. It permits no one to originate a peculiar order of doctrine or faith. All who love are of the same belief. Consequently, there is the same purpose of heart with the poor and the rich, with rulers and subjects, the ill and the well, the high and the low, the honored and the disgraced. The loving heart permits all to share in its good; more, it participates in the adversities of all men, regarding them as its own. Where love is, perfect unity and communion obtain in every event, good or bad. It is a most perfect bond.

[21] Where love is lacking, hearts are united and aims single in but few relations; in most things there is disagreement. For instance: Robbers have a common bond, but it is no more than a common purpose in committing robbery and murder. Worldly friends are of the same mind so far as concerns their own interests. Monks are united in relation to their order and their honor. Herod and Pilate agreed, but simply in regard to Christ. For the most part it is exceptional that one monk, priest or layman agrees with another. Their bond of union is weak; they are as chaff bound with straw. “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which also ye were called.”

[22] There is much to threaten the sundering of love’s bond. The devil never sleeps, but continually stirs up discord and unrest. Paul does not deny that the bond is assailed. But he exhorts us to resist, remembering that love must be exercised by opposition. He admonishes us to let the peace of Christ have dominion in our hearts. The thought of the verse is: Though the peace of the world and the flesh abides not, though you must witness the

forces of discord and disruption, nevertheless let your hearts have peace in Christ. We spoke of the peace of God in the epistle selection for the Fourth Sunday in Advent — Philippians 4:7. This is the peace whereunto the Gospel calls; not the peace of the world, the flesh or the devil, but the peace that passeth all understanding, of which Paul tells us. We are to hold the peace of God, not only when all is well, but when sin, death, the flesh, the world and all calamities rage. “And be ye thankful.”

[23] “Thankfulness” here may be taken in either of two senses: First, thankfulness toward God, Paul’s thought being: Let the remembrance of all God has done for you move you to gratitude for his grace and mercy, a gratitude to which shall succeed love and peace. Secondly, we may understand thankfulness toward men — gratitude for all the benefits received from our fellows. The apostle elsewhere (2 Timothy 3:2) speaks of there being, in the last days, among other vices, that of “unthankfulness” of men toward each other. Let everyone make choice for himself of the two applications. It is my opinion, since Paul later takes up the subject of gratitude to God, and since he is here handling that of love to our neighbor — it is my opinion he has reference here to gratitude to our fellow men. This, I think, is his meaning. Man is glad to have love shown him; he is quite willing to receive good from others and to be dealt with according to the Gospel. At the same time, he is not disposed to manifest love to his fellows: favors shown him are lost upon his ingratitude. Though love is not defeated by ungratefulness — for it bears all things (1 Corinthians 13:7) — yet unthankfulness produces weariness and aversion; and it is a base, unjust and shameful thing for one who continually lends assistance not to be served in return.

[24] Paul says on this topic (Galatians 6:6), “Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.” And he declares (1 Timothy 5:17) that they who labor in the Word and doctrine are worthy of double honor. In the ninth chapter of 1 Corinthians (Corinthians 9) he speaks at length on how teachers are entitled to support, saying the mouth of the threshing ox should not be muzzled; that would be gross ingratitude. Of such unthankfulness he here hints. It is true today, and ever has been, that preachers of the Word of God must in general seek their own bread and receive ingratitude as their reward for the wonderful blessings they confer. Were it their part to celebrate masses and indulgences, gratitude

would be forthcoming; great would be the gifts and service rendered them as expression of thankfulness. But just as ungratefully were the Levites treated under the old Law, in contrast with the favor shown the priests of idols and groves. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God.”

[25] This verse appropriately follows the injunction to be thankful. Paul would say: Be careful to honor teachers and preachers, being grateful that they handle the Word and may richly impart it to you. I do not imagine Paul refers to the giving of the Word of God from heaven, for it is not within man’s power to so give it; God alone can commit it to us. So he has done and continues to do. On every occasion when he permits the Gospel to be preached, he showers the message upon us abundantly, withholding no essential knowledge. But, after it is given, we ought to be thankful and to faithfully read and hear it, sing and speak it, and meditate upon it day and night. And it should be our part to secure teachers enough to minister it to us liberally and continuously. This is what is meant by letting the Word of God dwell among us richly.

[26] Satiated, indolent spirits soon grow tired and dismiss their pastors to go wherever they wish. The latter are forced to seek a living by other work, and thus God’s Word is neglected and becomes rare and thinly sown in the land. Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:10) complains that the Levites, because of lack of support, were forced to leave their worship and temple and flee to the fields or start false worship and fables to mislead the people. They then received enough to exist — they became wealthy. It has come about in the Christian Church that as often as the support of godly pastors and teachers has grown to be a burden, as Augustine laments has been the case, these have been either forced to neglect the Word to labor for their own support, or forced to invent that wretched, accursed worship now prevalent throughout the world and whereby the preachers have attained lordly position. With the revival of the Gospel the financial difficulty mentioned is recurring, and it will continue to recur. One hundred dollars cannot now be raised for the support of a good schoolmaster or preacher where formerly a thousand dollars — yes, incomputable sums — were contributed toward churches, institutions, masses, vigils and the like. Once more God punishes ingratitude by permitting his preachers to withdraw wholly from the

ministry and to engage in their own support, or by sending upon the people even greater delusions than ever, which defraud them of wealth and destroy body and soul. For they refuse to let the Word of God dwell among them richly. Paul adds the modifying phrase, “In all wisdom.”

[27] Were we to have the Word of God so richly as to ring in every street corner, to be sung everywhere by all children — as they designed who into the pulpits and the lessons introduced canonical prayers and singing and reading — what would all this profit without an understanding mind — without wisdom? For the Word of God was given to make us wise. It was intended that we should understand it; that it should be preached and sung intelligibly. And they who minister it, who sing and speak it, ought to be wise, understanding everything pertaining to the salvation of the soul and the honor of God. That is what it means to have the Word of God dwell among us in all wisdom. Here Paul briefly overthrows the vociferous practices of the churches and monasteries where so much preaching and reading obtain while at the same time the Gospel is not understood. He seems to have foreseen the coming time when the Word of God should freely prevail, but with no resulting wisdom; the time when men should daily increase in ignorance and fanaticism until they should become mere dolts, so completely void of wisdom as to call vociferation and boasting divine worship, and to regard that preaching the salvation of souls.

[28] What it is to teach and to admonish has been frequently explained. Here Paul makes the duty of instruction common to all Christians — “teaching and admonishing one another.” That is, aside from the regular office of preaching, each is to teach himself and others, thus making everyday use of the Word of God, publicly and privately, generally and specially.

[29] As I see it, the apostle’s distinction of the three words — psalms, hymns and spiritual songs — is this: “psalms” properly indicates those productions of David and others constituting the Book of Psalms; “hymns” refers to the songs of the prophets occasionally mentioned in the Scriptures — songs of Moses, Deborah, Solomon, Isaiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, with the Magnificat, the Benediction, and the like, called “Canticles”; “spiritual songs” are those not written in the Scriptures but of daily origin with men. Paul calls these latter “spiritual” to a greater degree than psalms and hymns, though he recognizes those as themselves spiritual. He forbids worldly,

sensual and unbecoming songs, desiring us to sing of spiritual things. It is then that our songs are calculated to benefit and instruct, as he says.

[30] But what is the significance of Paul's phrase "with grace"? I offer the explanation that he refers to the grace of God and means that the singing of spiritual songs is to be voluntary, uncompelled, spontaneous, rendered with cheerfulness and prompted by love; not extorted by authority and law, as is the singing in our churches today. No one sings, preaches or prays from a recognition of mercy and grace received. The motive is a hope for gain, or a fear of punishment, injury and shame; or again, the holiest individuals bind themselves to obedience, or are driven to it, for the sake of winning heaven, and not at all to further the knowledge of the Word of God — the understanding of it richly and in all wisdom, as Paul desires it to be understood. I imagine Paul has in mind the charm of music and the beauty of poetry incident to song. He says in Ephesians 4:29: "Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give grace to them that hear." Likewise should songs be calculated to bring grace and favor to them who hear. Foul, unchaste and superfluous words have no place therein, nor have any inappropriate elements, elements void of significance and without virtue and life. Hymns are to be rich in meaning, to be pleasing and sweet, and thus productive of enjoyment for all hearers. The singing of such songs is very properly called in Hebrew singing "with grace," as Paul has it. Of this character of songs are the psalms and hymns of the Scriptures; they are good thoughts presented in pleasing words. Some songs, though expressed in charming words, are worldly and carnal; while others presenting good thoughts are at the same time expressed in words inappropriate, unattractive and devoid of grace. "Singing with grace in your hearts unto God."

[31] Paul does not enjoin silence of the lips. He would have words of the mouth proceed from the heart sincerely and fervently; not hypocritically, as Isaiah mentions (Isaiah 29:13), saying: "This people draw nigh unto me, and with their mouth and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me." Paul would have the Word of God to dwell among Christians generally, and richly to be spoken, sung and meditated upon everywhere; and that understandingly and productive of spiritual fruit, the Word being universally prized. He would that men thus sing unto the Lord heartfelt praise and thanks. He says let the Word "dwell" among you. Not

merely lodge as a guest for a night or two but abide with you forever. He is constantly apprehensive of human doctrines. “And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

[32] The works of Christians are not circumscribed by name, time nor place. Whatever Christians do is good; whenever done it is timely; wherever wrought it is appropriately. So, Paul names no work. He makes no distinction, but concludes all works well, whether it be eating or drinking, speaking or keeping silence, waking or sleeping, going or staying, being idle or otherwise. All acts are eminently worthy because done in the name of the Lord Jesus. Such is Paul’s teaching here. And our works are wrought in the name of the Lord Jesus when we by faith hold fast the fact that Christ is in us and we in him in the sense that we no longer labor, but he lives and works in us. Paul says (Galatians 2:20), “It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me.” But when we do a work as of ourselves, then it is wrought in our own name and there is nothing good about it.

[33] The expression “in the name of God,” or “Go in the name of Jesus,” is frequently uttered falsely and in sheer hypocrisy. The saying is, “All misfortunes rise in the name of God.” For teachers of false doctrines habitually offer their commodities in the name of God. They even come in the name of Christ, as he himself foretells. Matthew 24:24. To sincerely and earnestly speak and work in Jesus’ name, necessarily the heart must accord with the utterances of the mouth. As the lips declare in the name of God, so must the heart confidently, with firm faith, hold that God directs and performs the work. Peter teaches the same (1 Peter 4:11): “If any man ministereth [perform anything], ministering as of the strength which God supplieth.” Then will the venture prosper. No Christian should undertake to do any deed in his own ability and directed by his own judgment. Rather let him be assured that God works with and through him. Paul says (1 Corinthians 9:26): “I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air.”

[34] Such an attitude will result in praise and thanks to God as the one to whom are due all honor and praise for every good thing. So Paul teaches and also Peter. Immediately after declaring that we are to work according to the ability which God gives, Peter adds “that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” But he who undertakes anything in his own

ability, however he may glorify God with his lips, lies and deceives, like the hypocrite in the Gospel. Thankfulness, therefore, is the only duty we can perform unto God; and this is not to be rendered of ourselves, but through our Mediator, Jesus. Without him none can come to the Father, none can be accepted. Of this fact we have often spoken.

Septuagesima. Third Sunday before Lent. The Christian Race for the Prize

Text: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 10:1-5.

24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat;

4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

5 But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. 1 Corinthians 10:1-5

The Christian Race for the Prize

[1] This lesson is a part of the long four-chapter instruction Paul gives the Corinthians. Therein he teaches them how to deal with those weak in the faith, and warns rash, presumptuous Christians to take heed lest they fall, however they may stand at the present. He presents a forcible simile in the running of the race, or the strife for the prize. Many run without obtaining the object of their pursuit. But we should not vainly run. To faithfully follow Christ does not mean simply to run. That will not suffice. We must run to the purpose. To believe, to be running in Christ's course, is not sufficient; we must lay hold on eternal life. Christ says (Matthew 24:13), "But he that endureth to the end, the same shall he saved." And Paul (1 Corinthians 10:12), "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

[2] Now, running is hindered in two ways; for one, by indolence. When faith is not strenuously exercised, when we are indolent in good works, our progress is hindered, so that the prize is not attained. But to such hindrance I do not think Paul here refers. He is not alluding to those who indolently run, but to them who run in vain because missing their object; individuals, for instance, who pursue their aim at full speed, but, deluded by a phantom, miss their aim and rush to ruin or run up against fearful obstacles. Hence Paul enjoins men to run successfully while in the race, that they may seize the prize and not lose it by default. In consequence the race is hindered when a false goal is set up or the true one removed. The apostle says (Colossians 2:18), "Let no man rob you of your prize." It is true, however, that an indolent, negligent life will eventually bring about loss of the prize. While men sleep, the enemy very soon sows tares among the wheat.

[3] The goal is removed when the Word of God is falsified, and creations of the human mind are preached under the name of God's Word. And these things readily come about when we are not careful to keep the unity of the Spirit, when each follows his own ideas and yields to no other, because he prefers his own conceit. Such must be the course of events where love is lacking. The strong and the learned desire to be looked upon as peculiarly commendable, while the weak in the faith are despised. Thus, the devil has abundant opportunity to sow tares. Paul calls love the unity of the Spirit and admonishes (Ephesians 4:3) that we endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit

in the bond of peace. In 2 Thessalonians 2:10 he proclaims the coming of Antichrist “because they received not the love of the truth”; that is, true love. “And every man that striveth in the games [that striveth for the mastery].”

[4] Were he who competes in a race to attempt other things or to make a success of other matters at the same time, he would not gain much; rather he would soon be defeated, lose the race and everything. If he would truly strive, he must attend to no other thing. All else must be neglected and attention centered upon the contest alone. Even then the winner must have fortune’s favor; for they who neglect all to run do not all gain the prize. Likewise, in the Christian contest it is necessary, and in an even higher degree, to renounce everything and to devote oneself only to the contest. He who would in addition seek his own glory and profit, who would find in the Word and Spirit of God occasion for his own praise and advantage after the manner of the dissenters and schismatics — what can such a one expect to win? He is wholly entangled in temporal glory and gain; bound hand and foot, a complete captive. The race he runs is the mere dream race of one lying upon his couch an indolent captive. “I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air.”

[5] Paul here points to himself as exemplar and hints at the cause of failure, viz., lapse from love and the use of the divine word in a willful, ambitious and covetous spirit, whereas the faith which worketh by love is lacking. Under such conditions, false and indolent Christians run indeed a merry race; yet God’s Word and ways in which they are so alert and speedy are merely a show, because they make them subserve their own interests and glory. They fail, however, to see that they race uncertainly and beat the air. They never make a serious attempt, nor do they ever hit the mark. While it is theirs to mortify ambition, to restrain their self-will and to enlist in the service of their neighbors, they do none of these things. On the contrary, they even do many things to strengthen their ambition and self-will, and then they swear by a thousand oaths that they are seeking not their own honor but the honor of God, their neighbor’s welfare and not their own. Peter says (2 Peter 1:9-10) this class are blind and cannot see afar and have forgotten they were purged from their old sins, because they fail to make their calling sure by good works. Therefore, it comes about that, as Paul says, they run uncertainly, beating the air. Their hearts are unstable and

wavering before God, and they are changeable and fickle in all their ways, James 1:8. Since they are aimless and inconstant at heart, this will appear likewise as inconstancy in regard to works and doctrines. They undertake now this and now that; they cannot be quiet nor refrain from factional strife. Thus, they miss their aim or else remove the goal, and cannot but deviate from the true and common path. “But I buffet [keep under] my body and bring it into bondage [subjection].”

[6] The apostle’s thought is the same as in his statement above, “Every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things.” By “keeping under the body” Paul means, not only subduing the carnal lusts, but every temporal object as well, in so far as it appeals to bodily desire — love of honor, fame, wealth and the like. He who gives license to these things instead of subduing them will preach to his own condemnation, however correct his preaching be. Such do not permit the truth to be presented; this is true particularly of temporal honor. These words of the apostle, then, are a fine thrust at ambitious and self-centered preachers and Christians. Not only do they run in vain and fight to no purpose; they become actual castaways with only the semblance — the color — of Christianity. Examples from Scriptures “For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant, that our fathers were all under the cloud.”

[7] Paul cites a terrible example from Scripture to prove that not all obtain the prize who run. There were about six hundred thousand of them, all of whom walked in the way of God and enjoyed his word and his confidence so completely as to be protected under the cloud and miraculously to pass through the sea; yet among the vast number who ran at that time only two, Joshua and Caleb, obtained the prize. They alone of all that multitude reached the promised land. Later on, in the chapter (verses 11-12) Paul explains this fact, saying: “Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition... wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” The design of these dealings of God with Israel is to terrify the pride, false wisdom and self-will; to deter men from despising their fellows and from seeking to make the Word of God minister to their own honor or profit in preference to the honor and profit of others. The intent is to have each individual put himself on an equality with others, each to bear with his

fellow, the weak enduring the strong, and so on, as enjoined in the four chapters.

[8] How many great and noble men may have been among the six hundred thousand, men to whom we would have been unworthy to hand a cup of water! They included the twelve princes of the twelve tribes, one of whom, Nahshon, Matthew (Matthew 1:4) numbers in the holy lineage of Christ. There were also the seventy elders who shared in the spirit of Moses, Eldad and Medad in particular (Numbers 11:27), and all the other great men aside from the faction of Korah. All these, mark you, strove in the race. They did and suffered much. They witnessed many miracles of God. They aided in erecting a grand tabernacle and in instituting divine worship. They were full of good works. Yet they failed and died in the wilderness. Who is so daring and haughty he will not be restrained and humbled by so remarkable an example of divine judgment? Well may it be said, “Let him that... standeth take heed lest he fall.”

[9] Well, the example of Israel is one readily understood. God grant we may heed it! Let us examine the apostle’s text yet further — his mention of baptism and spiritual food, using Christian terms and placing the fathers upon the same plane with us Christians, as if they also had had Baptism and the Holy Supper. He would have us know, first, the oft-repeated fact that God from the beginning led, redeemed and saved his saints by two instrumentalities — by his own word and external signs. Adam was saved by the word of promise (Genesis 3:15): The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head; that is, Christ shall come to conquer sin, death and Satan for us. To this promise God added the sign of sacrifice, sacrifice kindled with fire from heaven, as in Abel’s case (Genesis 4:4), and in other cases mentioned in the Scriptures. The word of promise was Adam’s Gospel until the time of Noah and of Abraham. In this promise all the saints down to Abraham believed, and were redeemed; as we are redeemed by the word of the Gospel which we believe. The fire from heaven served them as a sign, as baptism does us, which is added to the word of God.

[10] Such signs were repeated again and again at various times, the last sign being given by Christ in his own person — the Gospel with baptism, granted to all nations. For instance, God gave Noah the promise that he should survive the flood, and granted him a sign in the ship, or ark, he built. And by faith in the promise and sign Noah was justified and saved, with his

family. Afterward God gave him another promise, and for a sign the rainbow. Again, he gave Abraham a promise, with the sign of circumcision. Circumcision was Abraham's baptism, just as the ark and the flood were that of Noah. So also, our baptism is to us circumcision, ark and flood, according to Peter's explanation. 1 Peter 3:21. Everywhere we meet the Word and the Sign of God, in which we must believe in order to be saved through faith from sin and death.

[11] Thus the children of Israel had God's word that they should inherit the promised land. In addition to that word they were given many signs, in particular those Paul here names — the sea, the cloud, the bread from heaven, the water from the rock. These he calls their baptism; just as our baptism might be called our sea and cloud. Faith and the Spirit are the same everywhere, though the signs and the words vary. Signs and words indeed change from time to time, but faith in the one and same God continues. Through various signs and revelations, God at different times bestows the same faith and the same Spirit, effecting through these in all saints' remission of sins, redemption from death, and salvation, whether they lived in the beginning or at the end of time, or while time progressed.

[12] Such is Paul's meaning when he says the fathers did eat the same meat and drink the same drink as we. He, however, qualifies with the word "spiritual." Externally and individually Israel had signs and revelations different from ours; but the Spirit and their faith in Christ was identical with our own. Spiritual eating and drinking is simply believing in God's Word and sign. Christ says (John 6:56), "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him." And in the preceding verse, "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." That is, He that believeth in me shall live. "For they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them."

[13] In other words, they believed in the same Christ in whom we believe, though he was yet to come in the flesh; and the sign of their faith was the material rock, from which they physically drank water, just as we in partaking of the material bread and wine at the altar spiritually eat and drink the true Christ. With the outward act of eating and drinking we exercise inward faith. Had the Israelites not possessed the word of God and faith as they drank from the rock, the act of drinking would not have benefited their souls. Neither would it profit us to receive bread and wine at the altar if we were without faith. Indeed, had not the Word of God come first, the rock

would not have yielded water and command faith. Likewise, if God's Word did not accompany bread and wine, they would not be spiritual food nor exercise faith.

[14] So it is ever the same spiritual meat and drink which God embodies in his word and sign, whatever its material and external form may be. Were he to command me to lift up a mere straw, immediately the straw would hold for me spiritual food and drink. Not because of any virtue in the straw, but because it is a revelation and sign of the divine truth and presence. Again, if God's Word and his sign be lacking or unrecognized, the very presence of God himself has no effect. Christ says of himself (John 6:63), "The flesh profiteth nothing." He makes that statement because his hearers pay no heed to the words in which he speaks of his flesh, though it is these which make his body the true meat, according to his declaration (verse 58), "This is the bread which came down out of heaven." Therefore, we are not to regard unduly, as blind reason does, the works, signs and miracles of God; rather we are to recognize his message therein. This is the act of faith.

[15] The apostle refers to a single type — the rock, saying: "They drank of a spiritual rock that followed them: and the rock was Christ." By this statement he makes all the figures and signs granted to the people of Israel by the Word of God refer to Christ; for where the Word of God is, there Christ is. All the words and promises of God are concerning Christ. Christ himself refers the serpent of Moses to himself, giving it a typical significance, John 3:14. We may truly say the Israelites looked upon the same serpent we behold, for they saw the spiritual serpent that followed them, or Christ on the cross. Their beholding was believing in the Word of God, with the serpent for a sign; even as their spiritual drinking was believing in the Word of God with the rock for a sign. Without the Word of God, the serpent could have profited them nothing; nor could brazen serpents innumerable, had the Israelites gazed upon them forever. Likewise, the rock would have profited them nothing without the word of God; they might have crushed to powder all the rocks of the world or drank from them to no purpose.

[16] According to the general principle here laid down by Paul, by using the rock as illustration, we may say the Israelites partook of the same bread of heaven whereof we eat; and they ate of the spiritual bread of heaven which followed them — Christ. With them, eating was believing in the

Word of God, while they had for their sign the bread from heaven whereof they physically partook. Had not this Word accompanied the bread, it would have been simply material food, incapable of profiting the soul or calling forth faith. Christ says (John 6:32), “It was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread out of heaven.” And (John 6:58), “Not as the fathers ate [manna], and died.” Even Moses says (Deuteronomy 8:3), “And fed thee with manna... that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by everything that proceedeth out of the mouth of Jehovah.” In other words, “In the material manna you must not merely see the work — the act of satisfying the appetite — but much rather the word of promise bringing you the bread of heaven; for by that word you live forever if you have faith.”

[17] We may say the same concerning the sea and the cloud. The children of Israel walked under the same cloud that shadows us; that means, they walked under the spiritual cloud that followed them — Christ. Otherwise expressed, walking under the cloud was simply believing in the word of God, the word they had in their hearts, which told them to follow the cloud. Without that word they would have been unable to believe or to follow; indeed, with the word lacking, the cloud would never have appeared. Therefore, the cloud was called the glory of the Lord whose appearance had been promised. So we see how we must in all things have regard to the word of God. To it faith must attach itself. Without it, either there are no signs and works of God, or else, existing, and regarded with the physical eyes only, without reference to the Word, they cause one to open his mouth in wonderment for a while like everything else which is new, but they do not profit the soul nor do they appeal to faith.

[18] Some take the words “which followed them” to mean that the spiritual rock accompanied the children of Israel, companionship with them — *comitante petra*, not *petra consequente*, Christ being spiritually present in the word and by faith. This view they endeavor to base upon the Greek text. I have rendered it: “the rock following.” The point is not worth contention. Let each understand it as he may. Both interpretations given are correct. I hold to what I have offered because all the circumstances of the incident, and earlier words of God, pointed to a future Christ, a Christ who should follow, in whom they should all believe. Thus Abraham saw behind

him the ram in the thicket and took and sacrificed him; that is, he believed in the Christ who afterward should come and be sacrificed.

[19] Again, some say the common noun in the clause “and the rock was Christ” means the material rock; and since Christ cannot be material rock they explain the inconsistency by saying the rock signifies Christ. They here make the word “was” equivalent to “signifies.” The same reasoning they apply to certain words of Christ; for instance, they say where Christ, referring to the Holy Supper (Matthew 26:26), commands, “Take, eat; this is my body” — they say the meaning is, “This bread signifies, but is not truly, my body.” They would thereby deny that the bread is the body of Christ. In the same manner do they deal with the text (John 15:1) “I am the true vine,” in making it “I am signified by the vine.” Beware of such reasoners. Their own malice has led them to such perverting of Scripture. Paul here expressly distinguishes between material and spiritual rocks, saying: “They drank of a spiritual rock that followed them: and the rock was Christ.” He does not say the material rock was Christ, but the spiritual rock. The material rock was not spiritual and did not follow or go with them.’

[20] The explanations and distortions of such false reasoners are not needed here. The words are true as they read; they are to be understood in substance and not figuratively. So, in John 15:1, Christ’s reference is not to a material but a spiritual vine. How would this read, “I am signified by a spiritual vine”? Christ is speaking of that which exists and must so be understood — “I am”; here is a true spiritual vine. Similar is John 6:55, “My flesh is meat indeed.” The thought is not, “My flesh signifies, or is signified by, true meat”; spiritual meat is spoken of and the meaning is, “My flesh is substantially a food; not for the stomach, physically, but for the soul, spiritually.” Neither must you permit the words “This is my body” to be perverted to mean that the body is but signified by the bread, as some pretend; you must accept the words precisely as they mean — “This bread is essentially, by a real presence, my body.” The forcing of Scripture to meet one’s own opinions cannot be tolerated. A clear text proving that the infinitive “to be” is equivalent to “signify” would be needed; and, even though this might be proven in a few instances, it would not suffice. It would still have to be indisputably shown true in the place in question. This

can never be done. Now, the proposition being impossible, we must surrender to the Word of God and accept it as it stands.

[21] Christ has been typified by various signs and objects in the Old Testament, and the rock is one of them. Note first, the material rock spoken of had place independently of man's labor and far from man's domain, in the wilderness, in desolate solitude. So, Christ is a truly insignificant object in the world, disregarded, unnoticed; nor is he indebted to human labor.

[22] Further, water flowing from the rock is contrary to nature; it is purely miraculous. The water typifies the quickening spirit of God, who proceeds from the condemned, crucified and dead Christ. Thus, life is drawn from death, and this by the power of God. Christ's death is our life, and if we would live we must die with him.

[23] Moses strikes the rock at the command of God and points to it, thus prefiguring the ministerial office which by word of mouth strikes from the spiritual rock the Spirit. For God will give his Spirit to none without the instrumentality of the Word and the ministerial office instituted by him for this purpose, adding the command that nothing be preached but Christ. Had not Moses obeyed the command of God to smite the rock with his rod, no water would ever have flowed therefrom. His rod represents rod of the mouth whereof Isaiah speaks (Isaiah 11:4): "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth; and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." "A scepter of equity is the scepter of thy kingdom." Psalm 45:6.

Sexagesima. Second Sunday before Lent. Paul's Glory in His Labor and Sufferings

Text: 2 Corinthians 11:19-33; 2 Corinthians 12:1-9.

19 For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise.
20 For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.
21 I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also.
22 Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.
23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.
24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.
25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;
26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;
27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.
28 Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.
29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?
30 If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.
31 The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.
32 In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me:
33 And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands. 2 Corinthians 11:19-33
1 It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.
2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.
3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)
4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words,

which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

5 Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

6 For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 2 Corinthians 12:1-9

Paul's Glory in His Labor and Suffering

[1] They who praise themselves are fools according to the views and speech of the world. The saying is, "Self-praise is unsavory." It is forbidden by Solomon in Proverbs 27:2: "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth." And Christ says (John 8:54), "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing." Paul acknowledges that he had to become a fool, something for which he had no desire, by reason of the necessity laid upon him to praise himself. The false apostles, as false spirits habitually do, delivered great, fine, splendid speeches to the multitude, in their vainglorious attempt to raise themselves above Paul, thereby to make contemptible and insignificant that apostle and his doctrine.

[2] Paul was little concerned that he personally should be lightly esteemed and the false apostles highly honored, but he could not bear to have the Gospel perish in that way and his Corinthian converts seduced. Therefore, he exerts himself to the utmost, at the risk of becoming a fool by his boasting. But he, in his strong spiritual wisdom, glories in a masterly manner, and skillfully puts to shame the boasts of the false apostles. First, he shows them he can glory in the very things wherein they glory, and in even more. At the same time, he declares himself a fool for glorying. He might have said: "Foolish, indeed, are they, and boorish creatures, who

glory in themselves. They should feel shame to the very depth of their heart. No true, sane man boasts of what he is. The wicked and the frivolous do that.” But the apostle’s attack is not quite so severe and harsh. He addresses them civilly and delicately in that he makes himself appear a fool, as if to say: “Look! how becoming self-praise is in myself, although I have grounds for my glorying. But how much more disgraceful for you to boast when perhaps none of your claims are true.” So Paul wears the foolscap, that those coarse fools might have a mirror in which to behold their real selves. This is wisely making foolishness minister to the good of the neighbor and to the honor of the Gospel. To the just, even folly is wisdom, just as all things are pure and holy unto him.

[3] Second, Paul deals the false apostles a stout blow when he shows them to be ignorant of the grounds in which a true Christian seeks his glory. For, as he teaches them, a Christian glories in the things whereof other men are ashamed — in the cross and in his sufferings. This is the true art of glorying. To this he refers when he says (Galatians 6:14), “Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” But the false apostles are careful to avoid glorying thus; for they flee with alacrity from reproach and affliction, rather seeking a life of ease and honor. They ever would have prominence over their fellows, be superior to and unlike others — certain indication that they lack the right spirit and are not of God. Christ testifies (John 5:44), “How can ye believe, who receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not?”

[4] The main point of this lesson is that in a preacher or a teacher no vice is more injurious and venomous than vainglory. It is true, however, that avarice also is an evil characteristic of false teachers, being found hand in hand with vainglory. For the sake of profit, for the purpose of gain, the false teachers aspire to prominence, to honor and position. With them, nothing but current coin will pass, and what does not pay dividend is unprofitable. Any other vice is more endurable in a preacher than these two, though none is compatible with goodness, blamelessness and perfection being required in the ministry according to Paul, Titus 1:7. This is not surprising, for the two vices under consideration are essentially and directly opposed to the nature of the ministry. The ministry is ordained to have as its aim the glory of God and its promotion. Psalm 19:1 affirms, “The heavens declare the glory of God.” And ministers must, for God’s glory, suffer reproach and

shame. Jeremiah complains (Jeremiah 20:8), “The word of Jehovah is made a reproach unto me, and a derision, all the day.” The world will not endure the Word. For him who in preaching seeks his own honor, it is impossible to remain in the right path and preach the pure Gospel. Consequently, he avoids striving for God’s honor; he must preach what pleases the people, what brings honor to himself and magnifies his skill and wisdom.

[5] Avarice, too, is, according to its very nature, opposed to the interests of the ministry. Just as the ministry is to be devoted to God’s honor at the expense of our own, so is it to be devoted to the interests of our neighbor and not to our own. Otherwise it is an injury rather than a benefit. With the false teacher seeking only his own good, it is impossible for him to preach the truth. He is compelled to speak what is pleasing to men in order to gratify his appetites. Therefore Paul (Romans 16:18) says of such preachers that they serve their own bellies. And in many places the Scriptures reprove avarice. Let him, then, who would be a preacher guard vigilantly against vainglory and avarice. But, should he feel himself in the clutch of these sins, let him avoid the ministry. For under such conditions he will accomplish no good; he will only dishonor God, seduce souls and be a thief and robber in the acquisition of property. With this explanation, the lesson is now easily understood, but we will consider a few points.” “For ye bear with the foolish gladly, being wise yourselves.”

[6] Paul commends the Corinthians for their patience and wisdom in six points: as wise men, they cheerfully endure the foolish; they bear with those who bring them into bondage and oppress them; with those who devour them; with those who take from them [or take them captive]; with those who exalt themselves; with those who smite them in the face. But his commendation is meant to pave the way for his folly — to prepare them to suffer him the more readily. He would say, “Since you suffer so much from them who injure you — and you are wise in that — I trust you will bear with me who have wrought you only good, when I act the fool for a little; particularly when my object in it is your good — to preserve the Gospel among you in opposition to the false apostles.” Note how tenderly and patiently he deals with the Corinthians when he might have severely reproved them for tolerating the false apostles. He commends them as does a father a timid child, and yet, while commending them he censures both

them and their false teachers. He handles them as tenderly as if he held a raw egg in his hand, in order not to distract or terrify them.

[7] Paul delivers a masterly stroke when with the same words he praises the Corinthians and rebukes them and their false apostles. His commendation of their patience is in reality reproof, blows and wounds for the false teachers. He would say: "I have preached the Gospel to you at my own expense and jeopardy. By my labor have ye attained to its blessing. Ye have done nothing for me in return, and I have been no tax upon you. Now, upon my departure, others come and exploit you, and seek honor and profit from my labor. They would be your masters and I am to be ignored. They boast as if the accomplishment were all theirs. Of these ye must be disciples and pupils. Their preaching ye must accept, while my Gospel must become odious. My case is that of the bee who labors to make honey and then the idle drones and the earthworms come and consume the sweet not of their making. In me is illustrated Christ's proverb (John 4:37), 'one soweth, and another reapeth.' Continually one enters into the fruits of another's labor. One must toil and incur danger, while another reaps the benefit in security.

[8] "Ye can suffer these false apostles, though they be fools and teach only foolishness. In this ye display wisdom and patience. But ye do not so suffer me, who taught you true wisdom. Nor do ye permit me much enjoyment of my labor. Further, ye can permit them to make servants of you, to be your lords and to order you to do their bidding. And ye obey. But I who have made myself your servant, I who have served you without profit to myself, that ye might be lords with Christ, must now be ignored and all my labors be lost. They rule you at their pleasure, and their pleasure is all they consult. You suffer yourselves to be devoured. That is, your property is consumed; for ye bestow it upon them abundantly, as Psalm 14:4 has it, 'Who eat up my people.' Upon such as these ye can shower goods and gifts and can permit them to devour you as they please. But I have never enjoyed aught of your property. All my service has been without recompense, that ye might become rich in Christ. "Again, ye suffer the false teachers to take from you beyond your consent; to exalt themselves above you, to esteem themselves better than you and me, and to exercise their arrogance upon you. But ye deal not so with me, who have sacrificed my own substance, and have taken from others, that I might bring the Gospel to you; who have not exalted myself above any but have yielded to all and served them. The

false apostles permit you to serve them; in fact, trample you beneath their feet. They even smite you in the face; that is, they reproach you publicly, put you to shame, and abuse you with rude and insolent words. They act as if ye were beasts of burden and they your real masters. All this ye suffer. But my patience with you, my parental tenderness, past and present, is remembered no more. Paul is now represented as having wrought no good at Corinth.” Paul’s Description of False Teachers

[9] Note the master hand wherewith Paul portrays the character of false teachers, showing how they betray their avarice and ambition. First, they permit true teachers to lay the foundation and perform the labor; then they come and desire to do the work over, to reap the honors and the benefits. They bring about that the name and the work of the true teachers receive no regard and credit; what they themselves have brought — that is the thing. They make the poor, simple-minded people to stare open-mouthed while they win them with flowery words and seduce them with fair speeches, as mentioned in Romans 16:18. These are the idle drones that consume the honey they will not and cannot make. That this was the condition of affairs at Corinth is very clear from this epistle — indeed, from both epistles. Paul continually refers to others having followed him and built upon the foundation he has laid. Messengers of the devil, he terms them.

[10] And such false teachers have the good fortune that all their folly is tolerated, even though the people realize how these act the fool, and rather rudely at that. They have success with it all, and people bear with them. But no patience is to be exercised toward true teachers! Their words and their works are watched with the intent of entrapping them, as complained of in Psalm 17:9 and elsewhere. When only apparently a mote is found, it is exaggerated to a very great beam. No toleration is granted. There is only judgment, condemnation and scorn. Hence the office of preaching is a grievous one. He who has not for his sole motive the benefit of his neighbor and the glory of God, cannot continue therein. The true teacher must labor, and permit others to have the honor and profit of his efforts, while he receives injury and derision for his reward. Here the saying holds true: “To love without guerdon, nor wearying of the burden.” Only the Spirit of God can inspire such love. To flesh and blood it is impossible. Paul here scores the false prophets when he says, “Ye suffer fools gladly”; in other words, “I

know the false preachers often act as fools, nor can they help it, because their teaching is false; yet ye excuse them.”

[11] In the second place such teachers are disposed to bring the people into downright bondage and to bind their conscience by forcing laws upon them and teaching work-righteousness. The effect is that fear impels them to do what has been pounded into them, as if they were bond-slaves, while their teachers command fear and attention. But the true teachers, they who give us freedom of conscience and create us lords, we soon forget, even despise. The dominion of false teachers is willingly tolerated and patiently endured; indeed, it is given high repute. All those conditions are punishments sent by God upon them who do not receive the Gospel with love and gratitude. Christ says (John 5:43): “I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye shall receive.” The Pope, with his spiritual office, became our lord, and we became his captives, through his doctrine of human works. And our present-day schismatics pursue the same object with their fanciful doctrine concerning their works.

[12] In the third place, false teachers flay their disciples to the bone, and cut them out of house and home, but even this is taken and endured. Such, I opine, has been our experience under the Papacy. But true preachers are even denied their bread. Yet this all perfectly squares with justice! For, since men fail to give unto those from whom they receive the Word of God and permit the latter to serve them at their own expense, it is but fair they should give the more unto preachers of lies, whose instruction redounds to their injury. What is withheld from Christ must be given in tenfold proportion to the devil. They who refuse to give the servant of the truth a single thread, must be oppressed by liars.

[13] Fourth, false apostles forcibly take more than is given them. They seize whatever and whenever they can, thus enhancing their insatiable avarice. This, too, is excused in them. Thus, the great establishments of the Pope did not suffice for him; with various artifices, bulls, laws and indulgences, he has brought under his power land and people and all they possess, exhausting the world by usury. And so it should be, for this state of affairs was richly deserved by men for despising the Gospel and its preachers.

[14] Fifth, these deceitful teachers, not satisfied with having acquired our property, must exalt themselves above us and lord it over us. Not only do they possess all property, but they must for that very reason become our superiors; must have precedence and receive honor. We bow our knees before them, worship them and kiss their feet. And we suffer it all, yes, with fearful reverence regard it just and right. And it is just and right, for why did we not honor the Gospel by accepting and preserving it?

[15] Sixth, our false apostles justly reward us by smiting us in the face. That is, they consider us inferior to dogs; they abuse us and treat us as footrags. I venture to say we became sensible of such treatment when, under the Papacy, we were readily put in the van, cursed, condemned and delivered to the devil. We endured it all, suffered most patiently, and yielded up property, honor, body and soul. Fault in a sincere teacher, however, could by no means be tolerated. Very well, then; God is just, and it is his judgment that we must honor the messengers of Satan a thousand times more than his own and do and suffer everything. “I speak by way of disparagement [speak as concerning reproach], as though we had been weak.”

[16] There are two ways of interpreting this sentence: First, as meaning: “I speak as one of the weak whose folly you must endure; for which I deserve reproach, since I ought to bear with you.” From such meaning I to this day have seen no cause to swerve. The other interpretation is: “I speak as one reproached — after the manner of the weak.” Or, more fully expressed: “I can speak in two ways of myself and my class: First, with honor, because of our strength in the sight of God and the spiritually-minded, worthy of honor, noble; not weak but strong, able. But I will not at present employ, this way, for we are now despised; we are not known as honorable. And all because of the false prophets. I will, then, present myself in the other light, as I am regarded — despised, held in reproach and disrespect, weak and incapable. But even this condition shall be an occasion of glory for me; my reproach and weakness is more honorable than their honor, power and strength. What would my glory be should my actual strength inspire my speech! “Weakness,” according to Paul’s own later interpretation, implies being regarded worthless, unfit, a failure. The apostle’s meaning, then, is: “I, too, will be one of the boasting fools. You will excuse it in me for I speak from the standpoint of my critics, that of a

man contemptible, foolish, incompetent. Before God, however, I feel that I am a quite different being.”

[17] And recollect, Paul says, “Because ye are wise, ye suffer fools gladly,” implying that one fool cannot tolerate another. The saying is, “Two fools in one house will not do.” Reason and wisdom are required, to bear with another’s infirmities and to excuse them. “Yet whereinsoever any is bold.”

[18] That is, in whatever the false apostles can boast, I can likewise glory. Here we are shown what is the ground of the false apostles’ boasting: their outward respectability — being of Abraham’s seed, children of Israel, Christ’s preachers. Therein they think to far excel the Corinthians, claiming their doctrine and works to be of greater weight because they have Moses and the prophets for their teachers. But they failed to perceive that their boast is of mere externals, that render no one righteous or better before God. The majority of the Hebrews, of the Israelites, of the seed of Abraham, and of the preachers of Christ are lost. Names are of no consequence; they only make a fine show and serve to seduce the simpleminded. Paul boasts of his origin and yet derides his boasting, calling it fool’s work. His object is to destroy the boasting of the false prophets, that the people might not be deceived.

[19] Note how, even in Paul’s time, great men erred concerning the true sense of the Gospel, and many noble preachers would have estimated Christian life by a merely external appearance and name. The true spiritual preachers must have been few. Should it be strange, then, that in our time sincere preachers are not numerous, and that the majority of ministers riot in what they themselves seem and do? It cannot and shall not be otherwise. The thievish drones, which are prone to riot, let them riot! We will resist to the utmost of our power, commending the matter to God, who doubtless will grant us sufficient honor and profit, both temporally and eternally, though we must labor gratuitously, accepting injury and derision as our reward. Our adversaries will not long continue their persecutions, for, as Paul says just preceding our lesson, they will eventually receive their deserts.

[20] Again, Paul boasts of certain temporal afflictions wherein he excels the false apostles, who suffer nothing, for the sake of either the word or of

souls, but only boast of name and person. Among the afflictions he mentions, he names having been a night and a day in the deep. Some refer this allusion to the voyage of which Luke writes (Acts 27:20-21), when for fourteen days Paul and his companions ate nothing and saw never a star, being day and night continually covered by the surges and waves of the sea. Others think Paul was, like Jonah, personally sunk into the deep sea, though but for a day and a night. Such is the clear meaning of the text. Yet others interpret it as having reference to a prison or dungeon, because the Greek text makes no mention of the sea — simply “the deep.” “Who is weak, and I am not weak?”

[21] Of external afflictions affecting not his own person, but distressing others, Paul mentions two: he is weak if another is weak and burns if another is offended. Thereby he plainly portrays the ardor of his heart — how full of love he is; the defects and sorrows of others pain him as his own. By “weakness,” I imagine, he means, not bodily infirmity, but weakness of faith. He refers to those who, young in the faith, have a tender and frail conscience, thereby betokening immaturity and feebleness of faith. He says (Romans 14:2), “He that is weak eateth herbs”; and in Corinthians 8:12, that we sin against Christ if we wound a weak conscience. These weak ones Paul does not reject. He receives them and conducts himself as if he, too, were weak. He asserts (1 Corinthians 9:22), “To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak.”

[22] This interpretation of the sentence is borne out in his allusion to “that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches.” Paul would say: “I exert myself, I have a continual care, I urge and admonish constantly, that offenses and false doctrine may not invade and destroy my planting; may not violate and ruin the weak consciences. As seen in his epistle to the Corinthians, directed against the false apostles, and in that to the Thessalonians, such is his vigilant anxiety to guard them from the tempter that he sends them a special messenger, and he exultingly declares it is life to him to learn of their steadfastness.

[23] Likewise, by the assertion that he burns, we are to understand that he is exceedingly grieved and pained if one is offended; that is, if through misleading doctrines or examples one in any wise falls from the faith. Of the offense to faith, he says much in Romans 14. Not desiring to be

offended with the offended, as he became weak with the weak, he says: “I burn and sorrow for them.” “I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago.”

[24] Of the translation of Paul into the third heaven many have written, perplexing themselves over what constituted the first, second and third heavens, and the paradise. Paul himself, who had the experience, does not tell, and declares no man can tell, for none may utter the words he heard. Therefore, we must humbly acknowledge we do not know the nature of these things. And it matters not. Paul does not boast of his experience for the purpose of imparting knowledge to us or of enabling us to duplicate it. The purpose of his boasting is simply to stop the mouths of the fanatics and to show how paltry was their glory in comparison with his own. Certain it is, however, that Paul was ravished from this life into a life ineffable; otherwise his expression would be meaningless. Paul’s Thorn in the Flesh and Humility “There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan.”

[25] And must this mighty apostle, O merciful God, be subject to trials lest he exalt himself because of his great revelations? Then how should others, how should such infirm beings as we, be free from self-exaltation? Many teachers have explained Paul’s thorn to be the temptations of the flesh. The Latin text is responsible for this interpretation; it reads, “stimulus carnis,” a spear, or thorn for the flesh. Yet that rendering does not do justice to the words. Paul is not in the habit of terming temptations of the flesh “thorns.” The thorn stands rather for something painful and afflicting. In “a thorn of the flesh” the thought is not of an instrumentality whereby the flesh stings, but of something that stings the flesh. The Greek text impels us to the thought of a thorn for the flesh, or a thorn upon or in the flesh. The idea is much like that in the German proverb, “The clog is bound to the dog’s neck.” We may imagine Paul expressing himself: “As a clog to a dog’s neck, as a ring in a bear’s nose, a bit in a horse’s mouth or a gag in the mouth of a swine, in order to restrain them from running, biting and general mischief, — so is my thorn a clog to my body lest I exalt myself.”

[26] But Paul himself explains the nature of the clog, or thorn. He calls it “a messenger of Satan,” a devil, to “buffet” him, or to flay and jog him. Hence a spiritual trial cannot be meant. The explanation appeals to me that the persecutions and sufferings the apostle recounts above constitute the devil’s flaying. Thus, his meaning would be: “I have received great

revelations, for which reason the clog is bound to the dog; that is, the many dangers and misfortunes with which the angel of the devil buffets and humiliates my body will make me forget to exalt myself. They are the thorn in my flesh, or upon my body; for God will not permit it to come upon my soul.”

[27] Yet the text seems to imply some peculiar work of the devil upon Paul’s body, for it says the thorn, or clog, is the messenger Satan employs to beat his body; and also, that the apostle diligently but unavailingly thrice besought the Lord to remove it. I do not imagine him praying for the cessation of persecutions in a spirit of unwillingness to suffer them. But since he does not specify the affliction, we must let it remain a secret one, a distress known only to himself. It is enough for us to know that while God had given him great revelations, revelations beyond human ken, he also bound the clog to him — gave him a thorn for his body — to prevent his exaltation of himself; and that the knowledge of the buffetings and flaying caused by this clog, or devil, are likewise beyond human ken. “My power is made perfect in weakness.”

[28] It is a strange sort of strength which is weak and by its weakness grows stronger. Who ever heard of weak strength? or more absurd still, that strength is increased by weakness? Paul would here make a distinction between human strength and divine. Human strength increases with enhancement and decreases with enfeeblement. But God’s power — his Word in us — rises in proportion to the pressure it receives. It is characteristic of God the Creator that he creates all things from naught, and again reduces to naught all created things. Human power cannot do this. The power of God is the true palm-wood which buoys itself in proportion as it is burdened and weighted.

[29] Note here, “weakness” is not to be understood in a spiritual sense, as on a previous occasion, but externally; as not illness alone, but every sort of evil, misfortune, suffering and persecution calculated to buffet and humble the body. The power of Christ, in connection with which spiritual weakness cannot exist, is invoked against this weakness likewise. He says, “Most gladly will I glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” And his weaknesses he immediately explains as infirmities, injuries, necessities, persecutions and distresses. The thought, then, is: Christ is not mighty within us, his word and his faith are not strong in us,

unless our bodies suffer affliction. The false apostles, however, take excellent care to escape suffering.

Quinquagesima. Sunday before Lent. Paul's Praise of Christian Love.

Text: 1 Corinthians 13.

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

[1] Paul's purpose in this chapter is to silence and humble haughty Christians, particularly teachers and preachers. The Gospel gives much knowledge of God and of Christ, and conveys many wonderful gifts, as Paul recounts in Romans 12 and in 1 Corinthians 12. He tells us some have the gift of speaking, some of teaching, some of Scripture exposition; others of ruling; and so on. With Christians are great riches of spiritual knowledge, great treasures in the way of spiritual gifts. Manifest to all is the meaning of God, Christ, conscience, the present and the future life, and similar things. But there are to be found few indeed who make the right use of such gifts and knowledge; who humble themselves to serve others, according to the dictates of love. Each seeks his own honor and advantage, desiring to gain preferment and precedence over others.

[2] We see today how the Gospel has given to men knowledge beyond anything known in the world before and has bestowed upon them new capabilities. Various gifts have been showered upon and distributed among them which have redounded to their honor. But they go on unheeding. No one takes thought how he may in Christian love serve his fellow men to their profit. Each seeks for himself glory and honor, advantage and wealth. Could one bring about for himself the distinction of being the sole individual learned and powerful in the Gospel, all others to be insignificant and useless, he would willingly do it; he would be glad could he alone be regarded as Mister Smart.

[3] At the same time he affects deep humility, great self-abasement, and preaches of love and faith. But he would take it hard had he, in practice, to touch with his little finger what he preaches. This explains why the world is so filled with fanatics and schismatics, and why every man would master and outrank all others. Such as these are haughtier than those that taught them. Paul here attacks these vainglorious spirits, and judges them to be wholly insignificant, though their knowledge may be great and their gifts even greater, unless they should humble themselves and use their gifts in the service of others. To these coarse and mean people he addresses himself with a multitude of words and a lengthy discourse, a subject he elsewhere

disposes of in a few words; for instance, where he says (Philippians 2:3-4), “In lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself; not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others.” By way of illustration, he would pass sentence upon himself should he be thus blameworthy; this more forcibly to warn others who fall far short of his standing. He says, “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels.”

[4] That is, though I had ability to teach and to preach with power beyond that of any man or angel, with words of perfect charm, with truth and excellence informing my message — though I could do this, “but have not love [charity],” and only seek my own honor and profit and not my neighbor’s, “I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal.” In other words, “I might, perhaps, thereby teach others something, might fill their ears with sound, but before God I would be nothing.” As a clock or a bell has not power to hear its own sound, and does not derive benefit from its stroke, so the preacher who lacks love cannot himself understand anything he says, nor does he thereby improve his standing before God. He has much knowledge, indeed, but because he fails to place it in the service of love, it is the quality of his knowledge that is at fault. 1 Corinthians 8:1-12. Far better he was dumb or devoid of eloquence, if he but teach in love and meekness, than to speak as an angel while seeking but his own interests. “And if I have the gift of prophecy.”

[5] According to 1 Corinthians 14, to prophesy is to be able, by the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, correctly to understand and explain the prophets and the Scriptures. This is a most excellent gift. To “know mysteries” is to be able to apprehend the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures, or its allegorical references, as Paul does where (Galatians 4:24-31) he makes Sarah and Hagar representative of the two covenants, and Isaac and Ishmael of the two peoples — the Jews and the Christians. Christ does the same (John 3:14) when he makes the brazen serpent of Moses typical of himself on the cross; again, when Isaac, David, Solomon and other characters of sacred history appear as figures of Christ. Paul calls it “mystery” — this hidden, secret meaning beneath the primary sense of the narrative. But “knowledge” is the understanding of practical matters, such as Christian liberty, or the realization that the conscience is not bound. Paul would say, then: “Though one may understand the Scriptures, both in their obvious and their hidden sense; though he may know all about Christian liberty and a proper

conversation; yet if he have not love, if he do not with that knowledge serve his neighbor, it is all of no avail whatever; in God's sight he is nothing."

[6] Note how forcibly yet kindly Paul restrains the disgraceful vice of vainglory. He disregards even those exalted gifts, those gifts of exceeding refinement, charm and excellence, which naturally produce pride and haughtiness though they command the admiration and esteem of men. Who would not suppose the Holy Spirit to dwell visibly where such wisdom, such discernment of the Scriptures, is present? Paul's two epistles to the Corinthians are almost wholly directed against this particular vice, for it creates much mischief where it has sway. In Titus 1:7, he names first among the virtues of a bishop that he be "non superbus," not haughty. In other words that he do not exalt himself because of his office, his honor and his understanding, and despise others in comparison. But strangely Paul says, "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." Love the Spirit's Fruit Received by Faith

[7] We hold, and unquestionably it is true, that it is faith which justifies and cleanses, Romans 1:17; Romans 10:10; Acts 15:9. But if it justifies and purifies, love must be present. The Spirit cannot but impart love together with faith. In fact, where true faith is, the Holy Spirit dwells; and where the Holy Spirit is, there must be love and every excellence. How is it, then, Paul speaks as if faith without love were possible? We reply, this one text cannot be understood as subverting and militating against all those texts which ascribe justification to faith alone. Even the sophists have not attributed justification to love, nor is this possible, for love is an effect, or fruit, of the Spirit, who is received through faith.

[8] Three answers may be given to the question. First, Paul has not reference here to the Christian faith, which is inevitably accompanied by love, but to a general faith in God and his power. Such faith is a gift; as, for instance, the gift of tongues, the gift of knowledge, of prophecy, and the like. There is reason to believe Judas performed miracles in spite of the absence of Christian faith, according to John 6:70: "One of you is a devil." This general faith, powerless to justify or to cleanse, permits the old man with his vices to remain, just as do the gifts of intellect, health, eloquence, riches.

[9] A second answer is: Though Paul alludes to the true Christian faith, he has those in mind who have indeed attained to faith and performed miracles with it, but fall from grace through pride, thus losing their faith. Many begin but do not continue. They are like the seed in stony ground. They soon fall from faith. The temptations of vainglory are mightier than those of adversity. One who has the true faith and is at the same time able to perform miracles is likely to seek and to accept honor with such eagerness as to fall from both love and faith.

[10] A third answer is: Paul, in his effort to present the necessity of love, supposes an impossible condition. For instance, I might express myself in this way: “Though you were a god, if you lacked patience you would be nothing.” That is, patience is so essential to divinity that divinity itself could not exist without it, a proposition necessarily true. So, Paul’s meaning is, not that faith could exist without love, but on the contrary, so much is love an essential of faith that even mountain-moving faith would be nothing without love, could we separate the two even in theory. The third answer pleases me by far the best, though I do not reject the others, particularly the first. For Paul’s very first premise is impossible — “if I speak with the tongues of angels.” To speak with an angelic tongue is impossible for a human being, and he clearly emphasizes this impossibility making a distinction between the tongues of men and those of angels. There is no angelic tongue; while angels may speak to us in a human tongue, men can never speak in those of angels.

[11] As we are to understand the first clause — “If I speak with the tongues of angels” — as meaning, Were it as possible as it is impossible for me to speak with the tongues of angels; so are we to understand the second clause — “If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains” — to mean, Were it as possible as it is impossible to have such faith. Equally impossible is the proposition of understanding all mysteries, and we must take it to mean, Were it possible for one to understand all mysteries, which, however, it is not. John, in the last chapter of his Gospel, asserts that the world could not contain all the books which might be written concerning the things of the kingdom. For no man can ever fathom the depths of these mysteries. Paul’s manner of expressing himself is but a very common one, such as: “Even if I were a Christian, if I believed not in Christ I would be nothing”; or, “Were

you even a prince, if you neither ruled men nor possessed property you would be nothing.” “And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor.”

[12] In other words, “Were I to perform all the good works on earth and yet had not charity — having sought therein only my own honor and profit and not my neighbor’s — I would nevertheless be lost.” In the performance of external works so great as the surrender of property and life, Paul includes all works possible of performance, for he who would at all do these, would do any work. Just so, when he has reference to tongues, he includes all good words and doctrines; and in prophecy, understanding and faith he comprises all wisdom and knowledge. Some may risk body and property for the sake of temporal glory. So Romans and pagans have done; but as love was lacking and they sought only their own interests, they practically gave nothing. It being generally impossible for men to give away all their property, and their bodies to be burned, the meaning must be: “Were it possible for me to give all my goods to the poor, and my body to be burned.”

[13] The false reasoning of the sophists will not stand when they maliciously deduct from this text the theory that the Christian faith is not effectual to blot out sin and to justify. They say that before faith can justify it must be garnished with love; but justification and its distinctive qualities as well are beyond their ken. Justification of necessity precedes love. One does not love until he has become godly and righteous. Love does not make us godly, but when one has become godly, love is the result. Faith, the Spirit and justification have love as effect and fruitage, and not as mere ornament and supplement. We maintain that faith alone justifies and saves. But that we may not deceive ourselves and put our trust in a false faith, God requires love from us as the evidence of our faith, so that we may be sure of our faith being real faith. The Nature of Christian Love “Love suffereth long and is kind.”

[14] Now Paul begins to mention the nature of love, enabling us to perceive where real love and faith are to be found. A haughty teacher does not possess the virtues the apostle enumerates. Lacking these, however many gifts the haughty have received through the Gospel, they are devoid of love. First, love “suffereth long.” That is, it is patient; not sudden and swift to anger, not hasty to exercise revenge, impatience or blind rage. Rather it bears in patience with the wicked and the infirm until they yield.

Haughty teachers can only judge, condemn and despise others, while justifying and exalting themselves.

[15] Second, love is “kind.” In other words, it is pleasant to deal with; is not of forbidding aspect; ignores no one; is kind to all men, in words, acts and attitude.

[16] Third, love “envieth not” — is not envious nor displeased at the greater prosperity of others; grudges no one property or honor. Haughty teachers, however, are envious and unkind. They begrudge everyone else both honor and possessions. Though with their lips they may pretend otherwise, these characteristics are plainly visible in their deeds.

[17] Fourth, love “vaunteth not itself.” It is averse to knavery, to crafty guile and double-dealing. Haughty and deceptive spirits cannot refrain from such conduct, but love deals honestly and uprightly and face to face.

[18] Fifth, love is not “puffed up,” as are false teachers, who swell themselves up like adders.

[19] Sixth, love “doth not behave itself unseemly” after the manner of the passionate, impatient and obstinate, those who presume to be always in the right, who are opposed to all men and yield to none, and who insist on submission from every individual, otherwise they set the world on fire, bluster and fume, shriek and complain, and thirst for revenge. That is what such inflating pride and haughtiness of which we have just spoken lead to.

[20] Seventh, love “seeketh not her own.” She seeks not financial advancement; not honor, profit, ease; not the preservation of body and life. Rather she risks all these in her is no such thing as the Church of Christ nor as true Christians. Many erring spirits, especially strong pretenders to

[21] Eighth, love “is not [easily] provoked” by wrong and ingratitude; it is meek. False teachers can tolerate nothing; they seek only their own advantage and honor, to the injury of others.

[22] Ninth, love “taketh not account of [thinketh no] evil.” It is not suspicious; it puts the best construction on everything and takes all in good faith. The haughty, however, are immeasurably suspicious; always solicitous not to be underrated, they put the worst construction on everything, as Joab construed Abner’s deeds. 2 Samuel 3:25. This is a shameful vice, and they who are guilty of it are hard to handle.

[23] Tenth, love “rejoiceth not in unrighteousness [iniquity].” The words admit of two interpretations: First, as having reference to the delight of an individual in his own evil doings. Solomon (Proverbs 2:14) speaks of those who “rejoice to do evil.” Such must be either extremely profligate and shameless, characters like harlots and knaves; or else they must be hypocrites, who do not appreciate the wickedness of their conduct; characters like heretics and schismatics, who rejoice when their knavery succeeds under the name of God and of the truth. I do not accept this interpretation, but the other. Paul’s meaning is that false teachers are malicious enough to prefer to hear, above all things, that some other does wrong, commits error and is brought to shame; and their motive is simply that they themselves may appear upright and godly. Such was the attitude of the Pharisee toward the publican, in the Gospel. But love’s compassion reaches far beyond its own sins and prays for others.

[24] Eleventh, love “rejoiceth with [in] the truth.” Here is evidence that the preceding phrase is to be taken as having reference to malicious rejoicing at another’s sin and fall. Rejoicing in the truth is simply exulting in the right-doing and integrity of another. Similarly, love is grieved at another’s wrong-doing. But to the haughty it is an affliction to learn of uprightness in someone else; for they imagine such integrity detracts from their own profit and honor.

[25] Twelfth, love “beareth all things.” It excuses every failing in all men, however weak, unjust or foolish one may be apparently, and no one can be guilty of a wrong too great for it to overlook. But none can do right in the eyes of the haughty, who ever find something to belittle and censure as beyond toleration, even though they must hunt up an old fence to find the injury.

[26] Thirteenth, love “believeth all things.” Paul does not here allude to faith in God, but to faith in men. His meaning is: Love is of decidedly trustful disposition. The possessor of it believes and trusts all men, considering them just and upright like himself. He anticipates no wily and crooked dealing, but permits himself to be deceived, deluded, flouted, imposed upon, at every man’s pleasure, and asks, “Do you really believe men so wicked?” He measures all other hearts by his own, and makes mistakes with utmost cheerfulness. But such error works him no injury. He knows God cannot forsake, and the deceiver of love but deceives himself.

The haughty, on the contrary, trust no one, will believe none, nor brook deception.

[27] Fourteenth, love “hopeth all things.” Love despairs of no man, however wicked he may be. It hopes for the best. As implied here, love says, “We must, indeed, hope for better things.” It is plain from this that Paul is not alluding to hope in God. Love is a virtue particularly representing devotion to a neighbor; his welfare is its goal in thought and deed. Like its faith, the hope entertained by love is frequently misplaced, but it never gives up. Love rejects no man; it despairs of no cause. But the proud speedily despair of men generally, rejecting them as of no account.

[28] Fifteenth, love “endureth all things.” ‘It endures whatever harm befalls, whatever injury it suffers; it endures when its faith and hope in men have been misplaced; endures when it sustains damage to body, property or honor. It knows that no harm has been done since it has a rich God. False teachers, however, bear with nothing, least of all with perfidy and the violation of plighted faith.

[29] Sixteenth, love never faileth; that means, it abides forever, also in the life to come. It never gives up, never permits itself to be hindered or defeated by the wickedness or ingratitude of men, as do worldly individuals and false saints, who, immediately on perceiving contempt or ingratitude, draw back, unwilling to do further good to any, and, rendering themselves quite inhuman, become perfect misanthropes like Timon in his reputation among the Greeks. Love does not so. It permits not itself to be made wicked by the wickedness of men, nor to be hindered in well-doing. It continues to do good everywhere, teaching and admonishing, aiding and serving, notwithstanding its services and benefits must be rewarded, not by good, but by evil. Love remains constant and immovable; it continues, it endures, in this earthly life and also in the life to come. The apostle adds, “Whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away.” Love he commends above all other endowments, as a gift that can never pass, even in the life to come. Those other gifts, the boast of the false apostles, are bestowed only for this present life, to serve in the administering of the ministerial office. Prophecy, tongues, knowledge, all must cease; for in yonder life each individual will himself perceive perfectly and there will be no need for one to teach another. Likewise, all differences, all inequalities,

shall be no more. No knowledge and no diversity of gifts is necessary; God himself will be all in every soul. Corinthians 15:28.

[30] Here Paul gives utterance to the distinction between the life of faith here below and that heavenly life of divine vision. He would teach that we have in this life and the other the same possession, for it is the same God and the same treasures which we have here by faith and there by sight. In the objects themselves there is no difference; the difference consists in our knowledge. We have the same God in both lives, but in different manner of possession. The mode of possessing God in this life is faith. Faith is an imperfect, obscure vision, which makes necessary the Word, which, in turn, receives vogue through the ministry, tongues and prophecy. Without the Word, faith cannot live. But the mode of possessing God in the future life is not faith but sight. This is perfect knowledge, rendering unnecessary the Word, and likewise preaching, tongues and prophecy. These, then, must pass. Paul continues, “We know in part, and we prophesy in part.”

[31] “We know in part”; that is, in this life we know imperfectly, for it is of faith and not of sight. And we “prophesy in part”; that is, imperfectly, for the substance of our prophecy is the Word and preaching. Both knowledge and prophecy, however, reveal nothing short of what the angels see — the one God. “But when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.” He proves this by way of illustration and contrasts the child with the man. To children, who are yet weak, play is a necessity; it is a substitute for office and work. Similarly, we in the present life are far too frail to behold God. Until we are able, it is necessary that we should use the medium of Word and faith, which are adapted to our limitations. “For now, we see in a mirror [through a glass] darkly; but then face to face.”

[32] Faith, Paul tells us, is like a mirror, like a riddle. The actual face is not in the glass; there is but the image of it. Likewise, faith gives us, not the radiant countenance of eternal Deity, but a mere image of him, an image derived through the Word. As a dark riddle points to something more than it expresses, so faith suggests something clearer than that which it perceives. But in the life to come, mirror and riddle, faith and its demonstration, shall all have ceased to be. God’s face and our own shall be mutually and clearly revealed. Paul says, “Now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known [know even also as I am known].” That is, God now knows me perfectly, clearly and plainly; no dark veil is upon myself.

But as to him, a dark veil hides him from me. With the same perfect clearness wherewith he now knows me, I shall then know him — without a veil. The veil shall be taken away, not from him, but from me; for upon him is no veil. The Greatest Christian Virtue Is Love “But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

[33] The sophists have transgressed ‘in a masterly manner as regards this verse. They have made faith vastly inferior to love because of Paul’s assertion that love is greater than faith and greater than hope. As usual, their mad reason blindly seizes upon the literal expression. They hack a piece out of it and the remainder they ignore. Thus, they fail to understand Paul’s meaning; they do not perceive that the sense of Paul concerning the greatness of love is expressed both in the text and the context. For surely it cannot be disputed that the apostle is here referring to the permanent or temporary character respectively of love and other gifts, and not to their rank or power. As to rank, not faith only, but the Word, surpasses love; for the Word is the power of God unto salvation to all that believe. Romans 1:16. Yet the Word must pass. But though love is the fruit of the Word and its effect, it shall never be abolished. Faith possesses God himself. It possesses and can accomplish all things; yet it must cease. Love gives and blesses the neighbor, as a result of faith, and it shall never be done away.

[34] Now, Paul’s statement that love is greater than faith and hope is intended as an expression of the permanence, or eternal duration, of love. Faith, being limited as to time in comparison with love, ranks beneath it for the reason of this temporary duration. With the same right I might say that the kingdom of Christ is greater upon earth than was Christ. Thereby I do not mean that the Church in itself is better and of higher rank than Christ, but merely that it covers a greater part of the earth than he compassed; for he was here but three years and those he spent in a limited sphere, whereas his kingdom has been from the beginning and is coextensive with the earth. In this sense, love is longer and broader than either faith or hope. Faith deals with God merely in the heart and in this life, whereas the relations of love both to God and the whole world are eternal. Nevertheless, as Christ is immeasurably better and higher and more precious than the Christian Church, although we behold him moving in smaller limits and as a mere individual, so is faith better, higher and more precious than love, though its duration is limited, and it has God alone for its object.

[35] Paul's purpose in thus extolling love is to deal a blow to false teachers and to bring to naught their boasts about faith and other gifts when love is lacking. His thought is: "If ye possess not love, which abides forever, all else whereof ye boast being perishable, ye will perish with it. While the Word of God, and spiritual gifts, are eternal, yet the external office and proclamation of the Word, and likewise the employment of gifts in their variety, shall have an end, and thus your glory and pride shall become as ashes." So, then, faith justifies through the Word and produces love. But while both Word and faith shall pass, righteousness and love, which they effect, abide forever; just as a building erected by the aid of scaffolding remains after the scaffolding has been removed.

[36] Observe how small the word "love" and how easily uttered! Who would have thought to find so much precious virtue and power ascribed by Paul to this one excellence as counterpart of so much that is evil? This is, I imagine, magnifying love, painting love. It is a better discourse on virtue and vice than are the heathen writings. The model the apostle presents should justly shame the false teachers, who talk much of love but in whom not one of the virtues he mentions is found. Every quality of love named by him means false teachers buffeted and assaulted. Whenever he magnifies love and characterizes her powers, he invariably makes at the same time a thrust at those who are deficient in any of them. Well may we, then, as he describes the several features, add the comment "But you do very differently."

[37] It is passing strange that teachers devoid of love should possess such gifts as Paul has mentioned here, viz., speaking with tongues, prophesying, understanding mysteries; that they should have faith, should bestow their goods and suffer themselves to be burned. For we have seen what abominations ensue where love is lacking; such individuals are proud, envious, puffed up, impatient, unstable, false, venomous, suspicious, malicious, disdainful, bitter, disinclined to service, distrustful, selfish, ambitious and haughty. How can it consistently be claimed that people of this stamp can, through faith, remove mountains, give their bodies to be burned, prophesy, and so on? It is precisely as I have stated. Paul presents an impossible proposition, implying that since they are devoid of love, they do not really possess those gifts, but merely assume the name and

appearance. And in order to divest them of those he admits for the sake of argument that they are what in reality they are not.

Invocavit. First Sunday in Lent. An Entreaty to Live as Christians.

Text: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10.

1 We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

2 (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)

3 Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed:

4 But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

5 In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;

6 By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,

7 By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,

8 By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true;

9 As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed;

10 As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

[1] This lesson is an admonition to the Corinthians calculated to stimulate them in the performance of the duties they already recognize. The words are easily enough said, but execution is difficult and practice rare. For Paul gives a strange description of the Christian life, and the color and characteristics with which he exhibits it render it decidedly unprepossessing. First he says: “And working together with him we entreat also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”

[2] He calls the Corinthians co-workers, as in 1 Corinthians 3:9, where he puts it: “We are God’s fellow workers; ye are God’s husbandry, God’s building.” That is, we labor upon you with the external Word — teaching and admonishing; but God, working inwardly through the Spirit, gives the blessing and the success. He permits not our labor with the outward Word to be in vain. Therefore, God is the true Master, performing inwardly the supreme work, while we aid outwardly, serving him through the ministry. The apostle’s purpose in praising his co-laborers is to prevent them from despising the external Word as something inessential to them, or well enough known. For though God is able to affect everything without the instrumentality of the outward Word, working inwardly by his Spirit, this is by no means his purpose. He uses preachers as fellow workers, or co-laborers, to accomplish his purpose through the Word when and where he pleases. Now, since preachers have the office, name and honor of fellow workers with God, no one may be considered learned enough or holy enough to ignore or despise the most inferior preaching; especially since he knows not when the hour may come wherein God will, through preachers, perform his work in him.

[3] Secondly, Paul shows the danger of neglecting the grace of God. He boldly declares here that the preaching of the Gospel is not an eternal, continuous and permanent mode of instruction, but rather a passing shower, which hastens on. What it strikes, it strikes; what it misses, it misses. It does not return, nor does it stand still. The sun and heat follow and dry it up. Experience shows that in no part of the world has the Gospel remained pure beyond the length of man’s memory. Only so long as its pioneers lived did it stand and prosper. When they were gone, the light disappeared; factious spirits and false teachers followed immediately. Thus, Moses announces (Deuteronomy 31:29) that the children of Israel will corrupt themselves after his death; and the book of Judges testifies that so it really came to

pass. Each time a judge died in whose days the Word of God obtained sway, the people fell away and became more wicked than before. King Joash did what was right so long as the high priest Jehoiada lived, but after the latter's death this had an end. And following the time of Christ and his apostles, the world was filled with seditious spirits and false teachers. Paul, in fact, declares (Acts 20:29): "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock." So also, we now have the pure Gospel. This is a time of grace and salvation and the acceptable day; but should the world continue, this condition, too, will soon pass.

[4] To receive the grace of God in vain can be nothing else than to hear the pure word of God which presents and offers his grace, and yet to remain listless and irresponsive, undergoing no change at all. Thus, ungrateful for the Word and unworthy of it, we merit the loss of the Word. Such as these are described in the parable (Luke 14:16-24) where the guests bidden to the supper refused to come and went about their own business, thus provoking the master's anger until he swore they should not taste his supper. Similar is Paul's threat here, that we may take heed and accept the Gospel with fear and gratitude. Christ says (John 12:35), "Walk while ye have the light, that darkness overtake you not." I should think we might have learned wisdom from experience — from the darkness we suffered under the Papacy. But that is all forgotten; we show neither gratitude nor amendment of life. Very well, we shall find out the consequences. *Salvation Wherever the Gospel Is Sent* "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

[5] These words portray the richness of the salvation wherever the Gospel goes: nothing but grace and help; no wrath or punishment. Indeed, these are words of unutterable meaning the apostle here employs. First, he tells us that it is an "acceptable time," as the Hebrew expresses it. Our own way of putting it would be: "This is a gracious time, a time when God turns away his wrath and is moved only by love and benevolence toward us and is pleased to do us good." All our sins are forgotten; he takes no note of the sins of the past nor of those of the present. In short, we are in a realm of mercy, where are only forgiveness and reconciliation. The heavens are now open. This is the true golden year when man is denied nothing. So Paul says, "At an acceptable time I hearkened unto thee"; that is: "I am kindly disposed toward thee. Whatsoever thou shalt even desire and ask for, thou

shalt surely receive. Be not neglectful, therefore, and ask while the acceptable time continues.”

[6] Second, Paul declares that it is a day of blessing, “a day of salvation.” It is a day of help, wherein we are not only acceptable and assured of God’s favor and good will toward us, but we experience even as we have been assured — that God really does help us. He verifies his assurance, for his beneficence gives testimony that our prayers are heard. We call it a happy day, a blessed day, a day of abundance; for these two truths are inseparably related — that God is favorable toward us, and that his kindness is the proof of his favor. God’s favor toward us is revealed in the first clause, which speaks of an acceptable time; that he extends help to us is revealed in the second clause, telling of a blessed day of succor. Both these facts are to be apprehended by faith and in good conscience; for a superficial judgment would lead to the view that this period of blessing is rather an accursed period of wrath and disfavor. Words like these, of spiritual meaning, must be understood in the light of the Holy Spirit; thus, shall we find that these two glorious, beautiful expressions refer to the Gospel dispensation and are intended to magnify all the treasures and the riches of the kingdom of Christ. “Giving no occasion of stumbling [no offense] in anything.”

[7] Since this is a time of blessing, let us make right use of it, not spending it to no purpose, and let us take serious heed to give offense to none; thus avoiding reproach to our ministry. It is evident from the connection to what kind of offense the apostle has reference; he would not have the Gospel doctrine charged with teaching anything evil.

[8] Two kinds of offense bring the Gospel into disgrace: In one case it is the heathen who are offended, and this because of the fact that some individuals would make the Gospel a means of freedom from temporal restraint, substituting temporal liberty for spiritual. They thus bring reproach upon the Gospel as teaching such doctrine and make it an object of scandal to the heathen and worldly people, whereby they are misled and become enemies to the faith and to the Word of God without cause, being the harder to convert since they regard Christians as licentious knaves. And the responsibility for this must be placed at the door of those who have given offense in this respect. In the other case, Christians are offended among themselves. The occasion is the indiscreet exercise of Christian

liberty, which offends the weak in faith. Concerning this topic much is said in 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14. Paul here hints at what he speaks of in 1 Corinthians 10:32-33: “Give no occasion of stumbling, either to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the church of God: even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of the many that they may be saved.” He takes up the same subject in Philippians 2:4, teaching that every man should look on the things of others. Then no offense will be given. “That our ministration the ministry be not blamed.”

[9] Who can prevent our office being vilified? For the Word of God must be persecuted equally with Christ himself. That the Word of God is reviled by unbelievers ignorant of faith in God is something we cannot prevent. For, according to Isaiah 8:14 and Romans 9:33, the Gospel is a “rock of offense.” This is the offense of the faith; it will pursue its course and we are not responsible. But for love’s offense, offense caused by shortcomings in our works and fruits of faith, the things we are commanded to let shine before men, that, seeing these, they may be allured to the faith — for offense in this respect we cannot disclaim responsibility. It is a sin we certainly must avoid, that the heathen, the Jews, the weak and the rulers of the world may never be able to say: “Behold the knavery and licentiousness of these people! Surely their doctrine cannot be true.” Otherwise our evil name and fame and the obstacles we place before others will extend to the innocent and holy Word God has given us to apprehend and to proclaim; it must bear our shame and in addition become unfruitful in the offended ones. Grievous is such a sin as this. Marks of Christians as Ministers of God “But in everything commending ourselves, as ministers of God, in much patience.”

[10] The apostle here portrays the Christian life in its outward expression. Not that it is possible for anyone thereby to become a Christian, or godly; but, being servants of God, or Christians and godly people, we furnish in this manner, according to Paul’s statement here, the evidence thereof as by fruits and signs. Mark his phrase “ministers of God.” What a remarkable service for God is this wherein we must endure so much suffering, so much affliction, privation, anxiety, stripes, imprisonment, tumult or sedition, labor, watching, fasting, and so on! No mass here, no vigil, no hallucinations of a fictitious service of God; it is the true service of God, which subdues the body and mortifies the flesh. Not, indeed, as if

fasting, watching and toiling are to be despised because they do not make just. Though we are not thereby justified, we must nevertheless practice those things, instead of giving rein to the flesh and indulging our idleness.

[11] Paul also mentions sedition. Not that by our teaching or life we should be guilty of sedition against others; rather, we should be quiet and obedient. See Romans 13. Christ says (Matthew 22:21), “Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” Paul’s meaning is that when we become victims of sedition on the part of others we should submit; just as we are not to inflict upon others privations, distresses, stripes or imprisonment, but rather to accept them at their hands. So Paul heads the list with patience; which does not produce sedition, but endures it. It is a consolation in these times when we are charged with raising seditions, to reflect that it is the very nature and color of the Christian life that it be criticized as seditious when the fact is it patiently bears sedition directed against itself. Thus was it with Elijah, who was accused by King Ahab of troubling Israel and exciting turbulence. 1 Kings 18:17-18. Then, when we are charged with guilt in this respect, let us remember that not only did the apostles have to hear the same accusation, but even Christ himself, with all his innocence, was so accused. More than that, he was falsely reviled upon the cross with a superscription charging sedition; in fact, he was even put to death as a Jewish king guilty of opposition to Caesar and of enticing and inciting the people.

[12] The remaining marks of the Christian life — patience, affliction, necessities, distresses, stripes, imprisonments, labor, watching, fasting, purity, etc., are easily interpreted; it is readily seen how they are instrumental in our service to God. God will not have indolent, idle gluttons, nor sleepy and impatient servants. Most adroitly does Paul score in particular our fine idle youths who draw interest from their money, have an easy life, and imagine their tonsures, their long robes and their howling in the churches excuse them from labor. All men should labor and earn their bread, according to Paul. 2 Thessalonians 3:12. By labor, our text teaches, we serve God; more than that, our labor is testimony to the fact that we serve God. “In knowledge.”

[13] What is meant here? With Paul, knowledge signifies discretion, understanding, reason. He speaks of the Jews (Romans 10:2) as having “a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge”; that is, a zeal without

reason, without understanding, without discretion. His message here, then, is: “We should conduct ourselves in Christian affairs with becoming reason and moderation lest we give offense to the weak by a presumptuous use of Christian liberty. Rather we should, with discretion and understanding, adapt ourselves to that which promotes the neighbor’s welfare. Likewise, when we labor, fast, or when we regulate our sexual relations, we are to exercise reason, lest the body should be injured by too much fasting, watching and toil, and also by needless abstention from sexual intercourse. Let everyone take heed to remain within bounds by using reason and discretion. The apostle counsels the married (1 Corinthians 7:5) not to defraud each other too long, lest they be tempted. In all such matters, he would impose no measures and rules, no limits and laws, after the manner of the councils, the popes and the monks. He leaves it wholly to each individual’s discretion to decide and to test for himself all questions of time and quantity bearing upon the restraints of his flesh. “In longsuffering, in kindness.”

[14] The meaning of these phrases has been stated in many other places, particularly in connection with Romans 2 and Galatians 5. “By the Holy Spirit.”

[15] What are we to understand here? The words may have one of two meanings: First, the apostle may have reference to the Holy Spirit in person, who is God. Second, he may have reference to the spirit of individuals, or their spiritual condition. “Holy Spirit” may be intended to stand for “spirituality,” Paul’s meaning being: “Beware of the professedly spiritual, or of things glittering and purporting to be spiritual; beware of them who make great boast of the Spirit and nevertheless betray only a false, unclean, unholy spirit, productive of sects and discord. Abide ye in that true, holy spirituality proceeding from God’s Holy Spirit, who imparts unity and harmony, determination and courage.” As Paul expresses it elsewhere (Ephesians 4:3), “Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” They, then, who continue in one faith, one mind and disposition, give testimony by the reality and saintliness of their spiritual life and by the presence of the Holy Spirit that they are servants of God. For true spirituality, or a holy walk in the Spirit, means to be in heart and mind at one with the Spirit, through faith. “In love unfeigned, in the word of truth.”

[16] As the apostle opposes the Holy Spirit to false sects and false prophets, so he opposes unfeigned love to indolent Christians who in true faith and unity of mind possess marks of true spirituality, but are nevertheless indolent, cold, in fact false as regards love. Again, he opposes the “Word of Truth” to abusers of the Word of God, who misconstrue it and comment upon it according to their own fancy, and for their own honor and profit. While much that purports to be spiritual has not the Word as source and gives honor to the Spirit at the expense of the Word, the class under consideration profess to magnify the Word; they would be master interpreters of the Scriptures, confident that their explanations are correct and superior. In condemnation of this class, Peter says (1 Peter 4:11), “If any man speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God,” and not his own word. In other words, let him be assured he speaks the Word of God and not his own. God’s Word Paul here terms the “Word of truth”; that is, the true Word of God and not our own misconstrued, falsified word palmed off as God’s Word. In our idiom we would say “the real Word” where the Hebrew has “Word of truth,” or “true Word.” “In the power of God.”

[17] Peter speaks also of this power, in the verse before mentioned: “If any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth.” And Paul elsewhere declares (Colossians 1:29): “Whereunto I labor also, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily”; and again (Romans 15:18): “For I will not dare to speak of any things save those which Christ wrought through me, for the obedience of the Gentiles.” Christians should have the assurance that they are the kingdom of God, and that in whatever they do, especially in undertakings of a spiritual character, which have the salvation of souls as aim, they beware of everything not absolutely known as true, so that the work be not theirs but God’s. In God’s kingdom God alone is to speak, reign and act. Christ says (Matthew 5:16): “Even so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” — may glorify him as the worker, and not yourselves. Seductive spirits, however, come cavorting in their own power, throw the pictures out of the churches and establish rules of their own, without caring whether it is done in the power of God. The consequence is that their work is neither permanent nor fruitful

The Armor of Righteousness

“By the armor of righteousness.”

[18] This armor Paul more fully describes in Ephesians and in Thessalonians. Sufficient explanation of it has been given in the lesson for Advent. There is the “shield of faith,” the “helmet of salvation,” the shoes of “the preparation of the Gospel of peace,” and so on. Paul includes them all under the term “armor of righteousness,” and, in his epistle to the Ephesians, under the phrase “armor of God,” to teach Christians to eschew and to forsake carnal, worldly weapons for these. He would have them know themselves a spiritual people, spiritually warring against the spiritual enemies enumerated here and pointed out on the right hand and on the left.

[19] On the left hand he places dishonor and evil report, in that we appear to men as deceivers, unknown, in conflict with death, chastened, sorrowful, poor and needy. Scorn is hurled in our faces and the reputation accorded us is that of deceivers. The Christian must not only be unknown, friendless and a stranger, but men will also be ashamed of him — even his best friends — in consequence of the reproach and evil report under which he lies in the eyes of the great, the wealthy, the wise and the powerful of the world. He must be as one dying — continually expecting death by reason of the hatred and envy directed against him, and the various persecutions he suffers. He must be beaten and scourged; must at times feel the weight of the enmity and envy wherewith the world inflicts torment. He is like the sorrowful, for so ill does he fare in the world, he has reason to sorrow. He resembles the poor in that nothing is given him but injuries; he possesses nothing, for if he has not been deprived of all his possessions he daily expects that extremity. Lest he despair of his hope in God and grow faint, he must be armed on the left hand against these enemies with a divine armor: with a firm faith, with the comfort of the divine Word, with hope, so that he may endure and exercise patience. Thereby he proves himself to be a true servant of God, inasmuch as false teachers and hypocrites, with all their pompous worship, are incapable of these things.

[20] On the right he places honor and good report, inasmuch as we are after all true, well known, alive, defiant of death, full of joy, rich, possessing all things. The Christian will have always a few to honor and commend him; some there will be to give him a good report, to praise him as true and honest in doctrine. And there will be some who receive and acknowledge him, who are not ashamed of him. Life remains in spite of

death oft faced, even in scourgings. He rejoices when things with him are at the worst, for his heart remains joyful in God, that joy finding expression in words, deeds and manner. Though poor in the goods of the world, he does not die of hunger, and he makes many spiritually rich through the Word. Even though he has no possessions at all, he suffers no lack but has in hand all things; for all creatures must serve the believer. As Christ promised (Mark 9:23), "All things are possible to him that believeth." For himself, it is true, he possesses nothing, and gladly he endures his need; but for his neighbor's sake he can do all things, and all he has he is ready to place at the disposal of his neighbor whenever need requires. These blessings also give occasion for a powerful armor, for we must guard against pride and haughtiness.

[21] Thus the Christian is quite untrammelled. His eyes are fixed upon God alone. Always choosing the safe middle path he steers clear of danger on the right and on the left. He permits not the evil to overthrow him nor the good to exalt, but makes use of both to the honor of God and the benefit of his neighbor. This, Paul instructs us, should be the manner of our life now while the season of grace continues; nor must we fail to heed this! This is the true service of God, the service well pleasing to him; unto which may God help us. Amen.

Reminiscere. Second Sunday in Lent. Exhortation to Holiness.

Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7.

1 Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

2 For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

3 For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

4 That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;

5 Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

6 That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

7 For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7

[1] This lesson is easy of interpretation. It is a general and earnest admonition on the part of Paul, enjoining us to an increasing degree of perfection in the doctrine we have received. This admonition, this exhortation, is one incumbent upon an evangelical teacher to give, for he is urging us to observe a doctrine commanded of God. He says, "For ye know what charge [commandments] we gave you through the Lord Jesus." Whatever Christians do, it should be willing service, not compulsory; but when a command is given, it should be in the form of exhortation or entreaty. Those who have received the Spirit are they from whom obedience is due; but those not inclined to a willing performance, we should leave to themselves.

[2] But mark you this: Paul places much value upon the gift bestowed upon us, the gift of knowing how we are "to walk and to please God." In the world this gift is as great as it is rare. Though the offer is made to the whole world and publicly proclaimed, further exhortation is indispensable, and Paul is painstaking and diligent in administering it. The trouble is, we are in danger of becoming indolent and negligent, forgetful and ungrateful — vices menacing and great, and which, alas, are altogether too frequent. Let us look back and note to what depths of darkness, of delusion and abomination, we had sunk when we knew not how we ought to walk, how to please God. Alas, we have forgotten all about it; we have become indolent and ungrateful and are dealt with accordingly. Well does the apostle say in the lesson for the Sunday preceding this (2 Corinthians 6:1): "And working together with him we entreat also that ye receive not the

grace of God in vain, for he saith, At an acceptable time I hearkened unto thee, and in a day of salvation did I succor thee.”

[3] In our present lesson he treats chiefly of two vices: unchastity, which is a sin against oneself and destructive of the fruits of faith; and fraud in business, which is a sin against the neighbor and likewise destructive of faith and charity. Paul would have every man keep himself chaste and free from wrong against every man, pronouncing the wrath of God on offenses of this character.

[4] It was a fact reflecting much credit and honor on the Thessalonians in contrast to the Corinthians and the Galatians, that they continued upright in doctrine and true in the knowledge of the faith, though perhaps deficient in the above-mentioned two self-evident features of Christian life. While it is true that if sins of immorality are not renounced God will punish, yet punishment in such cases is for the most part temporal, these sins being less pernicious than such gross offenses as error in faith and doctrine.

[5] Paul, however, threatens such sins with the wrath of God, lest anyone become remiss and indolent, imagining the kingdom of Christ a kingdom to tolerate with impunity such offenses. As Paul expresses it, “God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification [holiness].” The thought is: Unchastity does not come within the limits of Christian liberty and privilege, nor does God treat the offender with indulgence and impunity. No, indeed. In fact, he will more rigorously punish this sin among Christians than among heathen. Paul tells us (1 Corinthians 11:30) that many were sickly, and many had succumbed to the sleep of death in consequence of eating and drinking unworthily. And Psalm 89:32 testifies, “Then will I visit their transgression with the rod.”

[6] True, they who sin through infirmity, who, conscious of their transgressions, suffer themselves to be reproved, repenting at once — for these the kingdom of Christ has ready pity and forbearance, commending them to acceptance and toleration (Romans 15; Galatians 6:1; Corinthians 13:7); but that such vices be regarded generally lawful and normal — this will not do! Paul declares, “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” And he speaks of “how ye ought to... please God.” His thought is: Some consider these sins a matter of little moment, treat them as if the wind blew them away and God rather had pleasure in them as trivial

affairs. But this is not true. While God really bears with the fallen sinner, he would have us perceive our errors and strive to mend our lives and to abound more and more in righteousness. His grace is not intended to cloak our shame, nor should the licentious abuse the kingdom of Christ as a shield for their knavery. Paul commands (Galatians 5:13), “Use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh”; and Peter (1 Peter 2:16), “As free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bondservants of God.”

[7] Paul, following the Hebrew way of speaking, has reference to chastity where he says, “your sanctification.” He terms the body “holy” when it is chaste, chastity being, in God’s sight, equivalent to holiness. “Holiness,” in the Old Testament, is a synonym for “purity.” Again, “holiness” and “purity” are regarded as the same thing in 1 Corinthians 7:14: “Else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.”

[8] The nature of the holiness and purity whereof he speaks he makes plain himself in the words: “That ye abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification and honor.” The apostle does not here prohibit matrimony, but licentiousness, and unchastity outside the marriage state. He who is careful to keep his vessel — his body — chaste, who does not commit adultery and is not guilty of whoredom — this man preserves his body in holiness and purity, and properly is called chaste and holy. The same thought is borne out in the succeeding verse: “Not in the passion of lust [in the lust of concupiscence], even as the Gentiles.”

[9] The Gentiles, who know not God, give themselves up to all manner of uncleanness, or disgraceful vices, as Paul records in Romans 1:29-31. Not that all Gentiles are guilty in that respect. Paul is not saying what all heathen do; he merely states that with the Gentiles such conduct is apparent, and quite to be expected from people “who know not God.” Under such conditions, one allows the sin to pass unreprieved, as does Paul himself. Notwithstanding he censures them who consent to sin of this character when knowing better, and who do not restrain the evil-doers. Romans 1:32. But in the case of Christians, when any fall into such sin they are to be reprieved and the sin resisted; the offense must not be allowed to pass as with the gentiles. In the case of the latter the lust of concupiscence holds sway; no restraints are exercised, and the reins are given to lust, so that its nature and passion are given free expression, just as if this were a provision

of nature, when the fact is it is a pest to be healed, a blemish to be removed. But there is none to heal and deliver, so the gentiles decay and go to ruin through evil lust. “Lust of concupiscence” would be, with us, “evil lust.” The conclusion is simple: “That no man transgress and wrong his brother in the matter.”

[10] In other words, that no one take for himself what belongs to another, or use the property of another for his own benefit, which may be done by a variety of tricks. To “defraud in any matter” is to seek gain at the expense of a neighbor. On this latter subject much has been written elsewhere, particularly in the little treatise on Merchants and Usury, showing the great extent to which extortion is practiced and how charity is rarely observed. It is on this topic that Paul here would fix our attention.

Oculi. Third Sunday in Lent. Exhortation to be Imitators of God.

Text: Ephesians 5:1-9.

1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;

2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;

4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

6 Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

7 Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Ephesians 5:1-9

Exhortation To Be Imitators of God

[1] This is a letter of admonition, instructing Christians, according to the plan underlying Paul's epistles, not to become sluggish and careless, but by their deeds to evince their faith, and honor and proclaim the Word he has

taught them; for the sake of the gentiles and unbelievers, that these may not take offense at the doctrine of Christ.

[2] To begin with, having shown that we were made children of God through Christ, he admonishes us to be followers, or imitators, of the Father, as beloved children. He employs the most endearing of terms — “beloved children” — to persuade us by the Father’s love to love even as we are loved. But what manner of love has God manifested toward us? It was not simply that love is manifest in the fact that he gives temporal support to us unworthy beings in common with all the wicked on earth; that he permits his sun to rise on the just and on the unjust and sends rain on the grateful and on the ungrateful, as Christ mentions (Matthew 5:45) in connection with his command to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. Not only thus did God love us, but in a special way; he has given his Son for us. In addition to showering upon us both temporal and eternal blessings he has given his own self; he has completely poured out himself for us, with all he is, with all he has, with all he does, — and we were nothing but sinners, unworthy creatures, enemies and servants of the devil. More than this would be beyond even his grace and power. He who despises such glow of love, which fills all heaven and earth and is beyond all power to comprehend it; who does not permit this love to kindle and incite in him love for his neighbor whether enemy or friend — such a one is not likely ever to become godly or loving by such measures as laws or commandments, instruction, constraint or compulsion.

[3] “Walk in love,” counsels the apostle. He would have our external life all love. But not the world’s love is to be our pattern, which seeks only its own advantage, and loves only so long as it is the gainer thereby; we must love even as Christ loved, who sought neither pleasure nor gain from us but gave himself for us, not to mention the other blessings he bestows daily — gave himself as a sacrifice and offering to reconcile God unto ourselves, so that he should be our God and we his children. Thus, likewise should we give, thus should we lend, or even surrender our goods, no matter whether friends claim them or enemies. Nor are we to stop there; we must be ready to give our lives for both friends and enemies and must be occupied with no other thought than how we can serve others, and how both our life and property can be made to minister to them in this life, and this because we

know that Christ is ours and has given us all things. “To God for an odor of a sweet smell [for a sweet-smelling savor].”

[4] This expression Paul takes from the Old Testament. There the temporal sacrifices are described as being “a sweet-smelling savor” unto God: that is, they were acceptable and well-pleasing to him; but not, as the Jews imagined, because of the value of the work or of the sacrifices in themselves. For such thoughts they were chastised by the prophets often enough. They were acceptable on the ground of the true sacrifice which they foreshadowed and encircled. Paul’s thought is this: The sacrifices of the Old Testament have passed. Now all sacrifices are powerless but that of Christ himself; he is the sweet-smelling savor. This sacrifice is pleasing to God. He gladly accepts it and would have us be confident it is an acceptable offering in our stead. Moreover, there is no other sacrifice the Christian Church can offer for us. The once-offered Christ alone avails. Although, following his example, we present our bodies a sacrifice, as taught in Romans 12:1, yet we do not do so in behalf of ourselves or others; that is the function of the one sacrifice alone — Christ. Therefore, all sacrifices offered in the mistaken notion that they avail for us, or even secure forgiveness of sin, are wicked and unsavory. But more of this elsewhere. Sins Not To Be Named among Christians “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as becometh saints.”

[5] In naming uncleanness in addition to fornication, the reference is to all sensual affections in distinction from wedded love. They are too unsavory for him to mention by name, though in Romans 1:24 he finds it expedient to speak of them without disguise. However, also wedded love must be characterized by moderation among Christians. While there is a conjugal duty to be required by necessity, it is for the very purpose of avoiding unchastity and uncleanness. The ideal and perfect condition, it is true, would be cohabitation with a sole view to procreation; however, that is too high for attainment by all.

[6] Paul declares that the sin he indicates should not be named of the Ephesians. Unquestionably, among Christians there will always be some infirm one to fall; but we must labor diligently, correcting, amending and restraining. We must not suffer the offense to go unchallenged, but curtail and remedy it, lest, as remarked in the preceding lesson, the heathen

stumble, saying: “Christians tolerate such vices among themselves; their conduct is not different from our own.” An occasional fall among Christians must be borne with so long as right prevails in general, and such things are neither tolerated nor taught, but reprovved and amended. Paul gives the counsel (Galatians 6:1) that the brethren restore the fallen in a spirit of meekness; and he blames the Corinthians for not reprovving them who sin. 1 Corinthians 5:2. A sin, once punished, is as if the sin did not exist; it is no longer a matter of reproach.

[7] Likewise with covetousness: we are to understand that it is not to be named of Christians. That is, should one be covetous, should one defraud another or contend with him about temporal advantage, as evidently was true of the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:1), the offense must not be suffered to go unreprovved and uncorrected. The Gospel must be carefully upheld and preserved among the multitude, “that our ministration be not blamed.” 2 Corinthians 6:3. I make this point for the sake of those who, so soon as they observe that all Christians are not perfectly holy, but will occasionally stumble and fall, imagine there is no such thing as a Christian and the Gospel is impotent and fruitless. Just as if to be a Christian meant the mountain already climbed and complete, triumphant victory over sin! The fact is, it is rather a contest, a battle. Wherever there is a contest, or a battle, some of the combatants will flee, some will be wounded, some will fall and some even be slain. For warfare is not unaccompanied by disaster if it be real warfare.

[8] The writer of the epistle goes on to assign the reason why it does not sound well to hear such things concerning Christians — because they are saints and it behooves saints to be chaste and moderate, and to practice and teach these virtues. Note, he calls Christians “saints,” notwithstanding that in this life they are clothed with sinful flesh and blood. Doubtless the term is not applied in consequence of their good works, but because of the holy blood of Christ. For Paul says (1 Corinthians 6:11): “But ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.” Being holy, we should manifest our holiness by our deeds. Though we are still weak, yet we ought duly to strive to become chaste and free from covetousness, to the glory and honor of God and the edifying of unbelievers. “Nor filthiness, nor foolish talking, or jesting, which are not befitting.”

[9] “Filthiness” — scandalous talk — is unchaste language suggestive of fornication, uncleanness and carnal sins. It is common in taverns and generally found as accompaniment of gluttony, drunkenness and gambling. Especially were the Greeks frivolous and adepts in this respect, as their poets and other writers attest. What Paul refers to in particular is the lewd conversation uttered in public without fear and self-restraint. This will excite wicked thoughts and give rise to serious offenses, especially with the young. As he states elsewhere (1 Corinthians 15:33), “Evil companionships [communications] corrupt good morals.” Should there be any Christians forgetful enough to so transgress, the offense must be reproved; otherwise it will become general and give the congregation an ill repute, as if Christians taught and tolerated it the same as the heathen. Foolish Talking and Jesting

[10] By “foolish talking” is indicated the fables and tales and other lore in which the Greeks particularly abound — a people who possess a special faculty for fiction of this sort. Similar are the tales commonly related by our women and maidens while spinning at the distaff, also those which knaves are fond of relating. Here belong also worldly songs which either relate lewd matters or turn upon slippery, frivolous themes. Such are “The Priest of Kalenburg,” “Dietrich of Berne” and innumerable others.

[11] Particularly unchristian is every kind of such buffoonery in the church when men are gathered to hear and learn the Word of God. But the practice is common where many come together. Even where at first things of a serious nature are discussed, men soon pass to frivolous, wanton, foolish talk, resulting in a waste of time and the neglect of better things. For instance, on the festival of Easter, foolish, ridiculous stories have been introduced into the sermon to arouse the drowsy. And at the Christmas services, the absurd pantomime of rocking a babe, and silly declamations in rhyme, have found vogue. Similarly, the festivals commemorating the three holy kings, the passion of Christ, Dorothy and other saints were characterized.

[12] In this category should also be classed the legends of the saints and the confused mass of lies concerning miracles, pilgrimages, masses, worship of saints, indulgencies, and so on, which once dominated the pulpit. Yet these falsehoods are too gross to be called merely foolish. They are not just frivolous lies merely destructive of good morals, such as Paul refers to here, but they completely overthrow faith and the Word of God,

making sainthood impossible. Such kind of jesting is altogether too serious. Those, however, who have seen into them treat them as lies of the same frivolous and abominable character as the fables or old women's tales mentioned by Paul 1 Timothy 4:7. But while the latter are mere human tales which nobody believes, which no one will place reliance on, serving as mere occasion of merriment, without becoming a source of general moral corruption, an obstacle to improvement and a cause of cold, indolent Christianity, the falsehoods of the pulpit are diabolical tales held as truth in all seriousness, but a comedy for the devil and his angels.

[13] "Jesting" has reference to those conversational expedients which pander to gaiety in the form of scandal; they are called among us banter and badinage. Laughter, mirth and gaiety is their purpose, and we meet with them generally in society and high life. Among the heathen, jesting was counted a virtue, and therefore received the title "eutrapelia" by Aristotle. But Paul calls it a vice among Christians, who certainly may find conversational expedients of a different kind, such as will inspire a cheerful and joyous spirit in Christ. True, Christians are not all so pure but that some may err in this matter; but the Christian Church does not command jesting, nor suffer any member to abandon himself to the practice. It reproveth and prohibits it, particularly in religious assemblies, and in teaching and preaching. For Christ says (Matthew 12:36) that at the last day men must give account of every idle, unprofitable word they have spoken. Christians should be a very firm, though courteous, people. Courtesy should be coupled with seriousness, and seriousness with courtesy, according to the pattern of the life of Christ supplied in the Gospel. "Which are not befitting."

[14] Paul apparently would include in the catalog all unprofitable language of whatever name. I would call those words unprofitable which serve not to further the faith nor to supply the wants of the body and preserve it. We have enough else to talk about during this short lifetime, if we desire to speak, enough that is profitable and pleasant, if we talk only of Christ, of love and of other essential things. The apostle mentions the giving of thanks. It should be our daily and constant employment to praise and thank God, privately and publicly, for the great and inexpressible treasures he has given us in Christ. But it appears that what is needful is relegated to the rear, while objects of indifference are brought to the fore.

Now, mark you, if Paul will not tolerate banter and suggestive conversation among Christians, what would he say of the shameful backbiting which is heard whenever people meet, though but two individuals? Yes, what would be his judgment of those who in public preaching clinch and claw, attack and calumniate each other? Fruitless Christians Are Heathen “For this ye know of a surety, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

[15] Hereby he declares in dry words that the man who does not exhibit the fruits of faith is a heathen under the name of a Christian. Here is absolute condemnation in a word. The whoremonger is a denier of the faith; the unclean person is a denier of the faith; the covetous individual is a denier of the faith: all are rebellious, perjured and faithless toward God. Paul tells Timothy (1 Timothy 5:8): “But if any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.” How could he utter anything more severe, more terrifying? He begins, “For this ye know.” In other words: Doubt not; do not find vain comfort in the thought that this is a jest or an aspersion. A Christian name, and association with Christians, will count for nothing. It will profit you as little as it profits the Jews to be Abraham’s seed and disciples of Moses. Christ’s words (Matthew 7:21) concern every man: “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.” There must be performance; faith must be manifested by works.

[16] If the great fire of divine love which he uses as his first argument will not draw us, then may the terrible threat of hell fire prove a sufficient incentive. In other words, if men follow not God, walking in love and showing their faith by their deeds, let them know they are not God’s children, not heirs in his kingdom, and therefore are unquestionably heirs of the evil one in hell. He who is unmoved by the threats of hell fire must truly be a stick or a stone; indeed, he must have a heart like an anvil, as Job says.

[17] The writer of the epistle passes unusually severe sentence upon the covetous man, for he calls him an idolater, or a worshiper of a false God. Plainly, Paul entertained special enmity against the covetous, for in Colossians 3:5 he defines this sin in a similar manner. His reasoning, I judge, is this: All other sinners turn to use what they have and make it subservient to their lusts. Fornicators and the unclean make their bodies serve their pleasure. The haughty employ property, art, reputation and men

to secure honor to themselves. The unhappy idolater alone is servant to his possessions; his sin is to save, guard and preserve property. He dare not make use of it either for himself or for others, but worships it as his god. Rather than touch his money, he would suffer both the kingdom of God and of the world to perish. He will not give a farthing to the support of a preacher or a schoolmaster for the sake of advancing God's kingdom. Because he places his confidence, his trust, in his money rather than in the living God, whose promises concerning ample support are abundant, his real God is his money, and to call him an idolater is entirely just. And, in addition, he must renounce heaven! A shameful vice, indeed! O contemptible Unbelief! What a dangerous vice art thou! Deception by Empty Words "Let no man deceive you with empty words."

[18] This applies to those who gloss their unchastity over, as if it were but a trivial sin. And some have been even such vulgar teachers as to consider no unchastity evil except adultery, and to accept it as a normal function, like eating and drinking. The Greek philosophers and poets were of this class. And Terence says, "It is neither a sin nor a shame for a youth to commit fornication." To obey such doctrine would be to know nothing of God and to live in the lust of concupiscence, like the gentiles who know not God, of whom we heard in the preceding lesson. All arguments of this character are vain words; they may fascinate the reason after a fashion; yet they are vain and futile, unable to profit their authors. Covetousness likewise has much false show and glitter. When one defrauds another or seeks his own advantage to the injury of others, his act is not at all called sin, but cleverness, economy and sagacity, though meanwhile the poor must suffer want and even die of hunger. Such arguments are merely the specious and blind utterances of heathen, contrary to Christian love.

[19] But we have additional light upon this subject, showing that because of such practices the wrath of God comes upon the unbelieving. In Corinthians 10:18 are cited numerous examples of punishment for the sin of fornication. See also Numbers 25. Again, because of wantonness, covetousness and unchastity, the entire world was destroyed by the flood. This is a severe utterance but true and indubitable. "For because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience." "Sons of disobedience" — in other words, they who have fallen from the faith. Thus, we see that he who does not show his faith by his deeds, is accounted

practically an infidel. In fact, he is worse than an infidel; he is an apostate Christian, or an apostate from the faith. Therefore, comes the wrath of God upon such, even here on earth. This is why we Germans must suffer so much famine, pestilence, war and bloodshed to come upon us.

[20] Among these idle chatterers and misleading teachers the sluggards and drones should beware of being classified, who, with better light than the heathen, know full well that covetousness and unchastity are sin. While they teach nothing to controvert this, they notwithstanding trust for salvation in a faith barren of works, on the ground that works cannot affect salvation. They know full well that a faith barren of works is nothing, is a false faith; that fruit and good works must follow a genuine faith of necessity. Nevertheless, they go on in carnal security, without fear of the wrath and judgment of God, who wants the old Adam to be crucified, and to find good fruit on good trees. It is possible that St. Paul does not refer in this passage to those who, like the heathen, teach and maintain by specious arguments that unchastity is no sin; nevertheless, there is reason to apprehend that the reward of the heathen will be meted out to them likewise; for they live like the heathen, being strangers to both chastity and kindness. And our apprehension is so much more justified because they have a better knowledge of the wrong they commit. This is Paul's standpoint when he asks (Romans 2:3): "And reckonest thou this, O man, who judgest them that practice such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" "After thy hardness and impenitent heart," he adds, thou "treasurest up for thyself wrath?" "Be not ye therefore partakers with them; for ye were once darkness but are now light in the Lord."

[21] Peter similarly counsels (1 Peter 4:3) to let the time past of our lives suffice us to have wrought the will of the gentiles, and no longer be partakers with them, but live the rest of our time to the will of God. While we were gentiles we knew not that all those things were sin, because of the darkness of unbelief, which prevented our knowing God. But now we have become a light in the Lord. That is, we have been so amply enlightened through Christ that we not only know God and what he desires, and understand what sin and wrong are, but we are also able to light others, to teach them what we know. Paul commends the Philippians for being a light in the world, among an evil and untoward generation. Philippians 2:15.

And, similarly, when we were gentiles we not only were darkened, not only were ignorant and went astray, but we were darkness itself, leading others into the same condition by our words and deeds. We have reason, then, to be thankful unto him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9), and to “walk as children of light.” “For the fruit of the light [Spirit] is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.”

[22] Since Paul is speaking of light, it would have been more to the point had he said, “fruit of the light,” in accordance with the Latin version, than “fruit of the Spirit,” the Greek rendering. And who knows but it may, in the Greek, have been altered to harmonize with Galatians 5:22, where Paul speaks of the “fruit of the Spirit”? It matters little, however; evidently “Spirit” and “light” are synonymous in this place. “Goodness” is the fruit of light, or of the Spirit, as opposed to covetousness. The Christian is to be good; that is, useful, gladly working his neighbor’s good. “Righteousness,” as fruit of the Spirit among men — for the Spirit also is righteous before God — is opposed to covetousness. The Christian must not take another’s possessions by force, trickery or fraud, but must give to each his due, his own, even to the heathen authorities. See Romans 13:1. “Truth” is the fruit of the Spirit as opposed to hypocrisy and lies. A Christian is not only to be truthful in word, but honest in life. He should not bear the name without the works; he cannot be a Christian and yet live a heathenish life, a life of unchastity, covetousness and other vices.

Laetare. Fourth Sunday in Lent. The Children of Promise.

Text: Galatians 4:21-31.

21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?

22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.

23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of

the freewoman was by promise.

24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.

25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

27 For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.

30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.

31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.
Galatians 4:21-31

The Children of Promise.

This lesson is amply expounded in my commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians. It is unnecessary to repeat the exposition here, for it may be found and read there.

He who desires further information on the subject may read the postils on the epistle lesson for the Sunday after Christmas and that for New Year's Day. There he will find all information. Thus, will be obviated the necessity of repeating the discourse in various places.

Judica. Fifth Sunday in Lent. Christ Our Great High Priest.

Text: Hebrews 9:11-15.

11 But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;

12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

13 For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:

14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

15 And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. Hebrews 9:11-15

Christ Our Great High Priest

[1] An understanding of practically all of the Epistle to the Hebrews is necessary before we can hope to make this text clear to ourselves. Briefly, the epistle treats of a twofold priesthood. The former priesthood was a material one, with material adornment, tabernacle, sacrifices and with pardon couched in ritual; material were all its appointments. The new order is a spiritual priesthood, with spiritual adornments, spiritual tabernacle and sacrifices — spiritual in all that pertains to it. Christ, in the exercise of his priestly office, in the sacrifice on the cross, was not adorned with silk and gold and precious stones, but with divine love, wisdom, patience, obedience and all virtues. His adornment was apparent to none but God and possessors of the Spirit, for it was spiritual.

[2] Christ sacrificed not goats nor calves nor birds; not bread; not blood nor flesh, as did Aaron and his posterity: he offered his own body and blood, and the manner of the sacrifice was spiritual; for it took place through the Holy Spirit, as here stated. Though the body and blood of Christ were visible the same as any other material object, the fact that he offered

them as a sacrifice was not apparent. It was not a visible sacrifice, as in the case of offerings at the hands of Aaron. Then the goat or calf, the flesh and blood, were material sacrifices visibly offered, and recognized as sacrifices. But Christ offered himself in the heart before God. His sacrifice was perceptible to no mortal. Therefore, his bodily flesh and blood becomes a spiritual sacrifice. Similarly, we Christians, the posterity of Christ our Aaron, offer up our own bodies. Romans 12:1. And our offering is likewise a spiritual sacrifice, or, as Paul has it, a “reasonable service”; for we make it in spirit, and it is beheld of God alone.

[3] Again, in the new order, the tabernacle or house is spiritual; for it is heaven, or the presence of God. Christ hung upon a cross; he was not offered in a temple. He was offered before the eyes of God, and there he still abides. The cross is an altar in a spiritual sense. The material cross was indeed visible, but none knew it as Christ’s altar. Again, his prayer, his sprinkled blood, his burnt incense, were all spiritual, for it was all wrought through his spirit.

[4] Accordingly, the fruit and blessing of his office and sacrifice, the forgiveness of our sins and our justification, are likewise spiritual. In the Old Covenant, the priest with his sacrifices and sprinklings of blood effected merely as it were an external absolution, or pardon, corresponding to the childhood stage of the people. The recipient was permitted to move publicly among the people: he was externally holy and as one restored from excommunication. He who failed to obtain absolution from the priest was unholy, being denied membership in the congregation and enjoyment of its privileges; in all respects he was separated like those in the ban today.

[5] But such absolution rendered no one inwardly holy and just before God. Something beyond that was necessary to secure true forgiveness. It was the same principle which governs church discipline today. He who has received no more than the remission, or absolution, of the ecclesiastical judge will surely remain forever out of heaven. On the other hand, he who is in the ban of the Church is hellward bound only when the sentence is confirmed at a higher tribunal. I can make no better comparison than to say that it was the same in the old Jewish priesthood as now in the Papal priesthood, which, with its loosing and binding, can prohibit or permit only external communion among Christians. It is true, God required such measures in the time of the Jewish dispensation, that he might restrain by

fear; just as now he sanctions church discipline when rightly employed, in order to punish and restrain the evildoer, though it has no power in itself to raise people to holiness or to push them into wickedness.

[6] But with the priesthood of Christ is true spiritual remission, sanctification and absolution. These avail before God — God grant that it be true of us — whether we be outwardly excommunicated, or holy, or not. Christ's blood has obtained for us pardon forever acceptable with God. God will forgive our sins for the sake of that blood so long as its power shall last and its intercession for grace in our behalf, which is forever. Therefore, we are forever holy and blessed before God. This is the substance of the text. Now that we shall find it easy to understand, we will briefly consider it. "But Christ having come a high priest of the good things to come."

[7] The adornment of Aaron and his descendants, the high priests, was of a material nature, and they obtained for the people a merely formal remission of sins, performing their office in a perishable temple, or tabernacle. It was evident to men that their absolution and sanctification before the congregation was a temporal blessing confined to the present. But when Christ came upon the cross no one beheld him as he went before God in the Holy Spirit, adorned with every grace and virtue, a true High Priest. The blessings wrought by him are not temporal — a merely formal pardon — but the "blessings to come"; namely, blessings which are spiritual and eternal. Paul speaks of them as blessings to come, not that we are to await the life to come before we can have forgiveness and all the blessings of divine grace, but because now we possess them only in faith. They are as yet hidden, to be revealed in the future life. Again, the blessings we have in Christ were, from the standpoint of the Old Testament priesthood, blessings to come. "Through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation."

[8] The apostle does not name the tabernacle he mentions; nor can he, so strange its nature! It exists only in the sight of God, and is ours in faith, to be revealed hereafter. It is not made with hands, like the Jewish tabernacle; in other words, not of "this building." The old tabernacle, like all buildings of its nature, necessarily was made of wood and other temporal materials created by God. God says in Isaiah 66:1-2: "What manner of house will ye build unto me?... For all these things hath my hand made, and so all these things came to be." But that greater tabernacle has not yet form; it is not yet

finished. God is building it and he shall reveal it. Christ's words are (John 14:3), "And if I go and prepare a place for you." "Nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption."

[9] According to Leviticus 16, the high priest must once a year enter into the holy place with the blood of rams and other offerings, and with these make formal reconciliation for the people. This ceremony typified that Christ, the true Priest, should once die for us, to obtain for us the true atonement. But the former sacrifice, having to be repeated every year, was but a temporary and imperfect atonement; it did not eternally suffice, as does the atonement of Christ. For though we fall and sin repeatedly, we have confidence that the blood of Christ does not fall, or sin; it remains steadfast before God, and the expiation is perpetual and eternal. Under its sway grace is perpetually renewed, without work or merit on our part, provided we do not stand aloof in unbelief. "For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer," etc.

[10] Concerning the water of separation and the ashes of the red heifer, read Numbers 19; and concerning the blood of bulls and goats, Leviticus 16:14-15. According to Paul, these were formal and temporal purifications, as I stated above. But Christ, in God's sight, purifies the conscience of dead works; that is, of sins meriting death, and of works performed in sin and therefore dead. Christ purifies from these, that we may serve the living God by living works. "And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant [testament]," etc.

[11] Under the old law, which provided only for formal, or ritualistic, pardon, and restored to human fellowship, sin and transgressions remained, burdening the conscience. It — the old law — did not benefit the soul at all, inasmuch as God did not institute it to purify and safeguard the conscience, nor to bestow the Spirit. It existed merely for the purpose of outward discipline, restraint and correction. So Paul teaches that under the Old Testament dispensation man's transgressions remained, but now Christ is our Mediator through his blood; by it our conscience is freed from sin in the sight of God, inasmuch as God promises the Spirit through the blood of Christ. All, however, do not receive him. Only those called to be heirs eternal, the elect, receive the Spirit.

[12] We find, then, in this excellent lesson, the comforting doctrine taught that Christ is he whom we should know as the Priest and Bishop of our souls; that no sin is forgiven, nor the Holy Spirit given, by reason of works or merit on our part, but alone through the blood of Christ, and that to those for whom God has ordained it. This matter has been sufficiently set forth in the various postils.

Palm Sunday. Christ an Example of Love. Christ's Humiliation and Exaltation.

Text: Philippians 2:5-11.

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11

Christ an Example of Love

[1] Here Paul again presents to us as a powerful example of the celestial and eternal fire, the love of Christ, for the purpose of persuading us to exercise a loving concern for one another. The apostle employs fine words and precious admonitions, having perceived the indolence and negligence displayed by Christians in this matter of loving. For this the flesh is responsible. The flesh continually resists the willing spirit, seeking its own interest and causing sects and factions. Although a sermon on this same text

went forth in my name a few years ago, entitled “The Twofold Righteousness,” the text was not exhausted; therefore, we will now examine it word by word. “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

[2] You are Christians; you have Christ, and in him and through him all fullness of comfort for time and eternity: therefore, nothing should appeal to your thought, your judgment, your pleasure, but that which was in the mind of Christ concerning you as the source of your welfare. For his motive throughout was not his own advantage; everything he did was done for your sake and in your interest. Let men therefore, in accord with his example, work every good thing for one another’s benefit. “Who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.”

[“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.”]

[3] If Christ, who was true God by nature, has humbled himself to become servant of all, how much more should such action befit us who are of no worth, and are by nature children of sin, death and the devil! Were we similarly to humble ourselves, and even to go beyond Christ in humility — a thing, however, impossible — we should do nothing extraordinary. Our humility would still reek of sin in comparison with his. Suppose Christ were to humble himself in the least degree — but a hair’s breadth, so to speak — below the most exalted angels; and suppose we were to humble ourselves to a position a thousand times more abased than that of the devils in hell; yet our humility would not compare in the least with that of Christ. For he is an infinite blessing — God himself — and we are but miserable creatures whose existence and life are not for one moment secure.

[4] What terrible judgment must come upon those who fail to imitate the ineffable example of Christ; who do not humble themselves below their neighbors and serve them, but rather exalt themselves above them! Indeed, the example of Christ may well terrify the exalted, and those high in authority; and still more the self-exalted. Who would not shrink from occupying the uppermost seat and from lording it over others when he sees the Son of God humble and eliminate himself?

[5] The phrase “form of God” does not receive the same interpretation from all. Some understand Paul to refer to the divine essence and nature in Christ; meaning that Christ, though true God, humbled himself. While Christ is indeed true God, Paul is not speaking here of his divine essence, which is concealed. The word he uses — “morphe,” or “forma” — he employs again where he tells of Christ taking upon himself the form of a servant. “Form of a servant” certainly cannot signify “essence of a real servant” — possessing by nature the qualities of a servant. For Christ is not our servant by nature; he has become our servant from good will and favor toward us. For the same reason “divine form” cannot properly mean “divine essence”; for divine essence is not visible, while the divine form was truly seen. Very well; then let us use the vernacular, and thus make the apostle’s meaning clear.

[6] “Form of God,” then, means the assumption of a divine attitude and bearing, or the manifestation of divinity in port and presence; and this not privately, but before others, who witness such form and bearing. To speak in the clearest possible manner: Divine bearing and attitude are in evidence when one manifests in word and deed that which pertains peculiarly to God and suggests divinity. Accordingly, “the form of a servant” implies the assumption of the attitude and bearing of a servant in relation to others. It might be better to render “Morphe tu dulu,” by “the bearing of a servant,” that means, manners of such character that whoever sees the person must take him for a servant. This should make it clear that the passage in question does not refer to the manifestation of divinity or servility as such, but to the characteristics and the expression of the same. For, as previously stated, the essence is concealed, but its manifestation is public. The essence implies a condition, while its expression implies action.

[7] As regards these forms, or manifestations, a threefold aspect is suggested by the words of Paul. The essence may exist without the manifestation; there may be a manifestation without the corresponding essence; and finally, we may find the essence together with its proper manifestation. For instance, when God conceals himself and gives no indication of his presence, there is divinity, albeit not manifest. This is the case when he is grieved and withdraws his grace. On the other hand, when he discloses his grace, there is both the essence and its manifestation. But the third aspect is inconceivable for God, namely, a manifestation of

divinity without the essence. This is rather a trick of the devil and his servants, who usurp the place of God and act as God, though they are anything but divine. An illustration of this we find in Ezekiel 28:2, where the king of Tyre is recorded as representing his heart, which was certainly decidedly human, as that of a god.

[8] Similarly, the form, or bearing, of a servant may be considered from a threefold aspect. One may be a servant and not deport himself as such, but as a lord, or as God; as in the instance just mentioned. Of such a one Solomon speaks (Proverbs 29:21), saying: "He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become a son at the last." Such are all the children of Adam. We who are rightly God's servants would be God himself. This is what the devil taught Eve when he said, "Ye shall be as God." Genesis 3:5. Again, one may be a servant and conduct himself as one, as all just and faithful servants behave before the world; and as all true Christians conduct themselves in God's sight, being subject to him and serving all men. Thirdly, one may be not a servant and yet behave as one. For instance, a king might minister to his servants before the world. Before God, however, all men being servants, this situation is impossible with men: no one has so done but Christ. He says at the supper (John 13:13-14): "Ye call me, Teacher, and, Lord: and ye say well; for so I am," and yet I am among you as a servant. And in another place (Matthew 20:28), "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

[9] From these explanations Paul's meaning must have become clear. His thought is: Christ was in the form of God; that is, both the essence and the bearing of Deity were his. He did not assume the divine form as he did that of a servant. He was, I repeat it; he was in the form of God. The little word "was" expresses that divinity was his both in essence and form. The meaning is: Many assume and display an appearance of divinity, but are not themselves actually divine; the devil, for instance, and Antichrist and Adam's children. This is sacrilege — the assumption of divinity by an act of robbery. See Romans 2:22. Though the offender does not look upon such conduct as robbery, it is none the less robbing divine honor, and is so regarded by God and angels and saints, and even by his own conscience. But Christ, who had not come by divinity through arrogating it to himself, but was divine by nature according to his very essence, did not deem his

divinity a thing he had grasped; nor could he, knowing divinity to be his very birthright, and holding it as his own natural possession from eternity.

[10] So Paul's words commend Christ's essential divinity and his love toward us, and at the same time correct all who falsely assume a divine form. Such are we all so long as we are the devil's members. The thought is: The devil's members all would be God, would rob the divinity they do not possess; and they must admit their action to be robbery, for conscience testifies, indeed must testify, that they are not God. Though they may despise the testimony of conscience and fail to heed it, yet the testimony stands, steadfastly maintaining the act as not right — as a malicious robbery. But the one man, Christ, who did not assume the divine form but was in it by right and had a claim upon it from eternity; who did not and could not hold it robbery to be equal with God; this man humbled himself, taking upon him the form of a servant — not his rightful form — that he by the power of his winning example, might induce them to assume the bearing of servants who possessed the form and character of servants, but who, refusing to own them, appropriated the appearance of divinity upon which they had no claim, since the essence of divinity was forever beyond them.

[11] That some fail to understand readily this great text, is due to the fact that they do not accept Paul's words as spoken, but substitute their own ideas of what he should have said, namely: Christ was born true God and did not rob divinity, etc. The expression "who, existing in the form of God" sounds, in the Greek and Latin, almost as if Christ had merely borne himself as God, unless particular regard be given to the words "existing in," which Paul contrasts with the phrase "took upon him." Christ took upon himself the form of a servant, it is true, but in that form was no real servant. Just so, while dispensing with a divine appearance, behind the appearance chosen was God. And we likewise take upon ourselves the divine form, but in the form we are not divine; and we spurn the form of servants, though that is what we are irrespective of appearance. Christ disrobes himself of the divine form wherein he existed, to assume that of a servant, which did not express his essential character; but we lay aside the servant form of our real being and take upon ourselves, or arrogate to ourselves, the form of God to which we are not fitted by what we are in reality.

[12] They are startled by this expression also: "Christ thought it not robbery to be equal with God." Now, at first sight these words do not seem to refer solely to Christ, since even the devil and his own, who continually aspire to equality with God, do not think their action robbery in spite of the testimony of their conscience to the contrary. But with Paul the little word "think," or "regard," possesses a powerful significance, having the force of "perfect assurance." Similarly, he says (Romans 3:28), "We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law"; and (1 Corinthians 7:40), "I think [deem] that I also have the spirit of God." But the wicked cannot boast it no robbery when they dare take upon themselves the form of God; for they know, they are satisfied in themselves, that they are not God. Christ, however, did not, nor could he, think himself not equal to God; in other words, he was confident of his equality with God, and knew he had not stolen the honor. Paul's words are chosen, not as an apology for Christ, but as a severe rebuke for those who arrogate to themselves the form of God against the protest of conscience that it is not their own but stolen. The apostle would show how infinitely Christ differs from them, and that the divine form they would take by theft is Christ's by right.

[13] Paul does not use this expression, however, when he refers to Christ's assumption of the servant form which is his, not by nature, but by assumption. The words produce the impression that Christ took by force something not his own. Paul should be expected to say: "He held it not robbery to assume the form of a servant." Why should he rather have chosen that form of expression in the first instance, since Christ did not assume the divine form, but possessed it as his very own — yes, laid it aside and assumed a form foreign to his nature? The substance of the matter is that he who becomes a servant does not and cannot assume anything, but only gives, giving even himself. Hence there is no warrant here to speak of robbery or of a disposition to look upon the matter in this light. On the other hand, assumption of the divine form necessarily involves taking, and altogether precludes giving. Hence there is warrant to speak of robbery in this connection, and of men who so view it. But this charge cannot be brought against Christ. He does not render himself guilty of robbery, nor does he so view his relation, as all others must do. Divinity is his by right, and so is its appropriate form a birthright.

[14] Thus, it seems to me, this text very clearly teaches that to have divine form is simply to assume in regard to others, in word and deed, the bearing of God and Lord; and that Christ meets this test in the miraculous signs and life-giving words, as the Gospels contend. He does not rank with the saints who lack the divine essence; he has, in addition to divine form, the divine essence and nature. On the other hand, the servant, or servile, form implies acting toward others, in word and deed, like a servant. Thus Christ did when he served the disciples and gave himself for us. But he served not as the saints, who are servants by nature. Service was, with him, something assumed for our benefit and as an example for us to follow, teaching us to act in like manner toward others, to disrobe ourselves of the appearance of divinity as he did, as we shall see.

[15] Unquestionably, then, Paul proclaims Christ true God. Had he been mere man, what would have been the occasion for saying that he became like a man and was found in the fashion of other men? And that he assumed the form of a servant though he was in form divine? Where would be the sense in my saying to you, “You are like a man, are made in the fashion of a man, and take upon yourself the form of a servant”? You would think I was mocking you, and might appropriately reply: “I am glad you regard me as a man; I was wondering if I were an ox or a wolf. Are you mad or foolish?” Would not that be the natural rejoinder to such a foolish statement? Now, Paul not being foolish, nor being guilty of foolish speech, there truly must have been something exalted and divine about Christ. For when the apostle declares that he was made like unto other men, though the fact of his being human is undisputed, he simply means that the man Christ was God, and could, even in his humanity, have borne himself as divine. But this is precisely what he did not do; he refrained: he disrobed himself of his divinity and bore himself as a mere man like others.

[16] What follows concerning Christ, now that we understand the meaning of “form of God” and “form of a servant,” is surely plain. In fact, Paul himself tells us what he means by “form of a servant.” First: He makes the explanation that Christ disrobed, or divested himself; that is, appeared to lay aside his divinity in that he divested himself of its benefit and glory. Not that he did, or could, divest himself of his divine nature; but that he laid aside the form of divine majesty — did not act as the God he truly was. Nor did he divest himself of the divine form to the extent of making it unfelt and

invisible; in that case there would have been no divine form left. He simply did not affect a divine appearance and dazzle us by its splendor; rather he served us with that divinity. He performed miracles. And during his suffering on the cross he, with divine power, gave to the murderer the promise of Paradise. Luke 23:43. And in the garden, similarly, he repelled the multitude by a word. John 18:6. Hence Paul does not say that Christ was divested by some outside power; he says Christ “made himself” of no repute. Just so the wise man does not in a literal way lay aside wisdom and the appearance of wisdom but discards them for the purpose of serving the simple-minded who might fittingly serve him. Such man makes himself of no reputation when he divests himself of his wisdom and the appearance of wisdom.

[17] Second: Christ assumed the form of a servant, even while remaining God and having the form of God; he was God, and his divine words and works were spoken and wrought for our benefit. As a servant, he served us with these. He did not require us to serve him in compensation for them, as in the capacity of a Lord he had a just right to do. He sought not honor or profit thereby, but our benefit and salvation. It was a willing service and gratuitously performed, for the good of men. It was a service unspeakably great, because of the ineffable greatness of the minister and servant — God eternal, whom all angels and creatures serve. He who is not by this example heartily constrained to serve his fellows, is justly condemned. He is harder than stone, darker than hell and utterly without excuse.

[18] Third: “Being made in the likeness of men.” Born of Mary, Christ’s nature became human. But even in that humanity he might have exalted himself above all men and served none. But he forbore and became as other men. And by “likeness of men” we must understand just ordinary humanity without special privilege whatever. Now, without special privilege there is no disparity among men. Understand, then, Paul says in effect: Christ was made as any other man who has neither riches, honor, power nor advantage above his fellows; for many inherit power, honor and property by birth. So lowly did Christ become, and with such humility did he conduct himself, that no mortal is too lowly to be his equal, even servants and the poor. At the same time, Christ was sound, without bodily infirmities, as man in his natural condition might be expected to be.

[19] Fourth. “And being found in fashion as a man.” That is, he followed the customs and habits of men, eating and drinking, sleeping and waking, walking and standing, hungering and thirsting, enduring cold and heat, knowing labor and weariness, needing clothing and shelter, feeling the necessity of prayer, and having the same experience as any other man in his relation to God and the world. He had power to avoid these conditions; as God he might have demeaned and borne himself quite differently. But in becoming man, as above stated, he fared as a human being, and he accepted the necessities of ordinary mortals while all the time he manifested the divine form which expressed his true self.

[20] Fifth: “He humbled himself,” or debased himself. In addition to manifesting his servant form in becoming man and faring as an ordinary human being, he went farther and made himself lower than any man. He abased himself to serve all men with the supreme service — the gift of his life in our behalf.

[21] Sixth: He not only made himself subject to men, but also to sin, death and the devil, and bore it all for us. He accepted the most ignominious death, the death on the cross, dying not as a man but as a worm (Psalm 22:6); yes, as an arch-knave, a knave above all knaves, in that he lost even what favor, recognition and honor were due to the assumed servant form in which he had revealed himself, and perished altogether.

[22] Seventh: All this Christ surely did not do because we were worthy of it. Who could be worthy such service from such a one? Obedience to the Father moved him. Here Paul with one word unlocks heaven and permits us to look into the unfathomable abyss of divine majesty and to behold the ineffable love of the Fatherly heart toward us — his gracious will for us. He shows us how from eternity it has been God’s pleasure that Christ, the glorious one who has wrought all this, should do it for us. What human heart would not melt at the joy-inspiring thought? Who would not love, praise and thank God and in return for his goodness, not only be ready to serve the world, but gladly to embrace the extremity of humility? Who would not so do when he is aware that God himself has such precious regard for him, and points to the obedience of his Son as the pouring out and evidence of his Fatherly will. Oh, the significance of the words Paul here uses! such words as he uses in no other place! He must certainly have burned with joy and cheer. To gain such a glimpse of God — surely this

must be coming to the Father through Christ. Here is truly illustrated the truth that no one comes to Christ except the Father draw him; and with what power, what delicious sweetness, the Father allures! How many are the preachers of the faith who imagine they know it all, when they have received not even an odor or taste of these things! How soon are they become masters who have never been disciples! Not having tasted God's love, they cannot impart it; hence they remain unprofitable babblers.

“Wherefore also God highly exalted him.”

[23] As Christ was cast to the lowest depths and subjected to all devils, in obeying God and serving us, so has God exalted him Lord over all angels and creatures, and over death and hell. Christ now has completely divested himself of the servant form — laid it aside. Henceforth he exists in the divine form, glorified, proclaimed, confessed, honored and recognized as God. While it is not wholly apparent to us that “all things are put in subjection” to Christ, as Paul says (1 Corinthians 15:27), the trouble is merely with our perception of the fact. It is true that Christ is thus exalted in person and seated on high in the fullness of power and might, executing everywhere his will; though few believe the order of events is for the sake of Christ. Freely the events order themselves, and the Lord sits enthroned free from all restrictions. But our eyes are as yet blinded. We do not perceive him there nor recognize that all things obey his will. The last day, however, will reveal it. Then we shall comprehend present mysteries; how Christ laid aside his divine form, was made man, and so on; how he also laid aside the form of a servant and resumed the divine likeness; how as God he appeared in glory; and how he is now Lord of life and death, and the King of Glory. This must suffice on the text. For how we, too, should come down from our eminence and serve others has been sufficiently treated of in other postils. Remember, God desires us to serve one another with body, property, honor, spirit and soul, even as his Son served us.

Easter Sunday. Purging Out the Old Leaven and the New Easter Festival of Christians.

Text: 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.

6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

[1] When God was about to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, he commanded, shortly before their departure, that they should eat the Passover the night they started; and as a perpetual memorial of their redemption, they were annually, on the recurrence of the season, to celebrate the feast of Easter for seven days. An especially urgent feature of the command was that on the first evening of the feast they must put out of their houses all leaven and leavened bread, and during the seven days eat none but the unleavened bread, or cakes. Hence the evangelists speak of the feast as the Feast (or Days) of Unleavened Bread. Mark 14:1; Luke 22:1.

[2] Paul, in this lesson, explains the figure in brief but beautiful and expressive words. He is prompted to introduce the subject by the fact that in the preceding verses of this chapter he has been reproofing the Corinthians for their disposition to boast of the Gospel and of Christ while abusing such liberty unto unchastity and other sins. He admonishes them that, possessing the Gospel and having become Christians, they ought, as becomes Christians, to live according to the Gospel, avoiding everything not

consistent with the faith and with Christian character — everything not befitting them as new creatures.

[3] So the apostle uses the figure of the Paschal lamb and unleavened bread requisite at the Jews' Feast of the Passover, in his effort to point the Corinthians to the true character and purpose of the New Testament made with us in the kingdom of Christ. He explains what the true Paschal Lamb is and what the unleavened bread, and how to observe the real Passover, wherein all must be new and spiritual. In the joy and wealth of his mind he presents this analogy to remind them that they are Christians and to consider what that means. His meaning is: Being Christians and God's true people, and called upon to observe a Passover, you must go about it in the right way, putting away from you all remaining leaven until it shall have been purged out utterly. What Paul means by "leaven" is told later in his phrase "neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness"; he means whatever is evil and wicked. Everything foreign to Christianity in both doctrine, or faith, and life, is "leaven." From all this Paul would have Christians purge themselves with the same thoroughness with which the leaven was to be put away from their Easter according to the law. And, holding to the figure, he would have us observe our Passover in the use of the sweet bread, which, in distinction from the leaven, signifies sincerity and truth, or a nature and life completely new.

[4] The text, then, is but an admonition to upright Christian works, directed to those who have heard the Gospel and learned to know Christ. This is what Paul figuratively calls partaking of the true unleavened bread — or wafers, or cakes. We Germans have borrowed our word "cakes" from the phraseology of the Jewish Church, abbreviating "oblaten," wafers, into "fladen," or cakes. How else should we gentiles get the idea of cakes on Easter, when at our Passover we, by faith, eat the Paschal Lamb, Christ? We are admonished to partake of the true unleavened bread, that life and conduct may accord with faith in Christ, whom we have learned to know. Paul's admonition begins: "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?"

[5] This by way of introducing the succeeding admonitions. Leaven is a common figure with the apostle, one he uses frequently, almost proverbially; employing it, too, in his epistle to the Galatians (Galatians 5:9). Christ, also, gives us a Scripture parable of the leaven. Matthew 13:33.

It is the nature of leaven that a small quantity mixed with a lump of dough will pervade and fill the whole lump until its own acid nature has been imparted to it. This Paul makes a figure of spiritual things as regards both doctrine and life.

[6] In Galatians 5:9 he makes it more especially typify false doctrine. For it is just as true that the introduction of an error in an article of faith will soon work injury to the whole and result in the loss of Christ. Thus, it was with the Galatians. The one thing insisted upon by the false apostles was circumcision, though they fully intended to preach the Gospel of Christ. Such innovation will pursue its course with destructive sweep until even the uncontaminated part becomes worthless; the once pure mass is wholly corrupted. The apostle writes to the Galatians (Galatians 5:2): “Behold, I Paul say unto you, that, if ye receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing.” Again (verse 4), “Ye are severed from Christ — ye are fallen away from grace.” But in this text he has reference more particularly to an erroneous idea concerning life and conduct. In this instance it is likewise true that, once the flesh be allowed any license, and liberty be abused, and that under the name of the Gospel, there is introduced a leaven which will speedily corrupt faith and conscience and continue its work until Christ and the Gospel are lost. Such would have been the fate of the Corinthians had not Paul saved them from it by this epistle admonishing and urging them to purge out the leaven of license; for they had begun to practice great wantonness and had given rise to sects and factions which tended to subvert the one Gospel and the one faith.

[7] This is, then, wise counsel and serious admonition, that faithful guard be maintained against the infusion or introduction into doctrine of what is false, whether it pertains to works or faith. The Word of God, faith and conscience are very delicate things. The old proverb says: *Non patitur jocum fama, fides, oculus*; — Good reputation, faith and the eye — these three will bear no jest. Just as good wine or precious medicines are corrupted by a single drop of poison or other impurity, and the purer they are, the more readily defiled and poisoned; so, also, God’s Word and his cause will bear absolutely no alloy. God’s truth must be perfectly pure and clear, or else, it is corrupt and unprofitable. And the worst feature of the matter is, the sway and intrenchment of evil is so strong that it cannot be removed; just as leaven, however small the quantity, added to the lump of

dough, soon penetrates and sours the whole lump, while it is impossible to arrest its influence or once more to sweeten the dough.

[8] The proposal of certain wise minds to mediate, and effect a compromise, between us and our opponents of the Papacy, is wrong and useless. They would permit preaching of the Gospel but at the same time retain the Papistical abuses, advocating that these errors be not all censured and rejected, because of the weak; and that for the sake of peace and unity we should somehow moderate and restrict our demands, each party being ready to yield to the other and patiently bear with it. While in such case no perfect purity can be claimed to exist, the situation can be made endurable if discretion is used and trouble is taken to explain. Nay, not so! For, as you hear, Paul would not mix even a small quantity of leaven with the pure lump, and God himself has urgently forbidden it. The slight alloy would thoroughly penetrate and corrupt the whole. Where human additions are made to the Gospel doctrine in but a single point, the injury is done; truth is obscured, and souls are led astray. Therefore, such mixture, such patchwork, in doctrine is not to be tolerated. As Christ teaches (Matthew 9:16), we must not put new cloth upon an old garment.

[9] Nor may we in our works and in our daily life tolerate the yielding to the wantonness of the flesh and at the same time boast the Gospel of Christ, as did the Corinthians, who stirred up among themselves divisions and disorder, even to the extent of one marrying his stepmother. In such matters as these, Paul says, a little leaven leavens and ruins the whole lump — the entire Christian life. These two things are not consistent with each other: to hold to the Christian faith and to live after the wantonness of the flesh, in sins and vices condemned by the conscience. Paul elsewhere warns (Corinthians 6:9-10): “Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” Again (Galatians 5:19-21): “The works of the flesh are manifest... of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

[10] Warrant is given here likewise for censuring and restraining the rash individuals who assert that men should not be terrified by the Law, nor surrendered to Satan. No! It is our duty to teach men to purge out the old leaven; we must tell them they are not Christians, but devoid of the faith,

when they yield to the wantonness of the flesh and willfully persevere in sin against the warning of conscience. We should teach that such sins are so much the more vicious and damnable when practiced under the name of the Gospel, under cover of Christian liberty; for that is despising and blaspheming the name of Christ and the Gospel: and therefore, such conduct must be positively renounced and purged out, as irreconcilable with faith and a good conscience. “Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened.”

[11] If we are to be a new, sweet lump, Paul says, we must purge out the old leaven. For, as stated, a nature renewed by faith and Christianity will not admit of our living as we did when devoid of faith and in sin, under the influence of an evil conscience. We cannot consistently be “a new lump” and partake of the Passover, and at the same time permit the old leaven to remain: for if the latter be not purged out, the whole lump will be leavened and corrupted; our previous sinful nature will again have supremacy and overthrow the faith, the holiness upon which we have entered and a good conscience.

[12] Paul does not here speak of leaven in general; he commands to purge out the “old leaven,” implying there may be good leaven. Doubtless he is influenced by respect for the words of the Lord Christ where (Matthew 13:33) he likens the kingdom of heaven also to leaven. In this latter case leaven cannot be bad in quality; rather, the object in mixing it with the lump is to produce good, new bread. Reference is to the Word of God, or the preaching of the Gospel, whereby we are incorporated into the kingdom of Christ, or the Christian Church. Though the Gospel appears to be mean, is despicable and objectionable to the world, yet such is its power that wherever introduced it spreads, finding disciples in whom it works; it transforms them, giving to them its own properties, even as leaven imparts its powers to the dough and causes it to rise.... But Paul refers here to old, inactive and worthless leaven. He means teachings, views, or manner of life resulting from the Old Adam, from flesh and blood, and destructive of the pure, new doctrine, or a nature renewed by Christianity. Later on he terms it the “leaven of malice and wickedness,” and in the verse under consideration bids the Corinthians be a new, pure lump.

[13] Note the apostle’s peculiar words. He enjoins purging out the old leaven, assigning as reason the fact: Ye are a new and unleavened lump. By

a new unleavened lump, he means that faith which clings to Christ and believes in the forgiveness of sin through him; for he immediately speaks of our Passover: Christ, sacrificed for us. By this faith the Corinthians are now purified from the old leaven, the leaven of sin and an evil conscience, and have entered upon the new life; yet they are commanded to purge out the old leaven.

[14] Now, how shall we explain the fact that he bids them purge out the old leaven that they may be a new lump, when at the same time he admits them to be unleavened and a new lump? How can these Corinthians be as true, unleavened wafers, or sweet dough, when they have yet to purge out the old leaven? This is an instance of the Pauline and apostolic way of speaking concerning Christians and the kingdom of Christ; it shows us what the condition really is. It is a discipline wherein a new, Christian life is entered upon through faith in Christ the true Passover; hence, Easter is celebrated with sweet, unleavened bread. But at the same time something of the old life remains, which must be swept out, or purged away. However, this latter is not imputed, because faith and Christ are there, constantly toiling and striving to thoroughly purge out whatever uncleanness remains, 15. Through faith we have Christ and his purity perfectly conferred upon ourselves, and we are thus regarded pure; yet in our own personal nature we are not immediately made wholly pure, without sin or weakness. Much of the old leaven still remains, but it will be forgiven, not be imputed to us, if only we continue in faith and are occupied with purging out that remaining impurity. This is Christ's thought when he says to his disciples (John 15:3), "Already ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you," and in the same connection he declares that the branches in him must be purged that they may bring forth more fruit. And to Peter — and to others — he says (John 13:10), "He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all." These passages, as is also stated elsewhere, teach that a Christian by faith lays hold upon the purity of Christ, for which reason he is also regarded pure and begins to make progress in purity; for faith brings the Holy Spirit, who works in man, enabling him to withstand and to subdue sin.

[16] They are to be censured according to whose representations and views a Christian Church is to be advocated which should be in all respects without infirmity and defect, and who teach that, when perfection is not in

evidence, there is no such thing as the Church of Christ nor as true Christians. Many erring spirits, especially strong pretenders to wisdom, and precocious, self-made saints, immediately become impatient at sight of any weakness in Christians who profess the Gospel faith; for their own dreams are of a Church without any imperfections, a thing impossible in this earthly life, even they themselves not being perfect.

[17] Such, we must know, is the nature of Christ's office and dominion in his Church that though he really does instantaneously, through faith, confer upon us his purity, and by the Spirit transforms our hearts, yet the work of transformation and purification is not at once completed. Daily Christ works in us and purges us, to the end that we grow in purity daily. This work he carries on in us through the agency of the Word, admonishing, reproofing, correcting and strengthening; as in the case of the Corinthians through the instrumentality of Paul. Christ also uses crosses and afflictions in effecting this end. He did not come to toil, to suffer and to die because he expected to find pure and holy people. Purity and holiness for us he has acquired in his own person to perfection, inasmuch as he was without sin and perfectly pure from the moment he became man, and this purity and holiness he communicates to us in their flawless perfection in so far our faith clings to him. But to attain personal purity of such perfection requires a daily effort on the part of Christ, until the time shall have come that he has wrought in us a flawless perfection like his own. So he has given us his Word and his Spirit to aid us in purging out the remaining old leaven, and in holding to our newly-begun purity instead of lapsing from it. We must retain the faith, the Spirit and Christ; and this, as before said, we cannot do if we give place to the old carnal disposition instead of resisting it.

[18] Note, one thing the text teaches: Even the saints have weakness, uncleanness and sin yet to be purged out, but it is not imputed unto them because they are in Christ and occupied in purging out the old leaven.

[19] Another thing, it teaches what constitutes the difference between the saints and the unholy, for both are sinful; it tells the nature of sins despite the presence of which saints and believers are holy, retaining grace and the Holy Spirit, and also what sins are inconsistent with faith and grace.

[20] The sins remaining in saints after conversion are various evil inclinations, lusts and desires natural to man and contrary to the Law of

God. The saints, as well as others, are conscious of these sins, but with this difference: they do not permit themselves to be overcome thereby so as to obey the sins, allowing them free course; they do not yield to, but resist, such sins, and, as Paul expresses it here, incessantly purge themselves therefrom. The sins of the saints, according to him, are the very ones which they purge out. Those who obey their lusts, however, do not do this, but give rein to the flesh, and sin against the protest of their own consciences. They who resist their sinful lusts retain faith and a good conscience, a thing impossible with those who fail to resist sin and thus violate their conscience and overthrow their faith. If you persist in that which is evil regardless of the voice of conscience, you cannot say, nor believe, that you have God's favor. So then, the Christian necessarily must not yield to sinful lusts.

[21] The Holy Spirit is given for the very purpose of opposing sin and preventing its reign. Paul says (Galatians 5:17): "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh... that ye may not do the things that ye would." And again (Romans 8:13): "If by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Also (Romans 6:12): "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey the lusts thereof."

"For our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ." ["For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us."]

[22] Here Paul assigns his reason for the statement just made — "Ye are unleavened." They are a new, unleavened or sweet lump, not because of any merit on their part, not because of their own holiness or worthiness, but because they have faith in Christ as the Passover sacrificed for them. This sacrifice makes them pure and holy before God. They are no more the old leaven they were when out of Christ. By this sacrifice they are reconciled with God and purified from sin.

[23] Likewise for us God institutes a new ordinance, a new festival. The old has given place to something wholly new. A different and better Passover sacrifice succeeds that of the Jews. The Jews had annually to partake of their offered sacrifice, but they were not thereby made holy nor pure from sin. Theirs was a sign or earnest of the true Passover to come, the Passover promised by God, in the shed blood of which we are washed from sin and wholly healed — a Passover the partaking whereof we must enjoy

by faith. We have now one perpetual and eternal Easter festival, wherein faith is nourished, satisfied and gladdened; in other words, we receive remission of sins and comfort and strength through this our Passover, Christ.

[24] The meaning of the phrase “sacrificed for us” has been explained in the sermon on the Passion of Christ. Two thoughts are there presented: First, necessity of considering the greatness and terror of the wrath of God against sin in that it could be appeased, and a ransom effected in no other way than through the one sacrifice of the Son of God. Only his death and the shedding of his blood could make satisfaction. And we must consider also that we by our sinfulness had incurred that wrath of God and therefore were responsible for the offering of the Son of God upon the cross and the shedding of his blood. Well may we be terrified because of our sins, for God’s wrath cannot be trivial when we are told no sacrifice save alone the Son of God can brave such wrath and avail for sin. Do you imagine yourself able to endure that wrath of God, or to withstand it if you will not consider this and accept it?

[25] The second thought presented in the sermon mentioned is, the necessity of recognizing the inexpressible love and grace of God toward us. Only so can the terrified heart of man regain comfort. It must be made aware why God spared not his own Son but offered him a sacrifice upon the cross, delivered him to death; namely, that his wrath might be lifted from us once more. What greater love and blessing could be shown? The sacrifice of Christ is presented to us to give us sure comfort against the terrors of sin. For we may perceive and be confident that we shall not be lost because of our sins when God makes such a sacrifice the precious pledge to us of his favor and promised salvation. Therefore, though your sins are great and deserve the awful wrath of God, yet the sacrifice represented by the death of the Son of God is infinitely greater. And in this sacrifice God grants you a sure token of his grace and the forgiveness of your sins. But that forgiveness must be apprehended by the faith which holds fast the declaration, “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.” By this promise must faith be comforted and strengthened. “Wherefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

[26] Having, then, a Paschal Lamb and a true Easter, let us rightly value them. Let us observe the festival with the gladness it ought to inspire. Let us no longer eat the old leaven, but true wafers and paschal cakes. Where the Paschal Lamb is, there must be the unleavened bread. The former is Christ sacrificed for us. To this sacrifice we can add nothing; we can only receive and enjoy it by faith, recognizing it as a gift to us. However, possessing the Paschal Lamb, it is incumbent upon us to partake also of the sweet festal bread; in other words, while embracing the faith of the Passover, we are to maintain the true doctrine of the Gospel, illustrating it by the godly example of our own lives. We should live an eternal Easter life, as it were, to carry out Paul's analogy, a life wherein we, as justified, sanctified and purified people, continue in peace and the joy of the Holy Spirit, so long as we remain on earth.

[27] In this verse, as in the preceding one, Paul contrasts the leaven and the unleavened bread. He makes leaven a general term for everything which proceeds from flesh and blood and an unrenewed sinful nature but classifies it under two heads — the leaven of malice and the leaven of wickedness. By “malice” we understand the various open vices and sins which represent manifest wrong to God and our neighbor. “Wickedness” stands for those numerous evil tricks, those nimble, subtle, venomous artifices practiced upon Christian doctrine and the Word of God with intent to corrupt and pervert them, to mislead hearts from the true meaning thereof. Paul warns (2 Corinthians 11:3): “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve in his craftiness, your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ.” Under “wickedness” comes also such evils as hypocrisy and other false, deceptive dealing practiced in the name of God by way of adorning and covering the sin; false teaching and deceptive action passed off as right, proper and Christian. Such wickedness Christ terms “the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” Mark 8:15. This sort of leaven, particularly, we have in the world to an unspeakable extent in this last and worst of times.

[28] To the leaven of malice and of wickedness, Paul opposes the leaven of sincerity and truth. To be sincere is to live and act in an upright Christian way, prompted by a faithful, godly heart, a heart kindly disposed to all and meditating wrong and injury to none; and to deal as you would be dealt with. To be true is to refrain from false and crafty dealing, from deceit and

roguery, and to teach and live in probity and righteousness according to the pure Word of God. Truth and sincerity must prevail and be in evidence with Christians, who have entered upon a relation and life altogether new; they should celebrate the new Easter festival by bringing faith and doctrine and life into accord with it.

Easter Monday. Peter's Sermon on the Blessings of Christ's Resurrection.

Text: Acts 10:34-43.

34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;

41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. Acts 10:34-43

The Blessings of Christ's Resurrection

[1] This sermon Peter preached to Cornelius, the Cesarean centurion, a gentile but a believer, and to the centurion's assembled friends, Peter having been summoned by Cornelius and having responded to the call-in obedience to a revelation and to the Holy Spirit's command, as related in the preceding verses of the chapter. It is an excellent sermon and bears strong testimony to Christ's resurrection. As should ever be the case with the sermons of apostles and preachers of the Gospel, it is not only a historical record of Christ's life, death and resurrection, but portrays the power and blessing thereof. The entire sermon being easily understood without explanation — for it is itself an exposition of the article on Christ's resurrection — we will go over it but briefly.

[2] First, Peter begins with the inception of the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, suggesting how it was promised in the Scriptures, being declared by the prophets, that Christ should come with a new doctrine, confirming it by miracles; also that he must suffer and die and rise from the dead, establishing thus a new kingdom; and how the promise was fulfilled. For confirmation of his words Peter appeals to his hearers, reminding them of their own knowledge that such was the promise of the Scriptures, and that the message has gone forth, not being uttered secretly, in a corner, but being proclaimed throughout all Judea; and how John the Baptist had shortly before testified he was sent as Christ's herald to prepare his way by directing and leading the people to Christ, etc. The Gospel a Doctrine of Peace

[3] Then Peter explains this new Gospel message as the doctrine of peace, the peace proclamation commanded of God; in other words, salvation and every good thing. The apostle portrays it as a comforting message, a Gospel of joy and grace, a message not accusing, threatening and terrifying with a vision of God's wrath for our sin, as did Moses with his doctrine of the Law. Peter offers to the hitherto terrified, God's favor, remission of sins and eternal life. Similarly, of old did the prophets

prophesy of this Gospel, calling it the message of peace. Peter's language is borrowed from them. For instance, Zechariah prophesies (Zechariah 9:10), "He shall speak peace unto the nations." And Isaiah (Isaiah 52:7), "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!" Paul offers the same thought (Ephesians 2:17), "And he came and preached peace to you that were far off, and peace to them that were nigh." A delightful message is this in which God recalls his wrath and, as Paul says (2 Corinthians 5:18-20), reconciles us unto himself, having commanded the Gospel to be preached to the world for that very purpose, and the office of preaching to be called the ministry of reconciliation; and God admonishes us to be reconciled unto himself, to be his friends, that we may from him receive grace and every good thing.

[4] Second: Peter declares what the Gospel message records concerning Christ: what he has wrought and the nature of his office — how he preached and worked miracles in the service, and for the relief, of all men, what thanks and reward his own people accorded him, in that they nailed him to the cross and put him to death; that nevertheless Christ was not destroyed by the power of the world nor overcome by death, but even retained his freedom, showing himself after death and letting his voice be heard; and that he is now exalted Lord and Judge over all. The Article of Faith on the Resurrection

[5] Here are comprised in a few words the entire history of the Gospel, and the articles of the Christian faith; but particularly does Peter deal with the article of the resurrection, the fact that Christ has, in his own person, completely overcome death and reigns eternal King and Lord of life. In proof of the truth of this article, the apostle adduces the fact of Christ's manifesting himself alive to his disciples, eating and drinking with them and appointing them special witnesses to these things as men to whom the doctrine had been proven, had been established by actual sight of the miracles.

[6] Third: Peter states the item of chief importance in the article, the blessing resulting to us. He explains first why Christ suffered all these things, and how the Gospel was to be published and received; Christ's motive in it all was not his advantage but our good. Before we could know the truth and be blessed, it was necessary that the message be preached. God commanded the apostles, Peter says, to preach the Gospel in all the

world, that all men might know it; and thus the blessing is brought to men through the public office of the ministry.

[7] Fourth: Our obligation concerning the message brought to us, and what it works in ourselves, is indicated in these concluding words of Peter's sermon: "To him bear all the prophets witness, that through his name everyone that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins."

[8] This verse constitutes the principal theme of the sermon. It is one of the greatest in the writings of the apostles. It contains the vital element of the Gospel message, teaching how we may appropriate its blessing, how obtain what it offers, namely, by faith; faith lays hold of what is offered us in the Gospel. The message is preached that we may receive and retain it. Through the Word the blessing is pronounced our own — it is offered to or given us; but by faith we receive it, make it our own, permit it to work in us.

[9] This power and work in us is called by Peter "remission of sins." This is the blessing, the possession, conferred through the preaching of the doctrine of Christ, or the articles of faith, particularly the articles of the resurrection. The meaning of the new message of comfort, the new declaration of peace, is that Christ, through his resurrection, has in himself conquered our sin and death, has turned away the wrath of God and procured grace and salvation; that he has commanded forgiveness to be preached unto us, desiring us to believe he gives it and confidently to receive it through faith.

[10] Faith must be of such character as to apprehend and hold fast the truth Peter declares in this verse. It must say "in his name." That is, must ascribe to Christ alone the entire agency, merit and power responsible for remission of sins; must believe we have forgiveness, not through our own worthiness, but for Christ's sake alone; must believe that by virtue of Christ's resurrection we obtain remission of sins, every namable element not from Christ being completely excluded, and the honor given to him alone. What does the work, the ability, of all mankind amount to when it comes to accomplishing or meriting a thing of such magnitude as remission of sins and redemption from death and eternal wrath? How will it compare with the death and shed blood of the Son of God, with the power of his resurrection? How will it divide honors with him in having merit to secure

remission of sin and redemption from death? The efficacy of Christ's death and blood alone God would have preached in all the world and accepted by mankind. Therein he rejects the boasting of the Jews and of all aspirers to holiness through their own works, teaching them they cannot obtain his favor through the Law, or by their own efforts. In Christ's name alone is remission of sins received, and that through faith.

[11] Salvation through Christ, according to Peter, was before that time proclaimed in the Scriptures, being declared by all the prophets. This is truly strong testimony adduced by the apostle; the Jewish people certainly ought to believe their own prophets unless they willfully are hardened and lost. Much more should we gentiles have faith in Christ's atonement, being obliged to confess that not in any wise have we done aught that such grace should be offered and given to us. We certainly ought to be honest enough to honor Christ to the extent of believing the apostles, in fact the Scriptures entire. We ought to be ashamed to doubt or question the fact of forgiveness of sins and justification before God through Christ alone, to which all Scripture testifies. If we are honest with ourselves, we must confess it the truth, or secure forgiveness of sins or be justified before God by our own works.

[12] Now we have heard what the substance is, the chief doctrine, of the Scriptures, the teaching to which all portions lead; namely, to teach and confirm the article of faith: we have remission of sins for Christ's sake, through faith. We have heard that such was the faith of the fathers, the prophets and all saints, from the beginning of the world, and later was the doctrine preached by Christ himself, and also the doctrine of the apostles, who were commanded to publish it to the world. To this day the same doctrine prevails, and it will until the end be unanimously accepted by the whole Christian Church, with the exception of our present opponents. The Christian Church has ever, as a unit, believed, confessed and contended for this article, the article maintaining that only in the name of the Lord Christ is remission of sin obtained; and in this faith its members have been justified before God and saved. Thus, by such testimony is the foundation of our doctrine laid sufficiently firm; that article was with power contended for, defended and established long before our time.

[13] He who inquires, who would know exactly, what the Christian Church ever holds and teaches, especially concerning the all-important

article of justification before God, or the forgiveness of sins, over which there has always been contention, has it here plainly and exactly in this text. Here is the unwavering testimony of the entire Church from the beginning. It is not necessary, then, to dispute about the doctrine any more. No one can name any just reason, or have any excuse, for doubts on the subject; or reasonably wait for further determinations of investigating councils. In this text we see that the reliability of the article of faith has long ago been proven, even in ancient time, by the Church of the primitive fathers, of the prophets and the apostles. A solid foundation is established, one all men are bound to believe and maintain at the risk of their eternal salvation, whatever councils may establish, or the world advance and determine, to the contrary. Indeed, the sentence has been declared to us; we are commanded to shun every other doctrine that may be believed, taught or ordained. Paul says (Galatians 1:8): “But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema.”

[14] You see now against what the Papacy with all its adherents blusters and rages, and how they are to be regarded who refuse to hear and to tolerate the article Peter here advances and confirms by the testimony of all the prophets and of the Scriptures entire; who cease not to persecute godly and innocent ones for their acceptance of this article of faith, under the pretense of being themselves the Church and of magnifying its name to the utmost while opposing us, though at the same time their doctrine, faith and deeds openly testify against them, proclaiming their belief and teaching to be contrary to the testimony of all the prophets and of the entire Church. By no means can they be the Church who so rashly contradict Peter and the Scriptures, who even trample under foot, in his Word, Christ himself, the Head. Rather, they must be wicked devils, a miserable rabble, the worst enemies of the Christian Church; more wicked and pernicious than heathen or Turks.

[15] Lastly: Peter, by way of proving conclusively to the world that this one Lord, as he names him, Jesus of Nazareth, is the true Messiah promised of old in the Scriptures, says: “To him bear all the prophets witness.” The prophets plainly speak of such a person, one to be born of David’s flesh and blood, in the city of Bethlehem, who should suffer, die and rise again, accomplishing just what this Jesus has accomplished and even proven by

miraculous signs. Therefore, truly the Jews and the non-Christians have no reason to doubt concerning Christ, no reason to await the coming of another.

[16] Further, Peter, citing the testimony of the prophets, indicates the nature of Christ's kingdom as not external power; not temporal dominion like that of earthly lords, kings, and emperors; not dominion over countries or control of people, property and temporal concerns; but a spiritual, eternal kingdom, a kingdom in the hearts of men, an authority over, and power opposed to, sin, everlasting death and hell, a power able to redeem us from those things and bestow upon us salvation. Salvation is ours, Peter teaches, through the preaching of the Gospel, and is received by faith. Faith is the obedience every man must render unto the Lord. By faith he makes himself subject to Christ and partaker of his grace and blessings. Paul also (Romans 1:5) uses the term "unto obedience of faith."

Easter Tuesday. Paul's Sermon on the Power and Blessings of Christ's Resurrection.

Text: Acts 13:26-39.

26 Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

27 For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.

28 And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.

29 And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.

30 But God raised him from the dead:

31 And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.

32 And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,

33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

34 And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

35 Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

36 For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:

37 But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

38 Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:

39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Acts 13:26-39

[1] This sermon Paul preached in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, to the assembled Jews and gentiles. Note, he says, “whosoever among you feareth God.” It is a counterpart of the sermon in the preceding epistle lesson delivered by Peter at Caesarea. Here also the first part of the sermon is simply a narration of the historical facts of Christ’s resurrection, and designed to prove Christ the true Messiah promised in the Scriptures. This is sufficiently demonstrated by the facts in the case that by his own divine power and strength Christ rescued himself from death and the grave, and rose from the dead and showed himself alive and talked with men, something no man but Christ alone had ever done or ever can do. Paul elsewhere (Romans 1:3-4) says that this Jesus our Lord was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.

[2] Not content with a mere narration of the history of the resurrection, Paul cites Scripture testimony incontestably proving that Christ necessarily

must rise from the dead and set up his spiritual and eternal kingdom through the Word he commanded the apostles to publish worldwide. He also discloses the true meaning of Scripture from revelation itself, showing how to seek and find Christ therein. The preceding Gospel lesson also spoke of this.

[3] Third, as was true of Peter, Paul does not fail to mention what is of surpassing importance, the use of the historical parts of Scripture and the blessing and benefit accruing to us from that which Scripture proclaims and witnesses; also the method of appropriating its power and blessing. And he concludes with a beautiful utterance of apostolic power, showing how we are to obtain remission of sins and be saved. He says: “Through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins: and by him everyone that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” This certainly is a powerful passage and so plain it needs no comment, no further explanation. It is a point most firmly established and emphasized everywhere in Paul’s epistles. We should note well and remember such clear passages, that we may gain strength and assurance as to the ground of Christian doctrine. Seeing how perfectly, as faithful, truthful and harmonious witnesses, these two apostles agree in their preaching, we are justified in confidently drawing the conclusion that any doctrine at variance with theirs, any teaching concerning the remission of sins and our salvation contrary to theirs, is not of the church, but of the devil’s accursed teachers, a doctrine of Satan’s own. Galatians 1.

Easter Tuesday. Second Sermon. The Divine Word and the Resurrection.

Text: Acts 13:26-39.

26 Men [and] brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

27 For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled [them] in condemning [him].

28 And though they found no cause of death [in him], yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.

29 And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took [him] down from the tree, and laid [him] in a sepulchre.

30 But God raised him from the dead:

31 And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.

32 And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,

33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

34 And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, [now] no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

35 Wherefore he saith also in another [psalm], Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

36 For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:

37 But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

38 Be it known unto you therefore, men [and] brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:

39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Acts 13:26-39

The Word and the Resurrection

[1] This sermon was preached by Paul in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia, where were gathered with the Jews some Greek converts. Wherever in a city Jews were to be found, there also were their synagogues in which they taught and preached; and many gentiles, coming to hear, were

converted to God through the preaching of his Word. Undoubtedly it was by God's wonderful direction that the Jews were dispersed throughout the world among the gentiles, after the first destruction of Jerusalem by the Assyrians. Inasmuch as this dispersion resulted in the spread of the Word, they were instrumental in securing salvation for the gentiles and in preparing the way for the world-wide preaching of the Gospel by the apostles. For wherever the apostles went they found Jewish synagogues and the opportunity to preach to a regular congregation, through whom their Gospel might be widely disseminated because of the many gentiles also in attendance. Had not these gentiles been already accustomed to the Jewish synagogues, they would not have listened to the apostles, nor even permitted them publicly to preach, strangers that they were.

[2] Thus it is Paul comes into the synagogue on the Sabbath, a time when the congregation was wont to assemble and read the Scriptures. He and Barnabas being guests from the country of the Jews, Paul is besought to give an exhortation, or sermon, to the people, whereupon he rises and delivers a fine, lengthy discourse concerning Christ: how in the Scriptures he had been promised unto the fathers and to David the king, had been born of the seed of David and had received the public testimony of John the Baptist; how Christ was sacrificed by the Jews (Peter gives the same account in the preceding epistle lesson); how he rose from the dead and for some time showed himself alive; how he then commanded his apostles to publish to the world the new doctrine that God's promise to the Jews had been fulfilled; and how, by his resurrection, he brought to them the promised blessing, namely, the remission of sins unattainable through the Law of Moses and all their ordinances, but dispensed and imparted alone to faith in the Christ proclaimed.

[3] As stated later in the text, there were, beside the Jews, many gentiles present at the preaching of this sermon, and at its conclusion they besought Paul to speak to them again between sabbaths. Accordingly, when he came to the synagogue the next sabbath, he found almost the whole city assembled. But to return to the first sermon: Paul says, "Brethren, children of the stock of Abraham" — or, native Jews — "and those among you that fear God" who are gentiles. Now, though this could not but be a discourse objectionable and highly offensive to the Jews, Paul opens with tender and nicely chosen words meant to conciliate and to secure their respectful

attention. He highly honors them by addressing them as the people chosen by God in preference to all the gentiles; as children of the holy fathers who had a special claim to the promise of God. But, again, he vitiates his pleasing impression when he proclaims to the Jews naught else but the crucified and risen Christ, and concludes with the statement that with nothing but Moses' Law and ordinances they ranked no higher in the sight of God than the gentiles. The Word of Salvation

[4] Paul's discourse is in perfect harmony with Peter's sermon. Peter speaks of God having sent unto the Jews heralds proclaiming peace; and Paul here says, "To you [us] is the word of this salvation sent." Notwithstanding the joy and comfort wherewith these words are fraught, they could not please the Jews. The Jews disdained the idea — in fact, it was intolerable to them to hear it expressed — that after their long expectation of a Messiah to be lord and king of the world, they should receive a mere message, and at that a message rendering of no significance at all that Law and government for which they had expected, through that Messiah, exaltation and world-wide acceptance. Indeed, such an issue could only mean to them having entertained a vain hope.

[5] Paul makes his teaching yet more offensive by not referring to the Gospel simply as the word of peace, as Peter does, but by giving it the greater and grander title, "the word of salvation"; in other words, a doctrine calculated to heal and save. No grander name could be found for the Gospel; for a message of salvation is an expression of God's grace, forgiveness of sins, abiding peace and life eternal. Moreover, these blessings were not to be bestowed upon the Jews alone; they were to be equally shared with the gentiles, who had no knowledge of God, of the Law, or of divine worship. The gentiles were thus to be made the equals of the Jews, leaving the latter without preference or special merit before God, and without advantage and lordship over the former in the world.

[6] Thus early in his discourse Paul grows blunt and severe, kneading Jews and gentiles into one lump. Indeed, he plainly tells the Jews that the Law of Moses did not secure to them the favor of God in the past and would be equally profitless in the future; that through the Gospel message, and only so, they, and all gentiles as well, were to be delivered from sin, death and the power of the devil, and to become God's people, with power over all. Yet he presents no other tangible token of the great boon he calls

salvation and blessedness than his preaching alone. Now, one may say: “The word I hear, and Paul I see, a poor human being; but this salvation — grace, life and peace — I behold not. On the contrary, I daily see and experience sin, terror, adversity, suffering and death, until it seems as if in all humanity none are so utterly forsaken by God as the Christians, who hear this message.”

[7] But this is precisely the precious doctrine to be learned if we are to be God’s children and sensible of his kingdom within us, a doctrine beyond the knowledge and experience of the Jews with their Law and of the gentiles with their wisdom drawn from reason — this it is: our salvation stands in the Word Paul here declares of Christ, a Word which, in name and reality, is a Word of salvation and peace; for salvation and peace are the blessings which it offers and imparts.

[8] God has sent this word, Paul says. Its origin and conception is not with man. It is not the edict of the Roman emperor, nor the command of the high priest at Jerusalem. It is the Word of the God of heaven. In it he speaks. He will have the message preached by poor human beings as a power unto happiness and salvation, both in name and reality. Such the Law never was. Paul says (Romans 1:16): “I am not ashamed of the Gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.” And God himself has bound up with it our salvation when he manifests himself in the voice heard from heaven at Jordan, saying of Christ, “This is my beloved Son” — who is to be heard.

[9] God desires Christ’s Word to be heard. Otherwise expressed, his command is: “Here ye have the Word of peace and salvation. Not elsewhere may you seek and find these blessings. Cling to this Word if you desire peace, happiness and salvation. Let befall what may, crosses, afflictions, discord, death — whether you be beheaded, or fall victim to pest or stroke, or in whatever manner God may call you home — in it all, look only upon me, whose Word promises that you shall not die, what seems death being but a sweet sleep, ay, the entrance into life eternal Christ says (John 8:51): “Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my Word, he shall never see death.” Note, it is the keeping of the Word on which Christ lays stress. “Keeping” is holding fast to the promise, feeling and all senses to the contrary, doubting not the truth of the message heard. For he who promises is not man; it is the Lord of heaven and earth and all that in them is, who

has to this moment controlled and preserved the same. One hundred years ago, what were you and I and all men now living but absolutely nothing? How and from what was creation effected when there was nothing to start with? “He spoke, and it was done” — that was created which before had not existence — declares Psalm 33:9, quoting from Genesis 1; “he commanded, and it stood fast.”

[10] Being the Word of God, the Gospel is an entirely different thing from man’s word, no matter though it be spoken by a mere man or even a donkey. Therefore, let there be, now or henceforth, discord, terror of sin; the menace of death and hell, of the grave and corruption: come upon you what may — only press to your heart this Word that Christ has sent you a message of salvation — of redemption, of triumph over all things; and that he commands you to believe it. Then you will perceive that he, as your God and Creator, will not deceive you. What are death, the devil and all creatures as a match for Christ?

[11] The glory of Christ’s message, then, here called by Paul “the Word of salvation,” is much greater and higher than would have been the promise of all the kingdoms, all the riches and splendors of the world, yes, of both heaven and earth. For what, could they benefit if one possessed not the Word of salvation and eternal life? With all these, when assailed by sins, or by the distress and danger of death, one must still say, “Away with all the blessings and joys of the world, so that I may hear and have altogether the message of salvation sent by Christ.” You must hold fast to it and know that it alone gives eternal peace and joy; that it must receive your faith in spite of all apparent contradiction; that you must not be governed by your reason or your feelings, but must regard that as divine, unchangeable and eternal truth which God has spoken and commands to be proclaimed. Such is Paul’s exhortation addressed primarily to the Jews to accept this message as sent by God and as being the bearer of wondrous blessings.

[12] Next, he proceeds to remove their chief stumbling block, the thing of greatest offense to them. He warns them against the course adopted by them of Jerusalem, who had the Word of salvation from Christ himself, who read it in the prophets every day, who should have had no trouble perceiving that the prophets testified to Christ and that there was complete harmony between their teaching and that of Christ and the apostles yet would not understand. Because Christ came not in the manner they desired,

they condemned the very One whom they read of in the Scriptures as appearing with this Word of salvation, the time of whose coming had been pointed out, leaving them to know it had long since arrived and they had no reason to wait for another. They understood not the Scriptures because their minds were completely hardened and dominated by the fixed idea that Christ should reign as a temporal king. So thoroughly was the whole Jewish nation impressed with this belief that the very apostles had no other conception of Christ's kingdom, even after his resurrection. As John says (John 12:16), they did not understand the Scriptures until Christ ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit came. So long as there hangs before one's eyes this curtain — the carnal fancy of a temporal kingdom for Christ, an earthly government for his Church — the Scriptures cannot be understood. As Paul says of the Jews (Corinthians 3:14), the veil remaineth in the reading of the Scriptures. But this lack of understanding is inexcusable. That is gross and wilful blindness which will not receive the instruction and direction imparted by the apostles. The Jews continue to rave against the Gospel; they will hear nothing of the Christ, though even after crucifying him they receive the offer of repentance and remission of sins at the hands of the apostles.

[13] That Paul should make bold to tell the most prominent men and rulers of the whole Jewish nation — the heads of God's people, pillars of the Church, as we would say — that not only the common rabble, but likewise they themselves did not know and understand the Scriptures committed to them; ay, that, not content with such ignorance and error, they had themselves become the individuals of whom they read, the murderers and crucifiers of the Son of God, their Savior — this was a matter of grave offense indeed! Offensive indeed was it to have this accusation brought against them, a people among whom God had ordained his worship, his temple and priesthood, and for whom he had instituted a peculiar government, giving the high priest power to say, "Do so or you will be put to death." Deuteronomy 17:12. And of them were the glorious and great council of the seventy-two elders originally ordained through Moses (Exodus 18:25-26), the council called the Sanhedrim. They ruled the entire people and certainly knew right and wrong according to their law. Was there not reason here to tear Paul to pieces with red-hot pinchers as a seditious character, a public blasphemer, speaking not only against the Jewish government but against the honor of God himself; daring to accuse

all the princes of the nation of being in error, of knowing nothing of the Scriptures, even of being murderers of the Son of God? The Pope and his crowd lack the credentials of such glory and endorsement by God. They have merely reared a system of self-devised doctrine and idolatry, which they still defend. Hence, whatever censure and condemnation we heap upon the Pope and his crowd is small in comparison to the thrust Paul dealt the Jewish leaders.

[14] Note, Paul does not stand back for anything. He teaches men utterly to disregard the hue and cry of the offended Jews that they were the high priests, teachers, rulers in a government ordained by God and commanding the obedience of the people; that teaching disobedience to them was equivalent to teaching disobedience to parents and to civil government, yes, to God himself — something in the nature of the case not to be tolerated. Yet Paul fearlessly does so teach, as an apostle of God and in fulfillment of God's command. How much more would Paul oppose our popish deceivers who, without the authority of God's Word, boast themselves heads of the Church and of the people of God, at the same time neither teaching nor understanding the Scriptures, but offering their own drivel as God's commands!

[15] But what cause has Paul at heart that he dares so boldly condemn the judgment of these exalted officials? It is this, according to his own statement: There is One called Jesus Christ, of whom the prophets, in fact the entire Scriptures, speak. Him the Jews refuse to know. He is higher and greater than the high priests and the rulers, greater than the temple or the whole city of Jerusalem. And the Jews know his coming means their passing, and their obedience to him as Lord and Supreme Ruler. Therefore, they are inexcusable in their rejection of Christ. Of no avail is their evasion, "God has given us the dominion and the supreme power and has commanded obedience to us in equal degree with obedience to parents."

[16] The fact that an individual is a lord or a prince, a father or a mother, a child or a subject, administers authority or obeys it, will not excuse him from being baptized and believing in Christ. For Christ is sole and supreme Lord over all kings, princes and governors. True, we should be obedient to parents and to civil authority, but not to the extent of disobeying the Lord, him who has created and subjected to himself emperors and magistrates equally with the lowliest of men. But the gentlemen and lords at Jerusalem,

like those of our day, were unwilling to permit obedience to any but themselves. From such conditions arises the present dispute about ecclesiastical authority. To go counter to it in obeying God's command — this the ecclesiasts unjustly call disobedience and sedition. But such must be our course if we are to be loyal to our Lord and theirs, whom they deny.

[17] In the matter of salvation, Caiaphas or Pope, Caesar or king, avails naught; none avails but Jesus Christ. "Him," says Paul, "the rulers of Jerusalem, the Holy City, have killed. Though ye were ordained by God and given authority, God no longer regards you, because ye reject Christ. Ye have become great blockheads, blind leaders, understanding not at all the Scriptures. Yet ye should and would teach others, just as Moses and the prophets have pointed to this Christ promised to you and to all the world for salvation and solace. Persisting in your blindness, ye have brought him to the cross, though finding in him no cause for condemnation. Surely, he did you no injury; he deprived you of naught, neither money, goods, honor nor power, but has brought you all good — even salvation — if ye will but receive him. But ye made yourselves the very ones who fulfilled the Scriptures ye daily read — those who put Christ to death and brought to pass the fact that he rose from the dead (though without thanks to you or to Satan) and became a Lord commanding the obedience of all creatures. "We shall no longer regard what ye, or all the world, have to say of our preaching Christ; it is all the same to us whether you rage or smile. For we boast the Lord, the Son of God, made Lord over all the fathers through his resurrection. It is his will that we preach of him, and that all men believe. Since ye refuse him, your God-given privilege ceases, which, however, was granted only until the advent of the Messiah. We must withdraw from you, renouncing your authority and priesthood, and Jerusalem itself. We tell you plainly that we cannot and will not obey you in opposition to the will of the Lord."

[18] Mark you, in order to make the Jews Christians, Paul had to preach that Christ was already come; that he was no longer to be looked for. He was obliged to bring home to them what they had done to Christ, they the rulers and chief of those bearing the name of God's people and entrusted with the Law and the order of divine worship — he was forced to do so that they might perceive their sin and quit their boast of having the true Law and worship, having nothing whatever wherein to glory before God. For, though

possessing the Law of Moses and having heard often enough the Word of God, they would not recognize and receive the Messiah sent by God in accordance with his promise, but condemned him and became his murderers. In view of this fact, what does their boast about being Abraham's children, God's people, possessors of the prophets and the Law and the priesthood, amount to? These privileges only magnify their sins, only make their guilt the more grievous, before God. Not as blind, ignorant heathen, but as a people who have, and should know, the Word of God, they willfully put to death God's Son. Thus we have the first part of Paul's sermon.

The Resurrection and Faith.

[19] The second part deals with the resurrection of Christ and its power through faith. This is the goal Paul has in view when he tells them that they have slain the Christ, thus effecting their condemnation by God and forfeiting whatever glory they possessed as Jews, gaining shame and wrath before God in its stead. To be still delivered from such condemnation, and to obtain justification and salvation, as he expresses himself toward the end, it is necessary to hear and believe the word concerning the selfsame Christ. Moreover, inasmuch as they with their leaders have refused to receive and recognize this Messiah when he preached and wrought miracles in person; now, that he is invisible and absent in the body, they are called upon to receive him whom they themselves have crucified unto death, and to believe that he is risen from the dead as Lord over all, according to the testimony of the apostles. The dreams of the past they are now utterly to forsake, and their expectations of a Messiah still to come and elevate them with their Law and manner of worship to fame, riches and position, and to spread abroad their Moses and their priesthood in all the earth. They must now thank God for being placed on the same footing with the gentiles, in that they may come with them to the Word of salvation for the purpose of obtaining God's favor, remission of sins and life eternal. Old Testament Testimony

[20] Paul supports his discourse on the resurrection of Christ with many strong Scripture texts. There is no doubt that he dwelt on these at length and preached quite a sermon, which, however, has not been recorded here in full, but only in part. The apostle's purpose was to point us to the Old

Testament Scriptures, that we might there make diligent study for ourselves of how forcibly the prophets have spoken concerning Christ, his works and his kingdom.

[21] The first text Paul cites is from the Second Psalm (Psalm 2), which treats throughout of the Messiah and his reign, as even the Jews at the time when wisdom still prevailed had to admit. Christ's own words are: "I will tell of the decree: Jehovah said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." Paul says he is here quoting from the First Psalm, though in all editions, old and new, this psalm comes second in order.¹ But the apostle does not have reference to the technical arrangement of the psalms in a book, but to the order of his quotations. The thought is: "First, I will prove it from the psalm," or, "First, as I Since Luther's Time this discrepancy has been removed by allowing the change, "Second Psalm." written in the psalm." Just as the preacher of today says, "I observe, first," or, "It is written, first, in the psalm," whether the psalm be the first, second, twentieth or thirtieth, he not having reference to the order of the psalm but to the order in which he cites it.

[22] But how does Paul make this text prove the resurrection of Christ? It is truly a strong statement, and no doubt the apostle fully explained it, amplifying it beautifully and well. The psalm refers to that Messiah, or King, who shall reign in the Jewish nation, among the people; for the writer says plainly, "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion," or Jerusalem. The King, then, must be true man like other men. Indeed, the psalmist adds that the kings and rulers of earth shall rage and persecute him, which could not be unless he reigned upon earth.

[23] But this verse also makes the King true God, for here God calls him his own Son, begotten of himself in his divine, eternal essence and majesty. He is, then, not an adopted Son, but the true Son of God by birth. Being man, however, just like others, he must, in accord with his human nature, die; indeed, he must suffer crucifixion and death at the hands of the lords of the world. But, again, if he be also the begotten Son of God and therefore true God, he cannot, even according to his human nature, remain in death; he must come forth from it, must triumph over it, becoming Lord of life and death forever. Here is an indivisible Being, at the same time a Son of the virgin of the house of David and of God. Such cannot remain in death. If he enters death, it must be to overcome and conquer it, yes, to slay it, to

destroy it; and to bring to pass that in him as Lord shall reign naught but life, life for all who receive him. This subject is elsewhere more fully expounded.

[24] But the succeeding text cited on the resurrection — from Isaiah 55:3 — reads yet more strangely: “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David,” which in the Hebrew is: “I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” The prophet has reference to the promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7, concerning Christ. In the preceding verses of the chapter, Isaiah most tenderly entreats and invites the whole world to receive the promises of salvation, for thereby shall the poor, the wretched and the afflicted obtain the great treasures of joy and salvation. And immediately following the verse quoted, he speaks of the Messiah, the promised seed of David, as given to the Levites for a “witness” — in other words, a preacher sent by God — and for “a leader and commander to the peoples.” The thought is of a King and Ruler differing from Moses and his priests and exponents of the Law; a ruler differing from every other lord, ruler and king, from David and all worldly rulers whatever, subjecting everything to himself. Not that this Leader should set up a new temporal government, or extend Jewish authority among the gentiles, but that both Jews and gentiles should receive him and believe in him, obtaining the fulfillment of that promise he here terms a covenant of the sure mercies of David. This covenant, God says, he enters into and keeps, a divine, sure covenant: through Christ shall be given whatever blessings God’s mercy shall bestow, with remission or blotting out of sins, redemption from death and life eternal.

[25] Now, if the Christ of this covenant is true man and, as the promise to David is, of David’s flesh and blood; and if he is to bring eternal mercy, he must likewise be God, such gift being in the province and power of God alone. This being true, he cannot remain in death, although he may suffer death by reason of his human nature; he must of his own power rise from the dead. Only so can he raise others and give them everlasting life; only so can he truly be called eternal King of grace, righteousness and life, according to the sure promise of God.

[26] Therefore, wherever the Scriptures speak of Christ’s eternal kingdom, and of everlasting grace, they point out this article of the resurrection of Christ. No doubt, the apostle in explanation of the text from

the Second Psalm (Psalm 2) quoted other Old Testament passages; for instance, Psalm 110:1: “Jehovah saith unto my lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool”; also Psalm 110:4: “Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent: Thou art a priest for ever.” In these passages God has promised to give us Christ, him who was to sit at his right hand — that is, have the omnipotent, divine power possible only to an eternal Lord and King — and at the same time to have his kingdom on earth, at Zion — or Jerusalem; and who was, moreover, to be a priest forever, being taken from among men and like unto them, even in his ability to die, yet at the same time continuing a priest forever, thereby forestalling the necessity of remaining in death and grave.

[27] The third passage cited by Paul is taken from the Sixteenth Psalm, which is in reality one of the Messianic psalms. This is the psalm Peter in his first sermon on the day of Pentecost more fully explains, drawing from it the irresistible conclusion, so apparent in his own words, that Christ indeed has died; not, however, to become victim to decay in the tomb, but, proof against mortal destruction and hurt, to arise on the third day.

Easter Wednesday. Also Suited to Easter Tuesday. The Fruit That Follows Belief in the Resurrection.

Text: Colossians 3:1-7.

- 1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.
- 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.
- 3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.
- 4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with

him in glory.

5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:

7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.
Colossians 3:1-7

Exhortation to Truly Good Works

[1] We have been hearing of the glorious message of Christ's resurrection, how that resurrection took place and how we must believe, for our own blessing, comfort and salvation. Now, that we may be sincerely thankful to God for this inestimable blessing, and that our attitude toward the doctrine of the resurrection may be one to truly honor and glorify it, we must hear also, and practice, the apostles' teaching of its essential fruits, and must manifest them in our lives. Therefore, we will select Paul's admonition to the Colossians (ch. 3), which has to do with this topic particularly. Observe here, Paul exhorts Christians to be incited by the resurrection of Christ unto works truly good and becoming; the text declares unto us the supreme blessing and happiness the resurrection brings within our reach — remission of sins and salvation from eternal death. Lest, however, our wanton, indolent nature deceive itself by imagining the work is instantaneously wrought in ourselves, and that simply to receive the message is to exhaust the blessing, Paul always adds the injunction to examine our hearts to as certain whether we rightly apprehend the resurrection truth. How We Are Risen with Christ

[2] By no means are we simply to assent to the words of the doctrine. Christ does not design that we be able merely to accept and speak intelligently of it, but that its influence be manifest in our lives. How is a dead man profited, however much life may be preached to him, if that preaching does not make him live? Or, of what use is it to preach righteousness to a sinner if he remains in sin? or to an erring, factious individual if he forsake not his error and his darkness? Even so, it is not

only useless but detrimental, even pernicious in effect, to listen to the glorious, comforting and saving doctrine of the resurrection if the heart has no experience of its truth; if it means naught but a sound in the ears, a transitory word upon the tongue, with no more effect upon the hearer than as if he had never heard it. According to Paul in the text, this nobly-wrought and precious resurrection of Christ essentially must be, not an idle tale of fancy, futile as a dead hewn-stone or painted-paper image, but a powerful energy working in us a resurrection through faith — an experience he calls being risen with Christ; in other words, it is dying unto sin, being snatched from the power of death and hell and having life and happiness in Christ. In the second chapter (verse 12), the apostle puts it plainly, “buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.”

[3] If, Paul says, ye have apprehended by faith the resurrection of Christ and have received its power and consolation, and so are risen with him, that resurrection will surely be manifest in you; you will feel its power, will be conscious of its working within. The doctrine will be something more than words; it will be truth and life. For them who do not thus apprehend the resurrection, Christ is not yet risen, although his rising is none the less a fact; for there is not within them the power represented by the words “being risen with Christ,” the power which renders them truly dead and truly risen men. So Paul’s intent is to make us aware that before we can become Christians, this power must operate within us; otherwise, though we may boast and fancy ourselves believing Christians, it will not be true. The test is, are we risen in Christ — is his resurrection effective in us? Is it merely a doctrine of words, or one of life and operating power?

[4] Now, what is the process of the life and death mentioned? How can we be dead and at the same time risen? If we are Christians, we must have suffered death; yet the very fact that we are Christians implies that we live. How is this paradox to be explained? Indeed, certain false teachers of the apostles’ time understood and explained the words in a narrow sense making them mean that the resurrection of the dead is a thing of the past according to Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 1:10, and that there is no future resurrection from temporal death. The believer in Christ, they said, is already risen to life; in all Christians the resurrection is accomplished in this

earthly life. They sought to prove their position by Paul's own words, thus assailing the article of the resurrection.

[5] But we will ignore these teachers as being condemned by Paul, and interpret the words as he meant them, his remarks both preceding and following making it clear and unquestionable that he refers to the spiritual resurrection. This fact is certain: If we are, at the last day, to rise bodily, in our flesh and blood, to eternal life, we must have had a previous spiritual resurrection here on earth. Paul's words in Romans 8:11 are: "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you." In other words: God having quickened, justified and saved you spiritually, he will not forget the body, the building or tabernacle of the living spirit; the spirit being in this life risen from sin and death, the tabernacle, or the corruptible flesh-and-blood garment, must also be raised; it must emerge from the dust of earth, since it is the dwelling place of the saved and risen spirit, that the two may be reunited unto life eternal.

[6] The apostle, then, is not in this text referring to the future resurrection of the body, but to the spiritual rising which entails the former. He regards as one fact the resurrection of the Lord Christ, who brought his body again from the grave and entered into life eternal, and the resurrection of ourselves, who, by virtue of his rising, shall likewise be raised: first, the soul, from a trivial and guilty life shall rise into a true, divine and happy existence; and second, from this sinful and mortal body shall rise out of the grave an immortal, glorious one. So Paul terms believing Christians both "dead" and "alive." They are spiritually dead in this life and also spiritually alive. Nevertheless, this sinful temporal life must yet come to an end in physical death, for the destruction of the sin and death inherent therein, that body and spirit may live forever. Therefore, he says: "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God."

[7] In other words: Seek and strive after what is above — the things divine, heavenly and eternal; not the terrestrial, perishable, worldly. Make manifest the fact that you are now spiritually raised and by the same power will later be raised bodily.

[8] But does this mean that we, as Christians, are no more to eat and drink, to till the ground, to attend to domestic or public duties, or to engage in any kind of labor? Are we to live utterly idle, practically dead? Is that what you mean, Paul, when you say we are not to seek the things of earth, though all these are essentially incident to life? What can you say to the fact that Christ the Lord is, himself, with us on earth? for he said before his ascension to heaven (Matthew 28:20): “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”; and also the baptism which he commands, the sacrament and the office of Gospel ministry whereby he governs his Church here — these are things of earth.

[9] Paul, however, explains in the succeeding verse what he means by “things that are upon the earth” and “things that are above.” He is not telling us to despise earthly objects. He does not refer to God’s created things, all which are good, as God himself considered them; nor has he reference to the Christian who, in his earthly life, must deal with the things of creation. He has in mind the individual without knowledge of God; who knows no more, and aims no further, than reason teaches, that reason received from parents at physical birth; who is an unbeliever, ignorant of God and the future life and caring not for them; who follows only natural understanding and human desire and seeks merely personal benefit, honor, pride and pleasure. The apostle calls that a worldly life where the Word of God is lacking, or at least is disregarded, and where the devil has rule, impelling to all vices. Paul would say: Ye must be dead to a worldly life of this sort, a life striven after by the heathen, who disregard God’s Word and suffer the devil to have his way with them. Ye must prove the resurrection of Christ in you to be something more than vain words. Ye must show there is a living power manifest in you because ye are risen, a power which makes you lead a different life, one in obedience to the Word and will of God, and called the divine, heavenly life. Where this change does not take place, it is a sign ye are not yet Christians but are deceiving yourselves with vain fancies.

[10] Under the phrase “things that are upon the earth” — worldly things — Paul includes not only gross, outward vices, sins censurable in the eyes of the world, but also greater immoralities; everything, in fact, not in accordance with the pure Word of God, faith and true Christian character.

Spiritual and Carnal Worldliness

[11] In order to a better understanding of the text, we shall adopt Paul's customary classification of life as spiritual and carnal. Life on earth is characterized as of the spirit, or spiritual; and of the flesh, or carnal. But the spiritual life may be worldly. The worldly spiritual life is represented by the vices of false and self-devised doctrine wherein the soul lives without the Word of God, in unbelief and in contempt of God; or, still worse, abuses the Word of God and the name of Christ in false doctrine, making them a cover and ornament for wicked fraud, using them falsely under a show of truth, under pretense of Christian love. This is worldly conduct of the spiritual kind. It is always the worst, ever the most injurious, since it is not only personal sin, but deceives others into like transgression. Paul refers, in the epistle lesson for Easter, to this evil as the "old leaven" and the "leaven of wickedness." And in 2 Corinthians 7:1, he makes the same classification of spiritual and carnal sin, saying, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit." By defilement of the spirit he means those secret, subtle vices wherewith man pollutes and corrupts his inner life in the sight of God; his sins not being manifest to the world but deceiving human reason and wisdom.

[12] If we would be Christians we must, first of all, be dead to conduct of this sort. We must not receive nor tolerate the worldly doctrine and corrupt inventions originating with ourselves, whether in the nature of reason, philosophy or law, theories ignoring the Word of God or else falsely passing under its name. For such are wholly of the world; under their influence man has no regard to God's will and seeks not his kingdom and eternal life. They are meant merely to further the individual's own honor, pride, renown, wisdom, holiness or something else. Though boast is made of the Gospel and of faith in Christ, yet it is not serious, and the individual continues without power and without fruit.

[13] If we are risen with Christ through faith, we must set our affections upon things not earthly, corruptible, perishable, but upon things above — the heavenly, divine, eternal; in other words, upon doctrine right, pure and true, and whatever is pleasing to God, that his honor and Christ's kingdom may be preserved. Thus, shall we guard ourselves against abuse of God's name, against false worship and false trust and that presumption of self-holiness which pollutes and defrauds the spirit.

[14] Under carnal worldliness Paul includes the gross vices, enumerating in particular here, fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, and so on, things which reason knows to be wicked and condemns as such. The spiritual sins take reason captive and deceive it, leaving it powerless to guard against them. They are termed spiritual sins not simply because of their spirit-polluting character, for all vices pollute the spirit, the carnal vices among them; but because they are too subtle for flesh and blood to discern. The sins of the flesh, however, are called carnal, or body-polluting, because committed by the body, in its members. Now, as we are to be dead unto spiritual sins, so are we to be dead unto carnal sins, or at least to make continual progress toward that end, striving ever to turn away from all such earthly things and to look toward the heavenly and divine. He who continues to seek carnal things and to be occupied with them, has not as yet with Christ died unto the world. Not having died, he is not risen; the resurrection of Christ effects nothing in him. Christ is dead unto him and he unto Christ.

[15] Paul's admonition is particularly necessary at the present time. We see a large and constantly-increasing number who, despite their boast of the Gospel and their certain knowledge of the polluting and condemning power of spiritual and carnal sins, continue in their evil course, forgetful of God's wrath, or endeavoring to trust in false security. Indeed, it is a very common thing for men to do just as they please and yet pretend innocence and seek to avoid censure. Some would represent themselves guileless as lambs and blameless; no act of theirs may be regarded evil or even wrong. They pretend great virtue and Christian love. Yet they carry on their insidious, malicious frauds, imposing falsehoods upon men. They ingeniously contrive to make their conduct appear good, imagining that to pass as faultless before men and to escape public censure means to deceive God also. But they will learn how God looks upon the matter. Paul tells us (Galatians 6:7) God will not, like men, be mocked. To conceal and palliate will not avail. Nothing will answer but dying to vice and then striving after what is virtuous, divine and becoming the Christian character.

[16] Paul enumerates some gross and unpardonable vices — fornication, or unchastity, and covetousness. He speaks also of these in Ephesians 5:3-5 and in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7, as we have heard in the epistle lessons for the second and third Sundays in Lent. He enjoins Christians to guard against

these sins, to be utterly dead to them. For they are sensual, acknowledged such even among the gentiles; while we strive after the perfect purity becoming souls who belong to Christ and in heaven. It is incumbent upon the Christian to preserve his body modest, and holy or chaste; to refrain from polluting himself by fornication and other unchastity, after the manner of the world.

[17] Similarly does the apostle forbid covetousness, to which he gives the infamous name of idolatry in the effort to make it more hideous in the Christian's eyes, to induce him to shun it as an abominable vice intensely hated of God. It is a vice calculated to turn a man wholly from faith and from divine worship, until he regards not, nor seeks after, God and his Word and heavenly treasures, but follows only after the treasures of earth and seeks a god that will give him enough of earthly good.

[18] Much might be said on this topic were we to consider it relative to all orders and trades in succession. For plainly the world, particularly in our day, is completely submerged in the vice of covetousness. It is impossible to enumerate the subtle arts it can invent, and the good and beautiful things it knows how to pass off where-under it masks itself as a thing not to be considered sinful, but rather extremely virtuous and indicative of uprightness. And so idolatry ever does. While before God it is the worst abomination, before the world its appearance and reputation are superior. So far from being recognized as sin, it is considered supreme holiness and divine worship. The very worship of Mammon wears an imposing mask. It must not be called covetousness or dishonest striving after property, but must be known as upright, legitimate endeavor to obtain a livelihood, a seeking to acquire property honestly. It ingeniously clothes itself with the Word of God, saying God commands man to seek his bread by labor, by his own exertions, and that every man is bound to provide for his own household. No civil government, no, nor a preacher even, can censure covetousness under that guise unless it be betrayed in gross robbing and stealing.

[19] Let every man know that his covetousness will be laid to the charge of his own conscience, that he will have to answer for it, for God will not be deceived. It is evident the vice is gaining ground. With its false appearance and ostentation, and its worldwide prevalence, it is commonly accepted as legal. Without censure or restraint, men are engrossed in coveting and

accumulating to the utmost. Those having position and power think they have the right to acquire by violence as much as they can, daily making assessments and imposts, and new oppressions and impositions upon the poor. And the common rabble seek gain by raising prices, by extortion, fraud, and so on. Yet all desire not to be charged with wrongdoing; they would not they should be called unchristian on account of their conduct. Indeed, such excess of covetousness obtains that the public robbing and stealing, and the faithlessness and fraud, of the meanest hirelings, servants and maids everywhere can no longer be restrained.

[20] But who would care to recount the full extent of this vice in all dealings and interests of the world between man and man? Enough has been said to induce everyone who aims to be a Christian to examine his own heart and, if he find himself guilty of such vice, to refrain; if not, to know how to guard against it. Every individual can readily perceive for himself what is consistent with Christian character in this respect, what can be allowed with a good conscience; for he has Christ's rule of dealing as we would be dealt with, which insures equality and justice. Where unfairness exists, covetousness must obtain to some extent.

[21] If you will not desist from the vice of covetousness, then know you are not a Christian, not a believer, but, as Paul calls you, a base, detestable idolater, having no part in God's kingdom; for you are living wholly to the world and without intent to rise with Christ. You will receive no blessing from the joy-inspiring and gracious revelation that Christ died and rose for sinners. You cannot say, "Therefore he died for me, I trust." Truly, Christ died for you, but if you continue in your wickedness, using this revelation as a cloak for your mean covetousness, do not — such is the declaration of the text — by any means apply that comforting promise to yourself. Although Christ indeed died and rose for all, yet unto you he is not risen; you have not apprehended his resurrection by faith. You have seen the smoke but have not felt the fire; you have heard the words but have received nothing of their power. The New Life in Christ

[22] If you would be able honestly to boast of this revelation as unto you, if you would have the comfort of knowing that Christ, through his death and resurrection, has blessed you, you must not continue in your old sinful life, but put on a new character. For Christ died and rose for the very purpose of effecting your eventual death with him and your participation in

his resurrection: in other words, he died that you might be made a new man, beginning even now, a man like unto himself in heaven, a man having no covetous desire or ambition for advantage over a neighbor, a man satisfied with what God grants him as the result of his labor, and kind and beneficent to the needy.

[23] In his desire to arouse Christians to the necessity of guarding against such vices as he mentions, Paul strengthens his admonition, in conclusion, by grave threats and visions of divine wrath, saying, “for which things’ sake cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience”; that is, upon the unbelieving world, which regards not the Word of God, does not fear or believe in it nor strive to obey it, and yet is unwilling to be charged with idolatry and other unchristian principles, desiring rather to be considered righteous and God’s own people. In the last quoted clause Paul also implies that worldly conduct, the life of worldly lusts such as covetousness and other vices, is inconsistent and impossible with faith, and that the power of Christ’s resurrection cannot reach it. For this reason he terms them “sons of disobedience,” who have not faith and who, by their unchristian conduct, bring God’s wrath upon themselves and are cast out from the kingdom of God. God seriously passes sentence against such conduct, declaring he will reveal his wrath against it in bodily punishment in this world and eternal punishment in the world hereafter. Elsewhere Paul says practically the same thing (Ephesians 5:6): “For because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience.” See also Romans 1:18.

[24] Such is the admonition of Paul unto all who would be called Christians. He reminds them whereunto the Gospel of Christ calls them and what his resurrection should work in them — death to all life and doctrine not in harmony with God’s Word and God’s will — and that if they believe in the risen and living Christ, they, as risen with him, should seek after the same heavenly life where he sits at the right hand of God, a life where is no sin nor worldly error, but eternal life and imperishable treasures to be possessed and enjoyed with Christ forever.

[25] But the revelation of Christ’s resurrection can be apprehended by nothing but faith. The things Paul here tells us of life and glory for Christians in the risen Christ are not apparent to the world; in fact, Christians themselves do not perceive them by external sense. Notice, he

says, “Ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” The world does not understand the Christian life and has no word of praise for it; it is hostile to the faith and cannot tolerate the fact that you believe in Christ and refuse to join hands with it in love for worldly lusts. A hidden life indeed is the Christian’s; not only hidden to the world, but, so far as external perception goes, to the Christian himself. Nevertheless, it is a life sure and in safe keeping, and in the hereafter its glory shall be manifest to all the world. For Paul says: “When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory.”

[26] Here is comfort for Christians in this earthly life where, though they receive the doctrine of Christ and apprehend him by faith, their resurrection seems to the world and to their own perceptions untrue; where they must contend with sin and infirmities and moreover are subject to much affliction and adversity; and where consequently they are extremely sensible of death and terror when they would experience joy and life. In this verse Paul comforts them, showing them where to seek and surely apprehend their life.

[27] Be of good cheer, he would say, for ye are dead to the worldly life. This life ye must renounce, but in so doing ye make a precious exchange. Dying unto the world is a blessed experience, for which ye will obtain a life far more glorious. Ye are now, through Christ’s death, redeemed from sin and from death eternal and are made imperishable. Upon you is conferred everlasting glory. But this risen life ye cannot yet perceive in yourselves; ye have it in Christ, through faith. Christ is spoken of as “our life.” Though the life is still unrevealed to you, it is certain, insured to you beyond the power of any to deprive you of it. By faith in Christ’s life, then, are ye to be preserved and to obtain victory over the terrors and torments of sin, death and the devil, until that life shall be revealed in you and made manifest to men. In Christ ye surely possess eternal life. Nothing is lacking to a perfect realization except that the veil whereby it is hidden so long as we are in mortal flesh and blood, is yet to be removed. Then will eternal life be revealed. Then all worldly, terrestrial things, all sin and death, will be abolished. In every Christian shall be manifest only glory. Christians, then, believing in Christ, and knowing him risen, should comfort themselves with the expectation of living with him in eternal glory; the inevitable condition is that they have first, in the world, died with him.

[28] Paul does not forget to recognize the earthly environment of Christians and saints, for he says: "Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth." Though acknowledging Christians dead with Christ unto worldly things and possessing life in Christ, he yet tells them to mortify their members on earth, and enumerates the sins of fornication, covetousness, etc. This is truly a strange idea, that it should be necessary for men who have died and risen with Christ and hence have been made really holy, to mortify worldly inclinations in their bodily members. The apostle refers to this subject in Romans 7:5, Romans 8:23, and elsewhere, frequently explaining how, in the saints, there continue to remain various lusts of original sin, which constantly rise in the effort to break out, even gross external vices. These have to be resisted. They are strong enough utterly to enslave a man, to subject him to the deepest guilt, as Paul complains (Romans 7:23); and they will surely do it unless the individual, by faith and the aid of the Holy Spirit, oppose and conquer them.

[29] Therefore, saints must, by a vigorous and unceasing warfare, subdue their sinful lusts if they would not lose God's grace and their faith. Paul says in Romans 8:13: "If ye live after the flesh, ye must die; but if by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live." In order, then, to retain the Spirit and the incipient divine life, the Christian must contend against himself. This cannot be accomplished by the monastic hypocrisies wherewith some expect to resist sin. For the pollution of sin is not merely something adhering to the clothing, or to the skin externally, and easily washed off. It is not something to be discharged from the body by fasting and castigation. No, it penetrates the flesh and blood and is diffused through the whole man. Positive mortification is necessary or it will destroy one. And this is how to mortify sin: It must be perceived with serious displeasure and repented of; and through faith Christ's forgiveness must be sought and found. Thus shall sinful inclinations be resisted, defeated and restrained from triumphing over you. More has been said on this topic elsewhere.

Quasimodogeniti. Sunday after Easter. The Victory of Faith and the Witness of the Holy Spirit Through Baptism.

Text: 1 John 5:4-12.

4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

6 This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. 1 John 5:4-12

Victorious Faith

[1] This epistle selection was primarily arranged for this particular Sunday because it treats of baptism and of the new birth of the believing Christian. It was in former time customary in the Church to baptize immediately after Easter those who had accepted the Christian faith and had been instructed in its precepts. This day is also called *Dominicam in albis*, and by us Germans *Weiszer Sonntag* (White Sunday), because the candidates for baptism were clad in white linen as indicative of their cleansing and new birth; just as today children to be baptized are arrayed in a white christening-robe. The New Birth

[2] While this lesson does not treat of the resurrection of Christ, it has reference to its fruits: faith, the very essence of Christianity, here expressed as being born of God; and the evidence of the Holy Spirit, received through baptism, which assures us we are children of God and have, through Christ, eternal life and all blessings.

[3] Though John's language is, as usual, plain and simple, yet, in the ears of men generally, it is unusual and unintelligible. The world estimates it as similar to the prattle of children or fools. What, according to the world's construction, is implied by the statement, "Whatsoever is begotten [born] of God overcometh the world?" Overcoming the world, the unconverted would understand to mean bringing into subjection to oneself every earthly thing and assuming the position of sovereign of the world. Yet more absurd in the ears of this class is the saying that we must be born of God. "Did one ever hear of such a thing," they might exclaim, "as children born of God? It would be less ridiculous to say we must be born of stones, after the idea of the heathen poets." To the world there is no birth but physical birth. Hence such doctrine as our lesson sets forth will ever be strange, unintelligible, incomprehensible, to all but Christians. But the latter speak with new tongues, as Christ in the last chapter of Mark (verse 17) says they shall, for they are taught and enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

[4] Clearly, then, when the Scriptures speak of being born of God, it is not in a human sense; the reference is not to the conditions of our temporal lives, but to those exalted ones of a future existence. To say we must be born of God is equivalent to saying that if man is to be redeemed from sin and eternal death, to enter into the kingdom of God and into happiness, his

physical birth will not suffice; all which nature, reason, free will and human endeavor may afford is inadequate. Physical birth, it is true, answers for everything in the way of temporal possession and achievement, everything great, powerful, noble, rich, wise, learned; in short, every exalted and desirable thing of earth. But all such possession and achievement serves only the physical existence; it is swept away by death, to which event it is ever subject. Hence becomes necessary a new and different birth, a birth more significant than that of the natural man even in the case of emperors, kings, or the wisest and most influential of earth. For as Isaiah says (40:6): “All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth.” The demand is for a divine birth, a birth in which parentage is wholly of God; a birth signifying the operation of God’s divine power in man, a power achieving something beyond the attainment of his natural capacities and effecting in him new understanding and a new heart.

[5] The process is this: When the individual hears the Gospel message of Christ — a message revealed and proclaimed not by the wisdom and will of man, but through the Holy Spirit — and sincerely believes it, he is justly recognized as conceived and born of God. John in his gospel (ch. 1:12) says: “As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name.” And in the first verse of the chapter including our text, he tells us: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God.” Through that faith, for the sake of his Son, God accepts us as his children, pleasing to him and heirs of eternal life; and the Holy Spirit will be sent into our hearts, as is explained later.

[6] This doctrine condemns those arrogant teachers who presumptuously expect to be justified before God by their own merits and works. They imagine that their wisdom, learning, good judgment, intelligence, fair reputation and morality entitle them, because of the good they are thus enabled to do, to the favor of God and to reception up into heaven. But the Scriptures clearly teach the very reverse, that all these things are nothing in the eyes of God. It is sheer human effort; it is not being born of God. However wise and powerful you might be, if even the noblest, most beautiful, fruit human nature can produce, you could not see the kingdom of God unless you became a wholly different person, unless you were born

anew, according to Christ's words in John 3:3. And this is something impossible to your natural powers. You certainly cannot make yourself of other parentage than you are. God must begin the work in you, communicating his seed — his Word — by virtue of which the Holy Spirit operates in you, enabling you, by faith, to cling to the promise, as said before.

[7] Now, he who is thus born of God, John declares, overcomes the world. Verily, this is a significant and forcible assertion the Holy Spirit makes; it represents a tremendous power, a great work. The child of God must, indeed, attempt and accomplish great things. The birth effected through the Word and faith makes men true sovereigns, above all earthly rulers; it gives them power even to overcome the world, something impossible to any Roman or Turkish potentate. They effect not their victory by physical force or temporal power, but by the spiritual birth, through faith. As John says immediately after the clause we are discussing, "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith." Here is his own explanation of what he means by being born of God. The Two Kingdoms

[8] Now, in order to understand the nature of the spiritual victory and how it is effected, we must know just what John means by the term "world." The reference is not to dominion over territory, to property or money. He implies the existence of two kingdoms. In one, the kingdom of God, the heavenly kingdom of Christ, is included, first, the angels in heaven, who are the chief lords, the inner circle of counselors; second, the entire Christian Church on earth, under one head, Christ the Lord and King. In the other kingdom, the hellish kingdom, the devil is prince, and his mighty counselors and servants are the angels who with him fell from heaven; it also includes the world, those on earth who teach, believe and live contrary to Christ, who represent the heathen, the Jews, the Turks and false Christians. By the heavenly kingdom of God we must understand, not only spiritual life and godly people, but the lord and regent of that kingdom — Christ with his angels, and his saints both living and dead. Thus, too, the kingdom of the world represents not only the earthly life with its worldly interests, but particularly its lord and regent — the devil and his angels, and all unchristian, godless, wicked people on earth. So, when John says, "Whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world," he means by "world" the devil and his whole earthly dominion.

[9] Now, the workings of these two kingdoms are plainly evident, though the leaders — Christ the Lord, and the devil — are not visible to mortal eyes. Christ rules direct and effectually, in his own power, through the Word and through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, maintaining them in the faith and in the knowledge of his Word, and protecting from the devil's wrath and subtlety; further, he rules through his angels, who guard his followers; again, he rules through his people themselves, who exercise authority one over another in loving service, each teaching, instructing, comforting and admonishing a noble little band of godly, obedient, patient, chaste, kind, tractable, benevolent souls. The nature of the devil's kingdom, the manner of life the world leads, is easily apparent. This kingdom is simply a huge booth filled with faithless, shameless, wicked individuals, impelled by their god to every sort of disobedience, ingratitude and contempt of God and his Word; to idolatry, false doctrine, persecution of Christians and the practice of all wantonness, mischief, wickedness and vice.

[10] These two kingdoms are opposed. They continually contend for the crown; they war with each other for supremacy. Christians are brought into the conflict to hold the field against God's enemy, whose rule of the world is one of falsehood and murder; they must contend with the enemy's servants, his horde of factious spirits and basely wicked individuals, in an effort to restrain evil and promote good. Christians must be equipped for the fray; they must know how to meet and successfully resist the enemy, how to carry the field unto victory, and hold it. Faith the Victor

[11] Therefore, when John says, "Whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith," his purpose is to admonish Christians that believers must manifest the power and working of faith in life and deed. In fact, his chief aim in writing this text was to reprove false Christians who are pleased to hear the doctrine that we are saved through Christ alone, our works and merits not earning our salvation; and who imagine the hearing of this doctrine constitutes them Christians and that there is no necessity for any effort or contention on their part. They forget that they must, through faith, become new persons fitted to overcome the world and the devil.

[12] Victory over the devil is the sign of the true Christian. Thereby we may know men are born of God, may distinguish them from the false

children who enjoy but the semblance of God's Word and never experience its power. Such are mere Mondkinder (moon children) — stillborn, destitute of real divine life, or divine power. It cannot be said we have been born of God when we continue in our old dead and worldly course, and as before lie and live in sin at the devil's pleasure. No, as children of God we must resist the devil and his entire kingdom. If, then, instead of overcoming the world you allow it to overcome you, then, boast as you may of faith and Christ, your own conduct testifies that you are not a child of God. To illustrate, beginning with some of the lower and grosser sins: If you boast of being a child of God, but still live in fornication, adultery, and such vices, the devil has already overcome you and wrested you from the kingdom of God. If you are miserly, injuring your neighbor by usury, by overcharging, by false wares and fraudulent business, you have permitted the world and your own flesh to overcome you for a penny. If you entertain envy and hatred toward your neighbor, you are at once thereby a captive servant of the devil. The same principle holds in the case of sins more subtle and refined, where the malicious knavery of the devil must be resisted. For instance, the devil deceives with misleading doctrines, impelling men to idolatry, false faith, presumption, despair, blasphemy, and so on. Now, if you yield to him, suffering yourself to be seduced, what will it profit you to boast of the Gospel faith? For you have not properly grasped God's Word, you have not rightly recognized God in Christ, but continue in error, in false fancies, captivated and deceived by the devil.

[13] It requires something more than mere human wisdom and skill, more than human power, to withstand and overcome an enemy so formidable as the devil. As said before, the Christian must be fortified with the knowledge of how to guard against his wiles and deceptions and how to withstand him. Hence a Christian is called a person who is born of God. He must be different from an intelligent heathen and a skillful worldling to rightly understand God's Word and apprehend Christ through faith and must use such knowledge as weapons of offense and defense in the conflict. Thus, will he be able to withstand the devil and the world and to gain the victory. God's Word and faith are the power which will bring him through; he cannot be overcome so long as he adheres to them. In this connection are John's words immediately preceding our text: "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous." Then he goes on, "For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the

world,” etc. Such is the power represented by genuine new birth, that therein the devil, the world and all evil are overcome. Just as, in physical birth, a normal child fully born into the world may overcome a slight offensive disease, while an abnormal or stillborn child perishes of its own weakness.

[14] For example, if I have faith and am born of God, I will not pollute myself with unchastity and fornication, I will not bring disgrace upon another's spouse or child. The new birth will indeed teach me not to reject shamefully the treasure I have in Christ, not to lose it willingly, and not to drive from me the indwelling Holy Spirit. Faith, if it truly dwells in me, will not permit me to do ought in violation of my conscience and of the Word and the will of God. Should I be tempted by avarice to deceive and defraud my neighbor, or to close my hand when I should give him aid, if I am a Christian and born anew my faith will protest and turn me from such action. Can I injure my neighbor or permit him to suffer want when I might contribute to his relief, if I am aware that Christ has given his body and shed his blood for me? How can there enter into the heart of the Christian who believes he has received ineffable and eternal treasures through the Son of God, the inclination to permit his neighbor to suffer a trivial want when he can easily extend relief? Much less would it be possible for the Christian to injure or to do injustice to his neighbor for the sake of shamefully gaining some small advantage. Rather he would reflect: "If I am, through Christ, a child of God and an heir of heaven, the sum of this world's goods is far too insignificant to induce me, for the sake of a penny, to deceive or defraud anyone. Then, too, if the devil tempt you by his tyrannical, factious spirits, or even by your own thoughts, to forsake your pure doctrine for his deceptions, you as a Christian are to resist the temptation, remembering the blessings you have through faith received from Christ in the Gospel; you have been liberated from darkness, blindness and error; have learned rightly to know God; and have obtained the sure consolation of grace and salvation, being aware upon what you must depend in life and death. Why, then, yield to the devil, allowing yourself to be robbed of salvation and eternal life? Why not much rather let go every earthly thing than to deny the Word of God or to permit this blessed consolation to be perverted, falsified and wrested from you?"

[15] So, then, John says, “This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith.” It is, indeed, saying very much for the Christian faith to attribute to it such power over the devil and the world — a power transcending all human ability. It requires an agency greater and higher than human strength to triumph over the devil, especially in the perplexing conflicts of conscience, when he vexes and tortures the heart with terror of God’s wrath in the attempt to drive us to despair. At such times all our works must immediately sink out of sight, leaving no help or victory except the faith that clings to the word of Christ the Lord, believing that, for the sake of his beloved Son, God will be merciful and will not condemn us for our sins and unworthiness if we believe in him. Such faith as this stands fast and gains the victory; neither the devil nor the gates of hell can prevail against it.

[16] The same is true in all temptations. Before we can resist and overcome, we must have faith to believe that through Christ we have remission of sins and the favor of God; that God gives us help and strength to enable us to stand in the conflict and successfully resist the devil, the world, the flesh and death; that we obtain the victory by the divine power of the Holy Spirit, lacking whose help we all would be far too weak to win. Without faith, we are under the power of the devil and sin, being subject to them by natural birth. We can be liberated in no other way than through faith in Christ.

[17] That John has reference to faith in Christ is plainly evident from his query, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” The apostle’s purpose therein is to make plain just what the true Scriptural faith is and what it implies. For there are other beliefs which the world calls faith. The Jews, the Turks, the Papists, claim they also believe in God who created heaven and earth. That such belief is not the true faith, however, is proved by the fact of its ineffectiveness. It does not contend and overcome, and it permits the believer to remain as he is, in his natural birth and under the power of the devil and sin. But the faith which believes Jesus is the Son of God is the true, triumphant sort. It is an invincible power wrought in the hearts of Christians by the Holy Spirit. It is a sure knowledge, that does not gaze and vacillate hither and thither according to its own thoughts. It apprehends God in Christ the Son sent from heaven, through whom God reveals his will and his love and transfers

us from sin to grace, from death to a new and eternal life; a refuge and trust that relies not upon its own merit or worthiness, but upon Christ the Son of God, and in his might and power battles against the world and the devil. Therefore, the Christian faith is not the cold, ineffective, empty, lifeless conception which Papists and others imagine it to be; no, it is a living, active power, ever followed by victories and other appropriate fruits. Where such fruits are lacking, faith and the new birth are not there. The Source of Faith

[18] Thus we have the first part of our sermon on the new birth and faith. For the second part, John shows whence and by what means comes the faith productive of victory; he says: “This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three who bear witness [in earth], the Spirit, and the water, and the blood,” etc.

[19] John speaks of Christ’s kingdom, and of the office the Holy Spirit bears outwardly and visibly in the Christian Church, represented in the ministerial office and the sacraments. He says: “There are three who bear witness [in earth].” John, as usual, employs the word “witness” in connection with the thought of preaching; it is a word he frequently uses. For instance, in the beginning of his gospel, where he speaks of John the Baptist, he says (ch. 1:7): “The same came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light.” So, in his use of the phrase “witness” or “bearing witness,” we are to understand simply the public preaching of God’s Word. Again, Christ says (John 16:9-14), that the Holy Spirit shall bear witness of him; that is, he shall publicly fill the ministerial office. This is God’s own witness to his Son. And here John tells us we have the victory over the devil and the world, through faith, for the sake of Christ the Son of God.

[20] This witness Christ himself ordains shall ever go forth, and remain, in the Church. To this end Christ sent the Holy Spirit; to this end Christ himself called and gave the Holy Spirit to the apostles and their successors, ministers, preachers and teachers, as Paul tells us (Ephesians 4:11-13), who are to exercise the Word, that the Word may resound always and everywhere in the world, reaching to children’s children, and on down to future generations. Were the witness not in the Church, the pulpit — in fact, the entire outward administration of the Church — would be useless, for

every man could read the Scriptures for himself. But for the sake of the uninstructed masses and the constantly rising young who, as yet in ignorance of the Word, need admonition — for the sake of these, the Spirit must bear public witness or administer the preaching office that they, too, may learn to know the grace of God manifest and given to us through Christ, and that God's wondrous works may be publicly recognized and extolled by us in opposition to the devil and the world.

[21] Wherever such witness is borne, there certainly will be some fruit. The witness never fails of effect. Some surely will be reached; some will accept and believe it. Since it is the witness of the Holy Spirit, and the apostle says here, the Spirit beareth witness, he will be effective, producing in us that to which John refers when he says we are children of God, and have the victory and eternal life. So the Word — the Gospel message accompanied by the witness of the Spirit — and faith are vitally related. In the last analysis they are inseparable. Without faith, preaching will be fruitless; and faith has origin in the Word alone. Therefore, we should gladly hear and handle the Word. Where it is, there is also the Holy Spirit; and where the Spirit is, there must be at least some believers. Even if you have already heard the Word and obtained faith, it will always continue to strengthen you as you hear it. One knows not at what hour God may touch and illumine his or another's heart. It may be in a time when we least look for it, or in the individual of whom we have least expectation. For the Spirit, as Christ says, breathes where he will, and touches hearts when and where he knows them to be receptive.

[22] It is relative to the power and energy wrought by the Holy Spirit that John speaks, indicating the source and means of the power of this witness, when he says of Christ, "This is he that came by water and blood," etc. In this sentence is included all we possess in the kingdom of Christ, and here is extolled the efficacy of our beloved baptism and the blood or sufferings of Christ. Here John unites all the elements in one bundle, so to speak, making a triune witness. They bear joint witness to our faith and confirm it — these three: the water, the blood and the Spirit. Baptism by Water and Blood

[23] Christ comes, first, "by water"; that is, by holy baptism. He employs baptism as an outward sign of his work in the new birth of man and in man's sanctification. This water by which Christ comes cannot be a

mere, empty sign; for he comes not merely to cleanse or bathe the body with water, but to purify the whole man from all pollution and blemishes inherent in him from Adam. Christ has instituted a cleansing wholly unlike the Mosaic ablutions under the Old Testament dispensation. Moses came with various laws relating to washings and purifications, but they were only cleansings of the body or of the flesh and had daily to be repeated. Now, since these ceremonials contributed nothing to man's purification in God's sight — a thing to be effected by nothing short of a new birth — Christ came with a new order of cleansing, namely, baptism, which is not a mere external ablution from physical impurities, but a washing effective in man's purification from the inward pollution of his old sinful birth and from an evil conscience, and bringing remission of sin and a good conscience toward God, as Peter says. 1 Peter 3:21. Paul, also (Titus 3:5), calls baptism the "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

[24] Christ first instituted baptism through John the Baptist. To distinguish it from the Mosaic baptism, the old Jewish rite of washings, Christ styles it "a baptism unto repentance and the remission of sins." He designs that therein man shall perceive his inner impurities and know them to be, in God's sight, beyond the power of outward Mosaic ablutions to reach; shall know also that purification of the conscience and remission of sins must be sought and obtained through the power of Christ the Lord, who instituted baptism.

[25] Secondly, that this cleansing of sin may be affected in us through baptism, something more than mere water must be present. Mere water could affect no more than do ordinary washings, and no more than Jewish and Turkish baptisms and washings effect. There must be a power and force accompanying the water effective to work inward purification, the purification of the soul. Therefore, John says, Christ came, not by water alone, but also by blood; not the blood of bulls, or of calves, or of goats, those Old Testament sacrifices, but his own blood, as Paul declares. Hebrews 9:12. He comes through the preaching office of the New Testament, which is his rule upon earth, imparts to us the effective power of his shed blood, his sacrifice for our sins, and thus applies to us the treasure wherewith he purchased our redemption.

[26] Hence there is now in baptism this efficacy of the blood of Christ. That is the true caustic soap which not only removes the uncleanness of the

outer man, but penetrates to the inner nature, consuming its impurities and cleansing them away, that the heart may become pure in God's sight. Thus, the blood of Christ is so effectively mingled with the baptismal water that we must not regard it as mere water, but water beautifully dyed with the precious crimson blood of our dear Savior, Christ. Baptism, then, cannot rightly be regarded a physical cleansing, like the Mosaic ablutions, or like the cleansing the bathhouse affords; it is a healing baptism, a baptism or washing with blood, instituted by none but Christ, the Son of God, and that through his own death.

[27] In the record of Christ's passion, careful note is made of the fact that blood and water flowed immediately from the spear thrust in Christ's side as he hung upon the cross; it is pointed out as a special miracle. The design there is to teach that Christ's shed blood is not without significance but stands for a washing or bath whose efficacy is present in the baptism with water; and that from the slain body of Christ issues an unceasing stream of water and blood, flowing on down through the entire Christian Church, wherein we must all be cleansed from our sins. What makes baptism so precious, so holy and essential is the mingling and union of the water with the blood of Christ; to be baptized into Christ with water is really to be washed and cleansed with the blood of Christ. The Spirit

[28] To these two John adds a third witness, "the Spirit." The Spirit bears witness with the water and the blood; in fact, through these other two he operates. It is the Holy Spirit himself; not as he is invisible up in heaven in his divine essence, but the Spirit who publicly manifests himself through his external office and permits himself to be heard through his Word. As John here asserts, the Spirit bears witness on earth with both the water and the blood.

[29] Neither Moses nor any other teacher in his doctrines of personal effort and external purifications, his washings and his sprinklings of the blood of sheep and goats — no such teacher brings and gives the Spirit. With them is no Spirit, no divine power, no regeneration of man. Any unbelieving, spiritless, wicked knave can exercise human effort and practice physical cleansing. But Christ alone brings with him the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies us through the blood and water issuing from the divine side. The Spirit makes us partakers of its cleansing influence through the external office of preaching and through the

sacraments, which are called the office and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Through these the Spirit works in the Christian Church just as he did at first, among the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, and will continue to do in the whole world, unto the last day. Without his ministration we would never obtain, nor know anything about, the saving power of Christ's blood in baptism.

[30] Such is the kingdom Christ unceasingly develops through the Christian Church. In him we have eternal purification when to the water is added the Spirit, who through the Word enkindles the heart and purifies it, not with the cleansing qualities of the water alone, but with the healing efficacy of the blood of Christ, whereby sins are exterminated, and God's wrath appeased. Although the work of our redemption was wrought once for all in Christ's blood shed upon the cross and is sufficient to cancel the sins of the entire world, yet Christ so instituted it that the same efficacy should remain forever and be daily distributed and offered to us through the Holy Spirit.

[31] This work of the Holy Spirit is neither received nor perceived except through faith in this witness, the preached word of Christ — when with the heart man grasps it and confidently believes it is fulfilled in himself as the Word declares. Thus, is the heart really cleansed, the individual born anew, through the Holy Spirit present in the sacred cleansing of water and of the blood of Christ. Peter (1 Peter 1:2) speaks of the sanctification of Christians as the “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” upon us by the Holy Spirit through the public preaching of the Gospel. This sprinkling radically differs from the Jewish sprinkling of water, or of the ashes of a red heifer, or of the blood of a dead lamb or goat, round about the altar and upon the applicants for purification. In the sanctification of Christians, the true consecrated water and the sprinkled blood of Christ are combined; that is, the message concerning the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is “sprinkled,” so to speak, upon the soul, and wherever that Word touches the soul it is effective. The blood in this case is not the ineffective, lifeless blood of a slain animal, but the potent, living blood of the Son of God. Under its application the soul cannot remain impure. Christ's blood purifies and heals from sin and death; it strikes at their very foundation, and entirely releases us from their power and grants us eternal life for soul and body.

[32] Note, this text is a grand sermon on the witness Christians have here on earth, which the apostle in concluding explains and extols in beautiful and comforting words. He calls it a witness that God himself bears to his Son and that serves to assure us of being the children of God and possessors of eternal life. For he says: “And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life,” etc. This is indeed an excellent witness, which God himself witnesses and declares to you, and the Holy Spirit brings and reveals to you. God cannot lie nor deceive, he is the eternal, unchangeable truth, as already mentioned. If you believe this witness, you certainly have received and possess it, as John again says: “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him.” Faith to Be Implicit

[33] The true, saving doctrine of the Christian faith is this: There must be witness and confidence of heart so absolute as to leave no room for doubt that, through Christ, we are God’s children and have remission of sins and eternal life. By way of showing us how God earnestly enjoins such faith upon us and forbids us to have any doubts on the subject, John says, “He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son.”

[34] This passage annihilates the pernicious, damnable, diabolical doctrine of the Papists, who shamelessly claim it is right to doubt and that a Christian should doubt his title to grace. This doctrine is equivalent to teaching the propriety of disbelieving the testimony of God. It is charging God with falsehood, dishonoring and blaspheming the Lord Christ, openly affronting the Holy Spirit, knowingly plunging people into unpardonable sins and blasphemies and consequently sending them to the devil without hope or comfort of salvation.

[35] Such is the beautiful fruit of papistical doctrine; such is papistical holiness. This is what they who would be the Christian Church recommend to us. They would have us, with them, openly and fearlessly charge God with falsehood, trample his Word under foot and worship the devil in his stead. Further, they require us to praise and honor them and render them thanks, rejoicing to be offered their stipulated terms of friendship. At the same time they have not in a single instance repented of their abominable idolatry or acknowledged their error; rather they plume themselves on having in their purity taught no wrong. If we will not accede to their demands, we must be persecuted, put to death, exterminated everywhere in

the world with fire and sword. But the devil and death may accede in our stead. Let the godly Christian desire and pray that God may hurl such accursed doctrine into the abyss of hell and punish as they deserve the impenitent blasphemers since they will not cease. And let all the people say, Amen, amen.

[36] Note particularly the consolation of Paul's concluding words. Here he embraces in one clear word the whole substance of the Gospel when he says: "He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life." How could he speak plainer and more forcibly? What is the need of further inquiry and investigation or discussion of this theme? Do you wish to have assurance of eternal life? According to this verse, you have it truly if you possess Christ the Sort of God; and you have Christ when you believe this witness and preaching as John says, and you should confidently rely upon it in life and in death as the divine, eternal truth. But if you believe not, you have not life; and all effort and suffering on your part, yes, combined with the effort and suffering of the whole world, will profit you nothing. You have not the Son of God if you do not believe God's witness of him but charge God with falsehood.

Misericordias Domini. Second Sunday after Easter. Exhortation to Patience by Christ's Example in Suffering.

Text: 1 Peter 2:20-25.

20 For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us,

leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

25 For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. 1 Peter 2:20-25

Patience Under Tribulation

[1] This epistle lesson is a beautiful selection from apostolic teaching. Doubtless it was intentionally arranged for this Sunday; for Peter's concluding words, "For ye were going astray like sheep; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls," accord with the gospel selection about the Good Shepherd. Yet it might also properly serve in part for the text of a sermon on the passion of Christ; for the sufferings of Christ are here presented as an example unto us. In the preceding part of the chapter, Peter taught the Christians how, having obtained faith, they are to exhibit its fruits — good works in the various stations of life. Particularly does he admonish them to manifest the fruit of patience under crosses and afflictions.

[2] When the individual accepts Christ and begins to profess his faith in word and life, invariably — it cannot be otherwise - the world, that eternal enemy of Christ and faithfully-obedient servant of the devil, will be dissatisfied. The world regards it contemptible, disgraceful, to live any life but one pleasing to itself, to do and speak ought but as it desires. Its rage is excited toward the Christian, and it proceeds to persecute, to torture, even to murder him when possible. We often hear the wiseacre scoffers say that Christ could have enjoyed peace had he desired to. The same may be said of Christians; they could have peace and pleasure if they would but take advice and conform to the world.

[3] What are we to do? It is a fact that to maintain and obey the truth is to stir up wrath and hatred. Even the heathen assert as much. But the fault

lies not with the advocate of truth but with its rejecters. Is the truth not to be preached at all? Must we be silent and permit all mankind to go direct to hell? Who could or would heap upon himself the guilt of such negligence? The godly Christian, who looks for eternal life after the present one and who aims to help others to attain unto the same happy goal, assuredly must act the part he professes, must assert his belief and show the world how it travels the broad road to hell and eternal death. And to do so is to antagonize the world and incur the displeasure of the devil.

[4] Now, since there is no escaping the fact that he who would confess Christ and make the world better must, in return for his service and benefactions, heap upon himself the enmity of the devil and his adherents, as Peter says — since this is the case, we must remember that it is incumbent upon us to have patience when the world manifests its bitterest, most hateful enmity toward our doctrine and toward our very lives, when it reviles and slanders and persecutes us to the utmost for our principles. Peter here admonishes and persuades Christians unto patience under these circumstances, and at the same time seeks to comfort them with tender and impressive words.

[5] First, Peter reminds the believers of their calling — of their reason and purpose in embracing Christianity. He says, in effect: “Remember, belief in Christ necessitates confession of him, and the entire Christian Church is numbered in the holy, divine calling that stands for the praise of God and the promotion of his kingdom.” An essential feature of this calling is the suffering of evil in return for good. It seems inevitable that Christians be condemned in the eyes of the world and incur its highest displeasures; that they be destined to take up the gauntlet against the devil and the world. It is said (Psalm 44:22): “For thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter,” or for the sacrifice. Sacrificial sheep were kept in an enclosure, not permitted to go to pasture with the others. They were not kept for breeding, but to be daily, one after another, slaughtered.

[6] Paul would say: “What will you do, beloved Christians? Will you live in the world and not encounter any persecution because of your good deeds? Will you rage at the wickedness of the world, and in your rage become wicked yourself and commit evil? Understand, you are called to suffer persecutions; they are a consequence of your baptism, your

Christianity. For these you renounced the devil and professed Christ. You are baptized unto the suffering of every sort of misfortune, unto the enduring of the world and the devil.” You cannot escape the smoke when compelled to live in the inn where the devil is host and the whole house is filled with it. Again, if you would have fire, you must have smoke as a consequence; if you would be a Christian and a child of God, you must endure the resultant evils that befall you.

[7] In short, the Christian, because he is a Christian, is subjected to the holy and precious cross. He must suffer at the hands of men and of the devil, who plague and provoke him; outwardly with misery, persecution, poverty and illness, or inwardly — in heart — with their poisonous darts. The cross is the Christian’s sign and watchword in his holy, precious, noble and happy calling unto eternal life. To such a calling must we render full dues and regard as good whatever it brings. And why should we complain? Do not even wicked knaves and opposers of Christians often suffer at the hands of one another what they are not pleased to endure? And every man must frequently suffer injuries and misfortunes relative to body, property, wife and children.

[8] Then, if you would be a Christian and live justly in your calling, be not so terribly alarmed, so filled with hostile rage, so extremely impatient, at the torments of the world and the devil. If you are unwilling to suffer and to be reviled and slandered, if you prefer honor and ease, then deny Christ and embrace the delights of the world and the devil. You will not, even then, be wholly free from suffering and sorrow, though it will be your prerogative not to suffer as a Christian and for the sake of Christ. At the same time, you will discover that even though you enjoy only pleasure on earth, it will be but for a brief time and ultimately you will find the bitter end of the pleasure sought. Christ Our Pattern

[9] In the second place, by way of rendering more impressive his admonition, Peter holds up the example of our real Master, our Leader and Lord, Christ, who endured persecutions similar to ours, and himself suffered more than any. The apostle refers to him in a truly scriptural way — as of a twin or dual character. He presents him not as an example of a saint in the ordinary sense, but as the real Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, who suffered for us, making sacrifice for our sins in his own body on the cross. In this capacity, he is our treasure, comfort and salvation.

[10] The apostle beautifully and strikingly points out the sublime perfections of our Pattern, in his suffering, by way of gently urging us to patience. He presents the chief points of Christ's endurance, examples of real patience: all our sufferings, when compared with those of Christ, are cast into the shade. "The passion of Christ," Peter would say, "the suffering of the Lord, is a surpassing, a preeminent and sublimely glorious thing, transcending every other instance of suffering; first, because it was for an example to us; second, because he suffered to save us; third, because he suffered innocently in all respects, never having committed any sin." In these three points we must leave to him alone the distinction, humbling ourselves before them; even had we suffered death in its every form, we must cry that all our suffering is nothing in comparison with his. Even if we could attain to the sublimest, the supreme, the most glorious degree of suffering, it would be but walking in his footprints, following his example; it would be but to fall far short of his suffering. He would stand preeminent - the Master. He would maintain immeasurable superiority and we would still be left to follow as best we could. The extent of his agony, the intensity and bitterness of his sufferings, no one on earth can comprehend. And if it be beyond our comprehension, how much more is it beyond our power to imitate or experience. We may thank God we have it before us for an example to behold and follow. True, we fall far short of perfect following, but we may approach it in proportion to our sufferings, faith and patience; for one may exceed another in these things. Christ is an example, Peter says, for all saints; not for a certain few. Contrasted with Christ, all saints must with downcast eyes confess: "Intense, bitter, grievous as our sufferings truly are, when the sufferings of Christ our Lord are mentioned we will willingly keep silent; for no human example of suffering will compare with that of Christ."

[11] Now, this one fact, that one so exalted as Christ himself, the only and eternal Son of God, has trod the path of suffering before us, enduring unlimited distress, agony transcending the power of humanity to experience — this alone should be enough to admonish and urge anyone to patiently endure affliction. Why, then, should we disciples, we who are so insignificant and inexperienced in comparison with our Master — why should we be at all troubled at any suffering for his sake? especially when all he asks of us is to follow him, to learn of him and to remain his disciples. Here, mark you, is the example set before the entire Christian

Church, the pattern she is to follow to the extent of at least walking in Christ's steps, at the same time, however, remembering that her most intense sufferings are naught in comparison to a single drop of his shed blood, as we shall hear later.

[12] Again, this example assumes its ineffable and inimitable character from the fact that Christ suffered not for himself, nor yet merely as an example, but in our stead. This act, to say the least, transcends all human ability. No saint can boast of equaling this example, can say he suffered for another as Christ suffered for our sins. No, here all boasting is summarily disposed of. In respect to atonement, Christ left us no example, for none can imitate him in that. He stands alone there. He alone was called to suffer for all men; for those individuals now called and holy, and for the still uncalled and sinners.

[13] The atonement is the chief, the most exalted, article of the Christian doctrine. Faith alone apprehends it as the highest good, the greatest blessing, of our salvation, and recognizes that we cannot, by our works or our sufferings, do or merit anything in atoning for sin. The manner in which this subject is scripturally presented prohibits us from adding to it anything of human origin. But so the accursed popedom has done in the teachings of its pillars and supporters the monks, who regard the sufferings of Christ as merely an example to us. They pervert and render immaterial the fact that he suffered for us; they place the entire responsibility upon ourselves, as if we, by our own works or our suffering are to make satisfaction for our sins, to appease God's wrath and to merit grace. This is a doctrine not found in the Word of God, but is of their own trivial, self-selected, self-devised and false human teachings.

[14] They have carried their untruthful, worthless inventions to the extent of claiming for the saints not only sufficient acquired merit for their own salvation, but a large accumulated surplus available for others, which they have bequeathed to the Pope, thus furnishing him with an abundant treasury. The Pope, through indulgences, is to distribute this excess, these superfluous merits, as he feels disposed, at the same time dipping out for himself and his shorn fat swine the riches of the world; indeed, the ecclesiasts distribute their own merits and works. This is the refined monastic chastity, poverty and rigid obedience of the orders — nothing but shameless falsehood and scandalous vice, practiced under that covering,

both privately and publicly, with the exception of a few who were sincere in their desire to be monks, of whom I was one. These falsehoods the orders readily sold to the laity on deathbeds and under other circumstances. Indeed, wretched mortals who had incurred a death penalty and were about to be publicly executed, they referred not to Christ for comfort, but counseled patience in their own well-deserved suffering and death; as if God would accept their pain as atonement for their sins if only they suffered patiently. Purchasing of merit was the ecclesiasts' chief doctrine, their strongest point. They fearlessly proclaimed it in public, and through its influence erected numerous churches and cloisters and satiated the avarice and cupidity of the Pope. And I too, alas, was one of these knaves until God delivered me. And now, God be praised, I am execrated and condemned by the hellish seat of the Roman dragon with its scales because I assailed this papal doctrine and would not justify it.

[15] Oh, the shameful abomination, that in the temple of God and in the Christian Church must be taught and received things which make wholly insignificant the sufferings and death of Christ! Gracious God! What can be said for human merit — for superfluity of human merit — when not one saint on earth has, with all his pains, suffered enough to cancel his own obligations; much less to be entitled to the honor of making his sufferings avail anything before God's judgment seat, by way of remuneration or satisfaction for the mortal sins of others in the face of divine wrath? Note, Peter says Christ left us an example that we should follow his steps; which is but concluding that no saint ever wrought or suffered enough to warrant the claim: "I have accomplished the measure — reached the limit; Christ is no more an example and pattern for me." No; the saint ought to be ashamed to boast of his sufferings in comparison to those of Christ, and ought to rejoice in the privilege of being partaker of the divine pain, of sharing it so far as he can, and thus be found in the footsteps of Christ.

[16] The theme of Christ's passion, then, must far outrank every other. His sufferings are like pure and precious gold, compared to which ours are as nothing. No one but Christ has suffered for the sins of another. No man has ever paid the price of his own sins, great or small. Even if man's suffering could avail ought for sin, the individual could not go beyond expiating his own sins. But Christ had no need at all to suffer for himself; for, as follows in the text, he had committed no sin. He suffered to leave us

an example, but yet also to bring to man the great blessing of being able to say, “My sins and the sins of the whole world were atoned for upon the cross, blotted out, through Christ’s death.” Peter, Mary, John the Baptist, and every soul born of woman must include himself or herself in this statement, “Christ also suffered for you.”

[17] In the third place, Christ stands preeminent, above all others, in the affirmation of Peter, quoted from Isaiah 53:9: “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.”

[18] You may draw your own conclusions as to the eminence of such a one; for certainly there is to be found no other human being who has not at some time sinned in word or deed. “If any man stumbleth not in word, the same is a perfect man,” says James 3:2. But where is this perfect man, and what is his name? It is this Christ, he alone of all, James should have added. For Peter excludes all other individuals, in one class, saying, “Ye were going astray like sheep.” And later on (3:18) he tells us plainly, “Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous.” This statement leaves no man innocent of sin, either in word or deed; and in word and deed is included man’s whole life. Speech and action are associated in various Scripture references; as in Psalm 34:13-14: “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil and do good.” But in speech is the greatest liability to error. In teaching, counseling, admonishing, consoling and censuring, and in confessing the truth, no one indeed will be found so perfect in his utterances as never to commit a blunder.

[19] But Christ is the one perfect example in this respect. It is impossible for saints to attain to his faultlessness. Surely no man — unless he desires to be a liar and a true disciple of the devil instead of a child of God and a faithful Christian — will be presumptuous enough to put himself on an equality with Christ, will dare boast himself without sin in word and act. Christ alone has suffered, the righteous for the unrighteous; that prerogative can honorably and truthfully be ascribed only to Christ the Lord and is his perpetually. No man is just and innocent in word and act. All must confess their sufferings, of whatever nature, to be the result of their own sins, and well-deserved chastisement. For the fact of having escaped the eternal wrath, condemnation and punishment of God, they must thank this just one alone, he who, being himself blameless, voluntarily suffered to make satisfaction for the unrighteous, and appeased God’s wrath. The sufferings

of all saints, then, must be rated far below those of Christ the Lord. The saints must clothe and adorn themselves with his innocence, and with the entire Christian Church pray, “Forgive us our trespasses”; and they must confess the article, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.”

[20] Now, let us sum up the three arguments Peter uses in admonishing Christians to patience in suffering. First: He says, “Hereunto were ye called.” Though you do have to suffer much and severely, you have ever before you the example of Christ, to the limit of whose sufferings you can never attain. You dare not boast even if you have suffered everything. Moreover, you are under obligation to suffer for God’s sake. Second: Christ did not suffer for his own sake, nor of necessity; he suffered for your sake, and all from good will toward you. Third: He was wholly innocent, free from sin; internally — in heart — and externally — in word and deed. For where evil dwells in the heart, it cannot long remain concealed. It must manifest itself in words, at least. Christ says (Matthew 12:34), “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”

[21] Why, then, should you complain of your suffering or refuse to suffer what your sins really deserve? Indeed, you deserve much more than you receive — eternal suffering. But God forgives you and remits the eternal punishment for the sake of Christ the Lord, desiring that you patiently endure the lesser suffering for the utter mortification of the sins inherent in your flesh and blood. To make such lot the less grievous to you, Christ has gone before and left you an example of perfect patience under the most intense suffering, an example equaled nowhere in the world. The Supreme Majesty, God’s own Son, suffered in the most ignominious manner the extremity of torture, pain and anguish in body and soul, something intolerable to mere human nature; and that innocently, and for us condemned sinners — suffering for the sins of strangers. “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered threatened not.”

[22] To further emphasize and make effectual in us the example of Christ’s patience, Peter proceeds to analyze it, to show it in its true colors, to mention the details and make plain how it differs from any other example of suffering. He has told us before that Christ did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. Why, then, did the Jews persecute and crucify him — put him to death? Inquire into his entire life history and you will find that no one could justly impeach, nor could convict, him for any sin. He himself

appealed to his enemies to prove ought of sin in him. No one could show an injury he had ever done to anyone, or a wrong he had ever taught or practiced. On the contrary, he had gone about to bring to the Jewish nation the grace and salvation of God. He had revealed God's Word, opened the eyes of the blind, healed the sick, cast out devils, fed great multitudes when hungry and lacking food. In short, in all his life, there was nothing in word or act but truth, goodness, beneficence and a disposition to aid. In return for the good he wrought, he was compelled to receive the ungrateful reward of man's hatred and condemnation. His enemies were moved solely by obdurate, diabolical hatred, and could not cease their persecutions until they brought him to the cross, where he was disgracefully hung up nude between two murderers, being lifted up as unworthy to touch the earth and to live among men.

[23] Christ was under no obligation to endure disgrace and ill-treatment. He might have refrained from his benevolent ministrations when he saw the futility of his efforts with the Jews. But he did not so; even in his sufferings upon the cross he charitably prayed for his enemies. He had authority, he had power enough, and he would have been justified in the action, had he revenged himself on his furious enemies, invoked evil upon them, and execrated them as they deserved to be execrated; for they had treated him with gross injustice before all the world, as even the testimony of his betrayer and his judge and all creatures admitted, and had bitterly reviled him when he hung upon the cross. But he did none of these things. He bore with ineffable meekness and patience all the ill-treatment his enemies could heap upon him. Even in his extremity of anguish, he benevolently interceded for them to his Heavenly Father, to which act the prophet Isaiah (ch. 53) offers a tribute of high praise.

[24] Notice, we have here in all respects a perfect and inimitable example of patience — patience of the most exalted kind. In this example we may behold as in a glass what we have yet to learn of calm endurance, and thus be impelled to imitate that example in some small measure at least.

[25] Not without reason does Peter applaud the fact that when Christ was reviled he reviled not again, and when he suffered he threatened not. Though to endure undeserved violence and injustice is hard enough, that which more than ought else naturally renders suffering grievous and makes men impatient is to experience the monstrous unfairness of receiving the

mean and vexatious reward of ingratitude from individuals who have enjoyed one's favors and greatest benefactions. Base ingratitude is extremely painful for human nature to endure. It makes the heart flutter and the blood boil with a spirit of revenge. When no alternative presents, an outburst of reviling, execration and threatening follows. Flesh and blood has not the power of restraint to enable it to remain calm when evil is returned for favors and benevolence, and to say, "God be thanked."

[26] Mark the example of Christ, however, and there learn to censure yourself. Beloved, how can you complain when you see how infinitely greater was the grief and how much more painful the anxiety endured by your beloved Lord and faithful Savior, the Son of God himself, who yet bore all patiently and submissively and, more than that, prayed for those instrumental in causing that agony? Who with a single drop of Christian blood in his heart would not blush with shame to be guilty of murmuring at his sufferings when, before God, he is so sinful and is deserving of much more affliction? Wicked, unprofitable and condemned servant must he be who does not follow his Lord's example of endurance but presumes to think himself better and nobler than Christ; who with inimical spirit murmurs, complaining of great injustice, when he really deserves affliction, and when he suffers infinitely less than did his dear, righteous, innocent Lord. Beloved, if Christ so suffered in return for the great blessing he conferred, be not too indolent to imitate him in some degree by suffering without anger and reproaches. Less reason have you to be angry and reproachful from the fact that you, too, were one whose sins brought Christ to the cross.

[27] But you may say: "What? Did not Christ revile when (Matthew 23) he called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites, murderers, serpents, a generation of vipers, and even more severely rebuked them?" I reply: Oh yes, we would gladly follow Christ's example here; we could cheerfully revile and accuse. It is much easier than being patient. We would need no Master to help us in this. But note what Peter says: When Christ was about to suffer death, having fulfilled the obligation of his ministry — having proclaimed the truth, rebuked falsehood and been brought to the cross therefore — and being about to conclude his mission, by suffering, he reviled not; as a sheep for the slaughter, he permitted himself to be executed and opened not his mouth against his calumniators and murderers. See Isaiah 53:7.

[28] It is necessary, then, to make a distinction here. Reviling — pronouncing execrations and threats — is of two kinds. In one case it is official and pronounced of God; in the other, without authority and comes from man. It was one of the duties of Christ's office on earth, and one now incumbent upon those called to bear that office after him, to assert the truth and censure the evil. Such a course is essential to the honor of God and the salvation of souls; for if the truth were to be ignored, who would come to God? Official chastisement is a work of divine, Christian love. It is a parental duty imposed of God. God has implanted in the parent nature intense love for the child; at the same time, if parents are godly and have proper affection for their children they will not connive at, or let pass unpunished, the disobedience of the latter. They must chastise, both with reproof and with keen rods. These are official strokes — love stripes — enjoined of God, and their infliction is our duty. They are not injurious, but beneficial. Solomon says (Proverbs 13:24): "He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." And Jesus the son of Sirach says in Ecclesiasticus: "He that loveth his son causeth him oft to feel the rod, that he may have joy of him in the end."

[29] So everyone may, and should, reprove when official duty or his neighbor's case requires; it serves to reform the subject. To quote Solomon again (Proverbs 27:6): "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are profuse [deceitful]." Reproofs and stripes prompted by love and a faithful heart are beneficial. On the other hand, an enemy may use fair and flattering words when he has enmity and deceit at heart, preferring to let you go on to ruin rather than by gentle reproof to warn of danger and rescue you from destruction. The faithful, conscientious physician must often, of necessity and with great pain to the patient, amputate a limb in order to save the body. Paul, too, commands pious bishops to be urgent in season, out of season; to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering. 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 2:15. By our silence to commend or to encourage to evil the wrongdoer would not be to manifest one's love to the offender, but rather to give him over wholly to death and the devil.

[30] It was this love and sincerity of heart which prompted Christ in his office to censure and rebuke, for which he merited only wrath and hatred; as we say, he sought his stripes. But the duty of his office required such action on his part. His motive was to turn the transgressors from their blindness

and malice, and to rescue them from perdition; and he could not be deterred by the consequent persecution, cross and death which awaited. But having fulfilled his official duties, and the hour of his suffering having arrived, he suffered patiently, permitting his enemies to heap upon him all possible evil in return for his manifested love and blessings. Instead of angrily reviling and execrating while, suspended from the cross, he endured the most shameful calumnies, he, with strong cries and with tears, prayed, "Father, forgive them." It was, indeed, a heart of unfathomable love that, in the midst of extreme suffering, had compassion on its persecutors and blessed them in greater measure than parent can bless child or one individual bless another.

[31] Observe, then, the distinction between official and unofficial censure and rebuke; the former is prompted by love, and the latter by wrath and hatred. The world, however, is artful and cunning enough when it hears this distinction, to pervert and confuse the two, exercising its own revenge under the name of official zeal and reproof. For instance, if a preacher is disposed to act the knave, he can easily give vent to his personal anger and vengeance in his pulpit utterances, censuring and rebuking as he pleases, and then claim it is all in obedience to the demand of office and for the good of the people. Again, a judge, a mayor, or other prominent official, desiring revengefully to satisfy a personal grudge, can more successfully accomplish his object under the title of the office he bears and the obligations imposed upon him for the punishment of the wicked than in any other way. This practice now frequently obtains since the world has learned to use the Gospel to conceal its malice and knavery, to adorn it with the name of a divinely appointed office. It ever uses the name and Word of God to cloak its infamy. But who is vigilant enough to elude such knavery and to make the children of the devil honest? Let him who would be a Christian, then, take heed how he shall answer such accusation. Assuredly God will not allow himself to be deceived. He will, in due time, relieve the innocent victim of injustice, and his punishment will seek out the wicked. Peter says, further: "But committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."

[32] Who revealed to Peter the nature of Christ's thoughts upon the cross? The apostle has just been saying that Christ reviled not nor thought of revenge, but rather manifested love and goodwill toward his virulent enemies. How could Christ approve such malice? Truly he could not

endorse it. Nor could he commend his enemies for crucifying him and putting him to death upon the cross without cause. No such conclusion may be drawn. The devil and his adherents must not construe the passage to mean license to heap all manner of torture and distress upon Christ and his saints as upon those who must not only patiently bear these things, unmoved by revengeful desires, but must render gratitude to their persecutors as if their acts were praiseworthy. No; this can by no means be permitted. Could I be said to suffer innocently if I am obliged to confess I am well treated? Several times in this epistle Peter admonishes Christians not to suffer as evil-doers, thieves, murderers. But if I suffer innocently and am unjustly treated, I am not to justify the ill-treatment and strengthen the enemy in his sins; for, so doing, I would approve his conduct and assume the guilt attributed. That principle would be pleasing to the Pope and the devil and to tyrants; they would willingly have it obtain. They are not wholly satisfied even to murder the innocent; they would prefer to be justified in their action — to have us confess to wrongdoing. But that is something no Christian heart will do; it may be left to the devil.

[33] But the Papists will say: “However, it is written, You must suffer and not revile; you must thank God for persecution and pray for your enemies.” That is true; but it is one thing to suffer patiently, the while wishing your enemies well and praying for them, and quite a different thing to justify them in their conduct. I must cease not to confess the truth and maintain my innocence, both in heart and with my lips. But if men will not accept my word, my heart must tell me I have suffered injustice. Rather should I endure ten deaths, could my enemies inflict them, than to condemn myself in violation of conscience. So, when Peter made this little statement about Christ not reviling nor threatening, which was true, he did not mean that Christ justified his persecutors in their treatment of him. But what are we to do? If we do not justify our enemies when they make us suffer, they will do even worse things to us; for they desire the name and the credit, in the eyes of the world, of having done right by us. Yes, as Christ has somewhere said, they would have it thought they do God great service by murdering us. Now, who is to judge and decide the question?

[34] Peter declares that Christ committed the matter to him who judges righteously. How should he do otherwise, knowing that his persecutors treated him unjustly and yet maintained the contrary? There was for him no

judge on earth. He was compelled to commit the matter to that righteous judge, his Heavenly Father. Well he knew that such sins and blasphemies could not go unpunished. No, the sentence was already passed, the sword sharpened, the angels given orders, for the overthrow of Jerusalem. Previous to his sufferings, on his way to Jerusalem, as Christ beheld the city, he announced its coming doom and wept over it. Therefore, he prays for his enemies, saying: “Dear Father, I must commit the matter to thee, since they refuse to hear or to see the wrong they do. Well I know they are rushing into thy wrath and thy terrible punishment, but I pray thee to forgive them what they do to me.” And so they would have been forgiven had they afterward repented at the apostles’ preaching, and had they not further sinned in persecuting God’s Word and thus brought upon their unrepentant selves ultimate punishment.

Christ Our Example in Suffering.

[35] Observe, as Christ did, so should we conduct ourselves in our sufferings; not approving or assenting to whatever may be heaped upon us, but yet not seeking revenge. We are to commit the matter to God, who will judge aright. We cannot maintain our rights before the world; therefore, we must commit our cause to God, who judges righteously and who will not allow calumny of his Word and persecution of believers to pass unpunished. We must, however, pray for our persecutors, that they may be converted and escape future wrath and punishment; and so we do. If it is possible for some of the bishops and other Gospel-persecuting tyrants to be converted, we will heartily pray and desire that their conversion may come to pass. But if it be impossible, as now, alas, is to be feared, since, after having been much admonished and often prayed for and having enjoyed the best advantages, they wittingly rage against the known truth — if so, then we must commit them to God’s judgment. What more can we do? I am persuaded that the intolerable persecution and calumniating of the Gospel prevalent today cannot be permitted to pass with impunity. It must ultimately meet the coming judgment upon the Papacy and Germany. Of this there can be no doubt. But it is ours to continue preaching, praying, admonishing and beseeching, in the hope of effecting repentance. Then, if our enemies still refuse to turn from their evil ways, if they perish in their

impenitence, what can we do but say: “Dear God, we commit the matter to thee. Thou wilt punish them; thou canst, indeed, most terribly.”

[36] Such, mark you, is the example of Christ, presented to the entire Christian Church — set up as a pattern for her. Hence it is the duty of the Church, as Peter elsewhere tells us, to arm herself with the same mind which was Christ’s, to suffer as Christ did and to think: If Christ, my Lord and Leader, has suffered for me with so great meekness and patience, how much more reason have I to submit to suffering! And what can it harm me to suffer when I know it is God’s will? Not because the suffering in itself is so perfecting and precious, but for the sake of the dear Savior who suffered for me. I know, too, that my persecutors thus commit most abominable sins against God and incur his wrath and punishment. Why, then, should I be impatient or desire revenge? I am already too highly honored of God in the fact that my sufferings meet his approbation and that he will perfectly avenge me of mine enemies. What can it advantage me for them to burn eternally in hell? I will rather pray and use my utmost efforts for their conversion. If I fail and they are determined to persist in their course, I must bring the matter home to God — must commit it to him. “Who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness.”

[37] Peter’s is the true preaching concerning the passion of Christ. He teaches not only the merit in Christ’s sufferings, but introduces both themes — its efficacy and example. Such is Paul’s custom, also. In this verse Peter presents Christ’s sufferings in the light of a sacrifice for sin. They constitute a work acceptable to God as satisfaction for the sins of the whole world and effective to reconcile him to men. So great is God’s wrath toward sin that none but that eternal one, the Son of God, could avert it. He had himself to be the sacrifice, to allow his body to be nailed to the cross. The cross was the altar whereupon the sacrifice was consumed — wholly burned — in the fire of his unfathomable love. He had to be his own high priest in this sacrifice: for no earthly mortal, all being sinners and unclean, could offer to God the sacrifice of his beloved and wholly sinless Son; the boasting of the priests of Antichrist in regard to their masses, to the contrary notwithstanding. Now, by the single sacrifice of God’s Son, our sins are remitted and we obtain grace and forgiveness; and this fact can be grasped in no other way than through faith.

[38] Peter mentions the ultimate object of the divine sacrifice made for us, what it accomplished in us, the fruit Christ's passion shall yield; for he would not have the Christian Church overlook that point, or neglect to preach it. Christ, he tells us, took upon himself our sins, suffering the penalty. Therefore, Christ alone is entitled to be called a sacrifice for all our sins. It was not designed, however, that after the sacrifice we should remain as before; on the contrary, the purpose was ultimately to work in us freedom from sins, to have us live no longer unto sin but unto righteousness. Now, if in Christ our sins are sacrificed, they are put to death, blotted out; for to sacrifice means to slay, to kill. Under the Old Testament dispensation, all sacrifices had to be presented to God slain. Now, if our sins are put to death, it is not meant that we are to live in them.

[39] Therefore, the saving doctrine of remission of sins and of Christ's grace cannot be so construed as to admit of our continuing in the old life and following our own desires. According to Paul (Romans 6:1-8), enjoying grace and remission of sins does not give license to live in sin. How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein? The very fact that we may be reckoned dead unto sins means they may no longer live and reign in us. In Christ's holy body were they throttled and slain expressly that they might also be slain in us.

[40] Be careful, then, what you believe and how you live, that the efficacy of Christ's sufferings may be manifestly fulfilled in you. If, through faith, you have rightly apprehended his sacrifice, its virtue will be indicated in the subduing and mortifying of your sins, even as they are already slain and dead through his death on the cross. But if you continue to live in sins, you cannot say they are dead in you. You but deceive yourself, and your own evidence is false when you boast of Christ in whom all sins are put to death, if sin remains vigorous in you. We naturally conclude it is inconsistent for sin to be dead in us and yet alive; for us to be free from sin and yet captive or fast therein. This fact has already been sufficiently pointed out.

[41] It is ours, Peter says, not only to believe that Christ has, through the sacrifice of his own body, put to death sin and liberated us therefrom — a thing the combined sacrifices of all mortal bodies could never have effected — but, sin being put to death by him, to endeavor to become ever more and more free from sin's sway in our bodies, and to live henceforth unto

righteousness, until we shall be completely and finally released from sin through death. Therefore, if before you believed on Christ you were an adulterer, a miser, a coveter, a maligner, you ought now to regard all these sins as dead, throttled through Christ; the benefit is yours through faith in his sacrifice, and your sins should henceforth cease to reign in you. If you have not so received the sacrifice, you cannot boast of Christ and faith. Though Christ has died for you, though your sins have been put upon him and reckoned dead, still you are not rid of those sins if you do not desire to be, if you do not, through faith, apprehend Christ and his blessing, nor in your life and conduct follow his example.

[42] Now you will say: “But you teach that we are all sinners, that there is not even a saint on earth without sin. And surely, we must confess the article, ‘I believe in the remission of sins,’ and must pray, ‘Forgive us our debts.’” I reply, most assuredly you never will attain sinless perfection here on earth; if such were the case you would have no further need for faith and Christ. At the same time, it is not designed that you should continue as you were before obtaining remission of sins through faith. I speak of known sins wittingly persisted in, in spite of the rebuke and condemnation of conscience. These should be dead in you; in other words, they are not to rule you, but you are to rule them, to resist them, to undertake their mortification. And if occasionally you fail, if you stumble, you should immediately rise again, embrace forgiveness and renew your endeavor to mortify your sins. “By whose stripes ye were healed.”

[43] It seems as if Peter could not sufficiently exalt and make impressive Christ’s sufferings. He brings in nearly the entire 53rd chapter of Isaiah in the attempt. Note how, in regard to the efficacy of works, he always significantly introduces the two themes at the same time — how he carefully distinguishes between performing human works in obedience to Christ’s example, and receiving by faith the merit of Christ’s work. First, we have, “Who his own self bares our sins in his body upon the tree...by whose stripes ye were healed.” This is the vital part in our salvation. Christ alone could fully accomplish the work. This doctrine must be taught in its purity and simplicity, and must so be believed, in opposition to the devil and his factions. Only so can we maintain the honor and the office of Christ wherein is anchored our salvation. But the second part of the doctrine must not be overlooked. There are false Christians who accept only the first part

and make no effort to reform themselves; but, being liberated from our sins and in a state of salvation, we may not again defile ourselves therewith. Where these two principals of the Christian doctrine are not maintained in their proper relation, injury must result to the truth in two respects: they who are occupied solely with their own works corrupt the true doctrine of faith; they who neglect to follow the example of Christ retard the efficacy and fruit of that faith. “For ye were going astray like sheep.”

[44] Here Peter bluntly and clearly points out the fact I have stated, that liberation from sin and death was affected not by our works and merits, but by Christ’s wounds and death alone. Forgiveness cost you nothing, Peter teaches; no blood, no wounds. You were powerless in this direction. You were but miserable, erring, lost sheep, separated from God, condemned to hell and unable to council or help yourselves. In just such condition are all they who are out of Christ. As Isaiah the prophet says more plainly in the chapter from which these words are taken (verse 6): “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way.” That is, whatever our lives, whatever our intent, we but turned farther away from God. As it is written (Psalm 14:3): “They are all gone aside; they are together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

[45] That men are prone to go astray like sheep is clearly exhibited in their conduct; history proves it. It has ever been the case that when mankind was divided into various idolatries or false services of God, into superstitions numerous and varied, even when God’s people thought to have attained the perfection of holiness — then one ran here and another there, ever seeking and seeking to come upon the road to heaven but getting farther and farther from it. It was exactly the case of the sheep straying from the flock and lost to the shepherd: the farther it runs and the more it follows the voice of strangers, the farther astray it goes. It continues to wander and to flee until it finally perishes, unless it hears again the voice of the shepherd. Let no one, then, dare boast of having himself found the right way to heaven, of having merited God’s grace and the remission of sins by his own manner of life. All men must confess the truth of Scripture testimony that we were but erring sheep, fleeing ever farther from our Shepherd and Savior, until he turned us back to himself. “But are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”

[46] You have now heard the voice of your Shepherd, who has brought you back to himself, from your erring and idolatrous ways. It was not your own effort that effected your return; it was accomplished at the cost of your Shepherd's wounds and shed blood. Be careful, then, Peter would say, to live not like erring and lost sheep; but, being converted — turned back — follow your beloved Savior. In him you have a godly Shepherd who faithfully pastures and cares for you, and also a loyal Bishop who ever watches over and guards you, not permitting you to stray.

[47] Immeasurably gracious and comforting are these words. But the meaning of the word "bishop" has been miserably obscured and perverted by our idolatrous priests and Episcopal frauds. Likewise, have they perverted and corrupted the terms "ecclesiasts," "Church," "divine service," "priest," etc., by their antiChristian rule. Only those have right to the name "ecclesiast" who have been redeemed from their sins through Christ's wounds, and who live holy lives. But the Papists have taken the name away from true Christians and applied it to the Pope's besmeared, and shaven-headed ones. Again, when we hear the word "bishop" we think only of great, pointed caps and of silver staves. As if it were sufficient to place in the Church such masks, such carved and hewn idols! For they are nothing better; in fact, they do more harm. According to the Scriptures, a true bishop is an overseer, a guardian, a watchman. He is like unto the householder, the warder of the city, or any judicial officer or regent who exercises constant oversight of state or municipal affairs. Formerly there were bishops in each parish, deriving their name from the fact that their office required oversight of the Church and the guarding against the devil, against false doctrines and all manner of offenses. Paul, too (Acts 20:28), reminds the bishops of their office, saying: "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops [overseers]." And overseers should bishops still be, as in fact all godly preachers and carers for souls are. But in all Popedom the office now is but a mere name, to the sin and shame of the entire Christian Church.

[48] Now, Christ our Lord is that faithful Guardian, that true Bishop, who above all others is entitled to the name (with him office and name are identical), and who bears it with due honor, to our eternal happiness. For, standing at the right hand of God and showing his wounds, he unceasingly intercedes for us before the Father; and moreover, on earth he rules,

sustains, nourishes and protects, through his Word, his sacraments and the efficacy of the Holy Spirit, the little flock that believe in him. Were he not present with and watching over us here, the devil would long ago have overthrown and destroyed us, and also the Word of God and the name of Christ. And such is the case when God in wrath turns away his eyes from the world to punish its ingratitude. Then immediately everything falls into the devil's power. Therefore, pure doctrine, faith, confession and the use of the sacraments are dependent for their perpetuity solely upon the vigilant guardianship of our beloved Shepherd and Bishop.

[49] Comforting, indeed, is it to have in Christ a priest so faithful and righteous; though, alas, the worthy name of "priest" also has been subjected to shame and contempt because of the Pope's disgraceful, shaven, shallow-headed occupants of the office. Comforting, indeed, it is to be the happy lambs who have a welcome refuge in the Shepherd and find in him joy and comfort in every time of need, assured that his perfect faithfulness cares for and protects us from the devil and the gates of hell. Relative to this subject, the entire Twenty-third Psalm is a beautiful and joyous song, of which the refrain is, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

Jubilate. Third Sunday after Easter. Our Christian Duties. An Exhortation to the New Christian Life.

Text: 1 Peter 2:11-20.

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they

shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;

14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

15 For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

16 As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

17 Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.

19 For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

20 For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. 1 Peter 2:11-20

Our Christian Duties.

[1] This epistle selection, too, is an admonition to good works, or the fruits of faith. It touches upon nearly every condition of life, teaching how each individual should live and conduct himself. But first, Peter admonishes Christians in general that in their intercourse with gentiles, or the unbelieving world, they give no real occasion for censure or reproach concerning their conduct. The admonition seems to hinge upon the fact that Christians, as the apostle reminds them in the first and second chapters, have been called to a lively, a never-dying hope of an imperishable inheritance in heaven, and of eternal joy and salvation; that they are now redeemed, having obtained remission of sins through the precious blood of Christ; and again, that they are become a holy nation and royal priesthood, to show forth and magnify the grace of God, they who in time past were not God's people and had not obtained grace. "But now," Peter would say, "you have obtained grace through the divine calling of Christ, through the suffering of your Lord. Live, then, as a holy people of God and citizens of heaven."

[2] We have already heard that in the Christian life are two essential principles, two principles upon which Christian teachers may lay emphasis. First, faith in the fact that through Christ's blood we are released from sin and have forgiveness; second, being forgiven, our natures are to be changed and we are to walk in newness of life. In baptism, when we first believe, we obtain not only remission of sins whereby we are of grace made children of God, but also the power to purge out, to mortify, the remaining sins. Our transgressions are not forgiven, Paul says (Romans 1:6), with the privilege of continuing in them, as the insolent rejecters of grace imagine. It is this way: Our sins being blotted out through the blood of Christ, we need not to make remuneration or render satisfaction for them; we are children of grace and enjoy forgiveness. Nevertheless, inherent sin is not entirely purged out, or mortified. Remission and Mortification Defined

[3] There is difference between remission of sins and mortification of them. The distinction should be made clear for the sake of combating those who confound and pervert the two principles by their false doctrines. In regard to remission, the Pope and many others have taught that forgiveness of sins is obtained through the foolishness of men's own self-elected works, the satisfactions of their own devising. This error has ever prevailed in the world. Cain was the first to make it, and it will continue to the end. And where this error is refuted, false teachers are found who, on the other hand, accept and boast of the doctrine of grace without enjoying its happy results. They proceed as if mere forgiveness were enough, and without further effect than averting punishment; as if it leaves us where we were before, not ameliorating in any wise our moral condition; and as if no more is to be known about Christ and the Gospel. Therefore, they who claim to be Christians must learn that, having obtained forgiveness without merit on their part, they should henceforth give no place to sins, but rather resist their former evil lusts and avoid and flee from the fruits and works thereof. Such is the substance of this lesson.

[4] But note from the apostle's words how his view has changed since the time when, as a fisherman of Bethsaida, he went about with the Lord previous to the Lord's death and resurrection. At that time Peter and the other apostles, in fact the entire Jewish nation, had no other conception of Christ's kingdom — the kingdom of God — than as an earthly one wherein they should know only happiness, figuring as wealthy farmers, citizens,

noblemen, counts and lords. The sum of the world's goods should be theirs, and all the gentiles their vassals. They were to be thenceforth undisturbed by enemies, wars, famine or misfortune, and to enjoy the extremity of peace, leisure and happiness under their supreme King, the Messiah. Such were their hopes, even their expectations. With these pleasing fancies were their minds filled. And just so today are the Jews full and drunken with their visionary dreams. The Nature of Christ's Kingdom

[5] Observe here, however, Peter teaches that the lot of the sharer in Christ's kingdom is quite the reverse of what he once imagined. "O beloved Christians," he would say, "who are called and baptized into the royal and priestly kingdom of Christ, I have now to tell you things quite different from the ideas and dreams you and used to entertain. We are, it is true, citizens, counts and lords in the kingdom where Christ reigns supreme over all earthly kings and lords, and where is only eternal riches, peace and happiness in every form; but the life of that kingdom is unlike that of earthly kings and dominions. You are not, be it known, lords and noblemen in a worldly sense; neither is Christ a king as the world regards kingliness, and the kingdom of the world is not in harmony with his. Know, then, you must regard yourselves strangers and pilgrims in the kingdom of the world. "Therefore, I admonish you that, having now become Christians brothers in the eternal heavenly kingdom — your manner of life should be such as becomes them who are no longer of a worldly kingdom. Regard this earthly life only as the traveler or pilgrim regards the country wherein he journeys, the inn where he procures a night's lodging. He does not expect to remain in the city, to be mayor or even a citizen. He finds there his food, but his thoughts are cast beyond its gates, to the place where home is. So, Peter says, must you look upon your earthly course. You did not become Christians with the prospect of reigning here on earth, as the Jews fancy they shall reign and be established. The dwelling place, the citizenship and the authority of Christians are to be found in another direction, not in this world. Therefore, think of yourselves as pilgrims on earth, directing your attention toward other possessions and another country, wherein you shall be lords forever, and where no discord nor misfortune such as you must endure in this earthly harbor shall ever enter."

Christian Use of This Life

[6] But how is indifference to this life to be accomplished? Peter goes on to say: “Be subject to every ordinance of man... whether to the king...or unto governors”; again, “Servants, be in subjection to your masters...also to the forward.” How is it consistent with royal citizenship in a celestial country to be a pilgrim on earth? How can we live here with wives and children, houses and lands, and being citizens under a temporal government, and yet not be at home? There is a distinction here which, as before said, was at first difficult for the beloved apostles themselves to understand. But to Christians, especially those of today, it should be clear. Christ and the apostles do not, in this teaching, design the rejection of external government and human authority — what Peter here terms ordinances of men. No, they permit these to remain as they are; moreover, they enjoin us to submit to and make use of them.

[7] This is the difference to be kept in mind: We are to conduct ourselves in our earthly stations and occupations as not regarding this life our true kingdom and best good. And we are not to think the life beyond holds nothing more nor better than what we possess here, as do the Jews and the Turks. Although they believe in the resurrection of the dead, they carnally imagine the future life will be like the present except for its perfect peace and happiness, its freedom from misfortune, persecution and all ills. It is the prerogative of the Pope and his holy epicures to believe nothing in any respect. Every Christian, be he lord or servant, prince or subject, should conduct himself as befits his station, using in trust whatever God has given him — dominion and subjects, house and home, wife and children, money and property, meat and drink. He is to regard himself solely as a guest of earth, as one eating his morsel of bread or taking his lunch in an inn; he must conduct himself in this earthly harbor as a pious guest. Thus may he actually be a king reigning with fidelity, or a lord faithful to his office, and at the same time declare: “I count nothing on this life. I do not expect to remain here. This is but a strange country to me. True, I am seated in the uppermost place at table in this inn; but the occupant of the lowest seat has just as much as I, here or yonder. For we are alike guests. But he who assigned my duty, whose command I execute, gave me orders to conduct myself piously and honorably in this inn, as becomes a guest.”

[8] So should Christians in all stations of life — lords and ladies, servants and maids — conduct themselves as guests of earth. Let them, in

that capacity, eat and drink, make use of clothing and shoes, houses and lands, as long as God wills, yet be prepared to take up their journey when these things pass, and to move on out of life as the guest moves on out of the house or the city which is not his home. Let them conduct themselves as does the guest, with civility toward those with whom they come in contact, not infringing on the rights of any. For a visitor may not unrestrainedly follow his own pleasure and inclinations in the house of a stranger. The saying is: “If you would be a guest, you must behave civilly; otherwise you may promptly be shown the door or the dungeon.”

[9] Christians should be aware of their citizenship in a better country, that they may rightly adapt themselves to this world. Let them not occupy the present life as if intending to remain in it; nor as do the monks, who flee responsibility, avoiding civil office and trying to run out of the world. For Peter says rather that we are not to escape our fellows and live each for himself, but to remain in our several conditions in life, united with other mortals as God has bound us, and serving one another. At the same time, we are to regard this life as a journey through a country where we have no citizenship — where we are not at home; to think of ourselves as travelers or pilgrims occupying for a night the same inn, eating and drinking there and then leaving the place.

[10] Let not the occupants of the humbler stations — servants and subjects — grumble: “Why should I vex myself with unpleasant household tasks, with farm work or heavy labor? This life is not my home anyway, and I may as well have it better. Therefore, I will abandon my station and enjoy myself; the monks and priests have, in their stations, withdrawn themselves from the world and yet drunk deeply, satisfying fleshly lusts.” No, this is not the right way. If you are unwilling to put up with your lot, as the guest in a tavern and among strangers must do, you also may not eat and drink. Similarly, they who are favored with loftier positions in life may not, upon this authority, abandon themselves to the idea of living in the sheer idleness and lustful pleasure their more favored station permits, as if they were to be here always. Let them reason thus: “This life, it is true, is transitory — a voyage, a pilgrimage, leading to our actual fatherland. But since it is God’s will that everyone should serve his fellows here in his respective station, in the office committed to him, we will do whatever is enjoined upon us. We will serve our subjects, our neighbors, our wives and children so long as we

can, we would not relax our service even if we knew we had to depart this very hour and leave all earthly things. For, God be praised, had we to die now we would know where we belong, where our home is. While we are here, however, on the way, it is ours to fulfill the obligations of our earthly citizenship. Therefore, we will live with our fellows in obedience to the law of our abiding-place, even unto the hour wherein we must cross the threshold outward, that we may depart in honor, leaving no occasion for complaint.

[11] Thus, mark you, should every Christian conduct himself here on earth, according to Peter. In the first place, he should know where is his real home, his fatherland. We learn this through faith in Christ, whereby we become children of God, heirs of eternal life, citizens of heaven. Accordingly, we sing: “Now we pray thee, Holy Spirit, for true faith,” etc., when we depart home from this wretchedness. This sentiment accords beautifully with the text here where Peter calls us “sojourners and pilgrims” — wayfarers in earthly wretchedness, desiring home and casting our thoughts beyond the gates of our sojourning place. Second, though we must suffer this wretched condition in a foreign land, we are under obligation to render every honor to the host and to respect the inn, making the best of whatever may befall us.

[12] The prophet Jeremiah found it necessary to give admonition of this sort to his wretched Jewish countrymen in Babylon who longed unspeakably to be home again and almost despaired because of having so long to suffer misery among strangers when many of their brethren were at home. Other prophets had encouraged them with the promise of soon being returned. Consequently, many of them ceased to till the land and neglected to provide for a livelihood. To these Jeremiah writes (ch. 29:10): “Ye must have patience, for ye are not so soon to return — not till seventy years be accomplished.” Meanwhile, though in wretchedness and captivity, they were to do as he bids in verses 5-7: “Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them. Take ye wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters: and multiply ye there, and be not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive and pray unto Jehovah for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.” That there in their misery they should build

houses and make themselves citizens of Babylon, should marry and rear children — yes, give their children in marriage — as if they were to remain there permanently — this injunction of the prophet was altogether disagreeable and annoying to them. And still more offensive was the command to pray for the city and kingdom wherein they were captives. Much rather would they have prayed for liberation; for, influenced by the other prophets, they hoped to return home the following year.

[13] Now, how was it with them? The godly, faithful ones had reason to hope and trust in release and a return to their own kingdom. Surely there was no pleasure, no joy, for them in their present miserable condition, as in Psalm 137 they testify and complain by the rivers of Babylon. There they cried and wept and had not an hour of enjoyment when they thought of home. The long seventy years their hearts continually stood at the gate ready to depart, so that they had no inclination whatever to build houses, to cultivate farms, to make gardens, to take wives and rear children. Nevertheless, the prophet bids them meet all the requirements of citizens of that country; and more than that, to pray for their hosts in the same spirit in which they would pray for their neighbors and fellow citizens, asking God for peace and prosperity upon the city. Christians Subjects of Two Kingdoms

[14] So, too, Christians are subjects of two kingdoms — they have experience of two kinds of life. Here on earth where the world has its home and its heavenly kingdom, we surely are not citizens. According to Paul (Philippians 3:20), “our conversation” — our citizenship — “is with Christ in heaven”; that is, in yonder life, the life we await. As the Jews hoped to be released from Babylon, we hope to be released from this present life and to go where we shall be lordly citizens forever. But being obliged to continue in this wretched state — our Babylon — so long as God wills, we should do as the Jews were commanded to do — mingle with other mortals, eat and drink, make homes, till the soil, fill civil offices and show good will toward our fellows, even praying for them, until the hour arrives for us to depart unto our home.

[15] He who is guided by these facts, who comprehends the distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of the world, will know how to resist successfully all classes of fanatics. For these latter paint this life in a terrible aspect. They want to run out of the world entirely and are

unwilling to associate with anyone; or they proceed to disturb civil regulations and to overthrow all order; or again, as with the Pope, they interfere in secular rule, desiring temporal authority, wholly under the name and color of Christianity. Having as Christians forgiveness of sins, and being now people of God, children of his kingdom, citizens no longer of Babylon but of heaven, let us know that during the period of our sojourn here among strangers, it is ours to live righteously, honorably and chastely, to further civil and domestic peace and to lend counsel and aid to benefit even the wicked and ungrateful, meanwhile constantly striving after our inheritance and keeping in mind the kingdom whither we are bound.

[16] In short, a Christian must be one who, as Paul says (1 Corinthians 7:29-31), uses this world as not abusing it, who buys and possesses as though he possessed not, who has wife and children as though he had them not and who builds as though not building. How is it possible to reconcile these seeming inconsistencies? By making the Christian faith distinct from the faith of the Jews and Turks — yes, of the Papists even: by accepting the fact that the Christian's attitude toward this earthly life is the attitude of the guest; that in such capacity is he to build, to buy, to have dealings and hold intercourse with his fellows, to join them in all temporal affairs — a guest who respects his host's wishes, the laws of the realm and of the city and the customs of the inn, but at the same time the Christian refrains from attesting his satisfaction with this life as if he intended to remain here and hoped for nothing better. Thus, will the Christian pass through every temporal event in the right way — having every possession as though not having it, using and yet not cleaving to it; not so occupied with the temporal as to lose the eternal, but leaving behind — forgetting — the former while striving after the latter as the goal set before him.

[17] Therefore, they who presume to run out of the world by going into the desert or the wilderness; who, unwilling to occupy the inn but finding it indispensable nevertheless, must become their own hosts — these are great and unreasonable fools. Surely, they must eat and drink and have clothing and shelter. With these things they cannot dispense, even if they can withdraw from all society. Nor is their action forsaking and fleeing the world, as they imagine it to be. Whatever your station and condition, whatever your occupation in life, of necessity you must be somewhere on earth while mortal life is yours. Nor has God separated you from men; he

has placed you in society. Each individual is created and born for the sake of other individuals. But observe, wherever you are and whatever your station, you are, I say, to flee the world. How to Escape the World

[18] But how are we to flee the world? Not by donning caps and creeping into a corner or going into the wilderness. You cannot so escape the devil and sin. Satan will as easily find you in the wilderness in a gray cap as he will in the market in a red coat. It is the heart which must flee, and that by keeping itself “unspotted from the world,” as James 1:27 says. In other words, you must not cling to temporal things, but be guided by the doctrine of faith in Christ, and await the eternal, heavenly inheritance; and in that faith and that hope are you to execute the trust and work committed to you here, declaring the while: “That which I do here is not the chief good, the thing of real value, for which I live; though such is the case with the world, the Jews, the Turks and the Papists. I hold this temporal life as a tavern, valuing it no more than the guest values the inn where he enjoys food and lodging, while heart and mind turn ever to his own home.” What tolerance would there be for one foolish enough to declare: “I will not eat nor drink here. I will behave peculiarly, smashing windows and turning things upside down, for this is not my abiding place”? For the very purpose of advancing himself on his journey, the traveler should make use of the inn, accepting whatever is offered.

[19] Likewise should Christians use the world, constantly casting their thoughts beyond this life, notwithstanding they have here house and home, wife and children. These are for the present life only, yet the Christian owes them due consideration, the while he asserts: “Today we are here, tomorrow elsewhere. Now we avail ourselves of this inn, the next day of another. We do not expect to remain here.” Relative to this subject, Peter in his beautiful Pentecostal sermon says concerning David, who nevertheless was a holy king, that he did not ascend into the heavens, but, having fulfilled the will of God, fell asleep. Peter, so far from being willing to disparage David’s office and rule, to criticize him therein for wrongdoing, rather magnifies it in glowing terms. David was a king, and cast not aside his crown; no, he retained his royal glory. He held his office as a God-entrusted one, in the execution whereof he served God. Similarly, should the righteous ruler do — in fact, all men in their respective offices and stations. Let them remember they are not placed where they are to choose their own pleasure,

but solely for the service of God. Such is their duty so long as they are here — transients, like the stranger at the inn with other guests, who conducts himself with respect to the needs and the pleasure of his fellows, doing as they do, and in case of danger and necessity uniting with them in the effort to help and protect.

[20] King David did not regard his kingdom and his God-bestowed blessings as his real glory, but as his office, his opportunities for service in this earthly pilgrimage. In it all he remains a guest, expecting to leave this tarrying place for a certain abode. Hence he says (Psalm 39:12): “I am a stranger with thee, a sojourner, as all my fathers were.” How is that? Has a king of David’s glorious rank occasion to speak thus? Is he a guest who occupies a royal throne, who is lord of landed estate and of more than twelve hundred thousand people according to his own calculation? This is David’s meaning: In his kingdom he serves God as a transient here on earth and set apart by God for that purpose; but at the same time as a citizen of God’s kingdom in another life, another existence, which he regards more glorious than earthly glory, and as affording something better than a temporal crown. Reasons to Abstain from Carnal Lust

[21] Such is Peter’s teaching. He admonishes Christians to Christ-like lives and works in view of the fact that they are called to great glory, having become through Christ a royal priesthood, a people of God and citizens of heaven. He would have them occupy this temporal world as guests, striving after another and eternal kingdom; that is, to abstain from all carnal lusts and maintain a blameless walk, a life of good works. The apostle assigns two reasons for such self-denial: First, that we may not, through carnal, lustful habits, lose the spiritual and eternal; second, that God’s name and the glory we have in Christ may not be slandered among our heathen adversaries, but rather, because of our good works, honored. These are the chief reasons for doing good works. They ought most forcibly to urge us to the performance of our duties.

[22] Peter admonishes, first, to “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” He implies that if we do not resist carnal inclinations, but rather follow them, we shall lose our priceless eternal inheritance. To be a stranger on earth, striving after another and better life, is inconsistent with living in fleshly lusts as if one’s sole intent was to remain in the world forever. If you would have the things of one life, Peter says, you must

forsake the things of the other. If you forget your fatherland and lie drunken with this carnal life, as does the heathen world in living in unbelief and without hope of eternal life, you will never reach yonder existence; for so you reject it. It is necessary to strive if we are to withstand the lusts of the flesh; for these, Peter says, war against the soul — against faith and the good conscience in man. If lust triumphs, our hold on the Spirit and on faith is lost. Now, if you would not be defeated, you must valiantly contend against carnal inclinations, being careful to overcome them and to maintain your spiritual, eternal good. In this instance, our own welfare demands the conquest.

[23] In the second place, God's honor calls for it. God's honor here on earth is affected by our manner of life. We are to avoid giving occasion for our enemies to open their mouths in calumny of God's name and his Word. Rather must we magnify the name of God by our confession and general conduct, and thus win others, who shall with us confess and honor him. Christ commands (Matthew 5:16): "Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

[24] Peter proceeds to enumerate certain good works appropriate to Christians in all stations of life, particularly those Christians under authority, or in a state of servitude — menservants and maidservants. In the apostle's day, Christians had to submit to heathen authority — to serve unbelieving masters. Peter admonishes Christians to glorify God by their conduct, patiently bearing the violence and injustice offered, and forbearing to return evil; as we heard in the epistle lesson for the preceding Sunday which follows today's text. But to take up all the good works Peter enumerates here would require too much time at present.

Jubilate. Second Sermon. The Resurrection of the Dead.

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.

20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

26 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

27 For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.

28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

[1] We have no desire to reject the Sunday epistle readings in common use up to this time, particularly as some of them are excellent and profitable; nevertheless, a different order and selection might well have been made. For portions have been taken from James for the two Sundays following, the intent of the compilers having been to choose something from each of the apostles, among whom they regarded James one of the chief. These selections, however, seem not to have been written by an apostle; they do not at all compare with the selections from the other apostles. It were better for the instruction and comfort of the people, and as befitting this season, to handle the article of the resurrection — concerning the resurrection of both Christ and ourselves, or of all the dead — between Easter and Pentecost. It seems appropriate so to do, making selections from the preaching of the apostles; for instance, the entire fifteenth chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, which treats throughout of the resurrection of the dead. Therefore, we shall arrange this chapter to the present and following

Sundays. It is our intent to so use it hereafter, and they who feel disposed may adopt it likewise. But it is not our purpose in so doing to restrict those who prefer the old arrangement. The entire fifteenth chapter, however, being amply explained in special sermons, we would advise everyone to read those expositions.

Cantate. Fourth Sunday after Easter. The Resurrection of the Dead.

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:35-50.

35 But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?

36 Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die:

37 And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain:

38 But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.

39 All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds.

40 There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.

41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory.

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:

43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:

44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

46 Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.

47 The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.

48 As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.

49 And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. 1 Corinthians 15:35-50

[1] This selection follows immediately after the one we have arranged for the preceding Sunday, concerning the resurrection of the dead. In the text Paul deals with the question, How are the dead raised, and with what body do they come? This passage likewise is treated fully enough in the sermons on the fifteenth chapter, and they who desire may read those discourses; they are too lengthy to insert here. The selection from the first chapter of James, however, having commonly been read for this Sunday, and as it contains good instruction and admonition, we will, for the sake of some who may desire to retain it, allow it to remain; and we will make some explanation of it lest we be thought to desire its rejection altogether. It was not, however, written by an apostle. It does not bear the apostolic stamp in all particulars, and is not in every respect compatible with the true doctrine.

Cantate. Second Sermon. Our Gifts and Duties.

Text: James 1:16-21.

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

James 1:17-21

[1] This lesson was addressed to all Christians. Particularly was it meant for the time when they had to endure from the unbelieving world persecutions severe and oft; as James indicates at the outset, where he says (verses 2-4): “Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations; knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience. And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire.” Again (verse 12): “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.” Why Men Reject the Gospel

[2] Two things there are which part men from the Gospel: one is angry impatience, and the other evil lust. Of these James speaks in this epistle. The former sin, he says, arises under persecution — when for the sake of Christ the Lord you must give up property and honor, and risk body and life; must be regarded as fools, as the drudges, yes, the footstool, of the world. Painful and intolerable to the point of discouragement and weariness is such a lot, particularly when it is apparent that your persecutors enjoy good fortune, having honor, power and wealth, while you suffer constantly. Peter, too, admonishes (1 Peter 3:10), upon authority of Psalm 34:12-14: He who would be a Christian must be prepared to avoid evil and do good, to seek peace, to refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile, and must commit himself to God. In the case of a great many people otherwise favorably disposed toward the Gospel, it is nothing but persecution which deters and repels them from it. They cannot endure the injuries and reproaches they must suffer for its sake. But for the precious holy cross which is laid upon Christians, and their inability to overcome

indignation and impatience, the world would long ago have been crowded with Christians. But on account of trials men recoil, saying: “Rather than endure these, I will remain with the majority; as it is with them, so be it with me.”

[3] The second thing to which James refers is worldly lust — “filthiness,” as James terms it. This, too, is a prevailing evil, particularly with the common people. When they once hear the Gospel, they are prone to think right away that they know all about it. They cease to heed it and drown in lust, pride and covetousness of the world, being concerned entirely with accumulating wealth and seeking pleasure.

[4] That these two evils prevail is apparent to the eyes of all men today. We fear that we shall fare no better than the prophets and the apostles; these things are likely to continue. Nevertheless, we must unceasingly exert ourselves in behalf of ourselves and others to guard diligently against both these evils. Particularly must we not impatiently murmur and rage against God; we must also show meekness toward our fellowmen, to the end that wrath everywhere may be quelled and subdued, and only patience and meekness reign among Christians.

[5] As I said before, such seems to be the trend of the whole text. The apostle gives a reason why we should be patient to the extent of not allowing ourselves to be vexed with them who injure us, especially ungrateful rejecters of the Word of God or persecutors of Christians. The reason he assigns is the debt of gratitude we owe: we are to remember the great good we receive from God in heaven — “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.” Our Blessings Outweigh Our Ills

[6] If you carefully balance our gifts and trials against each other and weigh them carefully, you will find the blessings conferred upon you so numerous and rich as far to outweigh the injuries and reproaches you must incur. Therefore, if you are assailed by the world, and are provoked to impatience by ingratitude, contempt and persecution, compare with your trials the blessings and consolations you have in Christ and his Gospel. You will soon find you have more reason to pity your enemies than you have to murmur and to rage against them.

[7] Again, concerning them who live in worldly lusts — in “filthiness,” as the apostle terms it: let not their conduct induce you to forsake the Gospel to be like them; for their portion is altogether paltry in comparison with your glorious blessings and divine riches. Take thought, then, and do not allow yourselves to be misled either by the wanton wickedness of the world, through the injury and pain it may inflict, or by the prosperity of the world’s wealthy, who live riotously in all manner of voluptuousness. Look upon what you have from the Father in comparison — his divine blessings, his perfect gifts.

[8] For the sake of distinction, we shall designate by “good gifts” the blessings we enjoy here in this life: by “perfect gifts” those awaiting us in the life to come. James implies this distinction when he says: “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.” In the terms “good gifts” and “perfect gifts,” the apostle comprehends all our blessings, those we have already received in the present life and those to be ours in the life to come.

[9] I will not now speak particularly of earthly, transient and changeable blessings, such as temporal goods, honor, a healthy body and others, but could we only compare our blessings with these and weigh our treasures and surpassing blessings, we should presently conclude that ours transcend in value a hundred thousand times anything the world possesses and boasts. Many individuals there are who would give thousands of dollars to have the sight of both eyes. So much do they prize the blessing of sight, they would willingly suffer a year’s illness or endure other great inconveniences to obtain it. Less sensible would they be to such discomforts than to the deprivation of the thing they desire. Of physical blessings particularly, we shall not now speak, however, save to mention that they are never equaled by physical ills. Who can purchase or merit, even by enduring tenfold his present physical ills, the very least of God’s gifts; as, for instance, the beholding of the light of the beautiful sun for a single day? And so long as mortal life itself remains, you have the greatest of blessings, one outweighing far all gold and silver and all the misfortunes you may endure.

Our Blessedness in Christ’s Resurrection

But we shall speak now particularly of the blessings we have in Christ's resurrection, a subject appropriate to this Paschal season. The text says, Every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights. For God has begun the work of edifying us, of building us up, and will constitute us his own children, his heirs. This work, James says, is wrought through the Gospel, or "the word of truth," as he terms it.

[10] But what does the resurrection advantage us? It has already brought us this gain: our hearts are enlightened and filled with joy, and we have passed from the darkness of sin, error and fear into the clear light; the Christian is able to judge all sects, all doctrines of devils, that may arise on earth. Is it not a thing of unspeakable value, a precious gift, to be enlightened and taught of God to the extent of being able to judge correctly every doctrine and every kind of conduct exhibited in this world, and to show all men how to live — what to do and what to avoid? "Well may we boast, then, of having here on earth also a Father — "the Father of lights" — from whom we receive blessings of such magnitude that man should willingly yield body and life for their attainment. What would I in my darkness not have given to be liberated from the very dread which prompted the celebration of masses and other abominations, yes, from the torture and anguish of conscience which left me no rest? Or to have instruction enabling me rightly to interpret a single psalm? I would, for such enlightenment, readily have crawled on the ground to the ends of the earth. Thank God, we now have the blessed treasure abundantly, the great and precious light, the gracious Word. What is the sum of all suffering and misfortune compared to this light?

[11] Secondly, through Christ's resurrection we have a good, joyous conscience, one able to withstand every form of sin and temptation and to maintain a sure hope of eternal life. The great, glorious gifts and blessings of the resurrection are these: the Gospel, Holy Baptism, the power of the Holy Spirit, and comfort in all adversity. What is a slight injury or the loss of some temporal blessing in comparison with these? What reason has any man to murmur and to rage when such divine blessings are his, even here in this life, blessings which none can take away or abridge? If, then, you are called to renounce money, possessions, honor and men's favor, remember you have a treasure more precious than all the honors and all the possessions of the world. Again, when you see one living in great splendor,

in pleasure and presumption, following his own inclinations, think thus: “What has he? A wretched portion, a beggarly morsel In contrast, I have divine grace enabling me to know God’s will and the work he would have me do, and all in heaven and on earth is mine.” Look, says James, upon the treasure already obtained from the Father of lights — his great and glorious gifts.

[12] But these do not represent the consummation of resurrection blessings. We must yet await the real, the perfect, gifts. Our earthly condition does not admit of perfection; hence we cannot truly perceive, cannot comprehend, our treasure. We are but “a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.” God has only commenced to work in us, but he will not leave us in that state. If we continue in faith, not allowing ourselves to be turned away through wrath and impatience, God will bring us to the real, eternal blessings, called “perfect gifts,” the possession of which excludes error, stumbling, anger, and any sin whatever. The Future Life of Blessedness

[13] That future existence, James goes on to say, will be one wherein is “no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning” — no alternating of light and darkness. In other words, there will not be the variation and instability characteristic of this world, even of the Christian life — today joyous, tomorrow sad; now standing but soon tottering. It is in the Christian life just as in the physical world: we find variableness and continual change — light, is succeeded by darkness, day by night, cold by heat; here are mountains, there valleys; today we are well, tomorrow ill; and so it goes. But all this change shall be abolished. The present life shall be succeeded by one wherein is no variation, but a permanence and eternity of blessing. We shall unceasingly behold God in his majesty where dwells no darkness, no death, plague nor infirmity, but pure light, joy and happiness. Look to this future life! Call it to mind, when assailed by the world and enticed to anger or evil lust. Remember the great blessings of heaven assuredly promised you, and whereof Christ your Head has already taken possession, that he may make sure your entrance into the same blessings. These should be to you far more precious and desirable than the things of earth, which all men must leave behind.

[14] To these things the Christian should direct his thoughts and efforts, that he may learn to prize his blessings, to recognize his treasures as great and glorious, and to thank God for the beginnings of his grace and blessing

bestowed here below. Let us ever look and turn toward true knowledge and understanding, toward righteousness and life; so shall we attain that perfection wherein we are freed from the present imperfect, unstable existence, the yoke we now bear upon our necks and which continually weighs upon us and renders us liable to fall from the Gospel. Impulse and aid for such pursuit we are to receive from the holy cross and persecution, as well as from the example of the world. With what ease the poor, wretched people are wrested from the Word and from faith, wherein they might enjoy unspeakable grace and blessings, by the sordid, beggarly pleasures to be sought for here!

[15] Therefore, James says: “Why trouble yourselves about earthly blessings, which though God-given are transitory? Why not much rather rejoice in the comforting prospect of the great heavenly blessings already abundantly yours and which cannot be taken from you?” And by way of explanation he says further: “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth.” God’s Children Begotten by the Word

[16] The first, and in fact the best, thing Christ has sent us from on high is sonship. He brought us forth, made us his children, or heirs. We are truly called children born of God. But how are we born? Through “the Word of truth,” or the true Word. By this statement James makes a wide thrust at all factions and sects. For they also have a word and boast much of their doctrine, but theirs is not the Word of truth whereby men are made children of God. They teach naught, and know naught, about how we are to be born God’s children through faith. They prate much about the works done by us in the state derived from Adam. But we have a Word whereby, as we are assured, God makes us his beloved children and justifies us — if we believe in that Word. He justifies us not through works or laws. The Christian must derive his sonship from his birth. All whittling and patching is to no purpose. The disciples of Moses, and all work-mongers, would effect it by commandments, extorting a work here and a work there, effecting nothing. New beings are needed, children of God by birth, as John 1:12 says.

[17] The children of God, John tells us, are they who believe on the name of Christ; that is, who sincerely cling to the Word. John extols the Word as the great, the mighty, gift. They are children who cleave to the message that through Christ God forgives their sins and receives them into his favor; who adhere to this promise in all temptations, afflictions and

troubles. The Word here on earth is the jewel which secures sonship. Now, since God has so greatly blessed you as to make you his own begotten children, shall he not also give you every other good?

[18] Whence, then, do you derive sonship? Not from your own will, not from your own powers or efforts. Were it so, I and other monks surely should have obtained it, independently of the Word; it would have been ours through the numerous works we performed in our monastic life. It is secured, James says, “of his will.” For it never entered into the thought of any man that so should we be made children of God. The idea did not grow in our gardens; it did not spring up in our wells. But it came down from above, “from the Father of lights,” by Word and Spirit revealed to us and given into our hearts through the agency of his apostles and their successors, by whom the Word has been transmitted to us. Hence we did not secure it through our efforts or merits. Of his Fatherly will and good pleasure was it conferred upon us; of pure grace and mercy he give it. Christians the First-Fruits

[19] James says, “That we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures”; that is, the newly-begun creature, or work, of God. By this phrase the apostle distinguishes the creatures of God from the creatures of the world, or creatures of men. Likewise does Peter when he says (1 Peter 2:13), “Be subject to every ordinance [or creature] of man”; that is, to everything commanded, ordained, instituted, made, by men. For instance, a prince constitutes men tax gatherers, squires, secretaries, or anything he desires, within the limits of his power. But new creatures are found with God. They are styled “creatures of God” because he has created them as his own work, independently of human effort or human power. And so the Christian is called a “new creature of God,” a creature God himself has made, aside from all other creatures and higher than they. At the same time, such creation of God is only in its initial stage. He still daily operates upon it until it becomes perfect, a wholly divine creature, as the very sun in clearness and purity, without sin and imperfection, all aglow with love divine.

[20] Take into careful consideration these facts. Keep before you the great blessing, honor and glory God has conferred upon you in making you heirs of the life to come, the life wherein shall be no imperfection nor variation, the life which shall be an existence in divine purity and protection

like God's own. Do not, then, by any means allow yourselves to be provoked to anger by the wretched, sordid, beggar's wallet which the world craves. Rather, much rather, rejoice in the divine blessings, and thank God for having made you worthy of them. Whether sweet or bitter — in comparison with these let everything else be spurned. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward" — to us the children of God — says Paul in Romans 8:18. Impatient Anger Forbidden

[21] So James draws the conclusion: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." In other words, in receiving counsel or comfort be swift; but do not permit yourselves readily to criticize, curse, or upbraid God or men. James does not mean to prohibit reproof, censure, indignation and correction where the command of God or necessity requires; but he forbids rashness or hastiness on our part, despite our provocation in the premises. When we are provoked we should first hear what the Word of God says and be advised thereby. It is the right and true counsel, and we should ever permit ourselves to be led by it; according to its teaching should all our decisions, reproofs and censures be regulated. In immediate connection, James bids us receive the Word with meekness, we are not to be incensed when censured by its authority, or to become impatient and murmur when we have to suffer something because of it. The reason James assigns for restraining our anger is: "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." This is a truth admitted even by the heathen — *Ira furor brevis est*, etc. — and verified by experience. Therefore, upon authority of Psalm 4:4, when you feel your wrath rising, sin not, but go to your chamber and commune with yourself. Let not wrath take you by surprise and cause you to yield to it. When slander and reproach is heaped upon you, or curses given, do not rashly allow yourself to be immediately inflamed with anger. Rather, take heed to overcome the provocation and not to respond to it.

[22] The apostle's first point, then, is: Christians should guard against yielding to wrath and impatience, and should remember the great blessings they enjoy — gifts wherewith all the advantages and favors of the world are unworthy of comparison.

[23] Similarly, James says regarding the other point: "Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness," etc. By "filthiness" he

means the impure life of the world — indulgence, voluptuousness and knavery of every sort. These things, he would say, should be far from you Christians who enjoy blessings so great and glorious. Could you rightly recognize and appreciate these blessings, you would regard all worldly pursuits and pleasures mere filth in comparison. Nor is this overdrawn; they are such when contrasted with the good and perfect heavenly gifts and treasures.

[24] “Receive with meekness the implanted word.” You have the Word, James says, a Word which is yours not by your own fancy or effort, but which God, by grace, gave to you — implanted in you. It has free course — is preached, read and sung among you. (By the grace of God, it is free among us, too.) In this respect, God be praised, there is no lack. It is of the utmost importance, however, to receive it, to make profitable use of it; to handle it with meekness that we may hold it fast and not allow it to be effaced by anger under persecution or by the allurements of worldly lusts. Christ says (Luke 21:19), “In your patience possess ye your souls [ye shall win your souls].” Meekness and Patience Enjoined Meekness and patience are necessary to enable us to triumph over the devil and the world. Without them we shall not be able to hold fast the Word in our strife against those evil forces. We must fight and contend against sin, but if we essay to cool our wrath by grasping the devil and his followers by the hair and wreaking vengeance upon them, we will accomplish nothing and may thereby lose our treasure, the beloved Word. Therefore, lay hold of the Word planted or engrafted within you, that you may be able to retain it and have it bring forth its fruit in yourself.

The Power of the Word.

[25] It is a Word, says James in conclusion, “which is able to save your souls.” What more could be desired? You have the Word, the promise of all divine blessings and gifts. It is able to save you if you but steadfastly cleave to it. Why, then, need you take any account of the world, and anything it may do, whether good or evil? What injury can the world render, what help can it offer, so long as you hold the treasure of the Word? Observe that the apostle ascribes to the spoken Word, the preached Gospel, the power to save souls. Similarly, Paul commends it to the Romans 1:15, in almost the same words, as “the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.”

[26] Now, the Word is implanted within you in a way to give you the certain comfort and sure hope of your salvation. Be careful, then, not to permit yourselves to be wrested from it by the wrath or the filth of the world. Take heed to accept in purity and to maintain with patience the Word so graciously and richly given you by God without effort or merit on your part. Those who are without the Word, and yet endeavor to attain heaven, what efforts have they made in the past! What efforts are they making today! They might torment themselves to death; they might institute and celebrate every possible service — they would accomplish nothing. Is it not better to cling to the Word and maintain this treasure whereby you attain salvation and divine sonship than to permit the world to wrest you from it through persecution, passion or moral filth the source of its own ruin and perdition?

Rogate. Fifth Sunday after Easter. The Change of Our Mortal Body and the Destruction of Death.

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:51-57.

51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that

is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:51-57

You will find this lesson explained in the special sermons on the same chapter.

Ascension Day.

Text: Acts 1:1-11.

1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Acts 1:1-11

This epistle text is simply a narrative concerning the visible ascension of Christ into heaven. It is in itself clear. Whatever it may be necessary to say relative to the article of Christ's ascension, we shall leave for the sermons on the Festivals of Christ as they occur at intervals during the year, at which times it is fitting to speak particularly of each article concerning Christ.

Exaudi. Sunday after Ascension. Soberness in Prayer and Fervency in Love, and the Proper Functions of Church Officers.

Text: 1 Peter 4:7-11.

7 But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

9 Use hospitality one to another without grudging.

10 As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

11 If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:7-11

Exhortation to Christian Living.

[1] This text, too, is an admonition to Christian living, a discourse concerning the fruits of a good tree, a figure applied to the Christian; in other words, concerning the fruits of the one who, through faith, has obtained redemption from sin and death and has a place in the kingdom of grace and of eternal life. Such a one is exhorted to live henceforth in a manner indicative of the fact that he has apprehended the treasure of salvation and is become a new man. Exhortation to Soberness

[2] Certain good works are also introduced, and in the first part of our text Peter makes an especially emphatic continuation of the admonition in the foregoing part of the chapter, warning Christians to abstain from gross vices — carnal lusts — which in the world lead to obscenity, and from the wild, disorderly, swinish lives of the heathen world, lives of gormandizing, guzzling and drunkenness. Peter admonishes Christians to endeavor to be “sober unto prayer.” The epistle was written chiefly to the Greeks, the masses of which people were very social, and inclined to carouse and gormandize. And we Germans are accused of the same excess; not without some reason either.

[3] With intent to turn Christians from these vices unto temperance and sobriety, Peter reminds them, as all the apostles are wont to do, of the obligations particularly incident to the Christian calling, to the only true, divine service, the things for the sake of which they have become Christians and which distinguish them from the remainder of the world. His meaning is: It is not for Christians to lead lives heathenish, profligate and riotous; to indulge in gormandizing, guzzling, carousing and demoralizing of themselves. They have something nobler to do. First, in that they are to become different beings, and be occupied with the Word of God wherefrom

they derive their new birth and whereby they preserve it. Second, being born anew, they have enemies to fight; so long as they live on earth, they must combat the devil, also their own flesh, which is corrupted by the devil until it is full of evil lusts. Having, then, to assume the obligations of this calling and contest, they must not give way to drowsy indolence; much less may they become foolish, drunken sots, indifferent to all issues and heedless of their obligations. Rather, they have need to be watchful and sober, ever ready with the Word of God and with prayer.

[4] These are the two kinds of armor, two weapons of defense, whereby the devil is vanquished and of which he is afraid: First, diligence in hearing, learning and practicing the Word of God, that instruction, comfort and strength may be received; second, sincere petitioning upon the authority of that Word, a crying and calling to God for help when temptations and conflicts arise. One or the other of these weapons of defense must continually be in active exercise, effecting perpetual intercourse between God and man — either God speaking to us while we quietly listen, or God hearing our utterances to him and our petitions concerning our needs. Whichever the weapon we wield, it is unendurable to the devil; he cannot abide it. Christians need both equipment's, that their hearts may ever turn to God, cleave to his Word, and continually, with ceaseless longing, pray a perpetual Lord's Prayer. Truly, the Christian should learn from the temptations and straits wherewith the devil, the world and the flesh constantly oppress him, to be ever on his guard, watching for the enemy's point of attack; for the enemy sleeps not nor rests a single moment.

[5] Here is applicable Peter's injunction for the Christian to keep within the bounds of physical temperance and sobriety; not to overload the body and injure it by excessive eating and drinking: so as to be watchful, intelligent, and in a mood, to pray. He who is not careful to discharge the obligations of his office or station with temperance and sobriety, but is daily in a sottish condition, is incapable of praying or performing any other Christian duty; he is unfit for any service.

[6] Right here a special admonitory sermon might well have preached to us dissolute Germans, in warning for our excesses and drunkenness. But where would be forthcoming a sermon forcible enough to restrain the shameful sottishness and the drink devil among us? The evil of overindulgence has, alas, swept in upon us like a torrent, overwhelming as a

flood all classes. It daily spreads further and further throughout the nation, embracing every station from the lowest to the highest. All preaching, all admonition, seem far too weak — not vain and impotent, but despised and scorned — to meet the emergency. But the apostles, and even Christ himself, declared that in the end of the world such a state of affairs should obtain. For that very reason did Christ (Luke 21:34) admonish Christians to take heed to themselves lest at any time their hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon them unawares.

[7] Now, God having in his infinite goodness so richly shed upon us Germans in these latter times the Gospel light, we ought, in honor and gratitude to him, to try to reform ourselves in the matter of intemperance. We should fear lest through this evil besides committing other sins we draw upon us the wrath and punishment of God. For naught else can result from the pernicious life of intemperance but false security, and contempt of God. Individuals continually dead in drunkenness, buried in excesses, living like swine, cannot fear God, cannot be occupied with divine things.

[8] Had we no other incentive to abandon our intemperate living, the scandalous reputation we have among the nations ought to move us to reform. Other countries, particularly those bordering on Germany, regard us with extreme contempt, calling us drunken Germans. For they have virtue enough to abstain from excessive drinking. The Turks are real monks and saints in this respect; so far are they from the evil of intemperance that in obedience to the teaching of their Mohammed they prohibit the drinking of wine or any other intoxicant and punish the offense as the greatest evil in their midst. For this very reason are they better soldiers than our drunken masses. They are always awake and vigilant, alert concerning their own interests, planning attacks upon us and continually extending their dominion, while we lie sleeping in our excesses as if we could withstand the Turks by drunkenness and carousing.

[9] But what is the use of multiplying words on the subject when the evil prevails to such extent as to be common custom in the land? No longer confined to the rude, illiterate rabble, to country villages and public taverns, it has penetrated all cities and entered nearly every house, being particularly prevalent among the nobility — in the courts of princes. I recall that when I was young, drunkenness was regarded an inexpressibly shameful thing

among the peerage, and that the dear lords and princes restrained it with serious prohibitions and punishments. But now it is more alarmingly prevalent among them than among farmers. It is generally the case that when the great and good begin to go down, they sink to a lower level than others. Yes, intemperance has attained such prevalence that even princes and lords have learned the habit from their young noblemen and are no longer ashamed of it. Rather, they call it honorable, making it a civil virtue befitting princes and noblemen. Whosoever will not consent to be a drunken sot with them, must be discountenanced; while the knights who stand for beer and wine obtain high honors, and great favors and privileges, on account of their drinking. They desire fame in this respect, as if they had secured their nobility, their shield and helmet, by the very fact that they exceed others in the shamelessness of their tippling.

[10] Yes, and have we not further reason for checking the evil when even the young practice it without fear or shame? They learn it from the aged, and unrestrained they disgracefully and wantonly injure themselves in the very bloom of life, destroying themselves as corn is cut down by hail and tempest. The majority of the finest, most promising young people, particularly the nobility, they of court circles, ruin their health, body and life, before arriving at maturity. How can it be otherwise when they who should restrain and punish commit the same sins themselves?

[11] Hence Germany has always been a wretched country, chastised and plagued by the drink devil, and completely immersed in this vice, until the bodies and lives of her people, as well as their property and honor, are shamefully consumed and only a sordid existence remains. He who would paint the conditions must portray something swinish. Indeed, but a small proportion of the inhabitants of Germany are undebased by this evil. These are children, girls and women. Some sense of propriety in the matter remains to them, though occasionally we find even under the veil some intemperance; however, it is with restraint. Enough modesty remains to inspire the universal sentiment that so disgraceful a thing is it for a woman to be drunk, such a one deserves to be trampled upon in the streets.

[12] In the light of their example, let us men learn to see our own shame and to blush for it. While noting how disgraceful is drunkenness for women, let us remember it is much more so for ourselves. We ought to be saner and more virtuous; for, according to Peter, the woman is the weaker

vessel. Because of the weakness of women, we ought to have more patience with them. Man being endowed with a broader mind, stronger faculties and firmer nature, he should be the saner being, the farther removed from the brute. It stands to reason that it is a much greater disgrace for him to indulge in the vice of drunkenness. In proportion to the nobility of his creation and the exalted nature where with God has endowed him, should be the disgrace of such unreasoning, brutish conduct on his part.

[13] What can be said for us? So complete is the perversion of all manly virtue and honor in our conduct in this respect that it cannot be surpassed by any other possible degradation of manhood. There remains to us but an atom of good reputation, and that is to be found among the women. The occasional instance of drunkenness among them but emphasizes our own disgrace. All countries look upon us with scorn and contempt, regarding us as shameful and sordid creatures, day and night bent upon making ourselves surfeited and stupid, possessing neither reason nor intelligence. The evil would be more tolerable, more excusable, if drinking and carousing had any limit, if intoxication were but an occasional thing — the case of a person inadvertently taking one drink too much, or of taking a stimulant when tired from excessive labor and worry. We excuse it in women who may chance to drink a little more at wedding parties than they are accustomed to at home. But this excessive guzzling kept up unceasingly day and night, emitting only to be filled again, is wholly inconsistent with the character of a prince, a nobleman, a citizen, yes, of a human being, not to mention the life of a Christian; it is really more in keeping with the nature and work of swine.

[14] Now, when God and all mankind permit you to eat and to drink, to enjoy good things, not merely what is necessary for actual subsistence, but in a measure calculated to afford gratification and pleasure, and you are yet not satisfied with that privilege — when such is the case, your sordid and gluttonous tendencies are worthy one born solely to consume beer and wine. But such are the excesses now to be seen in the courts of princes — the banqueting and the drinking — that one would think they meant to devour the resources of the country in a single hour. Lords, princes, noblemen — the entire country, in fact — are ruined, reduced to beggary, for the particular reason that God's gifts are so inhumanly wasted and destroyed.

[15] As I said before, the evil of drunkenness has, alas, gained such ascendancy as to be past restraint unless the Word of God may exert some controlling influence among the few, the individuals who are still human and who would be Christians. The masses will remain as they are, particularly as the civil government makes no effort to restrain the evil. It is my opinion that if God does not sometime check the vice by a special judgment — and until he does it will never be punished and restrained — even women and children will become inebriate, and when the last day arrives no Christian will be found but all souls will descend drunken into the abyss of hell.

[16] Let all who desire to be Christians know that it is incumbent upon them to manifest the virtue of temperance; that drunken sots have no place among Christians, and cannot be saved until they amend their ways, until they reform from their evil habits. Concerning them Paul says plainly (Galatians 5:19-21): “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Here you see that he who lies day and night in drunkenness has no more inheritance in the kingdom of God than the whoremonger, adulterer, and such like. Know then, just as idolatry, adultery and so on, are sins excluding you from heaven, so too, drunkenness is a sin which bars you from the blessings of baptism, and from remission of sins, faith in Christ and your personal salvation. Hence, if you would be a Christian and saved, you must be careful to lead a sober and temperate life. But if you disregard this admonition and yet hope to be saved — well, then continue to be an infidel and a brute so long as God permits.

[17] Were you a Christian, even if you could permit yourself to be unmoved by the physical injury wherein, by drunkenness, you plunge yourself, not only wasting your money and property, but injuring your health and shortening your life; and if you could permit yourself to be unmoved by the stigma justly recognized by men and angels as attaching to you, a filthy sot — even then you ought to be moved by God’s command, by the peril of incurring eternal damnation — of losing God’s grace and eternal salvation — to refrain from such unchristian conduct. O God, how

shameless and ungrateful we are, we so highly blessed of God in having his Word and in being liberated from the tyranny of the Pope, who desired our sweat and blood and tortured our consciences with his laws — how ungrateful we are in the face of these things not to amend our lives in some measure in honor to the Gospel, and in praise and gratitude to God!

[18] Where peradventure there are still pious parents or godfearing Christian rulers, they ought, for the sake of lessening the evil of intemperance, to restrain their children and domestics with serious chastisements. Pastors and preachers are under obligation to admonish the people frequently and faithfully, holding up to them God's displeasure and wrath and the injuries to soul, body and property resultant from this evil, to the intent that at least some might be moved and profited. And they who wantonly and openly persist in the vice, being not disposed to amend their conduct but at the same time boast of the Gospel, should not be allowed to participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper nor to act as sponsors at baptism. Preachers and pastors should hold such as openly antiChristian, and should make a distinction against them the same as with manifest adulterers, extortioners and idolaters. Such is Paul's command (Corinthians 5:11): "I wrote unto you not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no, not to eat." Necessity for Prayer

[19] But we will not now remark further upon this subject. To return to Peter: He admonishes us to be sober so that we may give ourselves to prayer, as becometh those who are Christians and have turned from the vile, heathenish conduct of the world. Just preceding our text, in verse 3, he says: "For the time past may suffice to have wrought the desire of the Gentiles, and to have walked in lasciviousness, lusts, winebibbings, revellings, carousings, and abominable idolatries." He admonishes us as being now called and ordained to contend against the devil by faith and prayer. Later on (ch. 5:8) he brings in the same warning in clearer phrase, exhorting Christians to be sober and watchful. Do you ask, "What is the great necessity therefore?" he says: "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion [in the midst of a flock of sheep], walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Peter's meaning is this: Since you are a people called to contend with this powerful spirit which is more intent on seizing your souls than is

the wolf on seizing the sheep, it is essential you should take thought how to withstand him. Resistance is affected only through faith and prayer. But soberness and vigilance are necessary to enable one to pray. With gormandizers and drunkards, reason is dethroned, and they are rendered incapable of respecting anything, or of performing any good work. Therefore, the ability to pray and call upon God has been taken from them and the devil overcomes and devours them at his will.

[20] The diligence in prayer which characterized Christians of the primitive Church, even while undergoing great persecution, is apparent to us. They were more than willing to assemble daily for prayer together, not only morning and evening, but also at certain other appointed hours; and frequently they watched and prayed entire nights. Some of them, according to St. Augustine, carried their vigils to such extent as at times to abstain from food for four days. True, this was going to somewhat of an extreme, particularly when later the practice came to be an example and a commandment. Yet their habit of perfect sobriety morning, evening and at all times is commendable. With the cessation of this practice in the congregations, there succeeded the wretched order of monks, who pretend to do the praying for others. They, it is true, observed the same appointed hours, the same seasons of prayer, in their matins, vespers, and so on, but they did not really pray; they merely kept up an incessant sound, muttering and howling. We still retain from the ancient custom the observance of morning and evening prayers in schools for children. But the same practice should obtain in every Christian family. Every father is under obligation to train up his children to pray at least at the beginning and the close of day, commending to God every exigency of this earthly life, that God's wrath may be averted, and deserved punishment withheld.

[21] Under such conditions, we would be properly instructed and not have to be subjected to intolerable oppression and to prohibitions relative to eating, drinking and dressing, being guided by nature's demands and our own honor and pleasure. Yet we would not be inordinate and brutish in these things nor shamefully dethrone reason. Drunkenness is a sin and a shame to any man and would be even were there neither God nor commandment; much less can it be tolerated among Christians. There is more virtue in this respect among the very heathen and Turks. They put us to shame, while it is our place to set an example shaming them. Our

characters ought to be so noble as to give no chance for offense at our conduct, that the name of God be not defamed but glorified, as Peter admonishes in the conclusion of this epistle lesson. Temperance in All Things

[22] What we have said in regard to sobriety, we must also say relative to that other virtue — temperance, to which Peter gives first place. They are mutually related, but temperance respects not only eating and drinking, but is opposed to all immoderation in outward life — in clothing, ornament, and so on; to whatever is superfluous, or excessive; to any extravagant attempt to be greater and better than others. To such extent has immoderation gained the upper hand in the world, there is nowhere any limit to expense in the way of household demands, dress, wedding parties and banquets, in the way of architecture, and so on, whereby citizens, rulers and the country itself are impoverished, because no individual longer keeps within proper bounds. Almost invariably the farmer aspires to equal the nobleman, while the nobleman would excel the prince. As with sobriety, so with the virtue of temperance — there is scarce to be found an example of it in our midst, so completely has self-control, sincerity and discipline given way.

[23] At the same time the apostle does not forbid appropriate and respectable recognition of the things of physical well-being, in keeping with each individual's station in life, even including things ministering pleasure and joy. For Peter would not have filthy, rusty, greasy monks nor sour-faced saints, with the hypocrisy and show of their simulated austere and peculiar lives, wherein they honor not their bodies, as Paul says (Colossians 2:23), but are ever ready to judge and condemn other people — the maiden, for instance, who chances to join in a dance or wears a red dress. If you are a Christian in other respects, God will easily allow you to dress and to adorn yourself, and to live with comfort, even to enjoy honor and considerable pleasure, so long as you keep within proper bounds; you should, however, not go beyond the limits of temperance and moderation. In other words, do not overreach propriety and self-restraint, regardless of real pleasure, in the endeavor to show off in excessive and unprofitable squandering. Such conduct results in confusion and trouble — chastisement sent of God; in taxes, extortion, robbing and stealing, until finally lords and subjects are ruined together. “Above all things being fervent in your love

[have fervent charity] among yourselves; for love [charity] covereth a multitude of sins.”

[24] In the foregoing part of the text, Peter admonishes Christians concerning their obligations to themselves; here he tells what is to be their conduct toward others. He embraces all the good works named in the second table of the commandments as obligations we owe to our neighbor, in the little but forcible and comprehensive phrase — “fervent in your love.” This virtue, too, is incumbent on the Christian who must contend against the devil and pray. For prayer is hindered where love and harmony are displaced by wrath and ill will. The Lord’s Prayer teaches: “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” How can they pray one for another who feel no interest in a neighbor’s wants, who rather are enemies, entertaining no good will toward one another? Where hearts are inflamed with hatred toward men, prayer has ceased; it is extinguished. Hence, antichristians and all popedom, however holy their appearance, cannot pray while enemies to the Word of God and persecutors of Christians. He who repeats the Lord’s Prayer while indulging wrath, envy and hatred, censures his own lips; he condemns his own prayer when he seeks forgiveness from God but does not think of forgiving his neighbor.

[25] With Christians there must be, not merely natural human affection such as exists even among heathen, but ardent, fervent love; not the mere appearance of love, the smoke — false, hypocritical love, as Paul calls it (Romans 12:9) — but real fervor and fire, which consent not to be easily extinguished, but which endure like the love between husband and wife, or the love of parents for children. True conjugal and parental love is not easily quenched, even though the object of its affection be weak, diseased or dangerously ill. Rather the greater the need and the danger of one individual, the more is the heart of the other moved and the brighter does love burn.

[26] Such sincere love, as the apostle elsewhere styles it, must exist among Christians who are all children of one Father in heaven and brothers and sisters. Indeed, they are under obligation to love even their enemies — who are human beings of the same flesh and blood — and to wish no one evil but rather to serve all wherever possible. This love is the beautiful red robe for the adornment of Christians, supplementing the pure white garment of faith received in baptism. It is to be worn in obedience to the example of

Christ, who for us, even while we were enemies, wore the same red garment of love when he was sprinkled with his own blood. It was then he burned with the intense fire of ineffable and most exalted love.

[27] The apostles were moved to admonitions of this character because they clearly perceived the great weakness and imperfection bound to exist among Christians even in their outward lives. They knew that no one could, in his everyday life among men, live so discreetly as not at some time or other, by word, gesture or act, to give offense to someone, moving him to anger. Such perfection of life is found in no family, not even with husband and wife. The case is the same as in the human body: one member frequently comes in conflict with another; a man may inadvertently bite his tongue or scratch his face. He who would be a saint so stern and selfish as to endure no evil words or acts, and to excuse no imperfections, is unfit to dwell among men. He knows nothing of Christian love, and can neither believe nor put into practice the article of the Creed concerning the forgiveness of sins.

[28] So the Christian's fire of love must be characterized, not by a dull, cold red, but by a warm scarlet — according to the Scriptures (Exodus 26:1), “Coccum bis tinctam” (rose-red). This love retains its fire and is really true, having which the Christian is not easily disheartened and overcome by wrath, impatience and revenge, but to a certain extent is able to endure and tolerate attacks upon himself calculated to distress. It manifests itself more strongly in suffering and enduring than in action.

[29] Therefore, Peter extols such love, declaring it to be a virtue potent not only to bear but to cover “a multitude of sins.” This statement he introduces from the Proverbs of Solomon (ch 10, 12). The Papists, however, pervert its meaning, explaining it in a way at variance with the doctrine of faith; they make of love to one's neighbor a work or virtue having merit with God. It is their desire to draw the conclusion that for the sake of our love our sins are covered; that is, forgiven and exterminated. But we shall not notice the dolts. It is clear enough from the text that reference is to hatred and love received from men; our own sins are not intended here, but the transgressions of others. To cover our sins in the sight of God, yet other love is requisite - the love of the Son of God, who alone is the bearer of sins in God's sight, and who, as John the Baptist says, takes away, bearing them upon his own shoulders, the sins of the whole world, including our own.

And the example of his love teaches that we, too, should in love cheerfully bear and freely forgive the sins of others against us.

[30] Solomon contrasts the two opposing principles of envious hatred and love and shows the effect of each. “Hatred,” he says, “stirreth up strifes; but love covereth all transgressions.” Where hatred and enmity dwell in the heart, they must inevitably stir up strife and bring misfortune. Animosity cannot restrain itself. It either bursts out in pernicious language clandestinely uttered against the object of enmity, or it openly demeans itself in a manner indicating its ill will. Hence follow reveling, cursing, quarreling and fighting, and, when wholly unrestrained, cruelty and murder. These things are due to the fact that the eyes of Younker Hate are so blinded by scorn and venom that he can see only evil in every man with whom he comes in contact; and when he actually finds it he will not let it alone, but stirs it, roots and frets in it, as the hog roots with defiled snout in offensive filth. “You must have viewed your neighbor from behind,” we say when one can speak and think only the worst of a neighbor though he may have many good traits. Hate really desires only that everyone be an enemy to his neighbor and speak the worst about him, and if he hears ought in his neighbor’s favor, he puts upon it the very worst construction, with the result that the other party is embittered and in turn comes to hate, curse and revile. Thus, the fire burns until only discord and mischief can obtain.

[31] But on the other hand, as Solomon tells us, Love is a virtue pure and precious. It neither utters nor thinks any evil of its neighbor. Rather, it covers sin; not one sin, nor two, but “a multitude of sins” — great masses of them, forests and seas of sin, as it were. That is, love has no desire to reflect itself in a neighbor’s sins and maliciously rejoice in them. It conducts itself as having neither seen nor heard them. Or, if they cannot be overlooked, it readily forgives, and so far as possible mends matters. Where nothing else can be done, it endures the sins of a neighbor without stirring up strife and making a bad matter worse.

[32] The apostle, upon authority of observation and experience, acknowledges that where people dwell together there must be mutual transgressions; it cannot be otherwise. No one will always do what is pleasing to others, and each is liable to commit open wrong. Peter would teach that since men must live together in their respective stations in life — for the Scriptures make no recognition of singular and intolerant saints who

would promptly run out of the world when some little thing takes place at variance with their opinions — -he who would live peaceably must so control himself as to be able to bear with others, to overlook their imperfections, and to cover their transgressions and thus avert further resulting evil. Where no toleration is exercised, where no wrong is forgiven and forgotten, hate and envy must find place. The sole office of these is to stir up strife and contention. No peace and rest is to be had where they exist; wrangling and fighting, oppression and bitterness, must obtain. The unbounded ill will, the innumerable strifes and wars, having place on earth, all result from the abominable evil of the lack of love among us and from the prevalence of pernicious hate, which leads to anger and revenge when opposition offers. Thus, we become enemies to one another instead of to evil, when it is our duty to love our fellow men.

[33] Now, if you would live as a Christian and enjoy peace in the world, you must make every effort to restrain your anger and not to give way to revenge as do others. Rather you must suppress these passions, subduing your hatred by love, and be able to overlook and bear, even though you have to suffer great pain and injustice. So doing you will develop a noble character fitted to accomplish much good through patience and humility, to allay and abolish enmity, and strife, and thereby to reform and convert others. If you are unwilling to be patient under injustice, then go on hating and envying, impatiently blustering about and seeking revenge. But from such a proceeding only strife and disquietude can be your portion, though your complaints be long and your lamentations loud. You may run hither and thither, and still you will not find the truth otherwise than as I have stated. This text would have to be done away with first, and the Scriptures falsified.

[34] Paul, having in mind Solomon's saying about love, in extolling the same virtue amplifies the latter's statement with various expressions, in the thirteenth of 1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13). Among other things he says there (verses 5-8): "Love seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth," etc. This, mark you, is "being fervent in love," as Peter calls it. Here is the heat, the fire, effective to consume all evil and to replace it with only good. This fire will not permit itself to be quenched;

it surmounts all checking. Whatever of evil is heaped upon it, it remains in itself good, and works only good.

[35] The essential property, the *differentia essentialis*, of genuine love, as its nature requires fervency, is the fact that it cannot be embittered. He who has it, will not cease to love, to do good and to endure evil. In a word love cannot hate; it cannot be at enmity with anyone. No evil can be wrought too great for love to endure. No one can commit against it more sins than it can cover. It cannot be enraged to the point of refusing to forgive. Its attitude is not unlike that of the mother toward her child. The child may be imperfect and impure, even filthy, but the mother notes it not, even if she sees it. Her love blinds her. The eyes wherewith she looks upon her child as the beautiful and God-given fruit of her own body are so pure that she overlooks all imperfections, regarding them as nothing. Indeed, she excuses, even glorifies, them. Although the child squints, it must not be called squint-eyed, but love-eyed, and even a wart must be thought to become it.

[36] Behold, this is covering sins with love — a virtue peculiar to Christians. The world does not possess that virtue. Such love is impossible to it, whatever its pretensions and ostentation's in that respect. However precious the world's love may be, it is subject to delusion, vanity and hypocrisy; for the world is false in appearance and pretension. No worldling likes to be regarded hateful and envious toward his neighbor, but succeeds in conducting himself, so far as word and gesture are concerned, in an affable manner to all. This attitude he maintains so long as we show him favors and obey his pleasure. But when our love for him becomes a little disaffected and we happen to offer a word he regards insulting, he promptly withdraws his affections and begins to complain and to rage as if he had been done a great wrong. He makes out he is under no obligation to endure the injustice; and he boastingly plumes himself on having shown great faithfulness and love to the offender, such fidelity as would have led him readily to share with that one the very heart in his body, and now he is so ill repaid that henceforth he will leave such people to be served by the devil. Such is the world's love. The world loves not "in deed," but "in word," as John expresses it. 1 John 3:18. It has no sincerity of heart. Its love is a mere *ignis fatuus* [friar's lantern, false hope], shining but having no fire; a love which endures not, but is blown out by a breath — extinguished with a

word. The reason of it all is, the world seeks only its own. It would be served, would receive from others, and not make any return, particularly if response must entail any suffering and forbearance on its part.

[37] “But,” you may say, “shall evil go unpunished? What would be the result were all evil to be tolerated and covered up? Would not that be giving the wicked opportunity to carry out their evil designs? Would it not encourage them in their wickedness until life would not be safe to anyone?” I reply: We have often stated what individuals properly merit our anger, and the extent and manner of punishment to be awarded them. It is truly the office of civil government and also of the father of every family to visit anger upon evil, and to punish and restrain it. Again, every pastor and preacher is commissioned — yes, every godly Christian — to admonish and censure when he sees a neighbor committing sin, just as one brother in a family admonishes another. But to be angry with evil and to inflict official punishment — punishment by virtue of office — is a different thing from being filled with hatred and revenge or holding ill will and being unforgiving.

[38] It is not inconsistent with the character of love to be angry and to reprove when a neighbor is observed to sin. But true love feels no inclination to behold the sin and disgrace of a neighbor; rather, much rather, it desires his improvement. Just as parents correct with a rod a disobedient and obstinate child but do not cast it out and become enemies to it because of that disobedience, their object being only to reform the child, while the rod is cast away after chastisement; so, too, according to Christ’s words (Matthew 18:15-17), you may censure your brother when he sins, and manifest your displeasure and indignation, that he may perceive and confess his wrongdoing, and if he does not then amend his conduct, you may inform the congregation. At the same time, his obstinacy does not justify you in becoming his enemy, or in entertaining ill will toward him. As said before, love to be true must not be dull and cold, too indifferent to perceive a neighbor’s sins; it must endeavor to relieve him thereof. It must have the red fire of fervor. He who truly loves will be distressed that a beloved neighbor wickedly trespasses against God and himself. Again, true love does not pale with hatred and revenge. It continues to glow red when the possessor’s heart is moved with sympathy, is filled with compassion, for its neighbor. True, when fervor and admonition fail to effect any reform, the

sincere-hearted Christian must separate himself from his obstinate neighbor and regard him as a heathen; nevertheless, he must not become his neighbor's enemy nor wish him evil.

[39] Anger and censure prompted by sincere love are very different from the wrath, hatred and revengefulness of the world, which seeks only its own interests and is unwilling to tolerate any opposition to its pleasure. True love is moved to anger only when a neighbor's good demands. Though not insensible to evil and not approving evil, it is yet able to tolerate, to forgive and cover, all wrongs against itself, and it leaves untried no expedient that may make a neighbor better. Sincere love makes a clear distinction between the evil and the person; it is unfriendly to the former, but kind to the latter. "Using hospitality one to another without murmuring: according as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

[40] Having admonished all Christians to love one another generally, Peter mentions various instances where love should be externally manifested among Christians and speaks particularly of those who have been favored above others with special gifts and special offices in the Church, whereby they are able to serve their fellows. Thus, he teaches that the Christian's whole external conduct should be regulated by that love which seeks not its own advantage, which aims not at profiting itself, but lives to serve its neighbor.

[41] First, Peter says, "Using hospitality one to another." The reference is to works of love relative to the various physical needs of a neighbor. Christians are to serve one another by ministering temporal blessings. Especially are the poor and the wretched to be remembered, they who are strangers or pilgrims among us, or come to us houseless and homeless. These should receive the willing ministrations of Christians, and none be allowed to suffer want.

[42] In the apostles' time, the primitive days of the Church, Christians were everywhere persecuted, driven from their possessions and forced to wander hither and thither in poverty and exile. It was necessary then to admonish Christians in general, and particularly those who had something of their own, not to permit these destitute ones to suffer want, but to provide for them. So, too, is it today incumbent upon Christians to provide for the

really poor — not lazy beggars, or vagabonds — the outdoor pensioners, so called; and to maintain those who, because of old age or other infirmity, are unable to support themselves. The churches should establish common treasuries for the purpose of providing alms for cases of this kind. It was so ordained of the apostles in Acts 6:3. Paul, also, in many places admonishes to such works of love; for instance (Romans 12:13): “Communicating to the necessities of the saints.”

[43] Moreover, as Peter says, hospitality is to be extended “without murmuring” — not with reluctance and aversion, as the way of the world is. The world is particularly reluctant when called upon to give to Christ the Lord, in other words to his poor servants the pastors and preachers, or to their children, into whose mouths they must count every bit of bread. It regards oppressive and burdensome the contributing of even a dime for that purpose. At the same time, it lavishly bestows its gifts upon the devil; as, for instance, under popedom it gave liberally and willingly to indolent, useless monks and shameless, wicked knaves, Impostors and seducers. Such is the inconsistency of the world; and it is a just punishment from God that it is made unworthy to contribute where it well might toward the preservation of God’s Word and his poor Church; and that it must give to other and ungrateful purposes. Christian love must be sincere enough to do good “without murmuring.” Paul says (Romans 12:8) to “let him that showeth mercy do so with cheerfulness,” or willingly, without restraint. Again (2 Corinthians 9:7), “God loveth a cheerful giver,” etc.

Stewards of God’s Gifts.

[44] Peter speaks also of love’s work in relation to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are bestowed for the good of the entire Church and particularly for its spiritual offices or government. He would have the Spirit’s gifts used in the service of others and admonishes Christians to consider all they have as given of God. The heathen has no such thought, but live as if life and all they possess were of their own attaining. But let Christians know they are under obligation to serve God with their gifts; and God is served when they employ them for the advantage and service of the people - reforming them, bringing them to a knowledge of God, and thus building up, strengthening and perpetuating the Church. Of such love the world knows nothing at all.

[45] So then, Peter says, we are to use the gifts called spiritual — gifts of the Holy Spirit — in the Christian Church “as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” He would have us know they are conferred upon us of grace. They are not given us to exalt ourselves therewith, but to make us stewards of the house of God — of his Church. They are manifold and variously distributed; for no one may possess all. Some may have certain gifts and offices, and certain others. But the mutual way in which these gifts are united and related makes one individual serve another.

[46] Peter would remind especially each individual to take heed to the duties of his particular office. In the pursuance of his own occupation, each is to attend faithfully to whatever is committed to his charge; to do whatever he is commanded to do. As the Scriptures teach in many places, there is no work nobler than being obedient to the particular calling and work assigned of God and satisfied therein; faithfully serving one’s neighbor and not gazing after what is committed to, or enjoined upon, another, nor presuming to transcend the limits of one’s own commission. Many fickle, unstable spirits, however, especially the presumptuous, proud and self-sufficient, imagine themselves to have such measure of the Spirit and of skill that their own calling is not sufficient for them; they must control all things, must superintend and criticize the work of others. They are malignant souls, doing nothing but to stir up mischief, and having not the grace to perform any good work, even though they have noble gifts. For they do not make use of the gifts of their office to serve their neighbors; they only minister therewith to their own glory and advantage.

[47] The apostle goes on to show how God distributes his gifts in various ways; he speaks of “manifold gifts.” Paul likewise (1 Corinthians 12:4-5) teaches that each one is given a special gift, and a particular office wherein he is to exercise his gift, continuing in his own sphere until called to another. Again, Paul says (Romans 12:6-7): “Whether prophecy, let us prophesy...or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry.” It is not enough to have numerous special gifts; grace is also requisite — “manifold grace of God,” Peter says. We must so use our gifts that God may be pleased to add his blessing, if we would successfully and profitably serve the Church and accomplish good. God’s grace will not be given to those who do not, in faith and in obedience to his command, fulfill the obligations of their calling. Now Peter proceeds to illustrate, giving a rule of how we

are to use our individual gifts. He says: “If any man speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth.”

[48] It is highly essential that the Church observe this doctrine. Had it been regarded heretofore; the world would not have been filled with anti-Christian errors and deceptions. For it fixes the bounds, it sets the mark, for all aspiring church members, however exalted their office and gifts; the limits of these they must not transcend.

[49] The apostle classifies Church government in two divisions: teaching, or “ministering” the Word; and holding office and fulfilling its duties in accordance with the teachings of the Word. In both cases, he tells us, we are to take heed that we are not actuated by our own ideas and pleasures; our teaching and ruling must ever be God’s Word and work or office.

[50] The workings of the Christian Church are not the same as the processes of civil government. They are unlike the operations that have to do with outward things, with temporal possessions. In the latter case men are guided by their own understanding. At the dictates of their own reason do they rule, instituting laws and regulations, and prohibiting, receiving and distributing according to those regulations. In the Christian Church we have a spiritual government of the conscience, an effecting of obedience in God’s sight. Whatever is spoken or taught, promised or done, we may be assured, will avail and stand before God; indeed, we may know it has origin with him, whereby we are justified in declaring: “God himself uttered the command or performed the work; for in us, his tabernacles where he lives and rules, essentially he, as rightful Master in the house, commands and performs all, though employing the instrumentality of men’s lips and hands.” Assurance of Pure Doctrine Essential

[51] In the first place, therefore, it is necessary that both preachers and hearers take heed to doctrine and have clear, unmistakable evidence that what they embrace is really the true Word of God revealed from heaven; the doctrine given to the holy and primitive fathers, prophets and apostles; the doctrine Christ himself confirmed and commanded to be taught. We are not permitted to employ the teaching dictated by any man’s pleasure or fancy. We may not adapt the Word to mere human knowledge and reason. We are

not to trifle with the Scriptures, to juggle with the Word of God, as if it would admit of being explained to suit the people; of being twisted, distended and patched to effect peace and agreement among men. Otherwise, there would be no sure, permanent foundation whereon the conscience might rely.

[52] Nor is it any more admissible for one who chances to have an office of greater influence than others, who is peculiarly holy, or who is of exalted spirit and intellect — even though he were an apostle — to presume upon his gifts and the office and take authority to teach according to his own inclinations, requiring his hearers to accept unquestioningly his word and rely upon it because what he teaches must be right. But thus the Pope in time past persuaded the world that because he occupied the seat of the apostles, the highest office, and assembled the councils, the latter could not err, and that therefore all men are obliged to believe and obey what they resolve and confirm.

[53] This theory is opposed by Peter's teaching, and all the Scriptures forbid men, at the peril of losing eternal salvation, to rely on or respect anyone or anyone's gifts, in the things pertaining to faith. The Scriptures teach rather that we are to prove and judge all doctrine by the clear and sure Word of God given us from heaven and supported by the reliable, concurrent testimony of the apostles and the Church from the beginning. Paul, by way of denouncing the false teachers who boasted of being disciples of eminent apostles and relied upon the latter and their reputation, pronounced this sentence (Galatians 1:8): "Though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema."

[54] Similarly, in the offices or government of the Church, there must first be convincing evidence that command and office are instituted of God. No one may be permitted to institute, promise or do anything of his own power or pleasure and compel men to regard it as divine authority or as essential to salvation, simply because of his appointment to office. Nevertheless, the Pope, by virtue of his ecclesiastical office, undertook to domineer over all men, to issue commands and institute laws and religious services binding upon everyone. He who holds and would exercise office in the Church must first give clear Scripture proof of having derived his office from the authority of God. He must be able to say: "I did not institute such

and such a proceeding; it is of God.” Then they who comply may be assured they are obeying, not the individual, but God.

[55] For instance, if in obedience to Christ’s command I, as a carer of souls, or servant of the Church, administer the holy sacrament or pronounce absolution; if I admonish, comfort, reprove; I can say: “That which I do, I do not; Christ performs it.” For I act not of my own design, but in obedience to the command of Christ into his injunction. The Pope and his adherents cannot make the above assertion. For they pervert the order and commandment of Christ the Lord when, in the sacrament, they withhold the cup from the laity, and when they change the use of the sacrament or mass, making it a sacrifice for the living and the dead. And thus they do also by innumerable other abominations in their false worship, things established without God’s command, indeed contrary thereto; for instance, the invocation of dead saints, and similar idolatries, introduced by the Pope under cover of his office, as if he had the power from Christ to institute and command such things. Assurance of Divine Efficiency Essential

[56] In the second place, it is not enough that office and commandment be God-appointed. We his ministers should be conscious — and the people should so be taught — that efficacy of office is not of human effort but is God’s power and work. In other words, that which the office was designed to accomplish is not effective by virtue of our speech or action, but by virtue of God’s commandment and appointment. He it is who orders; and himself will effectively operate through that office which is obedient to God’s command. For instance, in baptism, the Lord’s Supper and absolution, we are not to be concerned about the person administering the sacraments or pronouncing absolution — who he is, how righteous, how holy, how worthy. Worthiness or unworthiness of either administering or receiving hand effects nothing; all the virtue lies in God’s command and ordinance.

[57] This is the explanation of Peter’s phrase, “the strength or ability which God supplieth.” Effect is produced, not through man’s power, not in obedience to man’s will; but through the “strength” of God and because of his ordering. No man has a right presumptuously to boast his own power and ability effective, as the Pope does in his pretensions about keys and ecclesiastical power. Know that it is necessary to the efficacy of your office and the salutary character of your work or authority in the Church that God

himself give and exert the influence. And that influence is exerted when, as before said, God's Word and testimony are present that the ministry in question is commanded, or authorized, of God.

[58] Therefore it is earnestly enjoined that in the Church no attempt should be made by any individual to institute any order or perform any work, much or little, great or small, merely at the prompting of his own inclinations or in obedience to the advice of any man. Let him who would teach and work be sure that his words and acts are really of God — commanded by him. Until he is certain in this respect, let him abandon his office — suspend his ministry; let him engage in something else for a time. Nor should we hear or believe anything presented to us that does not bear indisputable evidence of being the divine Word, or command. For God will not permit mockery of himself in the things of his own prerogative and on which depends the salvation of souls; for souls will be led to eternal ruin where this rule and command are disregarded. "That in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

[59] Here is named the motive for all effort in the Christian community. No one may seek for nor ascribe to himself power and honor because of his office and gifts. Power and glory belong only to God. He himself calls his Church, and rules, sanctifies and preserves it through his Word and his Spirit. To this end he bestows upon us his gifts. And all is done purely of grace, wholly for the sake of his beloved Son, Christ the Lord. Therefore, in return for the favor and ineffable goodness bestowed upon us regardless of our merits, we ought to thank and praise God, directing all our efforts to the recognition and glory of his name.

Pentecost. The History of Pentecost.

Text: Acts 2:1-13.

1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

12 And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?

13 Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. Acts 2:1-13

The Gift of the Holy Spirit.

[1] The historical facts of this day, as well as the beautiful sermon the Holy Spirit delivered through the apostle Peter, which might appropriately be fully treated at this time, we shall leave for the special sermons on the various festivals of the year. For the present we will but briefly speak of the occasion of this festival, and of the office of the Holy Spirit.

[2] The festival we call “Pentecost” had origin as follows: When God was about to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, he permitted them to celebrate the Feast of the Passover on the night of their departure; and commanded them on every annual recurrence of the season to observe the same feast in commemoration of their liberation from bondage and their departure from Egypt. Fifty days later, in their journey through the wilderness, they arrived at Mount Sinai. There God gave them the Law, through Moses; and there they were commanded to observe annually, in commemoration of that giving of the Law, the fiftieth day after the Feast of the Passover. Hence the name “Feast of Pentecost,” the word “Pentecost” coming from the Greek *Pentecoste*, or “fiftieth day.” Our Saxons, rather more in conformity to the Greek, use the word *Pfingsten*. So we have it here of Luke: “When the day of Pentecost was now come,” or “fully come” — when the Jews had properly commemorated the giving of the Law of God on Mount Sinai — the Holy Spirit came, in accordance with Christ’s promise, and gave them a new law. We now celebrate this feast, not because of the old historical event, but because of the new one — the sending of the Holy Spirit. It is in order, then, to give a little instruction concerning the difference between our Pentecost and that of the Jews.

Literal Law and Spiritual Law

[3] The occasion of the Jews’ observance was the giving of the literal law; but it is ours to celebrate the giving of the spiritual law. To present the point more clearly, we cite Paul’s distinction of the two covenants. 2 Corinthians 3:6. And these two covenants respectively relate to two kinds of people.

[4] First, there is the written law commanded of God and composed of written words. It is styled “written” or “literal” because it goes no farther and does not enter the heart, nor are there any resulting works other than hypocritical and extorted ones. Consisting only of letters — a written law

— it is wholly dead. Its province being to kill, it ruled a dead people. With dead hearts men could not sincerely observe the commandments of God. Were every individual left to do as he pleased, being uninfluenced by fear, not one would be found choosing to be controlled by the Law. Unquestionably, human nature is conscious of the fact that while it prefers to follow its own inclinations it is impelled to do otherwise; for it reasons: “If I observe not God’s commandments, he will punish me, casting me into hell.” Thus, our nature is conscious of obeying unwillingly and contrary to desire. Because of the punishment men fear, they soon become enemies to God; they feel themselves sinners, unable to stand before God, and consequently not acceptable to him. Indeed, they would rather there were no God. Such enmity to God remains persistently in the heart, however beautifully nature may adorn itself outwardly. We see, therefore, how the Law, so long as it consists merely of written words, can make no one righteous, can enter no heart. Upon this topic we have elsewhere preached and written at length.

[5] The other law is spiritual; not written with ink and pen, nor uttered by lips as Moses read from the tables of stone. We learn from the historical record of the event that the Holy Spirit descended from heaven and filled all the assembled multitude, and they appeared with parting, fiery tongues and preached so unlike they were wont to do that all men were filled with amazement. The Spirit came pouring into their hearts, making them different beings, making them creatures who loved and willingly obeyed God. This change was simply the manifestation of the Spirit himself, his work in the heart. He wrote in those hearts his pure and fiery flame restoring them to life and causing them to respond with fiery tongues and efficient hands. They became new creatures, aware of possessing altogether different minds and different tendencies. Then all was life and light; understanding, will and heart burned and delighted in whatever was acceptable to God. Such is the true distinction between the written law of God and the spiritual. Herein we perceive what is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Office of the Holy Spirit

[6] From this we should learn what is the office of the Holy Spirit in the Church, and how or by what means he is received in the heart and works there. In time past it was preached that he merely endorses what the councils conclude and the Pope establishes in the Spiritless papal Church.

The fact is, however, the doings of Pope and councils are mere outward matters; they relate to external commands and government. The above theory is, therefore, wholly inconsistent and perverse. Of the work of the Holy Spirit, the Papists make a dead, written law, when it is really a living, spiritual law. Thus, they render the Holy Spirit a Moses, and his words mere human prattle. It is all due to ignorance of the character of the Holy Spirit, of the purpose of his coming and the nature of his office. Therefore, let us learn and firmly grasp those things and be able rightly to distinguish the Spirit's office.

[7] Observe here, the Holy Spirit descends and fills the hearts of the disciples sitting in fear and sorrow. He renders their tongues fiery and cloven and inflames them with love unto boldness in preaching Christ — unto free and fearless utterance. Plainly, then, it is not the office of the Spirit to write books or to institute laws. He writes in the hearts of men, creating a new heart, so that man may rejoice before God, filled with love for him and ready, in consequence, to serve his fellows gladly.

[8] What are the means and process the Spirit employs to change and renew the heart? It is through preaching Jesus Christ the Lord, as Christ himself says (John 15:26): “When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness of me.” As we have often heard, the Gospel is the message God would have preached worldwide, declaring to every individual that since no man can through the Law be made righteous, but must rather become more unrighteous, God sent his own beloved Son to shed his blood and die for our sins, from which sins we could not be released by our own effort.

[9] It is not enough simply that Christ be preached; the Word must be believed. Therefore, God sends the Holy Spirit to impress the preaching upon the heart — to make it in here and live therein. Unquestionably, Christ accomplished all — took away our sins and overcame every obstacle, enabling us to become, through him, lords over all things. But the treasure lies in a heap; it is not everywhere distributed and applied. Before we can enjoy it, the Holy Spirit comes and communicates it to the heart, enabling us to believe and say, “I too, am one who shall have the blessing.” To everyone who hears is grace offered through the Gospel; to grace is he

called, as Christ says (Matthew 11:28), “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden,” etc.

[10] Now, with the belief that God has come to our rescue and given us this priceless blessing, inevitably the human heart must be filled with joy and with gratitude to God, and must exultingly cry: “Dear Father, since it is thy will to manifest toward me inexpressible love and fidelity, I will love thee sincerely, and willingly do what is pleasing to thee.” The believing heart never sees God with jealous eye. It does not fear being cast into hell as it did before the Holy Spirit came, when it was conscious of no love, no goodness, no faithfulness, on God’s part, but only wrath and displeasure. But once let the Holy Spirit impress the heart with the fact of God’s good will and graciousness towards it, and the resulting joy and confidence will impel it to do and suffer for God’s sake whatever necessity demands.

[11] Let us, then, learn to recognize the Holy Spirit — to know that his mission is to present to us the priceless Christ and all his blessings; to reveal them to us through the Gospel and apply them to the heart, making them ours. When our hearts are sensible of this work of the Spirit, naturally we are compelled to say: “If our works avail naught, and the Holy Spirit alone must accomplish our salvation, then why burden ourselves with works and laws?” By the doctrine of the Spirit, all human works and laws are excluded, even the laws of Moses. The Holy Spirit’s instruction is superior to that of all books. The Spirit-taught individual understands the Scriptures better than does he who is occupied solely with the Law.

[12] Hence, our only use for books is to strengthen our faith and to show others written testimony to the Spirit’s teaching. For we may not keep our faith to ourselves but must let it shine out; and to establish it the Scriptures are necessary. Be careful, therefore, not to regard the Holy Spirit as a Lawmaker, but as proclaiming to your heart the Gospel of Christ and setting you so free from the literal law that not a letter of it remains, except as a medium for preaching the Gospel. Believers Must Yet Resist Sin

[13] Here we should be intelligent and know that in one sense all is not accomplished when the Holy Spirit is received. The possessor of the Spirit is not at once entirely perfect, pure in all respects, no more sensible of the Law and of sin. We do not preach the doctrine that the Spirit’s office is one of complete accomplishment, but rather that it is progressive; he operates

continuously and increasingly. Hence, there is not to be found an individual perfect in righteousness and happiness, devoid of sin and sorrow, ever serving all men with pleasure. The Scriptures make plain the Holy Spirit's office — to liberate from sin and terror. But the work is not then complete. The Christian must, in some measure, still feel sin in his heart and experience the terrors of death; he is affected by whatever disturbs other sinners. While unbelievers are so deep in their sins as to be indifferent, believers are keenly conscious of theirs; but Christians are supported by the Holy Spirit, who consoles and strengthens till his work is fully accomplished. It is terminated when they no longer feel their sins.

[14] So I say we must be prudent; we must take heed we do not arrogantly and presumptuously boast possession of the Holy Spirit, as do certain proud fanatics. The danger is in becoming too secure, in imagining ourselves perfect in all respects. The pious Christian is still flesh and blood like other men; he but strives to resist evil lusts and other sins and is unwillingly sensible of evil desires. But he who is not a Christian is carelessly secure, wholly unconcerned about his sins.

[15] It is of no significance that we feel evil lusts, provided we endeavor to resist them. One must not go by his feelings and consider himself lost if he has sinful desires. At the same time, he must, so long as life lasts, contend with the sins he perceives in himself. He must unceasingly groan to be relieved of them and must permit the Holy Spirit to operate in him. There is in believers continual groaning after holiness — groaning too deep for expression, as Paul says in Romans 8:26. But Christians have a blessed listener — the Holy Spirit himself. He readily perceives sincere longing after purity and sends the conscience divine comfort. There will ever be in us mingled purity and imperfection; we must be conscious both of the Holy Spirit's presence and of our own sins — our imperfections. We are like the sick man in the hands of the physician who is to restore him to health. Let no one think: "Here is a man who possesses the Holy Spirit; consequently, he must be perfectly strong, having no imperfections and performing only worthy works." No, think not so; for so long as we live in the flesh here on earth, we cannot attain such a degree of perfection as to be wholly free from weakness and faults. The holy apostles themselves often lamented their temptations and sorrows. Their feelings concealed from them the Holy Spirit's presence, though they were aware of his strengthening and

sustaining power in their temptations, a power conveyed through the Word and through faith.

[16] The Holy Spirit is given only to the anxious and distressed heart. Only therein can the Gospel profit us and produce fruit. The gift is too sublime and noble for God to cast it before dogs and swine, who, when by chance they hear the preached message, devour it without knowing to what they do violence. The heart must recognize and feel its wretchedness and its inability to extricate itself. Before the Holy Spirit can come to the rescue, there must be a struggle in the heart. Let no one imagine he will receive the Spirit in any other way.

[17] We see this truth illustrated in the narrative here. The beloved disciples were filled with fear and terror. They were disconsolate and discouraged and sunk in unbelief and despair. Only with great difficulty and effort did Christ raise them again. Yet their only failing was their faint-heartedness; they feared the heavens would fall upon them. Even the Lord himself could scarce comfort them until he said: “The Holy Spirit shall descend upon you from heaven, impressing myself upon your hearts until you shall know me and, through me, the Father. Then will your hearts be comforted, strengthened and filled with joy. And so was the promise fulfilled to them on this day of Pentecost.

Pentecost Monday. Peter’s Sermon on Joel’s Prophecy on the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Note: Luther’s Church Postil contains no sermons on the epistle selections for Whit-Monday and Whit-Tuesday.

Text: Acts 2:14-28.

14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:

15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:

21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

25 For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:

26 Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope:

27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

28 Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Acts 2:14-28

Only the text, without a sermon, is printed in the edition of 1559 of Luther's works. This and the following epistle text are too long to consider here, as they contain so many beautiful quotations from the Old Testament, which should not be passed over too briefly. Hence their discussion is reserved for their proper place.

Pentecost Tuesday. The Good Shepherd.

Text: John 10:1-11.

1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.

7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.
John 10:1-11

I. True Preachers of the Word Must Be Regularly Called

[1] This Gospel treats of the office of the ministry, how it is constituted, what it accomplishes and how it is misused. It is indeed very necessary to know these things, for the office of preaching is second to none in Christendom. St. Paul highly esteemed this office, for the reason that through it the Word of God was proclaimed, which is effective to the salvation of all who believe it. He says to the Romans 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." We must now consider this theme, since our Gospel lesson presents and includes it. It will, however, be a stench in the nostrils of the pope! But how shall I deal differently with him? The text says: "He that entereth not by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber (murderer)."

[2] This verse has been explained as having reference to those who climb, by their presumption, into the best church livings through favor and wealth, recommendations or their own power, not obtaining them by regular appointment and authority. And at present the most pious jurists are punishing people for running to Rome after fees and benefices, or after ecclesiastical preferment and offices. This they call simony. The practice is truly deplorable, for much depends upon being regularly called and appointed. No one should step into the office and preach from his own presumption and without a commission from those having the authority. But under present conditions, if we should wait until we received a commission to preach and to administer the sacraments, we would never perform those offices as long as we live. For the bishops in our day press into their offices by force, and those who have the power of preferment are influenced by friendship and rank. But I pass this by, and will speak of the true office, into which no one forces his way (even though his devotion urge him) without being called by others having the authority.

[3] True, we all have authority to preach, yea, we must preach God's name; we are commanded to do so. Peter says in his first Epistle, 1 Peter

2:9-10: “But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: who in time past were no people, but now are the people of God: who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” Nevertheless, Paul establishes order in Corinthians 14:40 and says: “In whatever you do among yourselves, let everything be done decently and in order.” In a family there must be order. If all the heirs strive for lordship, anarchy will reign in the family. If, however, by common consent, one of the number is selected for the heirship, the others withdrawing, harmony will obtain. Likewise, in the matter of preaching we must make selection that order may be preserved. But since all who are Christians have authority to preach, what will be the outcome? for women will also want to preach. Not so. St. Paul forbids women to put themselves forward as preachers in a congregation of men and says: “They should be subject to their husbands.” For when a woman will not submit to being led and governed, the result will be anything but good. These are, however, the words of Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11-12: “Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection. But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness.” If it happened, however, that no man could be secured for the office, then a woman might step up and preach to others as best she could; but in no other instance.

II. Preachers of the Word to Preach Nothing but the Word.

[4] So much for the call into the office. But Christ is not speaking of that here; for something more is required, namely, that no rival or supplementary doctrine be introduced, nor another word be taught than Christ has taught. Christ says in Matthew 23:2-4: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat: all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe: but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not. Yea, they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger.” Although these of whom Christ here speaks were regularly appointed, yet they were thieves and murderers; for they taught variations from Christ’s teaching. Christ reproves them in another place, in Matthew 15:3, where he holds up before them their traditions and tells them how,

through their own inventions, they have transgressed the commandments of God, yea, totally abolished them. We have also many prophets who were regularly appointed and still were misled, like Balaam, of whom we read in Numbers 22; also Nathan, described in 2 Samuel 7:3. Similarly many bishops have erred.

[5] Here Christ says: He who would enter by the door must be ready to speak the Word concerning Christ and his word must center in Christ. Let it be called “coming” when one preaches aright; the approaching is spiritual, and through the Word — upon the ears of his hearers, the preacher comes at last into the sheepfold — the heart of believers. Christ says that the shepherd must enter by the door; that is, preach nothing but Christ, for Christ is the door into the sheepfold.

[6] But where there are intruders, who make their own door, their own hole to crawl through, their own addition. different from that which Christ taught, they are thieves. Of these Paul says to the Romans 16:17-18. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent.” Paul does not speak of opposing or antagonistic doctrines, but of those placed beside the true doctrine; they are additions, making divisions. Paul calls it a rival doctrine, an addition, an occasion of stumbling, an offense and a byway, when one establishes the conscience upon his own goodness or deeds.

[7] Now, the Gospel is sensitive, complete and pre-eminent: it must be intolerant of additions and rival teachings. The doctrine of earning entrance into heaven by virtue of fastings, prayers and penance is a branch road, which the Gospel will not tolerate. But our Church authorities endorse these things, hence they are thieves and murderers; for they do violence to our consciences, which is slaying and destroying the sheep. How is this accomplished? If only I am directed into a branch or parallel road, then my soul is turned from God upon that road, where I must perish. Thus, this road is the cause of my death. The conscience and heart of man must be founded upon one single Word or they will come to grief. “All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field.” Isaiah 40:6.

[8] The doctrines of men, however admirable, fall to the ground, and with them the conscience that has built upon them. There is no help nor remedy. But the Word of God is eternal and must endure forever; no devil can overthrow it. The foundation is laid upon which the conscience may be established forever. The words of men must perish and everything that cleaves to them. Those who enter not by the door — that is, those who do not speak the true and pure Word of God, without any addition — do not lay the right foundation; they destroy and torture and slaughter the sheep. Therefore, Christ says further in this Gospel: “But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice.”

III. A True Preacher Should First Use the Law Aright and Then Preach the Gospel.

[9] The porter here is the preacher who rightly teaches the Law — shows that the Law exists and must reveal to us our helplessness; that the works of the Law do not help us, and yet they are insistent. He then opens to the shepherd, that is, to Christ the Lord, and lets him alone feed the sheep. For the office of the Law is at an end; it has accomplished its mission of revealing to the heart its sins until it is completely humbled. Then Christ comes and makes a lamb out of the sheep — feeds it with his Gospel and directs it how to regain cheer for the heart so hopelessly troubled and crushed by the Law.

[10] The lamb then hears Christ’s voice and follows it. It has the choicest of pastures and knows the voice of the shepherd. But the voice of a stranger it never hears and never follows. Just as soon as one preaches to it about works, it is worried and its heart cannot receive the teaching with joy. It knows very well that nothing is accomplished by means of works; for one may do as much as he will, still he carries a heavy spirit and he thinks he has not done enough, nor done rightly. But when the Gospel comes — the voice of the shepherd says: God gave to the world his only Son, that all who believe on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Then is the heart happy; it feeds upon these words and finds them good. The lamb has found its satisfying pasture; it wants none other. Yea, when it is given other pasture, it flees from it and will not feed therein. This pasture always attracts the sheep, and the sheep also find it. God says in the prophecy of

Isaiah: “So shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish all in the things whereto I sent it.” Isaiah 55:11. “And he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. When he hath put forth all his owns, he goeth before them and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers.”

IV. The Hearers Have the Right To Examine and Judge a Sermon.

[11] In this text there are two thoughts worthy of note: the liberty of faith, and the power to judge. You know that our soul-murderers have proposed to us that what the councils and the learned doctors decide and decree, that we should accept, and not judge for ourselves whether it is right or not. They have become so certain of the infallibility of the councils and doctors that they have now established the edict, publicly seen, that if we do not accept what they say, we are put under the ban. Now, let us take a spear in hand and make a hole in their shield; yea, their resolutions shall be a spider’s web. And you should, moreover, use upon them the spear which, until now, they have used upon us, and hold before them its point.

[12] Remember well that the sheep have to pass judgment upon that which is placed before them. They should say: We have Christ as our Lord and prefer his Word to the words of any man or to those of the angels of darkness. We want to examine and judge for ourselves whether the pope, the bishops and their followers do right or not. For Christ says here that the sheep judge and know which is the right voice and which is not. Now let them come along. Have they decreed anything? We will examine whether it is right, and according to our own judgment interpret that which is a private affair for each individual Christian, knowing that the authority to do this is not human, but divine. Even the real sheep flee from a stranger and hold to the voice of their shepherd.

[13] Upon this authority, the Gospel knocks all the councils, all the papistic laws, to the ground, granting to us that we should receive nothing without judging it, that we have besides the power to judge, and that such judgment stands until the present day. The papists have taken from us the sword, so that we have not been able to repel any false doctrine, and,

moreover, they have by force introduced false teachings among us. If now we take the sword from them they will be sorry. And we must truly take it, not by force, but by means of the Word, letting go all else that we have, saying: I am God's sheep, whose Word I wish to appropriate to myself. If you will give me that, I will acknowledge you to be a shepherd. If you, however, add another Gospel to this one and do not give me the pure Gospel, then I will not consider you a shepherd, and will not listen to your voice; for the office of which you boast extends no farther than the Word goes. If we find one to be a shepherd, we should receive him as such: if he is not, we should remove him; for the sheep shall judge the voice of the shepherd. If he does not give us the right kind of pasture, we should bid farewell to such a shepherd, that is, to the bishop; for a hat of pearls and a staff of silver do not make a shepherd or a bishop, but rather does the office depend upon his care of the sheep and their pasture.

[14] Now the papists object to judgment being passed upon any of their works; for this reason, they have intruded and taken from us the sword which we might use for such a purpose. Also, they dictate that we must accept, without any right of judgment, whatever they propose. And it has almost come to such a pass that whenever the pope breathes they make an article of faith out of it, and they have proclaimed that the authorities have the right to pass such laws for their subjects as they desire, independent of the judgment of the latter. These conditions mean ruin to the Christians, so much so that a hundred thousand swords should be desired for one pope. This they know very well, and they cling hard to their laws. If they would permit unbiased judgment, their laws would be set aside, and they would have to preach the pure Word; but such a course would reduce the size of their stomachs and the number of their horses.

[15] Therefore, be ye aroused by this passage of Scripture to hew to pieces and thrust through everything that is not in harmony with the Gospel, for it belongs to the sheep to judge, and not to the preachers. You have the authority and power to judge everything that is preached; that and nothing less. If we have not this power, then Christ vainly said to us in Matthew 7:15: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves." We could not beware if we had not the power to judge, but were obliged to accept everything they said and preached. V. Preachers Are to Force No One to Believe

[16] The second thought is, no one shall be forced to believe; for the sheep follow him whom they know and flee from strangers. Now, Christ's wish is that none be forced, but that they be permitted to follow from willing hearts and of their own desire; not out of fear, shame or strife. He would let the Word go forth and accomplish all. When their hearts are taken captive, then they will surely come of themselves. Faith does not go forth from the heart unless it has the Word of God.

[17] Our noblemen are now mad and foolish in that they undertake to drive people to believe by means of force and the sword. Christ here wishes the sheep to come of themselves, from their knowledge of his voice. The body may be forced, as the pope, for example, has by his laws coerced people to go to confession and to the Lord's Supper, but the heart cannot be taken captive. Christ wants it to be free. Although he had power to coerce men, he wished to win them through his pleasing, loving preaching. Whoever lays hold of Christ's word follows after him and permits nothing to tear him from it. The noblemen wish to drive the people to believe by means of the sword and fire; that is nonsense. Then let us see to it that we allow the pure Word of God to take its course, and afterward leave them free to follow, whom it has taken captive; yea, they will follow voluntarily.

[18] By this I do not wish to abolish the civil sword; for the hand can hold it within its grasp so that it does no one any harm, but it holds it inactive. It must be retained because of wicked villains who have no regard at all for the Word; but the sword cannot force the heart and bring it to faith. In view of its inability, it must keep silent in matters of faith; here one must enter by the door and preach the Word and make the heart free. Only in this way are men led to believe. These are the two expedients — for the pious and the wicked: the pious are to be drawn by the Word, and the wicked to be driven by the sword to observe order. VI. The Marks of False Preachers

[19] Now, Christ interprets his own words. He says that he is the door to the sheep, but all the others who came before him, that is, those who were not sent by God as the prophets were, but came of themselves, uncommissioned, are thieves and murderers; they steal his honor from God and strangle human souls by their false doctrines. But Christ is the door, and whoever enters by him will be saved, and will go in and out. and find pasture. Here Christ speaks of the Christian liberty. which means that Christians are now free from the curse and the tyranny of the Law, and may

keep the Law or not, according as they see that the love and need of their neighbor requires. This is what Paul did. When he was among the Jews, he kept the Law with the Jews; when among the gentiles, he kept it as they kept it, which he himself says in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23: “For though I was free from all men, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak: I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the gospel’s sake, that I may be a joint partaker thereof.”

[20] That the thieves and murderers, the false teachers and prophets, never do, they accomplish nothing but to steal, strangle and destroy the sheep. But Christ, the true and faithful shepherd, comes only that the sheep may have life and be fully satisfied. This is enough on today’s Gospel for the present. We will conclude and pray God for grace rightly to lay hold of it and understand it.

Pentecost Tuesday, Second Sermon.

Text: John 10:1-11.

1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.

7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.
John 10:1-11

[1] This Gospel lesson presents to us in a picture and parable that which is elsewhere taught concerning Christ's kingdom and the office of preaching in the Church. The same topic, is continued in the Gospel of the good shepherd immediately following our text. Both portions distinguish the different kinds of teaching that claim to point to heaven; and from these words we may correctly judge which are the true teachings of the Holy Spirit. There are three distinct kinds of teaching here considered. Only one of them can save the soul. The first is the teaching of those whom Christ calls thieves and murderers; the second, that of the porter of the sheepfold; the third, that of the true shepherd, to whom the porter opens and whom he permits to enter. John says that the disciples did not rightly understand this parable until Christ explained that he himself, and he alone, was the door of the sheepfold and that he was likewise the shepherd. We, too, would not understand it if he had not shown us the interpretation.

I. The First Class of Preachers, Thieves and Murderers.

[2] It is a fact that these three classes are always found in the Christian Church. Herein is danger, and the need that the people be warned to be on their guard and to protect themselves well against teachers who spread

heresy and destruction, and whose only object, wherever they appear among the sheep, is to steal from them the true pasture of pure doctrine and God's Word, and to destroy their souls also. Therefore, the apostles diligently warned the Christians against such teachers. Paul, in Acts 20:29-30, prophesies to them saying: "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock," etc.

[3] Such are they who would lord it over souls with doctrines formulated or invented by their own wisdom, or who, with good intent, would dictate to them about what they should do if they would be saved. As, for example, did the Pharisees and scribes among the Jews; they thought themselves saved by their own human doctrines and writings and the worship of good works. And they in the papacy expect to be saved by that utter filth — their own false and self-chosen works, worship and monkery; not to mention their public idolatry and shameful lying nonsense — praying to deceased saints, their indulgences, purgatory and the like. They indeed do not wish to be regarded as thieves and murderers; they would be respected in the world as worthy, invaluable, and safe teachers and preachers. But when they are made manifest by the Word of Christ, it is discovered that they awfully mislead and ruin the souls who follow them.

[4] They are called thieves because they come stealthily sneaking, and with smooth speech, as Paul says in Romans 16:18; and they come also with imposing airs, and in true sheep's clothing, especially advertising their faithfulness and their love of souls. But these are the very marks by which, as Christ teaches, they are to be known; they do not enter by the door, but climb up some other way, or, as Christ himself explains, they come before him and without him, not pointing and directing to him as the only Shepherd and Savior.

[5] For the words "came before me" do not refer to those who preached before Christ; nor only to those who undertake to preach without a call and secretly sneak into the fold, who are certainly no better than thieves and murderers. But the words refer in general to all those — yea to them who have a true call and are regularly installed in office — who do not begin with and adhere to the doctrine of faith in Christ as the chief article of Christianity, but mislead the people, directing to their own holiness and their own worship, which ignores faith in Christ. If it were not for this error, such teachers would never harm with their doctrine; for all doctrines

concerning works would be harmless if they did not teach faith and trust in works as being sufficient to merit the forgiveness of sins. But in no case is to be tolerated the teaching that we are to place in them our confidence and faith, for it should be centered alone in Christ; nor that we esteem them to be a special service to God when they are without the Word of God.

[6] We could also without wrong keep all the commandments of the pope and of his councils if they be not in opposition to God's Word — when they refer only to outward order and the observance of certain times — the use of certain clothing, meats, and the like; as in other things a person may follow custom. Yes, such outward and immaterial things were without harm if they did not claim that they are necessary to salvation or serve to promote it. Just so the greater part of their priestcraft and monkery is mere unprofitable, useless jugglery and simply child's play, appropriate to a Shrove-Tuesday carnival performance or to a puppet show. But that they should command man to do such works at the peril of being lost, and say, He who fails to do them shall fall under the wrath and displeasure of God Almighty and of all the saints and be condemned to hell — that is the wolf-like and murderous voice of the true Antichrist in Christendom.

[7] Now, these destructive thieves and murderers are the great multitude; they are always in the majority in the world. And they cannot be different since they are out of Christ. The world desires such wolf preaching and is not worthy of anything better since it will not hear nor respect Christ. Hence it is that there are so few true Christians and faithful preachers, always outnumbered by the members of the false church. Teachers and pupils mislead one another; as Moses says, the drunkards draw the thirsty after them and lead them to ruin. Deuteronomy 29:19. But Christ on the other hand comforts the true Church with his counsel to his dear sheep to guard against the false teachers and not to listen to, nor follow, them; as he says later, in plainer words: "My sheep hear my voice, but they hear not the voice of strangers."

[8] True, the sheep may at first and for a time be deceived by the false appearance and actions of thieves and robbers. Such has been the case hitherto under the papacy when all the pulpits and churches were filled with the false and only a few sheep heard the voice of Christ, the true shepherd; as Christ declared in Matthew 24:24, saying, that they would lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Yet, at last he shall help them to hear the voice of

the true shepherd and follow him. And many such have been snatched out of the errors of papacy even on their deathbeds - and have laid hold of Christ and died in him.

[9] Now, these are the first class of cursed teachers and preachers who directly oppose Christ and only mislead and ruin souls. These he sharply distinguishes from himself, and passes judgment, teaching that we are not to hear them at all nor tolerate them, and that they who, themselves out of Christ, point the people elsewhere, are only thieves and murderers. II. The Second Class of Preachers, Porters of the Fold

[10] There are other preachers, who advocate God's law and commandments, not devised of themselves, but taken from the Scriptures. Such were the teachers or scribes among the Jews, so far as they adhered to Moses and the Scriptures; of whom Christ says: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe." Matthew 23:3.

[11] These teachings in themselves do not oppose Christ, but they who make use of them to teach the people to trust in themselves and in salvation through the works of the Law, are thieves and murderers like the others; for they also hinder and restrain the sheep from coming to Christ.

[12] But if these preachers are to rightly serve, faithfully and helpfully, they must not themselves climb into the sheepfold like the others, nor attempt to be shepherds; they must be simply porters and servants of the true shepherd, Christ, keeping the sheep in shelter and safety and not allowing strangers to break in upon them, and preparing for and giving place to the shepherd, who himself leads them out to pasture and in. Further, their office is appointed not to feed themselves, but to open to the shepherd; then the sheep hear the shepherd himself and are fed by him.

[13] Such among the Jewish people were Moses and the prophets, likewise John the Baptist; and such are all who still preach the Law for repentance, to point the people to Christ, who shall save them from sin and death. So, then, such exercise both offices of the porter. They restrain strangers who come as shepherds to draw the sheep after them, taking care that the sheep be not misled by the delusion of a false confidence in their works, but learn to know their sins and danger and be ready to heed their shepherd. Paul speaks of the office of the Law, in Galatians 3:23-24,

mentioning how it was given that we might be kept in ward under it, and shut up unto the future faith in Christ. “So,” he says, “the Law is become our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be just(fied by faith.” Where the Law is so taught that man, threatened by the wrath and punishment of God, is outwardly held under good discipline, and restrained from presumption and carelessness, and is inwardly urged by fear and terror to feel his helplessness and misery and to recognize his own inability — where the Law is so taught, the fold is rightly closed and guarded, and the sheep cannot run away into error and thus become a prey to wolves.

[14] But this preaching and office of the porter is not enough for the sheep. For if they should remain thus shut up, they would suffer and die from hunger. Therefore, another duty of the porter is to open the door to the true shepherd, who himself comes and feeds the sheep. It is all for his sake — the preaching and teaching in the Church; otherwise one would not dare be a doorkeeper or preacher.

[15] It is, however, opening the door to Christ when we thus teach the Law, as we said. God requires us to keep these commandments at the peril of our eternal condemnation. And though you have kept them as perfectly as you can, you must know that you will neither be justified nor saved thereby before God; for you can never fulfill them, as you are indebted to do. And if you were to fulfill them, still you would not thereby merit that God should give you mote than he has already given you, for which you are in duty bound to obey him; as Christ says: “Even so ye also, when ye shall have done the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do.” Luke 17:10. Therefore, you must, after all this, have Christ, the Lord, for the true shepherd, who gives you his fullness and riches, and you must be fed, pastured and saved by him.

[16] Thus, you rightly fulfill both offices, and correctly distinguish the doctrine of works from the doctrine of faith — we are to keep the Law, but not trust in it; for faith alone will keep us and comfort us with Christ’s pasture. So, works rest upon the obligation of the Law, and faith upon grace in Christ. III. The Third Class of Preachers, In Whom Alone Christ Is Found

[17] Now, where the door is opened to the shepherd and he enters, the sheep receive comfort and help; as Christ says at the lose of our Gospel lesson: “I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.” For as Christ rules, guides and leads them, feeds and keeps them, he works in them through his Word and the power of the Holy Spirit, and they grow daily, becoming richer in knowledge, stronger in faith. in consolation, in patience, having victory in suffering and other trials, and of themselves bear fruit, teaching, serving and helping others. And thus the office and work of the shepherd, whose own the sheep are, go on continually, when he himself receives the sheep and works his will in them, which he does by his voice, that is, the external Word and preaching.

[18] Therefore, Christ calls himself the door by which the sheep go in and out. For, as he is the shepherd and also the sermon through which he comes to us and by which he is made known, so faith in our hearts, by which his power and work are experienced, is simply Christ dwelling and working in us, making us in our life and work complete in him. So all goodness goes forth from him and is received through faith in him; we are pleasing to God only because of him, and are not dependent upon anything else, neither have we comfort from any other source.

[19] With the same figure in which Christ speaks of his of-rice, which he administers through the Word, he speaks also of his sheep, telling how they are to conduct themselves in his kingdom — when the door is opened to him, they at once hear his voice and learn to know it. It is truly a comforting, cheering voice, whereby they are released from terror and fear and brought into liberty, where they can look to God in Christ for grace and all comfort. And where they once recognize this shepherd, they confidently hold to him alone and do not listen to the doctrine of any other. For they have, as the nature of sheep is, very keen ears, that respond to a very soft voice, and are very docile, recognizing and distinguishing the voice of their shepherd from all others who pose as shepherds. For now the experience of their own consciences and the witness of the Holy Spirit in their hearts testifies that no other doctrine or word can console the heart nor bring man rightly to trust in God and call upon him, except the voice of this shepherd, Christ. Therefore they reflect upon it without any doubting or wavering whatever. They do not gaze in wonder at what others teach or do, at what the world likes or the councils decree; if there were not a single person

upon earth to agree with them, they would still be assured that they hear the voice of their true shepherd.

[20] Yes, and they are of admirable intelligence; if they were, without fear or danger, given the choice, each pious soul would rather follow his conscience and plant himself upon Christ and his grace than upon his own works, even if he had an abundance of the latter. For of his works he is doubtful. Yea, he knows that they cannot stand before God's judgment; as David and all the saints say: "Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight no man living is righteous." Psalm 143:2. But he knows that grace is assured to him; for it is God's Word and truth.

[21] What mean Christ's further words: "And he calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out"? All hear the harmonious voice of Christ — the preaching of the Gospel: faith, baptism, hope and salvation they all have in common and in equal measure. The grace that Magdalene has is the same as that of the Virgin Mary, and that of Peter the same as the dying thief experienced.

[22] But there is a difference when he begins to call by special names those who are in the same grace; as a shepherd has special marks for each sheep and calls one "Brownie," another "Blackie," or such names as he will. Likewise, Christ produces special works in each individual when he comforts, admonishes, and helps him in his needs and cares, through his Word. Also, he distributes to men his gifts: to one a stronger faith than to another, or more understanding; gifts to teach and explain the Scriptures, to preach, to rule. Again, he uses an individual for a special work, to accomplish more and greater things than another; he visits one with much suffering and another with little; he extended the Gospel farther through Paul than through the other apostles; he called Peter and led him to suffer in a different way than he did John.

[23] Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, says: "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit," etc. As in the same house there are many kinds of work, many occupations, but all the workers are members of the same family, having the same kind of food; and as there are many members in the same body and each has its special work and use, and yet all are of the same body and the same in health, deriving a common pleasure from the food and nourishment: so in Christ's kingdom there are many kinds of gifts,

of works and sufferings, distributed to each according to his capacity and calling; but all are sheep of the same kind, sharing all his blessings, and one is as dear to him as another. He says further: “He leadeth them out. When he has put forth all his own, he goeth before them” etc.

[24] This leading them out is, as I said, Christian liberty. They are now free; no longer penned up and captive under anxious constraint and fear of the Law and of divine judgment, but happily pastured and nourished in Christ’s sweet kingdom of grace. Of this liberty St. Paul says: “Ye are not under law, but under grace.” Romans 6:14. Again he says: “Now that faith is come, we are no longer under a tutor.” Galatians 3:25.

[25] This liberty does not mean that the sheep may now without a fold and without a keeper run from their shepherd unrestrained into error; or that Christians can do whatever the flesh lusteth for. But it means that, now free from terror and fear of wolves, thieves and murderers, they may live with their dear shepherd, in love and pleasure following where he leads and guides; because they know that he so defends and lovingly oversees them that the Law dare no more accuse and condemn them, even though they are weak as to the flesh and have not perfectly fulfilled the Law.

[26] For here the Lord, God’s Son, is the shepherd, who takes the sheep under his grace, his shelter and protection; and he who will accuse or condemn the sheep, must first accuse or condemn the Lord himself. Paul gloriously and defiantly says in Romans 8:1: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,” etc.; likewise in verses and 34: “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” This is, I say, freedom of conscience — freedom from the condemnation of the Law. Now that we are in Christ, the Law has no claim on us, for the material, bodily life has no place here. It has its own external government and law, unrelated to spiritual life in the kingdom of Christ. “When he hath put forth all his own, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him.”

[27] That is the Christians’ life under their shepherd. Christ ever rules, leads and guides them. They remain with him in the liberty of faith, wherein they walk, following his example in obedience and good works, of which

example Peter says: Christ has “left you an example, that ye should follow his steps.” 1 Peter 2:21. And Christ himself says in John 13:15: “I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you.” Christ’s kingdom, as I said, was not instituted that we might indulge the lusts of our flesh; but that we, released from the captivity of the Law, under which we could not in sincerity do anything good, follow Christ forward cheerfully and with a good conscience in our lives and works. And each responds as Christ calls him, a special instrument for Christ’s use.

[28] To follow the advancing Christ means that our whole lives and all our works be in the faith of Christ — a constant exercise of faith, wherein we recognize and are assured that because of this dear shepherd we have favor with God. Thus our works and lives, weak and imperfect in obedience as they are, are also under the wings of the mother hen, and are pleasing to God because of the shepherd. In this confidence we now begin to be obedient, to call upon him in our temptations and needs, to confess his Word and serve our neighbors. And thus, both in the inner and the outer life — which Christ here calls “going out and in” — we are to find pasture; that is, comfort, strength, help, the increase of faith, and everything good. To this end a Christian constantly needs the Word of Christ as his daily bread; he needs to learn from it and to exercise himself in it. Therefore, Christ says again, in concluding his words on the sheep that follow him: “For they know his voice... And a stranger will they not follow but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers.”

[29] That means, they know now how to keenly distinguish doctrine, faith and life; for they have the standard of the Word, which teaches them to cling alone to this shepherd, and thus be enabled to rightly judge everything offered to them and shun and condemn that which directs and leads them otherwise. Therefore, under this shepherd they abide indeed safe, undeceived and rightly led; they are excellent, intelligent, well sheltered, contented, secure and blessed sheep.

[30] Notice that this parable pictures so beautifully to us Christ and his sheep that we see the inner life of his kingdom and the treasure we have from him. And it finely symbolizes how we should teach the Law and faith and works in the Church. But the Pharisees and their blind leaders and the false saints understand naught of this; as John here says: “But they understand not what things they were which he spoke unto them.”

[31] Yes, although Christ even interprets and illustrates these things in plain words, yet his hearers do not understand them. They consider and estimate his words from the low plane of their own reason, which learns nothing beyond the doctrine of the law of works - and seeks the fulfillment of the same by its own strength; as Paul, in Romans 10:3, says of them: They seek to establish their own righteousness, and do not subject themselves to the righteousness that avails before God. Hence, when they hear the doctrine of our salvation, how our lives must be hidden in Christ alone and nothing avails without him, they begin to blaspheme; as they say of him at the end of this sermon in verse 20: “He hath a demon, and is mad; why hear ye him?” So in our day they revile the doctrine of faith as heresy, and say that we forbid good works; but thereby they candidly reveal their own blindness — they do not understand what Christ, faith and good works are.

[32] We, however, who have — God be praised! — the true knowledge, should learn from this Gospel two things: First, that nothing should be taught in Christendom except that which pertains to this one shepherd, Christ — and every individual should guard against all that does not point to him for enlightenment of the conscience and for strengthening the hope of salvation; or that is not enjoined and commanded as necessary to keep. Therefore, Christ calls himself the door, through whom alone we must go out and in; and true doctrine and faith, and life proceed only from him, lead to him and are found in him.

[33] The second truth is that all Christians have the power and right to pass judgment upon any doctrine, and to turn from false preachers and bishops, refusing obedience to them. For you hear in this Gospel that Christ says of his sheep: “My sheep hear my voice, and a stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of the stranger.” The reason Christians can rightly judge is because they apply the standard — as I mentioned — from this Word of Christ, that all who fail to teach Christ are thieves and murderers. These words have already passed the judgment and further knowledge than that of Christ is unnecessary. Christians, then, are in duty bound to follow this judgment, fleeing and avoiding all it contains, it matters not who, how wise or how many they are.

[34] Here are deposed from their office and power those who wish to rule in the Church and yet do not teach Christ’s Words but their own

commands, and who require the people to obey them as bishops occupying the appointed seats of authority in the Church. So it is the duty of Christ's sheep to follow Christ's judgment, holding such teachers as dethroned, condemned and excommunicated from the Church of Christ, and fleeing from them as accursed. And they who wish to remain godly, and Christ's true sheep, should never yield this power and fight of judgment, nor permit themselves to indorse, accept or follow what others may decree, contrary to its teaching, be they pope, bishop or councils.

Pentecost Wednesday.

Text: John 6:44-51.

44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

45 It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.

46 Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father.

47 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

48 I am that bread of life.

49 Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.

50 This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.

51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. John 6:44-51

I. On Faith and Coming to Christ

[1] This Gospel text teaches exclusively of the Christian faith, and awakens that faith in us; just as John, throughout his whole Gospel, simply instructs us how to trust in Christ the Lord. This faith alone, when based upon the sure promises of God, must save us; as our text clearly explains. And in the light of it all, they must become fools who have taught us other ways to become godly. All that human ingenuity can devise, be it as holy and as luminous as it may, must tumble to the ground if man be saved in God's way — in a way different from that which man himself plans. Man may forever do as he will, he can never enter heaven unless God takes the first step with his Word, which offers him divine grace and enlightens his heart so as to get upon the right way.

[2] This right way, however, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Whoever desires to seek another way, as the great multitudes venture to do by means of their own works, has already missed the right way; for Paul says to the Galatians: "If righteousness is through the Law," that is, through the works of the Law, "then Christ died for naught." Galatians 2:21. Therefore I say man must fall upon this Gospel and be broken to pieces and in deep consciousness lie prostrate, like a man that is powerless, unable to move hand or foot. He must only lie motionless and cry: Almighty God, merciful Father, now help me! I cannot help myself. Christ, my Lord, do help now, for with only my own effort all is lost! Thus, in the light of this cornerstone, which is Christ, everyone becomes as nothing; as Christ says of himself in Luke 20:17-18, when he asks the Pharisees and scribes: "What then is this that is written. The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner? Everyone that falleth on that stone shall be broken to pieces; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust." Psalm 118:22. Therefore, we must either fall upon this stone, Christ, in all our inability and helplessness, rejecting our own merits, and be broken to pieces, or he will forever crush us by his severe sentence and judgment. It is better that we fall upon him than that he should fall upon us. For this reason the Lord says in this Gospel: "No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day."

[3] He must surely perish whom the Father does not draw. Thus it is decreed, that whoever does not come to this Son must be condemned forever. The Son is given to us only to the end that he may save us; besides him, nothing saves us, either in heaven or on earth. If he does not help us,

then nothing will. On this Peter says in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:11-12): “He is the stone which was set at naught of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner. And in none other is there salvation; neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved.” Where, in the light of this, are our theologians and professors who taught us that we become pious through our many good works? Here the great master Aristotle is put to shame, who proclaimed that reason strives for the best and always follows after the good. Christ says to this: No; if the Father comes not first and draws men, they must forever perish.

[4] Here all men must confess their incapacity and inability to do the good. Should one imagine he is able to do anything good of his own strength, he does no less than make Christ the Lord a liar; he would rudely and defiantly come to the Father and in all rashness ascend to heaven. Therefore, where the pure and plain Word of God goes, it breaks into pieces everything that is exalted of man, it makes valleys of all their mountains, and all their hills it makes low, as the prophet Isaiah (40:4) says. Every heart that hears this Word must lose faith in itself, else it will not be able to come to Christ. God’s works do nothing but destroy and make alive, condemn and minister salvation. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, sings of the Lord: “Jehovah killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up.” 1 Samuel 2:6.

[5] Hence, a person who is thus smitten in his heart, by God, to confess that he is one who, on account of his sins, must be condemned, is like the righteous man whom with the first words of this Gospel God wounds, and because of that wound fixes upon him the band or cord of his divine grace, by which he draws him, so that he must seek help and counsel for his soul. Before he could not obtain any help or counsel from God, nor did he ever desire it; but now he finds the first comfort and promise of God, which Luke 11:10 records thus: “For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” From such promises will he ever continue to gain courage as long as he lives and will ever win greater and greater confidence in God. Just as soon as he hears that grace is the work of God alone, he will desire it of God as from the hand of his gracious Father, who wishes to draw him. Now, if he is drawn by God to Christ, he will certainly experience what the Lord here says: “He will raise

him up in the last day.” For he has laid hold upon the Word of God and trusts God. In this he has a sure sign that he is one whom God has drawn, as John says in his First Epistle (1 John 5:10): “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him.”

[6] Hence, it must necessarily follow that he is taught of God, and that he knows now in truth that the meaning of God is nothing more than Helper, Comforter, Savior, as we say of those who rescue us from danger: Thou wast today my God. From this it is now clear that God will be to us nothing less than a Savior, a helper, and a giver of all blessedness, who neither demands nor desires anything from us. He only gives, he only offers to us; as he says to Israel in Psalm 81:10: “I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” Who would not be kindly disposed to such a God, who approaches us so lovingly and graciously, and offers us his favor and blessings if we only acknowledge him as God and are willing to be taught of him? They cannot escape the severe, eternal judgment of God who ignore such grace, as the Epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrews 10:28-29) says: “A man that hath set at naught Moses’ law dieth without compassion: of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing.”

[7] Oh, how diligent and earnest St. Paul is in all his Epistles that we may always grasp the knowledge of God aright! How often he expresses the wish for growth in the knowledge of God! As if he would say: If you only knew and understood what God is, then you would be already saved, then you would gain love for him and do only those things well-pleasing to him. Thus he says to the Colossians (Colossians 1:9-12): “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray and make request for you, that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to the might of his glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” And in Psalm 119:34 David says: “Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy Law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.”

[8] Thus you learn from the first utterance in today's Gospel that this knowledge must come from God the Father; he must lay the first stone of the foundation in us, else we will never do anything. But this is accomplished in the following way: God sends us preachers, whom he has taught, to preach to us his will. First, he instructs us that our entire lives and characters, however beautiful and holy they may be, are before him as nothing, yea, are as abomination, and displeasing; this is called a preaching of the Law. Then he offers us grace; that is, he tells us that he will not utterly condemn and reject us, but will receive us in his beloved Son, and not merely receive us, but make us heirs of his kingdom, lords over all that is in heaven and upon earth. This is called preaching grace or preaching the Gospel. But God is the origin of all; he first awakens preachers and constrains them to preach. This is the meaning of St. Paul's words when he says to the Romans: "So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ." Romans 10:17. This truth the words of the Lord in today's Gospel also declares, when Christ says: "It is written in the prophets, and they shall all be taught of God. Everyone that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he that is from God, he hath seen the Father."

[9] Now, under the first preaching, the preaching of the Law, namely, that we with all our works are condemned, man is restless and fearful before God, and knows not what to do with his life and deeds. He suffers from an accusing and timid conscience, and, if relief from some source were not to come quickly he would have to despair forever. Therefore, we must not long delay with the other preaching; we must preach the Gospel to him and lead him to Christ as the one whom the Father has given to us to be our mediator, that we should be saved solely through him, out of pure grace and mercy, without any works or merit on our part. The heart rejoices at this word and runs to such grace as a thirsty deer to the water. This longing David keenly experiences when he says in Psalm 42:1-2: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God, my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God."

[10] Now, when one comes to Christ, that is, to his Gospel, he hears the personal voice of Christ the Lord, which confirms the knowledge God taught him, namely, that God is nothing but a very gracious Savior, who wants to be gracious and merciful to all who call upon him. Therefore, the

Lord adds: “Verily verily, I say unto you, He that believeth hath eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven: if any man eats of this bread, he shall live forever: yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world.”

[11] In these words the soul finds a well-prepared table, at which it satisfies all hunger; for it knows for a certainty that he who speaks these words cannot lie. Therefore, the soul falls upon the Word, clings to it, trusts in it, and also builds its dwelling-place in the strength of this well-prepared table. This is the feast for which the heavenly Father slayed his oxen and fatlings and invited us all to it. II. The Bread of Heaven

[12] The living bread, of which the Lord here speaks, is Christ himself, of whom we partake. If in our hearts we lay hold of only a morsel of this bread, we shall have forever enough and can never be separated from God. The partaking of this bread is nothing but faith in Christ our Lord, that he is, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:30, “made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” He who eats of this food lives forever. Therefore, the Lord says, immediately following this Gospel lesson, where the Jews strove among themselves about this discourse of his: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

[13] The bread from heaven the fathers ate in the wilderness, as Christ says here, was powerless to keep them from dying; but this bread makes immortal. If we believe on Christ, death cannot harm us; yea, it is no longer death. The Lord utters the same truth in another passage when he says to the Jews: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my Word, he shall never see death.” John 8:51. Here he speaks definitely of the Word of faith, and of the Gospel.

[14] But one may say, as did the Jews, who took offense at these words of the Lord: The saints, nevertheless, died, and Abraham and the prophets likewise died. We reply to this: The death of Christians is only a sleep, as the Scriptures everywhere call it. A Christian neither tastes nor sees death; that is, he is never conscious of any death; for this Savior, Christ Jesus, in

whom he believes, has destroyed death so that he no longer needs to taste it and pay its penalty. Death is to the Christians only a transition of life, yea, a door to life: as Christ says in John 5:24: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my Word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.”

[15] Therefore, a Christian life is a life of bliss and joy. Christ’s yoke is easy and sweet; the reason it seems to us galling and heavy is that the Father has not yet drawn us, and so we have no pleasure in it, neither does this Gospel lesson minister comfort to us. If we, however, rightly appropriated the words of Christ, they would be of much greater comfort to us. By faith we partake of this bread that has come down from heaven, Christ the Lord, when we believe on him as our Savior and Redeemer.

[16] In this light I now remind you that these words are not to be misconstrued and made to refer to the Sacrament of the Altar; whoever so interprets them does violence to this Gospel text. There is not a letter in it that refers to the Lord’s Supper. Why should Christ here have in mind that Sacrament when it was not yet instituted? The whole chapter from which this Gospel is taken speaks of nothing but the spiritual food, namely, faith. When the people followed the Lord merely hoping again to eat and drink, as the Lord himself charges them with doing, he took the figure from the temporal food they sought and speaks throughout the entire chapter of a spiritual food. He says: “The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life.” Thereby he shows that he feeds them with the object of inducing them to believe on him, and that as they partook of the temporal food, so should they also partake of the spiritual. On this subject we will say more at some other time.

[17] Now let us here notice that the Lord approaches us so lovingly and graciously, and offers us himself — his blood and flesh — in such gentle words that it should in all reason move the heart to believe on him; to believe that this bread, his flesh and blood, born of the Virgin Mary, was given because he had to pay the penalty of death and suffer in our stead the torments of hell, and, besides, to suffer the guilt of sins he never committed, as if they were his own. This he did willingly and received us as brethren and sisters. If we believe this we do the will of the heavenly Father, which is nothing else than that we believe on the Son. Christ says, just before our text: “This is the will of my Father, that everyone that beholdeth the Son,

and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” John 6:40.

[18] It is now evident that whoever has faith in this bread of heaven — in Christ, in this flesh and blood, of which he here speaks that it is given to him and that it is his — he also accepts it as his own, and has already done the will of God and eaten of this heavenly manna; as Augustine says: What do you prepare for your mouth? Only believe, and you have already eaten.

[19] The whole New Testament treats of this spiritual supper, and especially does John here. The Sacrament of the Altar is a testament and confirmation of this true supper, with which we should strengthen our faith and be assured that this body and this blood, which we receive in the Sacrament, has rescued us from sin and death, the devil, hell and all misery. Concerning this I have spoken and written more on other occasions.

[20] What is the proof by which one may know that this heavenly bread is his and that he is invited to such a spiritual supper? He needs only to look at his own heart. If he finds it so disposed that it is softened and cheered by God’s promises and is firm in the conviction that it may appropriate this bread of life, then he may be assured that he is one of the invited; for as one believes, even so is it done unto him. From that moment on, he loves his neighbor and helps him as his brother; he rescues him, gives to him, loans to him and does nothing for him but that which he would desire his neighbor to do for himself. All this is attributable to the fact that Christ’s kindness to him has leavened his heart with sweetness and love, so that he has pleasure and joy in serving his neighbor; yea, he is even in misery if he has no one to whom to show kindness. Besides all this, he is gently and humbly disposed toward everybody; he does not highly esteem the transient pomps of the world; he accepts everyone as he is, speaks evil of no one, interprets all things for the best where he sees things are not going right. When his neighbors are lacking in faith, in love, in life, then he prays for them, and he is heartily sorry when anyone gives offense to God or to his neighbor. To sum up all, with him the root and sap are good, for he is grafted into a rich and fruitful vine. in Christ; therefore, such fruits must come forth.

[21] But if one has not faith and is not taught of God — if he never eats of this bread from heaven — he surely never brings forth these fruits. For

where such fruits are not produced, there is certainly no true faith. St. Peter teaches us in 2 Peter 1:10 that we should make our calling unto salvation sure by good works; there he is really speaking of the works of love, of serving one's neighbor and treating him as one's own flesh and blood. This is sufficient on this Gospel. Let us pray for God's grace.

Trinity Sunday. The Article of Faith on the Trinity. The Revelation of the Divine Nature and Will.

Text: Romans 11:33-36.

33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?

35 Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?

36 For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. Romans 11:33-36

The Article of Faith on the Trinity

[1] This epistle is read today because the festival of Holy Trinity, or of the three persons of the Godhead—which is the prime, great, incomprehensible and chief article of faith—is observed on this day. The object of its observance is that, by the Word of God, this truth of the Godhead may be preserved among Christians, enabling them to know God as he would be known. For although Paul does not treat of that article in this epistle, but touches on it only in a few words in the conclusion, nevertheless he would teach that in our attempts to comprehend God we must not speculate and judge according to human wisdom, but in the light of the Word of God

alone. For these divine truths are too far above the reach of reason ever to be comprehended and explored by the understanding of man.

[2] And although I have, on other occasions, taught and written on this article fully and frequently enough, still I must say a few words in general concerning it here. True, it is not choice German, nor has it a pleasing sound, when we designate God by the word “Dreifaltigkeit” (nor is the Latin, Trinitas, more elegant); but since we have no better term, we must employ these. For, as I have said, this article is so far above the power of the human mind to grasp, or the tongue to express, that God, as the Father of his children, will pardon us when we stammer and lisp as best we can, if only our faith be pure and right. By this term, however, we would say that we believe the divine majesty to be three distinct persons of one true essence.

[3] This is the revelation and knowledge Christians have of God: they not only know him to be one true God, who is independent of and over all creatures, and that there can be no more than this one true God, but they know also what this one true God in his essential, inscrutable essence is.

[4] The reason and wisdom of man may go so far as to reach the conclusion, although feebly, that there must be one eternal divine being, who has created and who preserves and governs all things. Man sees such a beautiful and wonderful creation in the heavens and on the earth, one so wonderfully, regularly and securely preserved and ordered, that he must say: It is impossible that this came into existence by mere chance, or that it originated and controls itself; there must have been a Creator and Lord from whom all these things proceed and by whom they are governed. Thus God may be known by his creatures, as St. Paul says: “For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity.” Romans 1:20. This is (a posteriori) the knowledge that we have when we contemplate God from without, in his works and government; as one, looking upon a castle or house from without, would draw conclusions as to its lord or keeper.

[5] But from within (a priori) no human wisdom has been able to conceive what God is in himself, or in his internal essence. Neither can anyone know or give information of it except it be revealed to him by the

Holy Spirit. For no one knoweth, as Paul says (1 Corinthians 2:11), the things of man save the spirit of man which is in him, even so the things of God none knoweth save the Spirit of God. From without, I may see what you do, but what your intentions are and what you think, I cannot see. Again, neither can you know what I think except I enable you to understand it by word or sign. Much less can we know what God, in his own inner and secret essence is, until the Holy Spirit, who searcheth and knoweth all things, yea, the deep things of God—as Paul says above—reveals it to us: as he does in the declaration of this article, in which he teaches us the existence in the divine majesty of the one undivided essence, but in such manner that there is, first, the person which is called the Father; and of him exists the second person called the Son, born from eternity; and proceeding from both these is the third, namely, the Holy Spirit. These three persons are not distinct from each other, as individual brothers or sisters are, but they have being in one and the same eternal, undivided and indivisible essence.

[6] This, I say, is not discovered or attained to by human reason. It is revealed from heaven above. Therefore, only Christians can intelligently speak of what the Godhead essentially is, and of his outward manifestation to his creatures, and his will toward men concerning their salvation. For all this is imparted to them by the Holy Spirit, who reveals and proclaims it through the Word.

[7] Those who have no such revelation, and who judge according to their own wisdom, such as the Jews, Turks and heathen, must consider the Christian's declaration the greatest error and rankest heresy; they must say that we Christians are mad and foolish in imagining that there are three Gods, when, according to all reason—yea, even according to the Word of God—there can be but one God. It would not be reasonable, they will say, that there should be more than one householder over the same house, more than one lord or sovereign over the same government; much less reasonably should more than one God reign over heaven and earth. They imagine that thus with their wisdom they have completely overthrown our faith and exposed it to the derision and scorn of all the world. As if we were all blockheads and egregious fools and could not see their logic as well as they! But, thank God, we have understanding equal to theirs, and can argue

as convincingly, or more so, than they with their Alkoran and Talmud, that there is but the one God.

[8] Further, we know, from the testimony of Holy Writ, that we cannot expound the mystery of these divine things by the speculations of reason and a pretense of great wisdom. To explain this, as well as all the articles of our faith, we must have a knowledge higher than any to which the understanding of man can attain. That knowledge of God which the heathen can perceive by reason or deduce from rational premises is but a small part of the knowledge that we should possess. The heathen Aristotle in his best book concludes from a passage in the wisest pagan poet, Homer: There can be no good government in which there is more than one lord; it results as where more than one master or mistress attempts to direct the household servants. So must there be but one lord and regent in every government. This is all rightly true. God has implanted such light and understanding in human nature for the purpose of giving a conception and an illustration of his divine office, the only Lord and Maker of all creatures. But, even knowing this, we have not yet searched out or fathomed the exalted, eternal, divine Godhead essence. For even though I have learned that there is an only divine majesty, who governs all things, I do not thereby know the inner workings of this divine essence himself; this no one can tell me, except, as we have said, in so far as God himself reveals it in his Word.

[9] Now we Christians have the Scriptures, which we know to be the Word of God. The Jews also have them, From whose fathers they have descended to us. From these, and from no other source, we have obtained all that is known of God and divine works, from the beginning of the world. Even among the Turks and the heathen, all their knowledge of God—excepting what is manifestly fable and fiction—came from the Scriptures. And our knowledge is confirmed and proven by great miracles, even to the present day. These Scriptures declare, concerning this article, that there is no God or divine being save this one alone. They not only manifest him to us from without, but they lead us into his inner essence, and show us that in him there are three persons; not three Gods or three different kinds of divinity, but the same undivided, divine essence.

[10] Such a revelation is radiantly shed forth from the greatest of God's works, the declaration of his divine counsel and will. In that counsel and will it was decreed from all eternity, and, accordingly, was proclaimed in

his promises, that his Son should become man and die to reconcile man to God. For in our dreadful fall into sin and death eternal, there was no way to save us excepting through an eternal person who had power over sin and death to destroy them, and to give us righteousness and everlasting life instead. This no angel or other creature could do; it must needs be done of God himself. Now, it could not be done by the person of the Father, who was to be reconciled, but it must be done by a second person, with whom this counsel was determined and through whom and for whose sake the reconciliation was to be brought about.

[11] Here there are, therefore, two distinct persons, one of whom becomes reconciled, and the other is sent to reconcile and becomes man. The former is called the Father, being first in that he did not have his origin in any other; the latter is called the Son, being born of the Father from eternity. To this the Scriptures attest, for they make mention of God's Son; as, for instance, in Psalm 2:7: "Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee ;" and again, Galatians 4:4: "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son," etc. From this it necessarily follows that the Son, who is spoken of as a person, must be distinct from the person of the Father.

[12] Again, in the same manner, the Spirit of God is specifically and distinctively mentioned as a person sent or proceeding from God the Father and the Son; for instance, God says in Joel 2:28: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh," etc. Here a spirit is poured out who is God's, or a divine spirit, and who must be of the same essence, otherwise he could not say, "my Spirit ;" and yet he must be a person other than he who sent him or who pours out. Again, because when he was sent he manifested himself, and appeared in his descent in a visible form, like that of a dove or tongues of fire, he must be distinct in person from both the Father and the Son.

[13] But in this article of faith, in which we say that the Son of God became man and that he was of the same nature as we ourselves are, in order that he might redeem us from sin and death and give us eternal life without any merit or worthiness of our own, we give Jews and Turks no less occasion for laughter and mockery than when we speak of the three persons. For this is a more absurd assertion by far, in the estimation of human reason, which speculates in its Jewish and Turkish—yea, heathenish—teachings, on this wise: God is an only, almighty Lord of all, who has created all men and given them the law according to which they are to live;

accordingly it follows that he will be merciful to the good and obedient, but will condemn and punish the disobedient. Therefore, he who does good works and guards himself against sin, God will reward. These are nothing but heathenish conclusions drawn from earthly, worldly experience and observation, as if God's government must be conducted on the same principles as that of a father among his children and domestics; for those are considered good rulers and masters who make a distinction with regard to their own interests.

[14] Such heathen ideas of wisdom, holiness and service of God are taught and practiced by the Pope. And so we believed, myself and others, while we were under him, not knowing any better; otherwise we would have done and taught differently. And, in fact, he who has not this revelation and Word of God, can neither believe nor teach other than pagan doctrine. With such a faith, how much better were we than the heathen and Turks? Yea, how could we guard ourselves against any deception and lying nonsense that might be offered as good works and as service of God? Then we had to follow every impostor who came with his cowl and cord, as if Christ were represented in him; and we thought that in the observance of these things we would be saved. So the whole world was filled with naught but false service of God—which the Scriptures properly call idolatry—the product of human wisdom, which is so easily deceived by that which pretends to be a good work and to be obedience to God. For human wisdom knows no better; and how could it know better without the revelation? Even when the revelation was proclaimed, human wisdom would not heed it, but despised it and followed its own fancies. Hence it continued to be hidden and incomprehensible to such wisdom, as Saint Paul says: “For who hath known the mind of the Lord?”

[15] But to us this counsel and mind of God in giving his Son to take upon himself our flesh, is revealed and declared. For from the Word of God we have the knowledge that no man of himself can be righteous before God; that our whole life and all our deeds are under wrath and condemnation, because we are wholly born in sin and by nature are disobedient to God; but if we would be delivered from sin and be saved, we must believe on this mediator, the Son of God, who has taken our sin and death upon himself, by his own blood and death rendering satisfaction, and has by his resurrection, delivered us. In this truth we will abide, regardless

of the ridicule heaped upon us because of such faith, by heathen wisdom, which teaches that God rewards the pious. We understand that quite as well, if not better, than heathenism does. But in these mysteries, we need a higher wisdom than our own minds have devised or can devise, a wisdom given to us by grace alone, through divine revelation.

[16] For it is not our intention thus to pry into the counsel, thoughts and ways of God with our understanding and opinions, and to be his counselors, as they do who meddle in the affairs that are the prerogative of the Godhead, and who even dare, in the face of this passage of Saint Paul, to refuse to receive or learn of God, but would impart to him that for which he must recompense again. And thus they make gods after their own fancy, as many gods as they have thoughts; so that every shabby monastic cowl or self-appointed work, in their estimation, accomplishes as much and passes for as much as God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in their eternal divine counsel, determine and accomplish. And they continue to be nothing but wearers of cowls and instructors in works, which works even they can do who know nothing of God and are manifestly scoundrels. And even though they have long been occupied with these things, they still do not know how matters stand between themselves and God. And it will ever be true as Saint Paul says: “For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counselor?”

[17] For your own theories—which are no more than what anyone can arrive at, conjecture or conceive in his own mind, without divine revelation—are not a knowledge of the mind of God. And what does it avail if you are not able to say more than that God is merciful to the good and will punish the wicked? Who will assure you that you are good and that you are pleasing to God with your papistic, Turkish monkery and holiness? Is it all that is necessary to assert: God will reward with heaven such as are faithful to the order? No, dear brother, mere presumption, or an expression of your opinion, will not suffice here. I could do that as well as you. Indeed, each may devise his own peculiar idea; one a black, and another a gray monk’s cowl. But we should hear and know what God’s counsel is, what is his will and mind. This none can tell you by his own understanding, and no book on earth can teach it except the Scriptures. These God himself has given, and they make known to us that he has sent his Son into the world to redeem us

from sin and the wrath of God, and that whosoever believes in him should have everlasting life.

Divine Mysteries Inexplicable to Reason.

[18] Behold, Paul's purpose in this epistle is to show Christians that these sublime and divine mysteries—that is, God's actual divine essence and his will, administration and works—are absolutely beyond all human thought, human understanding or wisdom; in short, that they are and ever will be incomprehensible, inscrutable and altogether hidden to human reason. When reason presumptuously undertakes to solve, to teach and explain these matters, the result is worthless, yea, utter darkness and deception. If anything is to be ascertained, it must be through revelation alone; that is, the Word of God, which was sent from heaven.

[19] We do not apply these words of Paul to the question of divine predestination for every human being—who will be saved and who not. For into these things God would not have us curiously inquire. He has not given us any special revelation in regard to them but refers all men here to the words of the Gospel. By them they are to be guided. He would have them hear and learn the Gospel and believing in it they shall be saved. Therein have all the saints found comfort and assurance in regard to their election to eternal life; not in any special revelation in regard to their predestination, but in faith in Christ. Therefore, where Saint Paul treats of election, in the three chapters preceding this text, he would not have any to inquire or search out whether he has been predestinated or not; but he holds forth the Gospel and faith to all men. So, he taught before, that we are saved through faith in Christ. He says (Romans 10:8): “The Word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart,” and he explains himself by saying that this Word should be proclaimed to all men, that they may believe what he says in verses 12 and 13: “For the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon him: for, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

[20] But he speaks of the marvelous ruling of God in the Church, according to which they who have the name and honor of being the people of God, and the Church—the people of Israel—are rejected on account of their unbelief. Others, on the other hand, who formerly were not God's

people, but were unbelieving, are now, since they have received the Gospel and believe in Christ, become the true Church in the sight of God, and are saved. Consequently, it was on account of their own unbelief that the former were rejected. Then the grace and mercy of God in Christ was offered unto everlasting life, and without any merit of their own, to all such as were formerly in unbelief and sin, if only they would accept and believe it. He declares: “For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.” Romans 11:32.

[21] Hereupon follows the text, which Saint Paul begins with emotions of profound astonishment at the judgment and dealings of God in his Church, saying: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!”

[22] Sublime are the thoughts and counsel of God, transcending by far the mind and comprehension of man, yea of all creatures, when he so richly pours forth his goodness and out of pure grace and mercy elects, as beneficiaries of that goodness, the poor and wretched and unworthy, who are concluded under sin—that is, those who acknowledge themselves before God to be guilty and deserving of everlasting wrath and perdition; when he does all this that they might know him in his real divine essence, and the sentiment of his heart—that through his Son he will give all who believe everlasting life. And, again, that they might know how he will reject and condemn the others—those who, in pride and security, boast of their own gifts and the fact that they are called the people of God in preference to all other nations; who boast that they have special promises, that they have the prophets, the fathers, etc.; who think that God will acknowledge no nation on earth but themselves as his people and his Church. He will reject them on account of their unbelief, in which they are lettered by the pride and imaginations of their own wisdom and holiness.

[23] This is that rich, inexpressible, divine wisdom and knowledge which they possess who believe in Christ, and by which they are enabled to look into the depths and see what the purposes and thoughts of the divine heart are. True, in their weakness they cannot fully reach it; they only can apprehend it in the revealed Word, by faith, as in a glass or image, as Saint Paul says. 1 Corinthians 13:12. But to blind, unbelieving reason, divine wisdom will be foreign and hidden; nothing of it will enter reason’s

consciousness and thoughts, nor will reason desire more though a revelation be given.

[24] That attitude Saint Paul encountered, especially when the arrogant Jews opposed themselves so sternly and stubbornly to the preaching of the Gospel. Filled with astonishment, he exclaimed: What shall I say more? I see indeed that it is but the deep unsearchable wisdom of God, his incomprehensible judgment, his inscrutable ways. So he says elsewhere: “But we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, even the wisdom that hath been hidden, which God foreordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the rulers of this world hath known.” 1 Corinthians 2:7-8.

[25] This depth and richness of wisdom and knowledge, we Christians apprehend through faith; for, as Saint Paul says, it cannot be apprehended nor comprehended otherwise. Though the world will not do it, we will firmly believe that God is a true God and Lord, wise, just and gracious, whose riches and depth are ineffable. We will glorify him with our whole heart, therefore, as he ought justly to be praised and glorified by every creature, for his wonderful government of his Church, through his Word and revelation. Whosoever will hear and receive the same shall have light that will turn them to him and give them a knowledge of their salvation—an experience which others can never realize. And he is to be glorified because he manifests such unutterable goodness to all who are in sin and under God’s wrath that he translates them, though they are unworthy and condemned, from the power of death and hell into the kingdom of eternal grace and life, if they will only seek grace and believe on Christ his Son. And, on the other hand, he is to be glorified because, as a just judge, he rightfully rejects and condemns those who will not believe the revelation and testimony of his will in his Son; who insist on, and boast of, their blind fancies, of their own wisdom and righteousness. Being accordingly deprived of such light, such grace and consolation, they must forever be separated and cast forth from the kingdom of God, regardless of what great name and fame may have been theirs when they were supposed to be the people and Church of God.

[26] And such are God’s unsearchable judgments and his ways past tracing out. Such are his government and works. For by “judgments” is meant that which in his view is right or wrong; what pleases or does not please him; what merits his praise or his censure; in short, what we should

follow or avoid. Again, by “his ways” is meant that which he will manifest unto men and how he will deal with them. These things men cannot and would not discover by their own reason, nor search out by their own intellect, and never should they oppose their judgments or speculations to God. It is not for them to say what is right or wrong, whether an act or ruling is divine. They should humble themselves before him and acknowledge that they cannot understand, they cannot teach God in such matters; they should give him, as their God and Creator, the honor of better understanding himself and his purposes than do we poor, miserable worms. “For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?”

[27] Paul states three propositions which take away from the world all its boasting concerning divine things: To know the mind of the Lord—what are his thoughts and purposes, or what he has determined within himself from eternity; to be his counselor—advising or showing him what to do and how to do it; to give to him— assisting him, by one’s own ability, to accomplish his divine purpose. All this is impossible to human nature; it cannot know his mind, and how much less will it be able, with all of its wisdom and activity, to counsel him or give him anything.

[28] Therefore, it is a shameful presumption on the part of the world to presume by its own powers to ascertain and discover God’s essence, his will and works, and to counsel him as to his duties and pleasures; and shameful is it that it presumes with its works to have merited something from him, and to have earned a recompense; shameful presumption to expect to be honored as having achieved much for God’s kingdom and for the Church—strengthening and preserving them and filling heaven with holiness!

[29] God must defeat minds so perverted. In his administration he must disregard their opinions and attempts. Thus, being made fools by their own wisdom, they may stumble and be offended at it. So would God, by showing us the realities, convince us of the futility of our own endeavors and lead us to acknowledge that we have not fathomed his mind, his counsel and will, and that we cannot counsel him. No man or angel has ever yet first thought out for God his counsel, or offered suggestion to him. Much less is he compelled to call us into counsel, or recompense us for anything we have given to him.

Three Classes of People

[30] There are three different kinds of people on earth, among whom Christians must live. The first of these are that rude class which is unconcerned about the nature of God and how he rules. They have no regard for God's Word. Their faith is only in their mammon and their own appetites. They think only of how they may live unto themselves, like swine in the sty. To such we need not preach anything of this text: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God." They would understand nothing of it though we were to preach it to them everlastingly. They would rather hear of the husks and swill with which they fill themselves. Therefore, we will let them remain the swine that they are, and separated from others as they are. But it is exasperating to have to encounter them among Christians.

[31] The second class are they who are still reasonable, concerning themselves, about God's purposes and their fulfillment, and how we may be saved. The heathen, and even we ourselves when under the papacy, contended, according to reason, over these things. Here is the beginning of all idolatry on earth; everyone teaches of God according to his own opinion. Mohammed says: He that believes his Koran and its doctrines is pleasing to God. A monk: He that is faithful to the order and its regulations will be saved. The Pope: He who observes his prescriptions and ritual, who makes a pilgrimage to the apostles at Rome, buys himself an indulgence; he has acquired the forgiveness of sins: but he who neglects it is under the wrath of God. These observances they call judgments and ways, controlling consciences and directing them to eternal life; and they imagine that they are God's judgments and ways.

[32] On the contrary, the Word declares that God wants none of these things; that they are error and darkness and a vain service—idolatry, which he hates and which provokes him to the utmost. All must acknowledge who have practiced their own self-appointed observances for any length of time, that they have no real assurance that God will be gracious unto them and take pleasure in them because of their lives and observances. Yet, in their blind delusion and presumption, they go on in their vagaries till God touches their hearts by a revelation of his law; then, alarmed, they must admit that they have lived without a knowledge of God and of his will, and

that they have no counsel or help unless they lay hold on the words of the Gospel of Christ.

[33] We were all like that heretofore. Even I, a learned Doctor of Divinity, did not know better. I imagined that with my monk's cowl I was pleasing to God and on the way to heaven. I thought that I knew the mind of God well. I wanted to be his counselor, and to earn a recompense of him. But now I realize that my belief was false; it was blindness. I know that I must learn from his Word; that nothing else avails before him but faith in the crucified Christ, his Son; and that in such faith we must live and do as our respective callings or positions require. Thus we may know right and wrong in God's sight; for our knowledge is not of our own invention, but we have it from revelation. By revelation God shows us his mind; as Saint Paul says (1 Corinthians 2:16): "We have the mind of Christ." And again (verse 10): "But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit."

[34] The third class are those who transgress, having knowledge. They have the Word of revelation. I am not now speaking of those who knowingly persecute the truth —those of the first class, who are unconcerned about God—but I am speaking of those who recognize the revelation but are led by the devil to override it and go around it. They would conceive ways and judgments of God that he has not revealed. If they were Christians, they would be satisfied and thank God for having given us his Word, in which he shows us what is pleasing to him and how we may be saved. But instead, they allow themselves to be led by the devil to seek for other revelations and to speculate on what God in his invisible majesty is, and how he secretly governs the world, and what he has determined in regard to the future of each particular individual. And so presumptuous is our human nature that it would even interfere, with its wisdom, in God's judgment, and intrude into his most secret counsel, attempting to teach him and direct him. It was because of his arrogance that the devil was cast out into the abyss of hell; because he aspired to interference in the affairs of divine majesty and would drag down man in the fall with himself. So did he cause man to fall in paradise, and so did he tempt the saints; and so he tempted Christ himself when he set him on the pinnacle of the temple.

[35] Against this third class Saint Paul directs his words, in answer to the impudent questions of wise reason as to why God punished and rejected the

Jews, as he did, and allowed the condemned heathen to come into the Gospel grace; why he so administers justice as to exalt the godless and allow the godly to suffer and be oppressed; why he elected Judas as an apostle and afterwards rejected him and accepted a murderer and malefactor. With these words Saint Paul would command the wise to cease their impertinent strivings after the things of the secret majesty, and to confine themselves to the revelation he has given us; for all such searching and prying will be in vain and harmful. Though you were to search forever you would nowhere attain the secrets of God's purposes, but would only risk your soul.

[36] If you, therefore, would proceed wisely, you cannot do better than to be interested in the Word and in God's works. In them he has revealed himself, and in them he may be comprehended. For instance, he manifests his Son, Christ, to you, on the cross. This is the work of your redemption. In it you may truly apprehend God and learn that he will not condemn you on account of your sins, if you believe, but will give you everlasting life. So Christ tells you: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:16. In this Christ, says Saint Paul (Colossians 2:3), are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden. Herein you will have more than enough to learn, to study and ponder. You will marvel at the wonderful revelation of God, and you will learn to delight in and love him. It is a mine which can never be exhausted in this life by study, and in the contemplation of which, as Peter says (1 Peter 1:12), even the angels never tire, but find unceasing joy and pleasure.

[37] I say this so that we may be prepared to instruct and direct those we may meet who, assailed and tormented by such thoughts of the devil, are led to tempt God. They are beguiled by the devil to search and grope, in his false ways, after what may be the intention of God concerning them, and thereby they are led into such apprehension and despair that they are unable to endure it. Such individuals must be reminded of these words and be reproved by them. So did Paul reprove the Jews and cavilers of his day when they presumed to comprehend God with their wisdom, to instruct him as his counselors and masters, to deal with him directly themselves, without any mediator, and to render him such service that he would owe them a recompense. Nothing will come of such searching. Against its endeavors he

has erected barriers that, with all your striving, you will never be able to overcome. And so infinite are his wisdom, his counsel and riches, that you will never be able to fathom nor exhaust them. You ought to rejoice that he gives you some knowledge of his omnipotence in his revelation, as follows: “For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him be the glory forever.”

[38] Why should we boast, he would say here, when everything that has being— and our own wisdom and capabilities, of course—did not originate itself but had its origin in him and must be preserved by him, must exist through him? He says (Acts 17:28): “For in him we live, and move, and have our being.” And again (Psalm 100:3): “It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves.” That is, what we are and are able to do, and the fact that we live and have peace and protection— in short, all the good or evil that happens to us—comes to pass not by accident or chance. It all proceeds from his divine counsel and good pleasure. He cares for us as his people and flock. He governs us and gives us good things. He aids and preserves us in every time of need. Therefore, all honor and glory are due to him alone, from his creatures.

Everything Is of God

[39] But when he says, of him, through him, in him, are all things—he says in the simplest way that the beginning, middle and end is of God; that all creatures have their origin in him, also their growth and their limitations. To illustrate: Every little grain of corn has its beginning. A root springs from the dead seed in the ground; then a shoot comes forth and becomes a stalk, a leaflet, an ear of corn, and here it pauses, having the three parts it is intended to have. All creatures also have their beginning, their continuation and end, filling up the period of their existence. When this order ceases, every creature will cease to exist. That which has a beginning and grows but does not attain its end, does not reach perfection, is nothing. To sum it all up, everything must be of God. Nothing can exist without origin in him. Nothing that has come into being can continue to exist without him. He has not created the world as a carpenter builds a house and, departing, leaves it to stand as it may. God remains with and preserves all things which he has made; otherwise they would not continue to exist.

[40] Saint Paul does not simply say—as he does elsewhere —Of him are all things. He adds two other assertions, making a triple expression, and then unites the three thoughts into one whole when he says, “To him be the glory forever.” No doubt it was his intention therewith to convey the thought of this article of faith and to distinguish the three persons of the Godhead, even though he does not mention them by name, which is not necessary here. The ancient teachers also looked upon this passage as a testimony to the Holy Trinity. Their analysis was: All things are created by God the Father through the Son—even as he does all things through the Son—and are preserved, in God’s good pleasure, through the Holy Spirit. So Paul is wont to say elsewhere; for example (1 Corinthians 8:6): “There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things.” And concerning the Holy Spirit, Genesis 1:31 says: “And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.”

[41] The Scriptures teach us that all creation is the work of one God, or the whole Godhead; and yet, inasmuch as they make a distinction between the three persons of the one Godhead, we may properly say that everything had its origin, everything exists and continues, in the Father as the first person; through the Son, who is Of the Father; and in the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from both the Father and the Son; which three, nevertheless, are comprehended in the one undivided essence.

[42] But how such a distinction of persons exists in the divine essence from eternity is a mystery which we shall and must leave unsolved. For we cannot, with our crude understanding, even fathom God’s creatures; no creature is wise enough to understand these three parts of itself—the beginning, the middle and the end. Though they are distinct from each other, nevertheless they are so closely connected that we cannot with our physical senses separate one from the other. Who has ever been able to discover or explain the process by which a leaflet grows from a tree, or a tiny grain of corn becomes a-root, or a cherry grows from the blossom to wood and kernel? Again, who can explain how the bodily members of a human being manifestly grow; what the sight of the eye is; how the tongue can make such a variety of sounds and words, which enter, with marvelous diversity, into so many ears and hearts? Much less are we able to analyze the inner workings of the mind—its thoughts, its meditations, its memory.

Why, then, should we presume, with our reason, to compass and comprehend the eternal, invisible essence of God?

Trinity Sunday. Second Sermon. The Trinity.

Text: Romans 11:33-36.

33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable [are] his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?

35 Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?

36 For of him, and through him, and to him, [are] all things: to whom [be] glory for ever. Amen. Romans 11:33-36

[1] This festival requires us to instruct the people in the dogma of the Holy Trinity, and to strengthen both memory and faith concerning it. This is the reason why we take up the subject once more. Without proper instruction and a sound foundation in this regard, other dogmas cannot be rightly and successfully treated. The other festivals of the year present the Lord God clothed in his works and miracles. For instance: on Christmas we celebrate his incarnation; on Easter his resurrection from the dead; on Whitsunday the gift of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Christian Church. Thus, all the other festivals present the Lord in the guise of a worker of one thing or another. But this Trinity Festival discloses him to us as he is in himself. Here we see him apart from whatever guise assumed, from whatever work done, solely in his divine essence. We must go beyond and above all reason, leaving behind the evidence of created things, and hear only God's own

testimony concerning himself and his inner essence; otherwise we shall remain unenlightened.

[2] Upon this subject the foolishness of God and the wisdom of the world conflict. God's declaration that he is one God in three distinct persons, the world looks upon as wholly unreasonable and foolish; and the followers of mere reason, when they hear it, regard everyone that teaches or believes it as no more than a fool. Therefore, this article has been assailed continually, from the times of the apostles and the fathers down to the present day, as history testifies. Especially the Gospel of St. John has been subjected to attack, which was written for the special purpose of fortifying this dogma against the attacks of Cerinthus the heretic, who in the apostolic age already attempted to prove from Moses the existence of but one God, which he assigned as reason that our Lord Jesus cannot be true God on account of the impossibility of God and man being united in one being. Thus he gave us the prattle of his reason, which he made the sole standard for heaven to conform to.

[3] O shameless reason! How can we poor, miserable mortals grasp this mystery of the Trinity? We who do not understand the operation of our own physical powers—speech, laughter, sleep, things whereof we have daily experience? Yet we would, untaught by the Word of God, guided merely by our fallible head, pronounce upon the very nature of God. Is it not supreme blindness for man, when he is unable to explain the most insignificant physical operation daily witnessed in his own body, to presume to understand something above and beyond the power of reason to comprehend, something whereof only God can speak, and to rashly affirm that Christ is not God?

[4] Indeed, if reason were the standard of judgment in such matters, I also might make a successful venture; but when the conclusions of even long and mature reflections upon the subject are compared with Scripture, they will not stand. Therefore, we must repeat, even though a mere stammering should be the result, what the Scriptures say to us, namely: that Jesus Christ is true God and that the Holy Spirit is likewise true God, yet there are not three Gods; not three divine natures, as we may speak of three brothers, three angels, three suns, three windows. There is one indivisible divine essence, while we recognize a distinction as to the persons.

Scripture Proof That Christ Is God.

Paul, speaking of Christ in Hebrews 1:3, refers to him as the express image of God's substance. Again, in Colossians 1:15 he says of Christ: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." We must take these words for what they say—that all creatures, even angels and men, are ranked below Christ. This classification leaves room for God only: taking away the creature, only God remains. It is one and the same thing, then, to say that Christ is the firstborn of all creatures and that Christ is true and essential God.

[5] To make the matter as clear as possible Paul uses the expression "image of the invisible God." If Christ be the image of God he must be a person distinct from him whose image he is, but at the same time in one divine essence with the Father. He and the Father are not one person, but two, and yet Christ could not be the express image of the Father's person, or essence, if he were not equally divine. No creature can be an image of the divine essence, for it does not possess that essence. To repeat, Christ could not be called the express image of God if he and the Father were not distinct persons; there must be one imaged and one who is the image. Expressed more clearly and according to Scripture, one person is the Father, who in eternity begets the other; the other is the Son, begotten in eternity, yet both are equally eternal, mighty, wise and just.

[6] Though the Jews and Turks ridicule our doctrine, as if we taught the existence of three brothers in heaven, it does not signify. Might I also cavil were it to serve any purpose here. But they do us wrong and falsify our teaching; for we do not conceive of the Trinity as in the nature of three men or of three angels. We regard it as one divine essence, an intimacy surpassing any earthly unity. The human body and soul are not so completely one as the Triune God. Further, we claim the Holy Scriptures teach that in the one divine essence, God the Father begot a son. Before any creature was made, before the world was created, as Paul says, "before the foundation of the world," in eternity, the Father begot a Son who is equal with him and in all respects God like himself. Not otherwise could Paul call Christ the express image of the invisible God. Thus, it is proven that the Father and the Son are distinct persons, and that nevertheless but one God

exists, a conclusion we cannot escape unless we would contradict Paul, and would become Jews and Turks.

Paul and Moses Agree in Testimony

[7] Again, Paul makes mention of Christ in different phrase, saying: “Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.” 1 Corinthians 10:9. Now, keeping this verse in mind, note how Paul and Moses kiss each other, how clearly the one responds to the other. For Moses says (Numbers 14:22): “All those men... have tempted me these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice,” and in this connection the speaker is represented by the term “Lord,” everywhere in the Bible printed by us in capitals to indicate a name belonging only to the Eternal, applicable to none but the one true God. Other terms used to designate God are sometimes applied also to men, but this word “Lord” refers only to God. Now, Moses says: “And the Lord [Adonai, the true God] said... All these men... have tempted me these ten times.” Then comes Paul explaining who this God is—saying they tempted “Christ.” Crawl through this statement if you may; the fact remains that Paul declares it was Christ who was tempted, and Moses makes him the one eternal and true God. Moreover, Christ was not at that time born; no, nor were Mary and David. Nevertheless, the apostle plainly says, They tempted Christ, let us not also tempt him.

[8] Certainly enough, then, Christ is the man to whom Moses refers as God. Thus the testimony of Moses long before is identical with that of Paul. Though employing different terms, they both confess Christ as the Son of God, born in eternity of the Father, in the same divine essence and yet distinct from him. You may call this difference what you will; we indicate it by the term “person.” True, we do not make a wholly clear explanation of the mystery; we but stammer when speaking of a Trinity? But what are we to do? We cannot better the attempt. So, then, the Father is not the Son, but the Son is born of the Father in eternity; and the Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father and God the Son. Thus there are three persons, and yet but one God. For what Moses declares concerning God Paul says is spoken of Christ.

[9] The same argument substantially Paul employs in Acts 20:28, when, blessing the Church of Miletus and exhorting the assembled ministers concerning their office, he says: “Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood.” This, too, is a significant text, proving beyond all controversy that Christ our Lord, who purchased the Church with his blood, is truly God, and to him the Church belongs. For the apostle plainly asserts it was God who bought the Church with his blood and that the Church is his own. Now, in view of the fact already established that the persons are distinct, and of the further statement that God has purchased the Church through his own blood, we inevitably conclude that Christ our Savior is true God, born of the Father in eternity, and that he also became man and was born of the Virgin Mary in time.

[10] If such blood—the material, tangible, crimson blood, shed by a real man—is truly to be called the blood of God, then he who shed it must be actually God, an eternal, almighty person in the one divine essence. In that case we truly can say the blood flowing from the side of the crucified One and spilled upon the ground is not merely the blood of an ordinary man, but God’s own. Paul does not indulge in frivolous talk. He speaks of a most momentous matter; and he is in dead earnest when he in his exhortation reminds us that it is an exalted office to rule the Church and to feed it with the Word of God. Lest we toy in the performance of such an office we are reminded that the flock is as dear to him as the blood of his dear Son, so precious that all creatures combined can furnish no equivalent. And if we are indolent or unfaithful, we sin against the blood of God and become guilty of it, in as much as through our fault it has been shed in vain for the souls which we should oversee.

[11] There are many passages of similar import, particularly in the Gospel of John. So we cannot evade the truth but must say God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are three individual persons, yet of one divine essence. We do not, as the Jews and Turks derisively allege, worship three Gods; we worship only one God, represented to us in the Scriptures as three persons. Christ said to Philip (John 14:9), “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” There Christ claims unity and equality with the Father in the one divine essence. So does Paul in Colossians 1:15, where he calls Christ “the image of the invisible God,” at the same time indicating

two distinct persons: the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father, yet they are one God. Such passages, I say, are frequent. By means of them the sainted fathers valiantly maintained this dogma of the Trinity against the devil and the world, thus making it our heritage.

[12] Now, what care we that reason should regard it as foolishness? It requires no skill to cavil over these things; I could do that as well as others. But, praise God, I have the grace to desire no controversy on this point. When I know it is the Word of God that declares the Trinity, that God has said so, I do not inquire how it can be true; I am content with the simple Word of God, let it harmonize with reason as it may. And every Christian should adopt the same course with respect to all the articles of our faith. Let there be no caviling and contention on the score of possibility; be satisfied with the inquiry: Is it the Word of God? If a thing be his Word, if he has spoken it, you may confidently rely upon it he will not lie nor deceive you, though you may not understand the how and the when. Since, then, this article of the Holy Trinity is certified by the Word of God, and the sainted fathers have from the inception of the Church chivalrously defended and maintained the article against every sect, we are not to dispute as to how God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God. This is an incomprehensible mystery, it is enough that God in his Word gives such testimony of himself. Both his nature and its revelation to us are far beyond our understanding.

Physical Life Inexplicable to Reason

[13] And why should you presume to comprehend, to exactly understand, the sublime, inconceivable divine essence when you are wholly ignorant of your own body and life? You cannot explain the action of your laughter, nor how your eyes give you knowledge of a castle or mountain ten miles away. You cannot tell how in sleep one, dead to the external world, is yet alive. If we are unable to understand the least detail of our physical selves, anything so insignificant as the growth of a mere hair, for instance, can we, unaided by the revelation of God's Word, climb by reason—that reason so blind to things within its natural realm—into the realm of heavenly mysteries and comprehend and define God in his majesty? If you employ reason from mere love of disputation, why not devote it to questions concerning the daily workings of your physical nature? For instance, where are the five

senses during sleep? Just how is the sound of your own laughter produced? We might without sin occupy ourselves with such questions. But as to the absolute truth in a matter such as this, let us abide patiently by the authority of the Word. The Word says that Christ is the express image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creatures; in other words, he is God equally with the Father.

[14] Again, John 5:23 testifies that all should honor the Son as they honor the Father. And in John 12:44 we read: “He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.” Also, John 14:1: “Believe in God, believe also in me.” And again, John 16:15: “All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine.” These and similar passages are armor that cannot be pierced; for they are uttered by God, who does not lie and who alone is qualified to speak the truth concerning himself. Thus the dogma of the Trinity is thoroughly founded upon the holy Scriptures.

The Third Person of the Trinity

[15] Now, having established the existence of Christ in the Trinity, we must next consider the third person, the Holy Spirit, in Scripture sometimes termed the “Spirit” of God and sometimes his “Soul.” This person is not spoken of as “born”; he is not born like the Son, but proceeds from the Father and the Son. To express it differently, he is a person possessing in eternity the divine essence, which he derives from the Father and Son in unity in the same way the Son derives it from the Father alone. There are, then, three distinct persons in one divine essence, one divine majesty. According to the Scripture explanation of the mystery, Christ the Lord is the Son of God from eternity, the express image of the Father, and equally great, mighty, wise and just. All deity, wisdom, power and might inherent in the Father is also in Christ, and likewise in the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from Father and Son. Now, when you are asked to explain the Trinity, reply that it is an incomprehensible mystery, beyond the understanding of angels and creatures, the knowledge of which is confined to the revelations of Scripture.

[16] Rightly did the fathers compose the Creed, or Symbol, in the simple form repeated by Christian children: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son... I believe in

the Holy Ghost.” This confession we did not devise, nor did the fathers of former times. As the bee collects honey from many fair and gay flowers, so is this Creed collected, in appropriate brevity, from the books of the beloved prophets and apostles—from the entire holy Scriptures—for children and for unlearned Christians. It is fittingly called the “Apostle’s Symbol,” or “Apostle’s Creed.” For brevity and clearness it could not have been better arranged, and it has remained in the Church from ancient time. It must either have been composed by the apostles themselves or it was collected from their writings and sermons by their ablest disciples.

[17] It begins “I believe.” In whom? “In God the Father.” This is the first person in the Godhead. For the sake of clear distinction, the peculiar attribute and office in which each person manifests himself is briefly expressed. With the first it is the work of creation. True, creation is not the work of one individual person, but of the one divine, eternal essence as such. We must say, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit created heaven and earth. Yet that work is more especially predicated of the person of the Father, the first person, for the reason that creation is the only work of the Father in which he has stepped forth out of concealment into observation; it is the first work wrought by the divine Majesty upon the creature. By the word “Father” he is particularly and rightly distinguished from the other persons of the Trinity. It indicates him as the first person, derived from no other, the Son and the Holy Spirit having existence from him.

[18] Continuing, the Creed says, I believe in another who is also God. For to believe is something we owe to no being but God alone. Who is this second person? Jesus Christ. God’s only begotten Son. Christians have so confessed for more than fifteen hundred years; indeed, such has been the confession of believers from the beginning of the world. Though not employing precisely these words, yet this has been their faith and profession.

[19] The first designation of God the Son makes him the only Son of God. Although angels are called sons of the Lord our God, and even Christians are termed his children, yet no one of these is said to be the “only” or “only-begotten” Son. Such is the effect of Christ’s birth from the Father that he is unequalled by any creature, not excepting even the angels.

For he is in truth and by nature the Son of God the Father; that is, he is of the same divine, eternal, uncreated essence.

[20] Next comes the enumeration of the acts peculiar to him: “Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” The distinct personality of the Son is thus demonstrated by acts peculiar to himself. Not the Father and not the Holy Spirit, but the Son alone, assumed human nature of flesh and blood, like unto ours, to suffer, die, rise again and ascend into heaven.

[21] In the third place we confess, “I believe in the Holy Ghost.” Here again a distinct person is named, yet one in divine essence with the Father and the Son; for we must believe in no one but the true God, in obedience to the first commandment: “I am Jehovah thy God... Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” Thus, briefly this confession comprehends the unity of the divine essence—we accept and worship only one God—and the revealed truth that in the Trinity are three distinct persons. The same distinction is indicated in holy baptism; we are baptized into the faith of one God, yet Christ commands us to baptize “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

[22] The peculiarity of this third person is the fact that he proceeds from both the Father and the Son. He is therefore called also the Spirit of the Father and the Son; he is poured into the human heart and reveals himself in the gathering of the Church of Christ in all tongues. Through the Word of the Gospel he enlightens and kindles the hearts of men unto one faith, sanctifying, quickening and saving them.

[23] So the Creed confesses three persons as comprehended in one divine essence, each one, however, retaining his distinct personality; and in order that the simple Christian may recognize that there is but one divine essence and one God, who is tri-personal, a special work, peculiar to himself, is ascribed to each person. And such acts, peculiar to each person, are mentioned for the reason that thus a confusion of persons is avoided. To the Father we ascribe the work of creation; to the Son the work of Redemption; to the Holy Spirit the power to forgive sins, to gladden, to

strengthen, to transport from death to life eternal. The thought is not that the Father alone is the Creator, the Son alone Redeemer and the Holy Spirit alone Sanctifier. The creation and preservation of the universe, atonement for sin and its forgiveness, resurrection from the dead and the gift of eternal life—all these are operations of the one Divine Majesty as such. Yet the Father is especially emphasized in the work of creation, which proceeds originally from him as the first person; the Son is emphasized in the redemption he has accomplished in his own person; and the Holy Spirit in the peculiar work of sanctification, which is both his mission and revelation. Such distinction is made for the purpose of affording Christians the unqualified assurance that there is but one God and yet three persons in the one divine essence—truths the sainted fathers have faithfully gathered from the writings of Moses, the prophets and the apostles, and which they have maintained against all heretics.

[24] This faith has descended to us by inheritance, and by his power God has maintained it in his Church, against sects and adversaries, unto the present time. So we must abide by it in its simplicity and not be wise. Christians are under the necessity of believing things apparently foolish to reason. As Paul says (1 Corinthians 1:21): “It was God’s good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe.” How can reason adapt itself to comprehend that three are one, and one is three; that God became man; that he who is washed with water in obedience to Christ’s command, is washed with the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and cleansed from all sins? Such articles of faith appear utterly foolish to reason. Paul aptly calls the Gospel foolish preaching wherewith God saves such as do not depend on their own wisdom but simply believe the Word. They who will follow reason in the things dealt with in these articles, and will reject the Word, shall be defeated and destroyed in their wisdom.

[25] Now, we have in the holy Scriptures and in the Creed sufficient information concerning the Holy Trinity, and all that is necessary for the instruction of ordinary Christians. Besides, the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and that of the Holy Spirit is also attested by miracles not to be lightly esteemed nor disregarded. The Lord our God brings to pass miraculous things for the Christian’s sake—for the strengthening of his faith—and not merely as a rebuke to false teachers. Were he to consider the false teachers alone, he might easily defer their retribution to the future life,

since he permits many other transgressors to go unpunished for ten, twenty or thirty years. But the fact is, God openly in this life lays hold upon leaders of sects who blaspheme and slander him with their false doctrines. He inflicts upon them unusual punishments for the sake of warning others. Besides being openly convicted of blasphemy and having the condemnation of their own conscience, the misguided ones receive testimony to the fact that these false leaders are instigators of blasphemy against God's name and his Word. All men are compelled to admit God can have no pleasure in their doctrine, since he visits them with special marks of his displeasure, destroying them with severer punishments than ordinarily befall offenders.

[26] History records that John the evangelist had as contemporary a heretic, by the name of Cerinthus, who was the first to arise in opposition to the apostolic doctrine and in blasphemy against the Lord Jesus with the claim that Jesus is not God. This blasphemy spread to such an extent that John saw himself compelled to supplement the work of the other evangelists with his Gospel, whose distinct purpose it is to defend and maintain the deity of Christ against Cerinthus and his rabble. A feature of John's Gospel patent to all is the sublime beginning of his Gospel which renders it distinct from the others. He does not lay stress upon the miraculous doings of Christ, but upon his preaching, wherein he reveals himself powerfully as true God, born of the Father from eternity, and his equal in power, honor, wisdom, righteousness and every other divine work. With respect to John and Cerinthus it is reported that the former, having gone to a public bath with some of his disciples, became aware that Cerinthus and his rabble were there, also. Without hesitation he told his disciples to be up and away, and not to abide among blasphemers. The disciples followed his advice and departed. Immediately after their departure the room collapsed, and Cerinthus with his followers perished, not one escaping.

[27] We also read concerning the heretic Arius, the chief foe of his time toward the dogma of the deity of Christ. the injury done by this man to the cause of Christ was such as to occupy the Church for four centuries after his death; and still today his heresy has not been altogether rooted out. But the Lord took the matter in hand by the performance of a miracle which could not but be understood. History records that Arius had ingratiated himself into the favor of Constantine, the emperor, and his counselors. With an oath

he had succeeded in impressing them with the righteousness of his doctrine, so that the emperor gave command that Alexander, bishop of Constantinople, should recognize him as a member of the Christian Church and restore him to the priestly office. When the godly bishop refused to accede to this demand, knowing full well the purpose pursued by Arius and his followers, Eusebius and the other bishops who supported Arius threatened him with the imperial edict and expressed the determination to drive him out by force and to have Arius restored by the congregation as such. However, they gave him a day to think the matter over.

[28] The godly bishop was fearful. The following of Arius was large and powerful, being supported by the imperial edict and the whole court. The bishop, therefore, resolved to seek help from God, where alone it is found in all things relating to God's honor. He fell down upon his face in the church and prayed all night long that God should preserve his name and honor by methods calculated to stem the tide of evil purpose, and to preserve Christendom; against the heretics. When it was morning, and the hour had come when Alexander the bishop should either restore Arius to office or be cast out of his own, Arius convened punctually with his followers. As the procession was wending its way to the church, Arius suddenly felt ill and was compelled to seek privacy. The pompous procession halted, waiting his return, when the message came that his lungs and liver had passed from him, causing his death. The narrative comments: *Mortem dignam blasphema et foetida mente*— a death worthy such a blasphemous and turpid mind.

[29] We see, then, that this dogma has been preserved by God first through the writings and the conflicts of the apostles, and then by miracles, against the devil and his blasphemers. And it shall be preserved in the future likewise, so that, without a trace of doubt, we may believe in God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. This is the faith which we confess with our children daily. To guard against a mixing of persons or the abandonment of the tri-personality, three distinct acts are predicated. This should enable the common Christian to avoid confusing the persons, while maintaining the divine unity as to essence. We proclaim these things on this Sunday in order to call attention to the fact that we have not come upon this doctrine in a dream, but by the grace of God through his Word and the holy

apostles and Fathers. God help us to be found constant and without blemish in this doctrine and faith to our end. Amen.

First Sunday after Trinity. God Is Love.

Text: 1 John 4:16-21.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. 1 John 4:16-21

God Is Love.

This epistle text is amply expounded in the “Explanation of Certain Epistles of the Apostles” printed in other volumes. Those who wish may read there one or more sermons for themselves or their people. They are too long to insert here.

Second Sunday. Exhortation to Brotherly Love.

Text: 1 John 3:13-18.

13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. 1 John 3:13-18

Exhortation to Brotherly Love.

[1] The Epistles and Gospels selected for the Pentecost cycle of Sundays have love as their general theme. They deal not only with the love we owe to Christ and God, which is only to be thankful for the unspeakable blessing of forgiveness of sins and salvation through Christ's blood and death, but also of the love we owe our neighbor; not a love in return for favors, but one that unceasingly gives, forgives and works all good even when unrequited.

[2] John here admonishes the Christian to exercise the virtue of love. Considering the evident rarity of love among men, this admonition is necessary. He particularly warns Christians not to wonder at the world's hatred and desire for their death. Such was the hate of Cain for his brother,

of which the apostle has just spoken. The world's hate, it must be admitted, repels love and powerfully obstructs its exercise.

[3] Is it not surpassingly strange that one can hate those who love him and from whom he has received only kindness? Such wickedness is almost inconceivable, we say. What incentive is there for any to render the world service when in ingratitude it rewards love with hatred? But let us examine ourselves, who are baptized and have received the Gospel, and confess how we requite the supreme love of God in giving us his Son. What a beautiful example of glad gratitude we display! For the shame of it we ought to despise ourselves before God and his angels. And what shall we say of those who will not endure the preaching of the glorious message of God's grace and blessing, but condemn it as heresy? to whom they who seek to serve, to benefit and save the world by declaring the good news, must be, as Paul says, "as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things," 1 Corinthians 4:13. Indeed, no criminal receives more wretched and ignominious treatment and execution, of which the Pope and his followers are a case in point.

The World's Hatred

[4] While experience has proven this otherwise incredible fact, John vouchsafes the admonition notwithstanding: "Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you." If we are not to wonder at this, is there anything in the world to incite wonder? I should truly think the hearing of a single sermon on the grace of Christ would suffice to bring the world to receive the Gospel with intense joy and never to forget the divine mercy and blessing. It would be no wonder should the earth suddenly open and engulf mankind because of its ingratitude to God who has given his Son to become man for the purpose of redeeming us condemned mortals from sin and death and restoring us to life and salvation. Is it not a horrible thing that any man should shun and oppose such a Savior and his doctrine even more than he does the devil himself?

[5] But what is God's attitude toward such conduct? Well does he say to the Jews through the prophet: "O my people, what have I done unto thee? And wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt and redeemed thee out of the house of bondage;

and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what Balak, king of Moab, devised; and what Balaam, the son of Beor, answered him; remember from Shittim unto Gilgal, that ye may know the righteous acts of Jehovah.” Micah 6:3-5. And well does Christ say to his ungrateful people: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” Matthew 23:37. As if he would say, “I surely did not come to affect your death and condemnation by my message. I am about to suffer death and God’s wrath for your sins. I bring you God’s endless grace and blessing for time and eternity. Then why this bitter hatred against me and my message?”

[6] “Since the world hates even God for his kindness,” argues John, “marvel not, my beloved, that you suffer the same fate. What does it signify that I show my love by hazarding life and limb to sustain this doctrine of the Gospel and help my neighbor? Mine is but a poor, mean, uncouth, offensive love in comparison with the love that led Christ to die for me and to redeem me from eternal death. If God’s supreme, unfathomable love fails to awaken the gratitude of the world, what wonder if the world hates you for all your kindness? Why will you bring down your fist and stamp your foot in anger at such ingratitude? You are yourselves of that race for whom the Son of God had to die. And even were you to die for the Gospel, your sacrifice would be as nothing in comparison to the fact that God, for the sake of the world, spared not his own Son but permitted the world to put him to death.”

[7] But whence arises the world’s hatred? John tells us in verse twelve when he mentions the incident of Cain, who, he says, “was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.” An excellent reason, indeed, for hating—the hater and murderer is evil and the benefactor good! In civil and domestic affairs, it is the evildoers and disobedient who incur displeasure and receive punishment; and such reward is just. But whenever God has dealings with the world, it shows what a rotten fruit it is by hating, persecuting, and putting to death as evildoers and impostors its very benefactors. This trait it inherits, John tells us, from its ancestor Cain, the

great fratricide saint. He is a true picture of the world of all times, and ever its spirit and fashion is patterned after him.

[8] When mother Eve, the dear, godly woman, bore her first son, she declared in her joy and her hope of God's promise of the future seed that should bruise the serpent's head: "I have gotten a man with the help of Jehovah" (Genesis 4:1); and she named him Cain, which means "obtained," as if she would say, "I have obtained the true treasure." For she had not before seen a human being born; this was the first, precious fruit of man. Over Cain she rejoiced, pronouncing herself blessed. This son was trained in the hope that he should be a savior of the future race, a comfort to his brothers and sisters with all their offspring. Nor was he unaware of these proud hopes. Proudly he lorded it over his brother, who in contrast had to bear the ignominious name of Abel, meaning "nothing," or "vanity," as if voicing the thought of the parents' hearts: "Alas! this one has no future. Cain is the rightful heir to the blessing God has promised man; he is lord and master of his brethren."

[9] It is likely that the godly father and mother for many years drew their solace from the hope placed in their first-born son, as they looked forward with intensest longing to the redemption from their deplorable fall. Doubtless they trained both sons very carefully and instructed them concerning their own sin and fall and the promise God had given them, until they were fully grown and had entered into the priestly office. Cain the first-born was particularly zealous in that respect, desiring to be first inasmuch as he offered his first fruits of the earth, given by God and obtained by his own labor, as he no doubt had seen his father offer. Abel, however, the inferior, the poor shepherd, offered the firstlings of his sheep, given him of God and obtained without effort and toil of his own. Now, God in a wonderful way manifested his preference concerning the gifts upon the altar. Fire descended from heaven and consumed Abel's offering, but Cain's remained. The fire was the sign of God's favor. The text says: "And Jehovah had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." Genesis 4:4-5.

[10] Thereupon Adam and Eve saw that the hope and solace centering in their firstborn son, were a delusion. They began to learn the wonderful judgments of God, who gave precedence to Abel, the male counterpart of Cinderella —which is all he was in his own sight when he compared

himself with his brother. Now Cain, with full confidence in his position, spoiled by the delusion of his parents that as the first-born he was God's preference, felt himself outraged. His hypocrisy, hitherto masked, comes to the surface. He burns with secret hate against God, with hate and anger against his brother, which he takes no trouble whatever to disguise. The parents rebuke him, but effect nothing. The flame of his resentment rises higher, and meeting him alone upon the field, he fells him to the ground. Far from contemplating amendment of life or seeking grace from God, he has no mercy upon the only brother he has on earth, who has done him no harm whatever. He cannot forgive him and leave him in unenvied possession of the grace of God.

[11] Such was the solace and joy poor Adam and Eve lived to experience in their first children! From this time on their earthly life was fraught with gloom and sorrow, particularly since they could not but see the source of these in their own fall and they would have pined to death had not God comforted them with another son. For when it became evident that the hope they had placed in Cain was a delusion, and that they were deprived of the son who, beyond a doubt, possessed the grace of God, they, without another son, would not have known where to look for the solace of the promised seed.

Cain the World, Abel the Church

[12] Note, in this man Cain is pictured the world in its true, characteristic colors; in him its true spirit stands reflected. Certainly, his equal has never been. In him are unquestionably prefigured the very flower, the very quintessence, of holiness on earth—the most pious servants of God. On the other hand, that poor, wretched, abject male counterpart of Cinderella, Abel, well represents the obscure little brotherhood, the Church of Christ. She must yield to Cain the lord the distinction of being everything before God, of being the recipient of every gift of God, of being entitled to all honor and every privilege. He feels important in his imagined dignity, permits this spirit to pervade his sacrifices and his worships, and thinks that God cannot but favor and accept his offering rather than that of his brother. Meanwhile, the pious Abel goes his way, meekly suffering his brother's contempt. He willingly yields Cain the honor, esteems himself vastly inferior and beholds no consolation for himself aside from the pure mercy and goodness of God.

He believes in God and hopes for the promised future seed. In such faith he performs his sacrifice as a confession, a sign, of his gratitude.

[13] This illustration is intended by God as solace for his little throng; for the incident is not written for Abel's sake but for the sake of the humble children of God, whose condition is like that of Abel. God has not forgotten them, though they are haughtily ignored by proud Cain, who regards them as nothing in his presence. God graciously looks upon them and rejects proud Cain with his birthright and offering.

[14] Innocent Abel becomes the object of anger and hatred when the Word of God lays hold of Cain revealing God's displeasure where he had fancied himself worthy, and God's unwillingness to regard his offering and devotion as superior to that of his brother and more meritorious. Cain begins bitterly to hate and persecute his brother. He finds no rest until Abel is laid low and cut off from the earth. Now you have the cause of the world's hatred and anger against Christians; simply this, as John says of Cain: "Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

[15] What offense had godly Abel committed against his brother to be so hated? He had even regarded that brother as the first-born, as vastly superior to himself, and had done him all honor and loved him as became a brother. He was easily satisfied, desiring simply the grace of God. He prayed for the future seed, that is, for the salvation and happiness of his parents, his brother and the entire human race. How could Cain be unmerciful and inhuman enough in his frenzy to murder his own flesh and blood? The answer is found in the fact that the devil had filled Cain's heart with pride and vanity over his birthright. He considered himself a man of distinction, with every claim upon God's favor and sinless, whilst his brother was nothing whatever. Cain's heart is devoid of true brotherly love; he has only contempt for Abel. He cannot endure God's manifest favor toward his brother and will not be moved by the injunction to humble himself and seek God's grace. Anger and envy possess him to the extent that he cannot tolerate his brother alive. In violation of God's commandment and his own conscience, he becomes a murderer, and then goes his way as if he had done right.

[16] This is what John means when he says that Cain had no other cause for his crime than that his own works were evil and his brother's righteous.

Similarly, that obedient daughter of Saint Cain, the world, hates the Christians; and for no other reason than the latter's love and goodness of heart. Witness the examples of the holy patriarchs, the prophets and, most of all, of Christ himself.

[17] What sin against the world did the beloved apostles commit? They desired the injury of none, but went about in extreme poverty and toil, teaching mankind how, through faith in Christ, to be saved from the devil's kingdom and from eternal death. This the world will not hear and suffer; hence the hue and cry: "Kill, kill these people! Away with them from off the earth! Show them no mercy!" Why this hostility? Because the apostles sought to relieve the world of its idolatry and damnable doings. Such good works the world could not tolerate. What it desires is nothing but praise and commendation for its own evil doings, expecting from God the impossible endorsement, "Your deeds are good and well-pleasing to me. Pious children of mine are you. Just keep on cheerfully killing all who believe and preach my Word."

[18] In the same way does the world conduct itself today with reference to our Gospel. For no other reason are we hated and persecuted than because we have, through God's grace, proclaimed his Word that recovered us from the blindness and idolatry in which we were sunken as deeply as the world, and because we desire to rescue others. That is the unpardonable sin by which we have incurred the world's irreconcilable anger and its inextinguishable hatred. It cannot permit us to live. We preach no other doctrine than faith in Christ, which our children pray and they themselves confess in words. We differ only in our claim that Christ having been crucified for us and having shed his blood to redeem us from sin and death, our salvation is not affected by our own works, or holiness or devotion. The fact that we do not regard their faithless worship equal to Christ himself, but teach men to trust in the grace of God and not their own worthiness, and to render him gratitude for his grace—this fact is intolerable to the world. It would be well for our adversaries if they would receive such teaching, since it would render them more than ever what they profess to be: our superiors in wisdom, knowledge and reputation—a claim we are willing to concede. But Cain's works are evil and Abel's righteous. The world simply cannot tolerate the Gospel, and no unity or harmony is ever to be hoped for. The world will not forsake its idolatry nor receive the faith. It would force us to

renounce the Word of God and praise its Cainlike worship or take death at their hands.

[19] Therefore, John says, “Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you,” for it is compelled to act according to the nature inherited from its father Cain. It would have all merits and concede to Abel none. The world comprises the exalted, the wise, the learned, the mighty. The Scriptures represent these as under necessity to hate and persecute the poor throng of the Church of Christ by reason of the good works done by them. They can under no consideration tolerate the idea of being taught by this despised and humble throng the doctrine of salvation through the grace and mercy of God alone, not through man’s own merits. They cannot endure the teaching that their offering—the mass, regarded by the Papists as a work of superlative merit and holiness—avails nothing before God.

[20] In the text the nature of the world is portrayed for our recognition. So to understand the world as to know what may be expected from it is essential and valuable knowledge for the Christian. Thus armed he will not be dismayed and become impatient of suffering, nor permit its malice and ingratitude to mislead him to hate and desire for revenge. He will keep his faith and love, suffering the world to go its way if it refuses to hear his message. The Christian should expect nothing better from the world than its bitter persecution in return for his good works and love. The Church of Christ on earth, let him remember, is never to have an easier lot. He is not to judge according to show and appearance, thinking: “They are the great throng, the wisest and cleverest people on earth; how is it possible that they should all be in error and under condemnation?”

[21] It is necessarily true that discipline and peace are impossible without the most excellent, exalted, erudite, clever people—royal, princely, noble in achievement and honor. Cain is never plain and lowly. He is always eminently clever, wise, holy and in every way vastly Abel’s superior. In fact, he must in himself represent all desirable things, as his name indicates. And the same characteristic is manifest in his children, who are ingenious in the invention of every variety of art. Deplorable the fact that a man of Cain’s qualifications, born of godly parents and signally honored of God, should display such hatred and inhumanity toward poor Abel merely because of God’s Word and Abel’s faith.

[22] Such knowledge is comforting to the godly little company of Christians, who are confident they have God's favor and know it to be the occasion of their persecution; they have no protection and succor but are exposed to the same fate as Abel. If they fare better, they may thank God for it. But they are ever to abide in love toward God, whose love they have received and felt, and likewise toward men, their enemies not excepted. This was Abel's way; could he have lived again, he would have kept his brotherly love for his murderer, forgiving him and even imploring God's forgiveness for him. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren."

Love Moves Christians

[23] To abide in love should be the motive for us Christians. John contrasts it with the motive of the world in hating us—its wickedness. The world's hatred of you, as John words imply, is not strange. The contrast between you and the world is exceedingly great. Through its own evil works, unbelief, pride, contempt for the Word and grace of God, and the persecution of the godly, the world has become by this time the victim of Satan and eternal death. It spurns all counsel and aid directed toward its rescue. Stiff-necked and hardened, under evident condemnation by its own conscience, it has chosen to persist in its doom. But we believers in Christ, God be praised! are different people. We have come forth from death; we have passed through death and entered into life through the knowledge and faith of the Son of God, who has loved us and given himself for us.

[24] Such grace and goodness of God, says the apostle, should prompt you not to be offended and vanquished by the world's ingratitude, hate and malice, and thus to cease from holy endeavor and become likewise, evil, which course will result in the loss of your treasure. It is yours, not by your own effort, but by grace alone; for at one time you as well as they languished in the kingdom and power of death, in evil works, far from faith and love. Remember to comfort yourselves, therefore, with the thought of this great blessing, an advantage you enjoy above the others. What if the world, abiding in death, does hate and persecute you who abide in life? Whom can its hatred injure? It cannot take from you the life which it lacks while you possess it, nor deliver you to death, from which you have passed, through Christ. When it does its worst, it may perhaps falsely slander you,

or deprive you of your property, or destroy your corrupt body—the final home of maggots and in any event doomed to corruption—and thus through the death of the body help you gain true life. Thus vengeance will be yours rather than its own. Yours will be the joy of being transplanted from death into life, whereas the world must abide in death. While they of the world think to deny you both the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth, they themselves lose body and soul. What more terrible retribution could their hatred and envy receive? For the sake of denying gratification to the devil and the world, and much more for your own welfare, you must not allow your persecutions to rob you of your peace and salvation, nor to lead you to lose your faith through impatience and desire for revenge. Rather, pity their wretchedness and doom. You lose nothing by their oppression; yours is the gain, theirs the loss. For the slight grief inflicted upon you with reference to body and time, they shall dearly pay both here and hereafter.

[25] How do we know we have passed from death unto life? John says, because we love the brethren. Just what does he mean? Is it not our doctrine that Christ first loved us, as John elsewhere says? That before we ever loved him he died and rose again for us? When we fully believe in our Savior's love, then our own hearts respond with perfect love to God and our neighbor. Why, then, does John say, "We have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren"?

[26] The explanation is found in the words "We know." John says plainly, "From the fact that we love the brethren, we know we have passed out of death into life." Love of the brethren is the test whereby we may ascertain who are the true believers. The apostle directed this epistle especially against false Christians; many there are who extol Christ, as did unbelieving Cain, and yet fail to bear the fruit of faith. John's reference is not to the means whereby we pass from sin and death to life, but to the proof whereby we may know the fact—not to the cause, but to the effect.

[27] It is not sufficient to boast of having passed from death into life; there must be evidence of the fact. Faith is not an inactive and lifeless thing. When there is faith in the heart, its power will be manifest. Where power is not in evidence, all boasting is false and vain. When the human heart, in its confidence in divine mercy and love, is thrilled with spiritual comfort, and also warmed into kindness, friendliness, humility and patience towards the neighbor, envying and despising none but cheerfully serving all and

ministering unto necessity even to hazarding body and life —when this is the case, then the fruits of faith are manifest. Such fruits are proof that the believer has truly passed from death into life. Had he not true faith, but doubted God’s grace and love, his heart would not prompt him, by reason of his love and gratitude to God, to manifest love for his neighbor. Where man has faith, and where he realizes God’s infinite mercy and goodness in raising him from death to life, love is enkindled in his heart, and he is prompted to do all manner of good, even to his enemies, as God has done to him.

[28] Such is the right interpretation and understanding of John’s expression: “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.” It leaves in its integrity the foundation, justification, or deliverance from death, through faith alone. This is the first element of Christian doctrine. Granting that faith does justify, the next question is whether the faith is real or simulated, being merely a deceptive show and unsupported claim. The clear information imparted by the apostles is, that love, indeed, does not deliver from death, but that deliverance from death and the presence of life becomes a matter of sight and knowledge in that love has been wrought. With true faith we must have come to the point where we no longer, like Cain, in our pride and conceit, despise our neighbor; where we are not filled with envy, hatred and bitterness; where we desire, and to the extent of our power, promote the interests of our neighbor and work him all good.

[29] John draws to a close by showing the opposite side of the picture, in that he addresses earnest words that reecho like peals of thunder to those who make the carnal boast of being Christians while destitute of love. He cites several facts as evidence that where love is lacking, necessarily faith and deliverance from death are absent, likewise. Thus no opportunity is given for self-deception or a frivolous excuse based upon wordy boasting of one’s faith. The reality of the inner life is known by the presence of love, which in turn attests the presence of faith in the heart.

I. “He That Loveth Not Abideth in Death”

[30] Here, in clear, decisive words, the conclusion is expressed that no man may boast of life unless he has love. If it is true that faith must be active, it

is conversely true that the absence of fruitage demonstrates one's continuance in the old Cainlike manner of existence, torpid and dead, bereft of solace and the experience of God's grace and life. Let no one presume to think he has passed into life so long as he is devoid of love and the fruits of faith. Let him become serious, and in alarm make ready to become a true believer, lest he remain in eternal death and under greater condemnation than those who have never heard the Gospel.

II. "Whosoever Hateth His Brother Is a Murderer: And Ye Know That No Murderer Hath Eternal Life Abiding in Him".

[31] Still clearer and stronger becomes the argument that lack of love means continuance in death. The stern and frightful judgment is here expressed that the unloving person is no better than Cain the fratricide. His heart is under the influence of deadly hate and murderous malice against the brother who refuses to be subservient to his desires. Kindling rage will prove its existence by appropriate works unless restrained by the fear of disgrace and punishment. He wishes his brother nothing good, but rejoices in his misfortune. All this, however, is impossible for one who believes that he has been delivered from death. One who knows the wretchedness and misery of death from experience, but has entered upon life with its solace and joy, blessings he seeks to maintain—such a person will desire for others the same blessing; he cannot rejoice in another's death. Therefore it is true conversely: "We know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

Hatred Natural to Human Reason.

[32] Thus we see the nature of the human heart without faith and the knowledge of Christ; at bottom it is but the heart of a Cain, murderous toward its neighbor. Nor can anything better be expected from him who is not a Christian. The Scriptures repeatedly denounce such faithless hypocrites as bloodthirsty and deceitful. "Jehovah abhorreth the bloodthirsty and deceitful man." Psalm 5:6. "For their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood." Proverbs. 1:16. See also verse 11. All mankind are by nature the children of the murderer Cain. They are, of course, no better than their father. While Cain was a man most magnificent, intelligent and wise, being the first fruit born of those holy parents Adam and Eve, and in his superior endowment with natural virtues infinitely

superior to all who come after him, he was nevertheless an unbeliever before God. Hence he became the murderer of his brother.

III. “Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath the world’s goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?”.

[33] These words delineate true Christian love and hold up the sublime example, or pattern, of God’s love manifest in Christ. Christ’s blood and death is God’s own blood and death. Paul in Acts 20:28, speaks of God having purchased the Church “with his own blood.” The heart of man by faith receives and apprehends this sacrifice. Under its transforming influence he is disposed to work good to his neighbor as he has himself received good. He even jeopardizes his life to that end, being conscious of his redemption from eternal death, and knowing physical death powerless to affect his eternal life. But the heart that fails to appropriate Christ’s sacrifice is without faith and insensible to God’s love and eternal life.

[34] John uses an illustration plain enough for anyone to understand, and from which we may judge that the soul found wanting in small duties will be deficient in great ones. According to the apostle, if one possesses this world’s goods and sees his neighbor want, he being able to render assistance without injury to himself, and yet closes his heart against that neighbor, not assisting him with even the slightest work of love, how can the love of God dwell in him since he appreciates it so little that he will not spare his needy brother a penny? How can he be expected, then, to render a greater service—to even lay down his life for his brother? What right has such a soul to boast—how can he know—that Christ has laid down his life for him and delivered him from death?

[35] How frequently are such people to be found! Having this world’s goods and being able to help the needy, they close their hearts against the unfortunate, as did the rich glutton toward poor Lazarus. Where shall we find in imperial courts, among kings, princes and lords, any who extend a

helping hand to the needy Church, or give her so much as a crust of bread toward the maintenance of the poor, of the ministry and of schools, or for other of her necessities? How would they measure up in the greater duty of laying down their lives for the brethren, and especially for the Christian Church? Note the terrible judgment that they who are devoid of brotherly love are in God's sight murderers and cannot have eternal life.

[36] But the merely selfish may well escape our censure in comparison with those who not only close their purses to the poor but shamelessly and forcibly deprive and rob their needy neighbor of his own by overreaching, by fraud, oppression and extortion; who take from the Church the property rightfully hers and especially reserved for her, snatching the bread from her mouth, so to speak. Not only is the papistical rabble today guilty of such sin, but many who would be known as evangelical practice the same fraud with reference to the parochial estates and general property of the Church, and, in addition, tyrannically harass and torment the poor ministers. But oh, how heavy and terrible the impending judgment for those who have denied to Christ the Lord in his thirst even the cup of cold water!

IV. "My Little Children, Let Us Not Love in Word, Neither with the Tongue; But in Deed and in Truth".

[37] The world and the false Christians in word pretend great love; but in practice, when love should manifest itself in deeds, it is found to be insincere. So John admonishes that where our love is not ardent enough to lead us to lay down our lives for our brethren, however much we may profess Christ, that love is assuredly only a vain show, a false pretense, wherewith we deceive ourselves and remain in infidelity and death, and in a more deplorable condition than those who are wholly ignorant of the Gospel. Therefore, let him who would proceed safely and prove himself a Christian remember to prove himself such by his deeds and works. Then men will know that he does not, a murderer and liar, like others, follow the devil. They will know, on the contrary, that he truly and with the heart clings to the Word of God, having passed from death to life.

Third Sunday after Trinity. Humility, Trust, Watchfulness, Suffering.

Text: 1 Peter 5:5-11.

5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

10 But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

11 To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:5-11

Humility, Trust, Watchfulness, Suffering.

[1] This is the conclusion of Saint Peter's epistle. It is an exhortation to good works, such as a Christian, or believer, should practice. It is evident that the doctrine of the Gospel is not such as is charged by some, forbidding good works, or not earnestly commanding and urging them. Most diligently and repeatedly it urges the doctrine of works—such works as are, indeed, good works. There are in this epistle four natural heads which furnish us four good sermons.

I. Humility

[2] The apostle has, in the verses immediately preceding our text, exhorted the elders, that is, preachers, to be in their lives “ensamples to the flock,” not “lording it over the charge allotted” to them, but using their office for the service of others. And here in our text he exhorts the others, especially the young, to “be subject unto the elder.” And, in general, he admonishes all to “gird” themselves “with humility, to serve one another.” So Paul likewise admonishes that we should honor one another. Humility is the noblest and sweetest virtue love brings forth, and it is the most essential to peace and discipline. But especially does it become and adorn the young, making them pleasing and precious to God and men, bringing forth an abundance of good fruits.

[3] If mankind could be led so to believe this, that the virtue of humility would be generally practiced, it would be well everywhere. This would be a beautiful world, filled with discipline and good works. I would much prefer to see a city in which the young are reared in this virtue than a hundred monasteries of barefooted and Carthusian friars, though they lived ever so strictly. Alas! the greatest and most frequent complaint heard anywhere is concerning the disobedience, wantonness and pride of the younger generation found among all ranks. Therefore it is necessary to use all diligence that this exhortation be instilled into the hearts of the young and urged upon them, in the hope that it may benefit them.

[4] First of all, Peter presents the divine command. We are not left to our own good pleasure in the matter—to show humility or not, as we please. God earnestly asks it of us, and asks that we do it lovingly and willingly. Otherwise his anger will be poured out upon us and we will have no happiness nor favor, not even among men. For everyone is a foe to pride and arrogance. These offenses are condemned by the whole world, even by strangers whom they do not concern. One may be guilty of pride and not see his own shame, yet he cannot suffer it in another; he will hate and condemn that one. This vice hurts no one save himself. He makes himself hateful and contemptible before God and men. Everyone calls him a great, proud bag of filth and cries shame upon him. God metes out judgment and scorn to him, witnessing that he will not let this vice go unpunished, but

will put the offender to shame. As Peter here says: “God resisteth the proud.”

[5] Men should be moved by the examples which daily come to light in fulfillment of this passage. If we should have no regard for our own honor and standing before the world, neither for the contempt and the curses of all men; if the illustrious example of the noble character and eternal majesty of God’s Son, our Lord, should not stir us (which ought to move us if we have one spark of Christianity in us), as we behold his unspeakable and incomprehensible humility which, rightly viewed, should melt the Christian’s heart—if all this does not move us, we should be humbled by the many awful examples of God’s fearful wrath which, from the beginning, he has hurled against pride.

[6] What is more terrible than the eternal, irreparable fall and banishment of once lofty angelic nature that resulted when the devil robbed himself of the honor and glory enjoyed by the noble blessed spirits, and of the contemplation of eternal God, and brought upon himself everlasting and intolerable damnation by seeking to make himself equal with God, and through similar pride, led the human race to its awful fall? But what a blind, condemned creature are you, who, with your filthy, shameful pride and haughtiness, become like the spirit of evil, thereby turning all the world into your enemy and opposing yourself to the divine majesty, before which even the angels must tremble! If you have no fear of losing the favor and prayers of mankind, at least be afraid lest God send down upon your head his lightning and thunder, with which he crushes iron, rocks, and mountains, and hurl you forever into the abyss, as he hurled down the proud spirit and his angels.

[7] Saint Peter exhorts both those who are in the office of the ministry, and other Christians, to whom God has given something, that they abide in their calling and office and conduct the same humbly, gladly obeying and serving others. Right here this vice of pride is the most hurtful to Christianity. For its whole government, life and essence are so ordered by God that no one should exalt himself and lord it over others, as the Pope, the true Antichrist has done. Only humility and deeds of Christian love and service should prevail in all classes and in all offices and works.

Pride Opposed to the First Table

[8] Pride in this order of the Church is really and directly opposed to the first table of the law. It is a genuinely devilish pride in God's name and Word on the part of such people as would be wise in matters of faith and would lord it over God's Word. They puff themselves up if, forsooth, they have a gift more than others, and they hold God and all men as nothing. This vice is common among the great, learned and wise bishops and preachers. It prevails among those who learn of them and cling to them, especially beginners who, inexperienced and undisciplined, are brought into prominence. Such puff themselves up and boast: "I also am a learned doctor. I love the Spirit and other gifts just as well as, and even in greater measure than, these preachers." So they think they deserve to be heard and honored above others. They consider themselves so wise that all the world, in comparison, are geese and fools. And the greater one's gifts, the greater and more harmful such pride. It is common in other professions, also. He who has a little ability, or bears the title of doctor, makes much ado about it, and despises others. He acts as if what he has were not given him by God, but as if it were his by nature and birth, and therefore he deserves the praise and worship of all men. Such persons do not realize they are acting in opposition to God, and that they will themselves plunge into the abyss of hell before they can hurl God down from his heavenly throne.

[9] See, from the examples of our own time, how God has overthrown such people. Thomas Munzer, with his tumultuous prophets, and later the Anabaptist faction, were proud of heart, would not listen to admonition, and lo! suddenly they went down to ruin, not only in utter disgrace, but to their own miserable and eternal loss and that of many people who had been misled by them. So, too, there are at the present day many proud spirits. Some dare not yet publicly show themselves. Such as have perceived that they are learned, or are held in regard by men, thereupon grow boastful and, despite all their skill and learning, abide without the Spirit and without fruit, even if they do not work more harm in addition to bringing themselves into condemnation.

[10] Thus it is in all kinds of gifts and offices where men are not Godfearing and humble. For example, those who are entrusted with the civil government—princes, counselors, lawyers (where they are not "theologians," that is, Christians) are so insolent and proud that they imagine themselves alone to be the people, whom others are to reverence as

gods. In their pride, they despise God and men, and by their arrogance they lead the land and the people to destruction. These have already the judgment upon themselves that they, as God's enemies, must be hurled down. For they have cut themselves loose from God's kingdom and grace; and the blessings of baptism and of Christ, with his suffering and blood, are lost upon them.

[11] We have now shown how pride conflicts with the demands of the first table of the law. Men do not employ the spiritual treasures and gifts to God's honor nor to the good of their neighbors. Thus they mar these gifts and, in their wicked course, go to the devil, into whose likeness they have grown.

Pride Opposed to the Second Table

[12] Further, this vice is just as general in the sphere of the second table of the law— among the common people and in the temporal life of the world, each one boasting of himself and despising others. Prince and nobleman think that all the world is nothing in comparison with themselves. Commoner and peasant, puffed up because they have much wealth, imagine they must defy everybody, and do good to nobody. These deserve to be spit upon by all men. Such pride does not become them better than ornaments of gold or silver would become an image of stone or a wooden block. Finally, the women, with their foolish pride of dress, must not be forgotten. One prides herself on being better or more beautifully adorned than her neighbor. She is, in truth, a finely decorated goose. She imagines that no other woman equals her. Yea, there is scarcely a house-servant or maid but brags over others.

[13] In short, we have come to the point where all men, with their insolence and boastfulness, seek to lord it over others. None will humble himself to another. Each thinks he has full right to act as he does, and is under no obligation to yield to others. And the civil government has grown so weak that there is no hope of restraining the haughtiness of all classes, from the highest to the lowest. At last, God must strike with thunder and lightning to prove to us that he resists such people and will not tolerate pride. Therefore the young, who can still be led, should be exhorted and trained, as far as possible, to guard themselves against this vice.

[14] Peter uses for his purpose a peculiar term when he says, “Gird yourselves with humility.” “Gird” has the meaning of being bound or joined together most firmly; or, as a garment, most carefully woven through and through so that it cannot tear. He illustrates by this term how Christians, with all diligence, should strive after the virtue, and manifest and practice it among themselves, as if upon them as a band it was a special obligation. Thus, he says, must you be twined together and bound to each other, and your hands clasped together. So must you be joined by humility, which cannot be dissolved, dismembered, or torn, even though occasion be given one, here and there, incited by the devil, or the evil word of someone else, to fly into a passion, and grow defiant and boastful, as if to say: Must I suffer such things at the hands of this man? But rather say to yourselves. We are Christians, and must bear with each other and yield, in many things; for we are all one body, and we are placed together here on earth for the sole reason that we may, through love, serve one another.

[15] And each should recognize his own weakness. He should remember that God has given others also something and can give them yet more, and that therefore he should gladly serve and yield to others, remembering that he needs their help. Each one is created for the sake of others, and we are all to serve one another. God gives the same grace and salvation to all, so that none may exalt himself above his neighbor; or, if he lift himself up, that he lose the grace conferred and fall into deeper condemnation. Therefore we must hold fast to this humility, so that the unity may not be destroyed. For Satan seeks to destroy this also, and uses every possible means to lead people to despise each other and to be proud and insolent in their treatment of each other. And these are things to which flesh and blood, even without special incitement, are inclined. Thus humility is easily and quickly lost if men are not alert to fight against the devil and their own flesh.

The Beauty of Humility

[16] Humility is one of the beautiful garments and ornaments with which Christians should adorn themselves before God and the world. Paul, in Colossians 3:12, says, “Put on humility.” He regards this virtue as more precious than all earthly crowns and splendor. This is the true spiritual life. It is not to be sought elsewhere, by running into the cloisters or the deserts, by putting on gray gown or cowl. Peter here admonishes all classes to

cultivate this virtue. This sermon on good works concerns every station in every house, city or village. It is for all churches and schools. Children, servants and the youth should be humbly obedient to parents, superiors and the aged. On the other hand, it is for those in the higher stations of life who serve their inferiors, even the lowest. If all men so observed this virtue the world would be full of good works. For it is impossible that humility should do evil. It is profitable and pleasant to all men.

[17] By this virtue, true saints and Christians can better be known than by monastic seclusion and holiness. It requires no great effort to wear a gray cowl. It is not even such a great trial to lie on the ground at night and to arise at midnight; scoundrels, thieves, and murderers must often do the same. But to wear and hold fast to this angelic garment, humility—this the world is not so willing to accept as monasticism and its works. And thus it comes to pass that flesh and blood do not strive after this holy life. Each man seeks an easy life, in which he can live to himself and need serve no one nor suffer anything at the hands of others; just as the monks have sought and chosen.

[18] Peter adds to this admonition the reason: “For God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.” As I have said above, he strives to show the earnestness of God’s command. The command is accompanied by a threat. He does not simply say, God punishes the proud, or God is hostile to them; but he “resisteth” them, he sets himself against them. Now, what is the pride of all men toward God? Not so much as a poor, empty bubble. Their pride puffs itself up and distends itself as though it would storm the sky and contend against the lightning and thunder, that can shatter heaven and earth. What can the combined might of all creatures accomplish if God oppose himself thereto? And how does a miserable man, whose heart is overwhelmed by a small pestilence, rise against the majesty of heaven which can, any moment, cast him down into the abyss? What are earth and ashes proud of? says Sirach, 10:9.

[19] Is it not enough and more than enough that other sin and disobedience are laid to our account, by which we anger God and merit heavy punishment, without our trying further to provoke him with our pride and haughtiness, so that he must arise in his majesty and resist us? With other sins he can have patience, that he may exhort and incite us to repentance. But if, in hardened impenitence, we defy and oppose him, he

cannot but rise up against us. Who is there that will bear it, or be able to stand, when God sets his countenance and his power against a poor man already subject, every moment, to death and the power of the devil?

The Consequence of Pride

[20] From the beginning, innumerable instances in history have proved the truth of this saying, “God resisteth the proud.” They show how he has always overthrown and destroyed the proud world and has cast down the haughty, scornful kings and lords. The great king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, was humbled when banished from his royal throne to the companionship of the beasts of the field and compelled to eat grass with them, Daniel 4:30ff. Again, remember how suddenly the great king Alexander was hurled down, when after the victory and good fortune God had given him, he began to grow proud, and wanted to be revered as a god? Again, there was King Herod Agrippa, Acts 12:23. The proud, learned emperor Julian, a virulent mocker and persecutor of Christ, whom he had denied—how soon was he drowned in his own blood! And since then, what has become of all the proud, haughty tyrants, who proposed to oppress and crush Christianity?

[21] The Pope, also, has ever, in devilish pride, exalted himself, and in the temple of God set himself forth as God. Further, in worldly pomp and pride he has lifted himself above all others. He has even learned, from heathen emperors, as Diocletian and other tyrants, to have men kiss his feet. Yea, he has forced emperors and kings to submit to this humiliating act. What open, inhuman insolence and pride Pope Alexander the Third practiced when, by threatening against him his empty ban, he compelled the pious and mighty German emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, to prostrate himself at his feet while he stepped upon him and said, Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; and when the emperor protested against such shameful pride and said, Non tibi, sed Petro (Not to thee, but to Peter), the Pope, with increasing scorn, replied, “Et mihi, et Petro” (Both to me, and to Peter). This is pride carried almost to its highest point.

[22] The Turk, too, is prouder now than ever, and, I hope, has reached the heights of pride, beyond which he cannot and shall not proceed. Meantime, may he not attack and humble us! But it will come to pass, in the

end, that God will overthrow both pope and Turk through his divine power, and, as Daniel says, without the aid of men. This word will not fail, “God resisteth the proud.” Its truth must appear in human events, so that men may see what is meant by the declaration, “God resisteth”; otherwise no one would believe it. Though the Turk and all the world should be a thousand times more proud and powerful, this should not help them when he who is above sees and grows angry and lifts his hand. He asks as little about the power of all Turkish emperors and of the Pope as about a dead fly.

[23] “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” Hebrews 10:31. This, however, is nothing else than with scorn and defiance to oppose his will, so that he, in turn, must set himself against man and must lift his hand. Therefore, let everyone beware lest he boast and grow defiant in the presence of the divine majesty. Not only must he beware, that he may not awaken God’s anger, but that he may have grace and blessing in the things he ought to do. For, if thou beginnest something in thine own power, and wisdom, and haughtiness, think not he will grant thee success and blessing to carry out thy purpose. On the other hand, if thou humblest thyself, and beginnest aught in accordance with his will, in the fear of God and trusting in his grace, there is given thee the promise, “He giveth grace to the humble.” So, then, thou shalt not only have favor with men, but success shall crown thine efforts. Thou shalt prove a useful man, both to God and to the world, and shalt complete and maintain thy work despite the resistance of the devil. For where God’s grace is, there his blessing and protection must follow, and his servant cannot be overthrown or defeated. Though he be oppressed for a time, he shall finally come forth again and be exalted. So Peter concludes by saying: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”

[24] Peter shows in these words what true humility is and whence it comes. The heart, through knowledge of its sin, becomes terrified in the presence of God’s anger and anxiously seeks grace. Thus a humility is born, not merely external and before men, but of the heart and of God, from fear of God and knowledge of one’s own unworthiness and weakness. He who fears God and “trembles at his word” (Isaiah 66:5), will surely defy or hector or boast against nobody. Yea, he will even manifest a gentle spirit toward his enemies. Therefore, he finds favor both with God and men.

[25] The cause of this, Peter says, shall be “the mighty hand of God.” As though he would say: Ye may not do nor leave undone this thing for the sake of men, but ye ought to humble yourselves under the hand of God. God’s hand is powerful and mighty in a twofold respect: It dashes down and overthrows the proud and self-secure, however hard and iron their heads and hearts may be. They must languish in dust and ashes; yea, must lie despondent and desperate in the anguish and torments of hell, if he touch them but a little with the terrors of his anger. These are experiences through which the saints also pass and concerning whose severity they make lamentation. “For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine indignation,” Psalm 38:2-3. “For I have eaten ashes like bread and mingled my drink with weeping. Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast taken me up, and cast me away,” Psalm 102:9-10. “I am consumed by the blow of thy hand. When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth,” Psalm 39:10-11.

The Reward of Humility.

[26] In the second place, God’s hand is mighty to raise, to comfort and strengthen the humbled and the fearful, and, as Peter says here, to exalt them. Those who in terror have been cast down should not, therefore, despair, or flee before God, but rise again, and be comforted in God. God wants it preached and published that he never lays his hand upon us in order that we may perish and be damned. But he must pursue this course in order to lead us to repentance: otherwise we would never inquire about his Word and will. And if we seek grace, he is ready to help us up again, to grant us forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. The Psalms and the Prophets here and there speak of this. “Jehovah hath chastened me sore; but he hath not given me over unto death,” Psalm 118:18. “Jehovah raiseth up them that are bowed down,” Psalm 146:8.

[27] God will “exalt you in due time,” says Peter. Though God’s help be delayed, and the humbled and suffering seem to lie oppressed all too long under God’s hand, and on that account to languish, nevertheless, let them hold to the promise Paul has given: God “will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able,” 1 Corinthians 10:13, but he will hear your cry, and will, at the right time, help; and with this let them be comforted. But again,

let the proud fear, even though he permits them to go unpunished and to continue in their boastful course for a time. He watches their lives, and, when the proper time comes, he will descend all too heavily upon them, so that they cannot bear it. He has already stretched forth his mighty hand, both to cast down the godless and to exalt the humble.

II. “Casting All Your Anxiety upon Him, Because He Careth for You”

[28] What will become of him who lives a God-fearing and humble life, suffering the insolence, pride and wantonness of the world? Or, where will he find protection and defense, to abide in his godly ways? We see daily how the pious are harassed and persecuted and are trod on by the world. The Apostle says: “Ye Christians must endure temptation and adversity, want and need, both physical and spiritual, in the world, and your heart is oppressed with anxiety and cares, and ye think within yourselves: O, what will become of me? How shall I be supported? What if I should die?” (The world only concerns itself about how it may be enriched and be filled, and anxious, unbelieving consciences would, through themselves and their own good works, seek to have a gracious God and to die in peace.) “In view of all this,” he says, “only hearken, I will counsel and instruct you aright as to what disposition you should make of your troubles.” There is a brief passage in Psalm 55:22 which reads: “Cast thy burden upon Jehovah, and he will sustain thee: he will never suffer the righteous to be moved.” Follow ye this advice. Let not your burden rest upon yourselves; for ye cannot bear it and must finally perish beneath its weight. But, confident and full of joy, cast it from you and throw it on God, and say: Heavenly Father, thou art my Lord and God, who didst create me when I was nothing; moreover hast redeemed me through thy Son. Now, thou hast committed to me and laid upon me, this office or work, and things do not go as well as I would like. There is so much to oppress and worry, that I can find neither counsel nor help. Therefore I commend everything to thee. Do thou supply counsel and help, and be thou, thyself, everything in these things?

[29] Such a prayer is pleasing to God, and he tells us to do only what we are commanded and throw upon him all anxiety as to the issue and what we shall accomplish. As also other passages of Scripture declare: “Commit thy way unto Jehovah, trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass,” Psalm

37:5. No heathen, philosopher, jurist, if he has not God's Word, can throw his care and complaint upon God. He thinks that all the world, especially the great, the wise, who rule, must accomplish everything by their own planning and circumspection. And where trouble arises—for it is quite common for even the greatest and wisest people to make mistakes—he becomes a madman or a fool and begins to murmur and argue against God and his government, as though God's rule merited criticism. But such men receive their deserts when God permits their calculations and hopes to fail, and lets the reverse obtain. For they will not admit they have need of him. They think they have sufficient wisdom and power, and that God must respect their plans. Thus, they spend their lives in many vain, useless cares and projects, and must, in the course of their experience, learn and confess, many a time, that the very opposite of their judgment is the truth.

[30] Christians have the rare faculty, above all other people on earth, of knowing where to place their care, whilst others vex and torture themselves and at length must despair. Such must be the consequence of unbelief, which has no God and would provide for itself. But faith understands this word Peter quotes from the Scriptures: "Because he careth for you." It joyfully meditates thereon and does and suffers faithfully. For faith knows this to be its duty. Its trouble, however, it commits to God, and proceeds with vigor against all that opposes. It can call upon God as a father, and it says: I will do what God has commanded me and leave the result with him.

[31] The Christian must take this course if he would proceed safely and happily in matters of the highest import. In time of danger and in the hour of death, when, with all his worrying, he cannot discover where he is or how he is journeying, he must, with eyes, senses and thoughts closed to the world, surrender himself in faith and confidence and cast himself upon God's hand and care and protection, and say: God has permitted me to live until this hour, without my solicitude. Moreover, he has given me his beloved Son as a treasure and sure pledge of eternal life. Therefore, my dear soul, journey on in joy. Thou hast a faithful Father and Savior, who has taken thee into his own hand, and will preserve thee.

[32] The Christian Church collectively must so proceed in the discharge of its high spiritual office, of which Peter speaks here, that no man or creature, by his own wisdom and power, can sustain or accomplish any work. No power, might, or protection that can comfort, or upon which one

may rely, is to be sought in the world. Wholly in God, and in God alone, must help be sought. By his divine power God must uphold the Church. He has, from the beginning, always and wonderfully preserved it in the world, in the midst of great weakness, in disunion occasioned by schismatics and heretics, in persecution by tyrants. And the government is wholly his, though he commits the office and service to men, whom he would summon and use to administer his Word and sacrament. Therefore, each Christian, especially if he fills such an office and partakes of this fellowship, should be intent, in that whereunto God has called and appointed him, upon serving God faithfully and doing that which is commanded him. The anxiety respecting the Church's continued existence and her preservation against the devil and the world, can be left to the Lord. He has taken this upon himself and thus has removed the burden from our shoulders, that we might be certain of the permanence of the Church. If its preservation were committed to human counsel, might and will, the devil, with his power, would soon overthrow and destroy it.

[33] Likewise, in every office and station, each one should follow this counsel of Saint Peter. A prince should seek to protect his land and people, to promote God's Word, to maintain discipline and peace, to do justice to every man, to punish the disobedient, etc. Councils, officials, and those in authority should faithfully advise and direct to this end. Pastors and preachers should rightly and fearlessly declare God's Word and truth. Every citizen and subject should be intent upon his work and duty, and whatever, in connection therewith, is unusual, he must simply commit to God. But the world does not pursue this course. Each one says: Why should I incur so much danger, opposition and hostility? Again, why should I labor and toil for naught? I will not accomplish my work at any rate. In this spirit of fear and worry, his proper office and work are delayed, or he is always careless. But let such people know that they are not Christians, nor do they promote God's kingdom or profit the offices conferred on them. If they do not propose to mend their ways, they should give up the office bestowed on them by God. It is not enough to simply sit at ease in one's office and accept the plaudits of men. We all like to render esteem and honor to office and station. But know this, that you are not in office to parade about in beautiful garments, to sit in the front row, and be called "Gracious Master" and "Esquire." You are to conduct faithfully the office with which God has

clothed and honored you, regardless of human honor and profit, shame or injury.

[34] But men are not generally inclined to believe and trust God. They are not inclined to remember that he cares for us; that he has assumed and must bear the greatest of burdens, which no man on earth can bear; that he cared for us before we were born, and could still, of himself, execute all things dispensing with all human help, but he prefers to accomplish his purpose through human means, and to employ us as instruments in these divine works—governing, punishing, teaching, comforting.

[35] The world is particularly culpable in this matter of pride. When divinely charged with some great work, it always seeks to determine, in advance, by its own wisdom, all future danger and accidents, and tries to anticipate them. The world looks for man's help and seeks friendship and assistance wherever it can. It makes alliances, and resorts to other schemes. It puts its trust in these and then considers itself strong enough to meet opposition and is sure of its cause by reason of its own efforts. This is not showing faith in God. It is not committing our cause and all care for ourselves to him. It is maintaining the cause through one's own anxiety and forethought. It is ignoring and disbelieving the fact that nothing can be accomplished by one's own vexed effort. No human wisdom has power to foresee the future. If we looked back at the examples furnished by history, we should learn how woefully human wisdom is deceived when it relies upon itself. The results are not what was expected, but the very opposite.

[36] The Scriptures give many pertinent examples of the kings of Judah and Israel, whom the prophets often and severely rebuked because they sought refuge and help among strange nations and kings. The prophets warned them that they should not trust in human aid, but should do according to God's Word and command. They told them he would protect and uphold them. But the kings would not hear. They continued to form friendships and alliances with the kings of Egypt, Syria, Babylon and Assyria, and thus invited them as guests into the land, whereupon the heathen kings came with force and led away captive the inhabitants and laid everything desolate. That was their reward for not heeding God's Word; for not believing that he cared for them, and desired to protect and defend them if they would but trust and obey him. The wisest and most eminent, even among the heathen, have lamented, in the light of their own experience, that

they have been shamefully deluded by their counsels, even though founded on the most careful deliberations. Nor can it be said that the world has grown wiser in consequence of its own or others' sufferings.

[37] This exhortation is preached to no one except the few who are Christians. They have regard for God's Word, and, now humbled, have learned that they should not rely on their own wisdom and reason, or upon human help and comfort. They have come to the belief that God cares for them. So they do what they know is right and are in duty bound to do, and suffer themselves not to be hindered by such fears as possess the world concerning dangers, injuries, and adversities. They commend all such things to God, and at his word go right through with courage.

[38] Let me illustrate from my own experience. What should I have done when I began to denounce the lies of the indulgence system, and later the errors of the papacy, if I had listened and given heed to the terrible things all the world wrote and said would happen to me? How often I heard it said that if I wrote against such and such eminent people I would provoke their displeasure, which would prove too severe for me and the whole German nation. But, since I had not begun this work of myself, being driven and led thereto by reason of my office (otherwise I should have preferred to keep silence), I must continue. I commended the cause to God and let him bear the burden of care, both as to the result of the work and also as to my own fate. Thus, I advanced the cause farther, despite tumultuous opposition, than I had ever before dared to think or hope.

[39] Oh, how much good would God accomplish through us if people could be persuaded, especially the eminent lords and kings, that what Peter here says is true: "He careth for you!" How much he could do if they believed that truth instead of seeking, through their own wisdom and reason, to equip, strengthen, and compose themselves by aid of human might and assistance, friendship and alliance, for the accomplishment and maintenance of their cause! It is apparent that mortal plans fail and have always failed, and that they accomplish nothing. God hinders and resists man's work when he will not trust him. Hence God can grant no success or favor to that which is founded on human wisdom or on trust in human powers. This is a truth man must finally perceive by experience, and they must lament because they would not believe it.

[40] Let him who would be a Christian learn to believe this. Let him practice and exhibit faith in all his affairs, bodily and spiritual, in his doing and his suffering, his living and his dying. Let him banish cares and anxious thoughts. Courageous and cheerful, let him cast them aside; not into a corner, as some vainly think to do, for when burdens are permitted to conceal themselves in the heart they are not really put away. But let the Christian cast his heart and its anxieties upon God. God is strong to bear, and he can easily carry the burden. Besides, he has commanded that all this be put upon himself. The more thou layest upon him, the more pleasing it is to him. And he gives thee the promise that he will carry thy cares for thee, and all things else that concern thee.

[41] This is a grand promise, and a beautiful, golden saying, if men would only believe it. If a powerful ruler here on earth were to give such a promise and were to demand that we let him have all the concern about gold and silver and the needs of this life, how cheerfully and contentedly would everyone cling to such promise! But now a greater lord says all this, one who is almighty and truthful, who has power over the body and life, and who can and will give us everything we need, both temporal and eternal. We should have in all this, if we only believed it, half of heaven, yea, a perfect paradise on earth. For what is better and nobler than a quiet, peaceful heart? For this all men are striving and laboring. So have we been doing hitherto, running to and fro after it. Yet it is found nowhere except in God's Word, which bids us cast our cares and burdens on God and thus seek peace and rest. It counsels us to throw upon him everything that threatens to oppress and worry us. God would not have anxiety dwell in our hearts, for it does not belong there; it is put there by the devil.

[42] Therefore, a Christian, even though obliged to suffer all manner of adversity, temptation and misfortune, can cheerfully go forward and say: Dear Lord God, thou hast commanded me to believe, to teach, to govern and to act; this I will attempt in thy name, and I will commend to thee whatever may happen to me in the course of duty. There you have a man who is equal to any task and can do much good. For he is freed from the greatest misfortune and has laid the heaviest weight upon God, whilst another man does nothing except fill his heart with anxiety and gloom. This other can apply himself to no good work. He becomes unfit both to do and to suffer. He is afraid of every trifle and, because of his vexation or

impatience, can do nothing worth mentioning. What is the world doing now? Princes, lords, counselors, citizens, and peasants—all want only power, honor, and wealth. None desires to render service. Everyone fears that this or the other thing might happen to him. Though the world never needed more careful rule than at the present time, lords and princes, simply because they are such, idly sit adorned with beautiful crowns, though they have received their trust from God to discharge their princely office. For the world must be governed, the youth must be educated, the wicked must be punished. But if thou desirest the honor only, and art not willing to step in the mire, to suffer people's displeasure, and through it all learn to trust God and for his sake do everything, thou art not worthy of the grace given for the accomplishment of a good and praiseworthy work. In punishment, resting under God's wrath, thou must remain unfit for every good work.

III. “Be Sober, Be Watchful: Your Adversary the Devil, As a Roaring Lion, Walketh About, Seeking Whom He May Devour: Whom Withstand Steadfast in Your Faith.”

[43] The apostle has set forth two things to be practiced throughout the Christian life; namely, Christian humility—which is fear of God—and faith and confidence in God. Now he admonishes his readers to battle and warfare, that these blessings may be preserved. He shows us our enemy and adversary who seeks to rob us of our treasure and deprive us of our salvation and eternal blessedness. Hence he would say: Be not concerned about living a life of earthly glory, and let not anxious cares fill your soul, but be intent on humbling yourselves before God. Trust in him. Let this be your care, that you may abide in the grace of humility. Let it never be wrested from you. For the devil seeks to instill these forbidden cares, and to produce disobedience against God, that he may tear faith and God's Word out of your heart.

Watchfulness Enjoined.

Therefore, you must not ignore these facts, and meanwhile strive after something else. You are not to go along in false security or sleep and snore as though there were no danger. You must rather know that you have not been placed in a garden of roses here, but in the midst of heavy conflicts, where you must be on your guard, always watchful and prepared for

resistance. For you have an adversary who is not insignificant or to be despised, but is strong, mighty, and moreover wicked and ferocious. He does not fight with stone and wood, destroying rocks and trees, but he has his eye fixed on you Christians. He never grows tired or weary, but without rest and ceasing he pursues you not only to spy upon you and to harass you, in which he can be withstood, but he desires utterly to devour you.

[44] His sole purpose and plan is to murder and destroy men, spiritually and bodily; even as, at the beginning, when man had been created, he led and cast him into death. He practices his schemes with awful and deadly effect in the world against those who do not believe in Christ, and he will never stop until the judgment day. One can perceive his incessant activity. He bustles about and openly raves and roars against all Christendom. He uses for his purpose the Turks, and other tyrants and godless people, not to speak of the sorrow and murder he works by so possessing people that in their frenzy they do themselves injury, or without cause murder others. He otherwise, through wicked and shameful snares, leads men into misfortune and sorrow. In short, the world is nothing else than the devil's murderous cave, both spiritually and physically. God, in order to somewhat hinder and restrain physical murder, has ordained temporal government, parental and other authority. These in their office are to be sober, watchful, and diligent. We ought to thank God for his preservation of such authority, for otherwise there would be no peace—everywhere on earth nothing but murder. Nevertheless, the awful murder the devil perpetrates on those who are without God's Word and faith, is not thereby checked.

[45] Some other defense and protection, then, another kind of watchfulness, must be sought, in order that men may remain undestroyed and unharmed in the presence of this bloodthirsty murderer. Of this Peter speaks here to the little company of Christians, and says: Ye, through Christ's blood and death rescued from the devil's lies and murderous intent, have been made alive and have been transplanted into the heavenly life, like your beloved fathers, Adam, Abel, and others. They are no longer under bondage to Satan, but live in Christ, though the body lie for a time in the earth and truth and life must be supplied to their body and soul. But because ye still dwell in the world, ye are exposed to all danger. Physically, ye are yet in the murderer's house; therefore ye must take good heed, that he may not kill you again, and murder your souls dwelling in these mortal bodies. It

shall harm you none that the soul was ruined and the body is yet subject to death. "Because I live," says Christ (John 14:19), "ye shall live also." However, ye must struggle if ye are to abide in the truth and life. To this ye are appointed whilst ye live here on earth; otherwise ye would already be in Paradise. But the devil has not yet been consigned wholly to the punishment of his damnation, which will be at the last day, when he will finally be cast down from his airy height, and from the earth, into the abyss of hell. Then he will no more be able to attack us, and there will no longer be cloud or veil between us and God and the angels.

Soberness Essential.

[46] In order, now, he continues, that ye may be saved from his murderous designs, and may preserve the life you have begun, ye must be sober and watchful; not only mindful of the body, but much rather of the mind and soul. It is true that a Christian who is to resist the devil must be physically sober, for a full hog and drunkard cannot be watchful nor can he plan defense against the devil. Yet must a Christian much more guard himself, lest the soul become sleepy or drunken. As the soul is burdened by the body when the latter is overwhelmed by drunkenness, so, when the soul is watchful and sober, the body also is temperate and prepared to hear God's Word. But where the body is oppressed by drunkenness, there the soul must first have been a drunkard, not heeding God's Word nor giving attention to prayer. Where the soul is drunken and drowned in such security, it will not avail that the body suffer hurt by strict fasting and self-mortification, after the fashion of the Carthusians and hermits.

[47] Saint Peter, then, forbids not only bodily drunkenness, but also drunkenness of the soul. One's soul is drunk when he lives in carnal security, without thought and anxiety as to whether he have and hold God's Word or not: when he asks no questions, either about God's wrath or his grace; and when he, moreover, lets himself be filled with the sweet poison of false doctrine through the mob of evil spirits Satan employs for this purpose, until he grows numb, loses faith and clear judgment and finally becomes overfull of drunkenness and spews it out upon others.

[48] The same thing results when men begin to be wise in divine things by following human reason. Saint Peter aptly describes this false doctrine

with the expression, “cunningly devised fables,” 2 Peter 1:16. He says: “We did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Such are the beautiful words and sermons which make a great show of wisdom and holiness, and naturally please men. For instance, it is a cunningly devised fable when one with the aid of philosophy, which reason can understand, sets forth in grandiloquent words what a fine thing it is for a man to live honorably, chastely, and to practice good works and virtues. The aim is, with such pretense, to have us believe that we, through these works (not alone through faith), are justified before God; that is, are redeemed from sin and death.

[49] Again, other factious spirits travel about with worthy sayings which they have heard from us—externals do not help souls; the Spirit must do the work—and then they proceed to fling contempt on baptism and the Lord’s Supper. So, Thomas Munzer, with his seditious peasants, and the Anabaptist rabble, went about, with great demonstration, preaching about the shameful, wicked life of the world, especially of the authorities, declaring that these were godless people and tyrants, and deserved God’s wrath and punishment; that therefore men should depose and execute them, and establish a new government, of only pious and holy people. These and similar things Peter calls “cunningly devised fables.” They are exaggeratingly pretended to be the product of great wisdom and art and are rendered sweet and palatable to reason. So has all idolatry, heresy, and false doctrine, from the beginning on, prevailed, being fashioned and most beautifully adorned by people learned and wise and held in the esteem of the world.

[50] How admirable did the position of Arius and his adherents appear in comparison with the true faith concerning the divinity of Christ, when they declared that though Christ should be exalted above all angels and creatures, and that all honor, dominion and power in heaven and on earth belong to him, yea, that he is quite equal to God—all this, yet he is not “homo-ousios”; that is, he is not in one undivided, divine, eternal essence, which is of such unity that it could be imparted to no one else. It would be too much to say that a man is God, etc. With such pretense was a great multitude of Christians seduced. Even few bishops remained in the pure doctrine and faith. And afterward this poison prevailed among the wise

people of Asia and Greece, until Mohammed, with his Saracens and Turks, had miserably corrupted the greatest part of the world.

[51] Likewise the Pope has adorned and colored with a glorious form his abominations and idolatry, claiming for his order of service that it is a meritorious and beautiful thing. Again, he calls attention to the serviceableness of the beautiful, orderly government and power of the Church, with its well-regulated gradations of office and position—bishops superior to the ordinary priests, and over the bishops Saint Peter’s chair at Rome. In that chair is vested the authority for the convocation of general councils so often as these may be necessary. These councils are to judge and decide in all matters of faith, and their decisions everyone must follow and obey. Again, he boasts what great service and consolation to the whole world is the work of the priests in the mass, when they daily renew and offer to God the sacrifice made by Christ on the cross. This is the sweet wine in the “golden cup” of the scarlet harlot of Babylon, with which she has made drunken all kings and nations, Revelation 17:2-4.

[52] Where the devil finds those who give ear to such fables, he takes them captive and so fills them with these falsehoods that they neither see nor hear anything else. They think their belief is the only one, and they will not suffer themselves to be instructed out of God’s Word. And so, in their madness, without rightful intelligence of faith and all principles of pure doctrine, they continue in their darkened mind, with their fantastic, lying prattle, without repentance and amendment, having no grace to learn or do anything good. This is amply proved by the example of all seditious spirits.

[53] Therefore, Peter admonishes us to be “sober and watchful,” especially in spirit, and to guard ourselves against this sweet poison and these beautiful, adorned lies and fables of the devil. He teaches us how to equip and defend ourselves against his wicked devices. “Whom withstand steadfast in your faith.”

[54] The true defense and resistance, in which we are to be sober and watchful, is to be well grounded in God’s Word and cling firmly thereto when the devil seeks, with his cunningly devised fables, born of human understanding and reason, to overthrow our faith. Reason is the devil’s bride, and always vaunts itself wise and skillful in divine things and thinks what it holds to be right and good must be accounted so before God. But

faith holds to God's Word alone. It knows that before God, human wisdom, skill and power, and whatever gifts and virtues man may have, count for nothing. Only his grace and the forgiveness of sins in Christ has value. Therefore, faith can repel and defeat all these fine pretensions and cunning fables.

[55] Worldly dominion and authority boasts before God in this fashion: My crown is a crown in God's sight, for my power and sovereignty have been given me by God. Therefore, whatever I say he must respect and regard as valid, and everyone must endorse my words and actions. The wise philosopher or jurist would thus give expression to his boasts and pretensions: We are the learned, the wise rulers of the world, and have admirable laws and statutes. We have superior and beautiful doctrines concerning good works and virtues. Men must listen to us and allow our judgment to have precedence. He who can do, or does, such things as we have done is, in God's sight, superior to others.

Faith, Not Worldly Wisdom, Essential

[56] No, dear man, says faith to this, I grant that the things of which thou boastest have been ordained and confirmed by God; but they are not of value save for this temporal life. The world regards it a crown to be known as wise. But in the presence of God thou shouldst lay aside thy crown, let thy might and power, thy law and wisdom, go, and say: God, be merciful to me a poor sinner! Reason has this advantage, that it is equipped and adorned with God's promise to confirm its rule here on earth and to be pleased therewith; but with the provision that reason shall not interfere in God's government or boast over against him. Let it be known that what is called wisdom and prudence on earth, is foolishness before God. What in the sight of the world is commended and honored as beautiful, valuable, as of honor and virtue, is before God sin, and subject to his wrath. What on earth is called life, is before God nothing but death.

[57] If, now, the parental, governmental, and other authority which he, himself, has arrayed and through his word established, and which is even administered by Christians, does not endure before him in that other life, how much less will he allow that to stand which man has devised or subtly contrived out of his own head and heart! Wouldst thou be wise and prudent,

then cultivate these virtues in the sphere appointed thee, in thy home, the State, and whatever office thou hast. In these temporal things, rule as well as thou canst. Thou wilt find little enough to help in all thy books, thy reason and wisdom. But when thou beginnest to devise out of thine own reason the things of God, though they may all seem trustworthy wisdom, yet, as Peter says, they are nothing else than fables and lies.

[58] For example, a monk's words: Whoever dons a cowl can lead a holy life, for he is cut off from the world, can banish all care and sorrow, and can undisturbed, in peace and quietness, serve God—these words appear wisely spoken, but at bottom they are nothing but unreliable and useless chatter. This is proved from God's Word, which teaches that God has forbidden us to invent our own worship; also, that God would have us serve him in our ordinary life and station and not by fleeing therefrom. Hence, such monkery cannot be a holy, godly life. In Psalm 119:85, we read: "The proud have digged pits for me, who are not according to thy law." That is, they preach to me about praiseworthy things, and represent their cause as most worthy, in order to overcome me. But when I look at their words aright, I do not find them to be in accord with thy Word and commandments, which (says he) "are faithful." A lie is always beautiful. It attracts and pretends to be truth. It has, further, the advantage that it can adorn itself from the wardrobe of God's Word, and, perverting the Word, can use it in an uncertain sense. On the other hand, the truth does not so glitter, because it does not make itself plain to reason. For example, a common Christian, a type of the brethren, hears the Gospel, believes, uses the sacraments, leads a Christian life at home with wife and children—that does not shine as does the fascinating lie of a saintly Carthusian or hermit, who, separated from his fellow men, would be a holier servant of God than other people. Yet the latter is useful to nobody. He lets others preach and rule, and labor in the sweat of their brows.

God's Word the Christian's Guide

[59] The one important thing, then, is to see to it that we have God's Word, and that we regulate all the teachings and claims of men in accordance therewith. We will thus distinguish between the true and the false. We must remember, also, that human reason holds a far inferior position to faith and is not to be acknowledged as trustworthy, save as it is authorized by God for

temporal authority. He who has faith can easily perceive when reason conflicts with God's Word or seeks, in its wisdom, to rise superior thereto; just as, in worldly things, each one in his station, office, or calling, knows full well, when another attempts the same work, whether he does it right or not. So every householder well understands that in his home wantonness and wrongdoing on the part of the servants are not to be tolerated. However, in divine things, reason can so attire and adorn itself as not to be recognized except by one who, guided by faith, has a right knowledge of God's Word. Reason will not refrain from intruding, with its wisdom and prudence, into the affairs of God, where it has no orders. Thus the devil creates endless misery, as he did at the beginning in the case of our first parents. And yet reason will not permit, in its own domain, the slightest interference of one unskilled in reason's code.

[60] If a cobbler were to arise in the Church and censure the people because they did not wear his make of shoes, and should try to convince people that such a procedure was necessary to salvation, they would pursue him out of the Church with shoes and slippers, and cry after him: Stay at home in your shop with your shoes and lasts! What does that concern the spiritual estate? But when a factious spirit stands up and in his supposed wisdom grunts forth: I am a holy, pious man. I have a special illumination from the spirit. Therefore, do not believe what the others say, which is nothing but the dead letter, that one person can be God and man; that a virgin can be a mother; that a man can be cleansed from sin by water and the spoken Word, etc. — when he does this, then there is no one to offer resistance. Reason then gains the victory if it only claims the glory of guidance by the Spirit, of a holy life, etc., even though God's Word and faith are not present in their purity. Behold, what mischief the Turk, with his Mohammed, has wrought and is still working, solely by claiming the honor of worshipping the one God, and asserting that he alone has the true God! He declares that only he and his followers are God's people on earth, to honor which God they war and fight against the Christians. He presses his cause the more vigorously because he has such large fortune and victory; so even many Christians who come among them adopt their faith and become Turks. But none of the Turks turn Christian.

[61] Therefore, no other counsel can be offered for resisting the devil and escaping destruction by him, then this, that we remain firm in faith,

says Saint Peter. One must have a heart which holds fast to God's Word and fully understands the same and holds it to be true. For faith cannot exist or endure without the Word, nor can it hear or understand aught else. One must separate the Word far from all reason and wisdom, placing it above these. He must hold reason as nothing—yea, as dead—in matters pertaining to God's government and to how man is to escape sin and eternal death. Reason must keep silent and give to God's Word alone the honor which belongs to the truth, "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ," as Saint Paul says, 2 Corinthians 10:5. If reason is to be my teacher in these things, what need is there of faith? And why should I not throw away all the Scriptures? We Christians, says Paul (1 Corinthians 1:20-21), preach something else and higher than reason comprehends, for the wisdom of the world is mere folly. If reason taught me that the mother of Christ is a virgin, the angel Gabriel might have remained in heaven and kept silent concerning the matter. Your faith, says Paul again (1 Corinthians 2:4), should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Now you have seen the tricks and wiles of the devil with which he seeks to devour you, which he bases on reason as opposed to God's Word.

[62] Peter admonishes all Christians, especially the preachers, how to defend themselves against the devil's intrigues and artifices, with which he seeks to capture them. In order that Christians may be properly equipped, Saint Peter calls attention to two things: First, we must know the enemy and realize his purpose; second, we must be armed to meet him and defend ourselves, that we may stand before him and conquer. He is a terrible, mighty foe, says Peter, and is the god of this world. He has more wisdom and more deceptive snares than all men, and can so blind and unsettle reason that it will cheerfully believe and follow him. He is, moreover, a wicked and bitter enemy to you who in Christ have life. He cannot bear to see you Christ's. He thinks and plots about nothing else than your overthrow. And think not that he is far from you, or that he will pursue you from a distance. He has encamped close to you and right around you; yea, in your own territory—that is, in your flesh and blood. There he seeks how to reach you, and overtake you when unguarded, attempting now this, now that. Misguided faith, doubt, anger, impatience, covetousness, evil passions, etc., are points of attack—any place where he finds an opening or discovers that you are weak. Therefore, think not that he is simply jesting. He is more furious and hungry than a famished and angry lion. He does not purpose

merely to wound or prick you, but wholly to consume you, so that nothing of body or soul will remain.

[63] Whoever would withstand such a foe must be equipped with other armor and weapons than those furnished by human wit and understanding, by human powers or ability. Your defense is nothing else, says Peter, than faith, which holds and grasps God's Word. And because the believer holds fast to this, the devil can gain nothing. It is God's truth and power, before which, with his lying and murdering, he cannot stand; he must yield and flee. Therefore Ephesians 6:16 says: "Taking up the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one." These fiery darts are chiefly those he hurls into the heart through the beautiful thoughts of human reason. He thus transforms himself into an angel of light, to displace right thoughts and faith, and to introduce human whims and false faith. His aim is, also, to lead into doubt, distrust, hatred, and anger toward God. Thus, it is, too, in the other temptations and trials of life, when Satan drives men into sin and disobedience against God's commandment, into such sins as avarice, usury, anger, revengefulness, unchastity, and other vices. Here he uses the same insidious arts, first tearing God's Word out of the heart, then blinding reason with sweet and beautiful thoughts. He says: The thing proposed is not so wicked. God will not be so angry with you. He can afford to be patient with you, you still love the Gospel. With such suggestions as these he carries you away and plunges you under God's fearful anger and condemnation.

[64] If you would withstand these wiles, there can be no other plan or counsel than this: Fight with God's Word in firm faith against these suggestions and allurements. Further, keep in mind both your former misery and your present treasures of grace. Remember how you were once under God's wrath when, without fear of God and without faith, you were the devil's own, subject to all his will, and must have perished had not God, in boundless goodness, forgiven you your sin and bestowed on you his grace. And now give heed that you may not lose this treasure, to which end the Holy Spirit has been promised you. You need not succumb if you remain in faith. Again, if you experience weakness and suffer want, you are bidden to call upon him, certain that he will hear you. The promise is: "If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name," John 16:23. Also:

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you,” John 15:7.

[65] Peter would, with his admonitions, make Christians bold and confident for resisting the temptations of the devil and defending themselves. He would not have us feel terrified nor despair before Satan, even though that wicked one press us hard through the instrumentality of the world and of our own flesh, as well as by his direct onslaughts. We are not to fear though he seem too strong for us, and though surrender to his prowess seems inevitable. We are to have a manly heart and fight valiantly through faith. We must be assured that, if we remain firm in the faith, we shall have strength and final victory. The devil shall not defeat us; we shall prove superior to him. We have been called of God and made Christians to the end that we renounce the devil and contend against him, and thus maintain God’s name, Word, and kingdom against him. Christ, our head, has already, in himself, smitten and destroyed for us the devil and his power. In addition, he gives us faith and the Holy Spirit, whereby we can wholly defeat Satan’s further wickedness and his attempts to overthrow us.

[66] A Christian should bear all this in mind, I say, and learn to experience the strength and power of faith. So will he not yield to temptation and enticement. Nor will he, from love of the devil or the world, to his own eternal hurt, and for the sake of small temporal advantage, pleasure, or honor, cast from him God’s grace and the Holy Spirit, and put himself again under God’s eternal anger and condemnation.

IV. “Knowing That the Same Sufferings Are Accomplished in Your Brethren who Are in the World”.

[67] This is a very precious and comforting passage, the truth of which Peter learned not only by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but from his own experience. One instance of his experience was when, in the high priest’s house, he thrice denied his Lord, and soon thereafter fell into such anxiety and despair that he would have followed the traitor Judas had not Christ turned and looked on him. It was for this reason that Christ, so soon after his resurrection, first of all commanded that the glad tidings should be announced to Peter. Christ also said to him, before all this happened: “Simon, I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not; and do thou,

when once thou hast turned again, establish thy brethren,” Luke 22:31-32. Conduct in Suffering Peter makes faithful use of the present passage for his readers’ comfort: Ye must expect, in the world, says he, to suffer many and severe things, both in temptations of soul and body, against the first and the second table of the law, Satan lying in wait for you with his deceitful and murderous arts.

[68] Weak Christians suffer beyond measure because they are plagued and beset so constantly by the devil. Their afflictions so sorely oppress them that they conclude that no one suffers so severely as do they. Especially does this seem the case in the great spiritual temptations which come to those endowed with peculiar gifts and who are called to positions of prominence in the Church. So Paul often laments his great temptations, which the common people do not understand and cannot endure. God, moreover, is careful to lay on each one just the cross he is able to carry. Still these sufferings are such that even the great and strong must languish and wither beneath them were it not for the comfort God bestows. These troubles grip the heart, and consume the very marrow, as the Psalms often lament.

[69] Some of those living in cloisters, and other pious, tender consciences, have learned by experience how hard such burdens are to bear, especially in the darkness of the papacy, where they receive but little genuine comfort. There are, also, some inexperienced and forward spirits who have seen but have not understood these things, and who yet desire to be regarded as people of large experience. When, however, the test comes, they are found wanting. It is related of one of this class, who heard others bemoaning their temptations, that he prayed God to let temptation visit him also; whereupon God permitted him to be tempted with carnal lust. But when he found he could not bear it, he again prayed God, asking that the burden of his brother, whom he regarded inferior to himself, be given him. But when this request was granted, he prayed yet more earnestly that God would give him back his former burden.

[70] Amid such temptations Peter comforts suffering Christians by telling them that they are not the first, nor the only ones, to be thus assailed. They are not to feel as if it were a wonderful, rare, unheard of cross which they bear, or that they bear it alone. They are to know that their brethren, the Christians of all times, and scattered through all the world, must,

because they are in the world, suffer the same things at the hand of Satan and his minions. It assuages and comforts beyond measure for the sufferer to know that he does not suffer alone, but with a great multitude.

[71] It is true that in external temptations this comfort is easily grasped, because of the knowledge of others' experiences. But when Satan assails thee alone with his poisonous darts—for example, when he tempts thee to doubt God's grace, as if thou alone hadst been cast off; or when he suggests horrible blasphemies, hatred of God, condemnation of his government, and so tortures and fills with anguish thy heart that thou art led to think that no man on earth is more fearfully assailed than thyself— then there is need to make use of this comfort which Peter offers thee and all Christians. In other words, Peter would say: "My friend, let not the devil and thy sufferings terrify thee or lead thee to despair. Thou shouldst know this for a certainty, that thou sufferest not alone. No matter how shamefully he attacks thee, he has done and is doing the same to others." The devil seeks, not only our own destruction, but also that of all Christendom. It is ever his purpose to tear out of men's hearts, in the midst of their sufferings, God's Word and faith. He would rob them of their comfort in Christ, and depict God in the most horrible and hostile light, that the heart may have not one kind thought regarding him. And he can do this; not only with lofty, refined, subtle thoughts, but also by gross suggestions from without, before which a man must fear and shudder. I, myself, saw and heard a girl who complained of a temptation of this nature; namely, that while she stood in the church and saw the sacrament elevated, the thought occurred to her: Lo, what a big knave the priest is elevating. And she was suddenly so frightened at the terrible thought that she sank to the floor.

[72] Such terror and anxiety proceed from the fact that one imagines that no one else has ever experienced such dreadful assaults. He thinks he has a special, strange, and unusual affliction. Although it is true that men's temptations differ and come from different sources and one may imagine his own a peculiar kind, yet the sufferings and temptations of all Christians are alike in this, that the devil tries to drive them all from the fear and confidence of God into unbelief, contempt, hatred, and blasphemy against God. Therefore, the apostles are accustomed to call Christians' sufferings a fellowship in pain and tribulations. They point all men who suffer to the agonies of Christ our Lord, as the head and exemplar. Peter says Peter 1:11:

“The Spirit of Christ... testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them.” And Paul says, “I fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh,” Colossians 1:24.

[73] If one would speak of especially severe sufferings, surely no human heart can comprehend, much less tell, how great and heavy were the anxiety and sorrow of our first parents on account of their miserable fall. And what sorrow must Adam have witnessed during the nine hundred years of his life in the experiences of his first son Cain, and his children! No man has ever borne such a burden as lay on both parents for nearly a hundred years after Abel’s death, until their third son was born. Truly, these nine hundred years were a period of sorrow and misery. Perhaps, on the last day, we shall discuss with this our father the solitary suffering of that time, of which we know nothing. And we shall willingly confess that in sorrow’s school he stands far above us and we have been only insignificant pupils. It must have been most severe and dangerous for him, since he had no example before him of similar suffering with which to comfort himself.

[74] Likewise, if thou couldst rightly understand what the other holy patriarchs, the prophets and apostles—especially Paul and Peter—and later all the beloved martyrs and saints, have endured thou wouldst be forced to say that all thy temptation and suffering are nothing in comparison. But above all these must we reckon the experiences of the Lord Christ, whose heart was so pierced by Satan’s fiery darts and bitter thrusts that the bloody drops of sweat were pressed out of his body. He has gone before and surpassed us on the way of sorrow. We, with all our suffering, can only follow his footsteps.

Of Temptation

[75] Therefore, learn well this saying of Peter, and think not that thou alone endurest this severe, fearful temptation and these onslaughts of the devil. Remember that thy brethren, not only they who are dead—who also have set thee a good example—but also those who live with thee in the world, have suffered and do suffer such terror and distress. For they have the very same enemy Christ and all Christendom have. Thou canst be glad and shout: God be praised! I am not the only one that suffers, but with me there is a great multitude, all Christians on earth, my beloved brothers and sisters,

even down to the last who shall walk this earth. And in this passage Peter comforts and strengthens me, as Christ commanded him, who also has tasted of these sorrows, and, indeed, in far greater measure than I and others have.

[76] I have at times thought, in my trials, that I should like to argue with Peter and Paul as to whether they were tried more severely than I. For, when he can do nothing else, the devil resorts to the plan of leading a man to fix his attention solely on his own affliction, and oppresses him with the thought: No man has been so cast off by God, or has sunk so deep into anxiety and distress. The devil has often so wearied me with such arguments that at length I could offer no further opposition to him, but simply turned him over to Christ, who can quickly silence him with arguments. If we have not Christ with us, Satan proves far too strong for us. We cannot silence him. He soon renders helpless all our skill, and slays us with our own sword.

[77] Ah, these seditious leaders and other self-secure spirits are poor, miserable people, who know nothing at all of this conflict! They drown in their own imaginations, and think they are perfect. And some of them are so shameless and without fear as to blaspheme, saying that God himself could not take their virtue from them. The devil simply strengthens them in these thoughts, and hardens them the more. This very thing is a sign that they do not yet know the devil; they are already blinded and taken captive by him, so that he can ruin them when he pleases.

[78] Genuine Christians are not thus self-confident and boastful when they are attacked. In severe conflicts and anxieties they labor that the devil may not deprive them of the sword. I know that I am learned and have seen something of what the devil can do; but I must bear him witness, from my daily experience, that he can overcome me unless I am well established in faith and have Christ in my heart. Thomas Munzer was so firm and inflexible, as he thought, that he dared to say that he would not behold Christ, if he did not himself wish to speak with him. But at last, when the devil began to attack him, men saw what his pride and boasts were. No, they are not the ones to accomplish anything, who go about so boastful, as if they had consumed the devil. They do not see that they, themselves, were long since devoured seven times over by him and are held fast in his jaws.

[79] The heretic Arius was also secure and proud enough against the pious bishops and Christians. Yea, when he was punished for his error by his bishop, and admonished to desist, he became the more obstinate. He complained about the bitter persecution to which he was subjected. But his suffering was that they would not approve his horrible blasphemy. Just so in every age the heretics and blasphemers, yea, even open murderers and tyrants, pose as martyrs when they are not permitted to run against God's Word and against pious people. So confident do they try to be that they have no fear of God. They count the devil a dead bee until, at length, he suddenly seizes and destroys them in a moment.

[80] But the poor, tempted Christians have need of the comfort and the strength furnished by God's Word. They must anxiously contend lest they lose, in their hours of severe temptation, God, Christ, faith, and Our Father. Therefore, the mission entrusted to Peter, to strengthen his brethren, is most needful. So the same comfort was necessary in his own temptations, and he was even given it beforehand by Christ, who declared that he had prayed for him that his faith might not be extinguished nor fail, which faith, however, from the time of his denial on to the third day did almost die, and scarcely the smallest spark remained. Hence he now, as a true apostle, comforts those who are in the like fears and straits of a sinking and expiring faith. He says to all the suffering and comfortless: My dear brother, think not that thou alone sufferest distress and temptation. Many of thy brethren have suffered quite as heavily, perhaps more heavily. I, myself, have been as weak as thou canst ever be. If thou dost not believe this, look and see what occurred in the house of Caiaphas, the high-priest, when I, who protested my readiness to go with Christ into prison and death, at a word spoken to me by a maid, fell, and denied and abjured most shamefully my beloved Lord. For three whole days I lay in misery. I had no one to comfort me and none who suffered equally with myself. I had no consolation except that my dear Master gave me, with his eyes, one friendly look.

[81] Therefore, no one should regard his distress and need as too heavy and fearful, as if it were an entirely new thing, something which had never been experienced by others. To thee it may be something new and untried. But look about thee, at the great multitude of the Church, from the beginning until this hour. The Church has been set in the world to suffer the attacks of the devil, and without ceasing it must be sifted as wheat, as

Christ's words suggest, Luke 22:31. My friend, thou hast not yet seen nor experienced what our first parents endured their whole life long, and after them all the holy fathers until Christ. Peter, also, has been farther in this school than I and thou, and I would say that the same temptation as his could hardly be found. Paul says of him and the beloved apostles (1 Corinthians 4:9): "For, I think, God hath set forth us the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, both to angels and men"—so that Satan may torment us according to his will, and thus work out his pleasure upon us. And what are the sufferings of all men combined when compared with Christ's agony and conflict, in that he sweat blood for thee?

[82] When the devil plagues and assails thee with his manifold temptations, refer him to Christ, with whom to dispute about the severe temptations, the death struggle, the anguish of hell, etc. Comfort thyself that thou art one of a great company of sufferers, past present and future. O beautiful, glorious company! All under one lord and head, who took from the devil his power and hellfire. In short, thy affliction cannot prove so great that thou wilt not find it paralleled in the lives of the apostles, prophets, patriarchs and all the saints, especially of Christ himself; with whom, if we suffer, let us not doubt, says Paul, that we shall "be also glorified," Romans 8:17.

Fourth Sunday after Trinity. Consolation in Suffering and Patience. Waiting for the Revealing of the Sons of God.

Text: Romans 8:8-22.

8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,

21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. Romans 8:8-22

Consolation in Suffering and Patience.

[1] Paul's language here is peculiar. He speaks in a manner wholly different from the other apostles. There is something particularly strange about the first sentences of the passage. His words must be faithfully studied and their meaning learned by personal experience. The Christian life consists altogether in the practice and experience of what the Word of God tells us. He who has no experimental knowledge of the Word will have but little conception and appreciation of Paul's words here. Indeed, they will be wholly unintelligible to him.

[2] Up to the point where our text begins, Paul has been assuring us in this epistle that through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ we attain the high privilege of calling God our Father; that the Holy Spirit bears witness in our hearts of our sonship, and makes us bold enough to come, by faith in Christ the Mediator, joyfully before God, trusting him to fill and bless us. Then Paul draws the conclusion, first, that we are children of God; next, he says: "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." The second conclusion is the outcome of the first. For the reason that we have the boldness and assurance to call God our Father in sincerity and nothing doubting, we are become not only children but heirs, heirs of God and brethren to Christ, joint heirs with him. But all this, as Paul says, is true "if so be that we suffer with him" (Romans 8:7).

[3] The high prerogative of heirship, Paul faithfully enjoins, is dependent on a sacred duty. Let him who would be Christ's brother, and joint heir with him, remember he must also be a joint martyr and joint sufferer with Christ. The apostle's meaning is: Many are the Christians, indeed, who would be

joint heirs with Christ and gladly enjoy the privilege of sharing his inheritance, but who object to suffering with him; they separate themselves from him because unwilling to participate in his pain. But Paul says this will not do. The inheritance follows only as a consequence of the suffering. Since Christ, our dear Lord and Savior, had to suffer before he could be glorified, we must be martyrs with him, with him be mocked by the world, despised, spit upon, crowned with thorns and put to death, before the inheritance will be ours. It cannot be otherwise. A consistent sympathy is essential to Christian faith and doctrine. He who would be Christ's brother and fellow-heir must also suffer with him. He who would live with Christ must first die with him. The members of a family not only enjoy good together but also share in their ills. As the saying is, "He who would be a companion in eating must also be a companion in labor."

[4] Paul would earnestly admonish us not to become false Christians who look to find in Christ mere pleasure and enjoyment, but to remember that if we are to participate in the "eternal weight of glory" we must first bear the "light affliction, which is for the moment." 2 Corinthians 4:17. By the words "if so be that we suffer with him" the writer means that we are to do more than exercise the sympathy that grieves over another's misfortune, though such sympathy is binding upon Christians and is a superior Christian virtue, a work of mercy: we ourselves must suffer, *non solum affectu, sed etiam effectu*, that is, we are overwhelmed by like sufferings. As Christ our Lord was persecuted, we also must endure persecution. As the devil harassed him, we also must be harassed unceasingly. And so Satan does torment true Christians. Indeed, were it not for the restraining hand of the Lord our God, the devil would suffer us to have no peace. Paul has reference to a heartfelt sympathy intense enough to enter into actual suffering. He says to the Hebrews (Hebrews 10:32-23): "Ye endured a great conflict of sufferings; partly, being made a gazing stock both by reproaches and afflictions."

[5] And in the verse preceding our text he tells us that as our blissful inheritance through brotherhood and joint heirship with Christ is not a mere fancy and false hope of the heart, but a real inheritance, so our sympathy must amount to real suffering, which we take upon ourselves as befitting joint heirs. Now Paul comforts the Christian in his sufferings with the authority of one who speaks from experience, from thorough acquaintance

with his subject. He seems to view this life as through obscurities, while beholding the life to come with clear and unobstructed vision. He says: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to usward [in us]."

[6] Notice how he turns his back to the world and his face to the future revelation, as if seeing no suffering anywhere, but all joy. "Even if it does go ill with us," he would argue, "what indeed is our suffering in comparison with the unspeakable joy and glory to be revealed in us? It is too insignificant to be compared and unworthy to be called suffering." We fail to realize the truth of these words because we do not see with our bodily eyes the supreme glory awaiting us; because we fail to grasp fully the fact that we shall never die but shall have a body that cannot suffer nor be ill. If one could conceive the nature of this reward he would be compelled to say: "Were it possible for me to suffer ten deaths by fire or flood, that would be nothing in comparison to the future life of glory. What is temporal suffering, however protracted, contrasted with eternal life? It is not worthy to be called suffering or to be esteemed meritorious."

[7] In this light does Paul regard suffering, as he says, and he admonishes Christians to look upon it similarly. Then shall they find the infinite beyond all comparison with the finite. What is a single penny measured by a world of dollars? though this is not an appropriate comparison since the things compared are both perishable. The suffering of the world is always to be counted as nothing measured by the glorious and eternal possessions yet to be ours. "I entreat you, therefore, beloved brethren," Paul would say, "to fear no sufferings, not even should it be your lot to be slain. For if you are actually joint heirs, it must be your fortune, a part of your inheritance, to suffer with others. But what is your pain measured by the eternal glory prepared for you and obtained by the sacrifice of your Savior Jesus Christ? It is too insignificant to be contrasted." So Paul makes all earthly suffering infinitely small — a drop, a tiny spark, so to speak; but of yonder hoped for glory he makes a boundless ocean, an illimitable flame.

[8] Why cannot we take his view of the insignificance of our afflictions and the magnitude of the future glory? The extravagance of our conduct is apparent in the fact that but a harsh word uttered by one to his fellow will make the injured one ready to overturn mountains and uproot trees in his

resentment. To them who are so unwilling to suffer, Paul's word of encouragement here is wholly unintelligible. Christians are not to conduct themselves in this impatient manner. It ill becomes them to make extravagant complaint and outcry about injustice. "But," you say, "I have truly suffered injustice." Very well, so be it. But why do you make so much of your sufferings and never give a thought to what awaits you in heaven? Why not exalt the future glory also? If you desire to be a Christian, truly it will not do to conduct yourself in this impatient manner. If you must air your grievances, surely you may do it quietly and decorously.

[9] In this life it must be otherwise than in the life of glory. If you essay to be a joint heir with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not suffer with him, to be his brother and are not like unto him, Christ certainly will not at the last day acknowledge you as a brother and fellow-heir. Rather he will ask where are your crown of thorns, your cross, the nails and scourge; whether you have been, as he and his followers ever have from the beginning of time, an abomination to the world. If you cannot qualify in this respect, he cannot regard you as his brother. In short, we must all suffer with the Son of God and be made like unto him, as we shall see later, or we shall not be exalted with him in glory.

[10] Upon this same topic Paul addresses also the Galatians (Galatians 6:17): Henceforth let no one confuse me, say nothing to me about the doctrine that friendship is rewarded on earth; for I bear branded on my body the marks of my Lord Jesus Christ. His reference is to the signs in ancient paintings of Christ, where the Savior was represented as bearing his cross upon his shoulders, with the nails, the scourge, the crown of thorns and other emblems in evidence. These marks or signs, Paul instructs, all Christians as well as himself must exhibit, not painted on a wall but branded in their flesh and blood. They are made when inwardly the devil affrights and assails us with all manner of terrors and overwhelming afflictions, and at the same time outwardly the world slanders us as heretics, laying her hand to our throats whenever possible and putting us to death. The Reward Such marks, or scars, for Christ the Lord, Paul admonishes all Christians to exhibit. Thus he encourages them not to be terrified though they suffer every conceivable wrong, such as our brethren here and there have suffered now for several years. But brighter days are in store for us when once the hour of our enemies and the power of darkness shall come.

Our adversaries annoy us now with malignant words and slanderous writings, and indeed they may take our lives. So be it. We must in any event suffer if we are ever to attain true glory. But what they will secure by putting us to death they certainly shall experience.

[11] In Paul's reference to the glory that shall be revealed in us there is a hint as to the cause of man's unwillingness to suffer: faith is yet weak and fails to descry the hidden glory; that glory is yet to be revealed in us. Could we but behold it with mortal vision, what noble, patient martyrs we should be! Suppose one stood on yonder side of the Elbe with a chest full of gold, offering it to him who should venture to swim across for it. What an effort would be made for the sake of that tangible wealth!

[12] Take the case of the adventurous officer. For a few dollars per month he defies spears and guns, exposing himself to almost certain death. The merchant hurries to and fro in the world in a frenzied effort to amass riches, hazarding life and limb, apparently careless of physical cost so long as God's mercy preserves to him but the shattered hulk of a body. And what must not one endure at court before he realizes, if he ever does, the fulfillment of his ambition? In temporal things man can do and suffer everything for the sake of honor, wealth and power, because these are manifest to earthly vision. But in the spiritual conflict, because the reward is not discernible to the senses it is very difficult for the old man in us to believe that God will finally grant us glorious bodies, pure souls and hearts of gladness, and make us superior to any earthly king. Indeed, the very reverse of this condition obtains now. Here is one condemned as a heretic; there one is burned or in some other way put to death. Glory, wealth and honor are not in evidence now. So it seems hard for us to resign ourselves to suffering and wait for the redemption and glory yet unrevealed. Again, no hardship is too great for the world to undergo for the sake of sordid gain; it willingly suffers whatever comes for that which moth and rust consume and thieves steal.

[13] Paul means to say: "I am certain there is reserved for us exceeding glory, in comparison wherewith all earthly suffering is actually of no consideration; only it is not yet manifest." If we have to face the slightest gale of adversity, or if a trifling misfortune befalls us, we begin to make outcry, filling the heavens with our false complaint of a terrible calamity. Were our faith triumphant, we would regard it but as a small inconvenience

to suffer, even for thirty or forty years or longer; indeed, we should think our sufferings too trifling to be taken into account. May the Lord our God only forbear to reckon with us for the sins we have committed! Why will we have so much to say about great sufferings and their merits? How utterly unworthy we are of the free grace and ineffable glory which are ours in the fact that through Christ we become children and heirs of God, brethren and joint heirs with Christ! Well may we resolve: "I will maintain a cheerful silence about my sufferings, boasting not of them nor complaining about them. I will patiently endure all my merciful God sends upon me, meanwhile rendering him my heartfelt gratitude for calling me to such surpassing grace and blessing." But, as I said, the vision of glory will not enter our hearts because of our weak and miserable flesh, which allows itself to be more influenced by the present than by the future. So the Holy Spirit must be our schoolmaster to bring the matter home to our hearts.

[14] Note particularly how Paul expressly states that the glory is to be revealed in us. He would remind us that not only such as Peter or Paul are to participate in the blessing, as we are prone to believe, but that we and all Christians are included in the word "us." Indeed, even the merest babe obtains at death, wherein it is a joint sufferer with mankind, this unspeakable glory, which the Lord Jesus into whose death it was baptized has purchased and bestowed upon it. Though in the life beyond one saint may have more glory than another, yet all will have the same eternal life. Here on earth men differ in point of strength, comeliness, intellect, yet all enjoy the same animal life. So in the other life there will be degrees of radiance or glory, as Paul teaches (1 Corinthians 15:41), yet all will share the same eternal happiness and joy; there will be one glory for all, for we shall all be the children of God.

[15] Now the first point of consolation is that we turn our backs upon all suffering, saying: "What is all my pain, though it were tenfold greater, compared to the eternal life unto which I am baptized, to which I am called? My sufferings are not worthy to be so termed in connection with the exceeding glory to be revealed in me." Paul magnifies the future glory to make the temporal sufferings the more insignificant. Then follows: "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the revealing [manifestation] of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope: [For the creature was

made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope;]”

[16] Here is the second point of consolation. Paul holds up as an example to us the condition of the whole creation. He exhorts us to endure patiently, as the creature does, all the violence and injustice we suffer from the devil and the world, and to comfort ourselves with the hope of future redemption. Remarkable doctrine this, unlike anything elsewhere found in the Scriptures, that heaven and earth, sun, moon and stars, leaf and blade, every living thing, waits with sighing and groaning for the revelation of our glory.

The Travail of Creation

[17] Such sighing and agony of the creature is not audible to me, nor is it to you. But Paul tells us he sees and hears it, not expressed by one creature alone, but by all God has made. What does he mean? What is the sighing and longing of creation? It is not that annually the leaves wither and the fruits fall and decay: God purposes that every year new fruits shall grow; he decrees the shattering of the fallen tree. But Paul refers to the creature’s unwilling subjection to the ungodly; “subject to vanity,” he phrases it. For instance, the blessed sun, most glorious of created things, serves the small minority of the godly, but where it shines on one godly man it must shine on thousands and thousands of knaves, such as enemies of God, blasphemers, persecutors, with whom the world is filled; also murderers, robbers, thieves, adulterers. To these it must minister in all their ungodliness and wickedness, permitting its pure and glorious influence to benefit the unworthy, most shameful and abandoned profligates. According to the apostle, this subjection is truly painful, and were the sun a rational creature obeying its own volition rather than the decree of the Lord God who has subjected it to vanity against its will, it might deny every one of these wicked wretches even the least ray of light; that it is compelled to minister to them is its cross and pain, by reason of which it sighs and groans. Just as we Christians endure many kinds of injustice and consequently sigh for and implore help and deliverance in the Lord’s prayer, so do the creatures sigh. Although they have not human utterance, yet they have speech intelligible to God and the Holy Spirit, who mark the creatures’ sighs over their unjust abuse by the ungodly.

[18] Nowhere else in the Holy Scriptures do we find anything like Paul's declaration here concerning the earnest expectation and waiting of the creatures for the revelation of the children of God; which waiting the apostle characterizes as a sighing in eager desire for man's redemption. A little later he compares the state of the creature to a woman in travail, saying it cries out in its anguish. The sun, moon and stars, the heavens and earth, the bread we eat, the water or wine we drink, the cattle and sheep, in short, all things that minister to our comfort, cry out in accusation against the world because they are subjected to vanity and must suffer with Christ and his brethren. This accusing cry is beyond human power to express, for God's created things are innumerable. Rightly was it said from the pulpit in former times that on the last day all creatures will utter an accusing cry against the ungodly who have shown them abuse here on earth, and will call them tyrants to whom they were unjustly subjected.

[19] Paul presents this example of the creatures for the comfort of Christians. His meaning is: Be not sorrowful because of your sufferings; they are small indeed when the ensuing transcendent glory is considered. You are not alone in your tribulation and your complaint at injustice; the whole creation suffers with you and cries out against its subjection to the wicked world. Every bleat of the flock, every low of the herd, is an outcry against the ungodly as enemies of God and not worthy to enjoy the creatures' ministrations; not even to receive a morsel of bread or a drink of water. Along this line St. Augustine is eloquent. "A miserly wretch," he says, "is unworthy the bread he eats, for he is an enemy of God." Paul tells us the whole creation groans and travails with us, as if desiring relief from anguish; that it suffers like a woman in travail. For instance: the heavenly planets would gladly be freed from serving, yes, in the extent of their anguish would willingly suffer eclipse; the earth would readily become unfruitful; all waters would voluntarily sink from sight and deny the wicked world a draught; the sheep would prefer to produce thorns for the ungodly instead of wool; the cow would willingly yield them poison rather than milk. But they must perform their appointed work, Paul says, because of him who has subjected them in hope. God will finally answer the cry of creation; he has already determined that after the six thousand years of its existence now passed, the world shall have its evening and end.

[20] Had not our parents sinned in paradise, the world would never be dissolved. But since man has fallen in sin, we all — the whole creation — must suffer the consequence; because of our sins, creation must be subjected to vanity and dissolution. During the six thousand years, which are as nothing compared to eternal life, all created things must be under the power of a condemned world, and compelled to serve with all their energies until God shall overthrow the entire world and for the elect's sake purify again and renew the creature, as Peter teaches. 2 Peter 3:13.

[21] The sun is by no means as gloriously brilliant as when created. Because of man's ungodliness its brightness is to an extent dimmed. But on the day of visitation God will cleanse and purify it by fire (2 Peter 3:10), giving it a greater glory than it had in the beginning. Because it must suffer in our sins, and is obliged to shine as well for the worst knave as the godly man, even for more knaves than godly men, it longs intensely for the day when it shall be cleansed and shall serve the righteous alone with its light. Neither would the earth produce thistles nor thorns were it not cursed for our sins. So it, with all creatures, longs for the day when it shall be changed and renewed.

[22] This is the explanation of Paul's remarkable declaration concerning the "earnest expectation of the creation." The creature continually regards the end of service, and freedom from slavery to the ungodly. This event will not take place before the revealing of the sons of God; therefore the earnestly expectant creation desires that revelation to come without delay, at any moment. Until such manifestation the world will not consider godly souls as children of the Father, but as children of the devil. So it boldly abuses and slanders, persecutes and puts to death, God's beloved children, thinking it thereby does God service. In consequence the whole creation cries: "Oh, for a speedy end of this calamity, and the dawning of glory for the children of God!"

[23] We have plain authority for the interpretation of the groaning of creation in Paul's further words, "the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will." He thus makes all creation — sun and moon, fire, air, water, heaven and earth with all they contain — merely poor, captive servants. And whom do they serve? Not our Lord God; not for the most part his children, for they are a minority among those ministered unto. To whom, then, is their service given? To the wicked — to vanity. The created

things are not, as they would be, in righteous service. The sun, for instance, would choose to shine for Paul, Peter and other godly ones. It begrudges to wicked characters like Judas, Pilate, Herod, Annas and Caiaphas the least ray of light; for it is useless service, yielding no good. To serve Peter and Paul would be productive of pleasure and profit; well may its benefit be bestowed upon these godly ones. But the sun must shine as well for the wicked as for the ungodly. Indeed, where it fittingly serves one godly individual, thousands abuse its service. The case is similar with gold and other minerals, and with all the articles of food, drink and clothing. To whom do these minister? Wicked desperadoes, who in return blaspheme and dishonor God, condemn his holy Gospel and murder his Christians. This is wasted service.

[24] So Paul says, “The creature was made subject to vanity;” it must render service against its consent, having no pleasure therein. The sun does not shine for the purpose of lighting a highway robber to murder. It would light him in godly deeds and errands of mercy; but since he follows not these things the service of the blessed sun is abused and that creature ministers with sincere unwillingness. But how is it to avoid service? A wicked tyrant, a shameful harlot, may wear gold ornaments. Is the gold responsible for its use? It is the good creature of the Lord our God and fitted to serve righteous people. But the precious product must submit to accommodating the wicked world against it will. Yet it endures in hope of an end of such service — such slavery. Therein it obeys God. God has imposed the obligation, that man may know him as a merciful God and Father, who, as Christ teaches (Matthew 5:45), makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good. For the Father’s sake the blessed sun serves wickedness, performing its service and bestowing its favors in vain. But God in his own good time will reckon with those who abuse the glorious sunlight and other creatures and will richly recompense the created things for their service.

[25] Beloved, Paul thus traces the holy cross among all creatures; heaven and earth and all they contain suffer with us. So we must not complain and excessively grieve when we fare ill. We must patiently wait for the redemption of our bodies and for the glory which is to be revealed in us; especially when we know that all creatures groan in anguish, like a woman in travail, longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For then shall begin their redemption, when they shall not be slaves to wickedness but shall

willingly and with delight serve God's children only. In the meantime, they bear the cross for the sake of God, who has subjected them in hope. Thus, we are assured that captivity will not endure forever, but a time must come when the creatures will be delivered. "Do ye likewise, beloved Christians," Paul would advise, "and reflect that as the creature will rejoice with you on the last day, so does it now mourn with you; that not you alone must suffer, but the whole creation suffers with you and awaits your redemption, a redemption so great and glorious As to make your sufferings unworthy to be considered."

Fourth Sunday after Trinity. Suffering, Waiting and Sighing of Creation.

Text: Romans 8:18-22.

18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,

21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. Romans 8:18-22

Redemption of the Creatures.

[1] We have heard how Paul comforts the Christians in their sufferings, pointing them to the future inconceivable and eternal glory to be revealed in us in the world to come; and how he has, for our greater consolation, reminded us that the whole creation as one being suffers in company with the Christian Church. We have noted how he sees, with the clear, keen eye of an apostle, the holy cross in every creature. He brings out this thought prominently, telling us it is not strange we Christians should suffer, for in our preaching, our reproving and rebuking, we easily merit the world's persecution; but creation must suffer being innocent, must even endure forced subjection to the wicked and the devil himself.

[2] Could the sun voice its experience from Adam's time down, what misery it has witnessed and endured, undoubtedly it would tell of its heavy cross in being compelled to serve innumerable adulterers, thieves, murderers, in fact, the devil's whole kingdom. Yet it is a noble and admirable work of creation, fit to serve only God, angels and pious Christians, who thank God for it. But it must serve those who blaspheme and dishonor God and who are guilty of all wickedness and lawlessness. Notwithstanding its dislike of such service, it is with every other created thing obedient to God.

[3] This is a fine and comforting thought of the apostle's, that all creatures are martyrs, having to endure unwillingly every sort of injustice. The creatures do not approve the conduct of the devil and of the wicked in their shameful abuse of creation, but they submit to it for the sake of him who has subjected them to vanity, at the same time hoping for a better dispensation in the fulfillment of time, when they shall again be rightly received and abuse be past. Hence Paul points to another life for all creation, declaring it to be as weary of this order as we are and to await a new dispensation. By his reference to the earnest expectation of the creature he means that it does not expect to remain in its present condition, but with us looks toward heaven and hopes for a resurrection from this degraded life into a better one where it will be delivered from the bondage of corruption, as he says later.

[4] By these sayings Paul gives us to understand that all creation is to attain a perfection far beyond its present state where with us it must be subject to tyrants. These tyrants wantonly abuse our characters, our bodies, our property rights, just as the devil abuses our souls. But we must suffer

our lot, remembering that mankind is captive on earth in the kingdom of the devil, and all creation with it. The earth must submit to be trodden and to be cultivated by many a wicked one, to whom it must yield subsistence. Likewise is this submission true of the elements — air, fire, water — all creation having its cross, yet hoping for the end of the dispensation.

[5] There is a refined and comforting perception in the apostle's exposition where he represents the entire creation as one being, with us looking forward to entrance upon another life. We are satisfied that our present life is not all, that we await another and true life. Likewise the sun awaits the restoration coming to it, to the earth and all creatures, when they shall be purified from the contaminating abuse of the devil and the world.

[6] And this condition is to come about when the children of God are revealed. True, they are God's children on earth, but they have not yet entered into their glory. Similarly, the sun is not now in possession of its real glory, for it is subject to evil; it awaits the appointed time when its servitude shall cease. With all creation and with the true saints it waits and longs, being meanwhile subject to vanity — that is, the devil and the wicked world — for the sake of God alone, who subjects, yet leaves hope that the trial shall not continue forever.

[7] We are children of God now on earth. We are blessed if we believe and are baptized, as it is written: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Mark 16:16. And again: "As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name." John 1:12. Baptism is a visible rite and we behold with mortal vision those who receive it; the Word of the Gospel we hear, and we have in ourselves the witness of the Holy Spirit that our faith, however weak, is acceptable to God. But who among men recognizes us as children of God? Who will apply the term to a class imprisoned and tortured and tormented in every conceivable way, as if they were children of the devil, condemned and accursed souls?

[8] Not without significance is Paul's assertion that the glory of God's children is now unmanifest but shall be revealed in them. In Colossians 3:3-4 he declares: "Ye died, and your life is hiding with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory." So long as God's children are here upon earth they are

not arrayed in the garb of his own but wear the livery of the devil. It would be fitting for the children of the devil to be bound, fettered and imprisoned and to suffer all manner of misfortune; but it does not so come to pass. They have the world's pleasures. They are wealthy and powerful, have honor and money in plenty and withal bear God's name and wear the garb of his children, as if having his approval. Meanwhile they regard us as heretics and enemies of God. Thus, the rightful order of things is reversed: they who are God's appear to be the devil's, and the devil's to be God's. This condition is painful to the pious. Indeed, heaven and earth and all creatures cry out in complaining protest, unwilling to be subject to evil and to suffer the abuse of the ungodly; to endure that dishonor of God that opposes the hallowing of his name, the extension of his kingdom and the execution of his will on earth as in heaven.

[9] Because God's children are thus unrevealed and denied their true insignia, all creation, as Paul says, cries out with them for the Lord God to rend the heavens and come down to distinguish his children from those of the devil. Considering the unrevealed state of God's own on earth, the ungodly in their great blindness are not able to discern them. The doctrine of the righteous which magnifies God's grace manifest in Christ is by the wicked termed error, falsehood, heresy and diabolical teaching. So Paul says the whole creation waits for the manifestation of the children of God. The Christian's Glory to Be Revealed John, also, says: "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him." 1 John 3:2. That is, when our Lord Jesus Christ comes with his loved angels and we are drawn up into the clouds to meet him in the air, he will bring to God's children a glory consistent with their name. They will be far more splendidly arrayed than were the children of the world in their lifetime, who went about in purple and velvet and ornaments of gold, and as the rich man, in silk. Then shall they wear their own livery and shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Such is the wonderful glory of the revelation that the radiant beauty of poor Lazarus who lay in wretchedness at the rich man's gate surpasses all expectation. Upon this topic, see Wisdom of Solomon, Song of Solomon 5:2ff.

[10] The hope of this wonderful glory, Paul says, is ours and that of all creation with us, for creation is to be purified and renewed for our sakes.

Then will we be impressed with the grandeur of the sun, the majesty of the trees and the beauty of the flowers. Having so much in prospect, we should, in the buoyancy of our hope, attach little importance to the slight suffering that may be our earthly lot. What is it compared to the glory to be revealed in us? Doubtless in yonder life we shall reproach ourselves with the thought: “How foolish I was! I am unworthy to be called the child of God, for I esteemed myself all too highly on earth and placed too little value upon this surpassing glory and happiness. Were I still in the world and with the knowledge I now have of the heavenly glory, I would, were it possible, suffer a thousand years of imprisonment, or endure illness, persecution or other misfortunes. Now I have proven true that all the sufferings of the world are nothing measured by the glory to be manifested in the children of God.”

[11] We find many, even among nominal Christians, with so little patience they scarce can endure a word of criticism, even when well deserved. Rather than suffer from the world some slight reproach, some trifling loss, for the sake of the Gospel, they will renounce that Gospel and Christ. But how will it be in the day of revelation? Beloved, let us be wise now and not magnify our temporal sufferings; let us patiently submit to them as does creation, according to Paul’s teaching. We may imagine the earth saying: “I permit myself to be plowed and cultivated for man’s benefit, notwithstanding the Christians whom I bless are in the minority, the great mass of those profiting by me being wicked men. What am I to do? I will endure the conditions and permit myself to be tilled because my Creator so orders; meanwhile I hope for a different order eventually, when I shall no longer be subject to wickedness and obliged to serve God’s enemies.”

[12] Peter also alludes to the new order of creation, saying: “The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat... But according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” 2 Peter 3:10 and 13. In other words: Here on earth men as a rule are dishonorable and wicked and obey not the will of the Lord God as it is done in heaven; but the day will come when only righteousness and holiness shall dwell on the earth — none but godly, righteous souls. As in heaven all is righteousness, the devil being banished, so on the last day, Satan and all the

ungodly shall be thrust from the earth. Then will there be none but holy ones in both heaven and earth, who will in fullness of joy possess all things. These will be the elect. This is Peter's meaning in the words, "According to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Paul adds that all creation waits with us for the revelation, groaning and crying out in anguish.

[13] But Paul protects the creature from condemnation and reproach for sinful submission to abuse. He says, in effect: "True, it is subject to vanity, yet not willingly." Likewise, I do not desire to suffer reproach as a heretic and a deceiver, but I endure it for God's sake, who permits it. This attitude on my part does not make me partaker of the sin committed against me by enemies of the truth who reproach me. The case is the same as that of the creature suffering abuse for the sake of him who has subjected it. And you Christians are to imitate the example of creation. The sun seems to say: "Great God, I am thy creature; therefore, I will perform, I will suffer, whatsoever is the divine will." So when the Lord God sends upon you some affliction and says, "Endure a little suffering for my sake; I will largely repay it," you are to say: "Yes, gladly, blessed Lord. Because it is thy will, I will suffer it with a willing heart." Of Hope It also belongs to the consolation against suffering to be conscious that the suffering will not last forever, but will sometime have an end — on the day of judgment, when the godless shall be separated from the godly. For this life on earth is nothing else than a masquerade where people walk in masks, and one sees another different than he is. He who appears to be an angel is a devil, and those considered the children of the devil are angels and the children of our dear Lord. Hence it is that they are attacked, plagued, martyred and put to death as heretics and children of the devil. This masquerade must be tolerated until the day of judgment; when the wicked will be unmasked and will no longer be able to pass as holy people.* The text now continues: "That the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God." "[Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.]"

[14] We Christians are not the only beings to receive deliverance, Paul declares; the creature in bondage has the same hope of release as the poor, enslaved human being. Sun, moon and every other created thing is captive

to the devil and to wicked people and must serve them in every form of sin and vice. Hence these sigh and complain, waiting for the manifestation of the children of God, when the devil and the ungodly shall be thrust into hell, and for all eternity be denied sight of sun and moon, the enjoyment of a drop of water or a breath of air, and forever deprived of every blessing.

[15] So the apostle tells us, "Creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption." In other words, creation must now subserve most shameful ends. Sun, moon and all creatures must be slaves to the devil and the ungodly because God so desires. He wills for his beautiful creation to lie at the feet of Satan and his adherents and to serve them for the present. Likewise, many a sensitive heart is compelled to obey a tyrant or a Turk because the Lord has imposed that servitude upon it. Some may even have to clean the Turk's boots, or perform still more menial duties, and in addition suffer all sorts of indignities from that individual.

[16] These words, "Creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption," signify that all created things must until the final reckoning be servants and menials, not to the godly, but to the devil and wicked men. Paul himself regards with pity the sun and other creatures because of their forced service to Satan and to tyrannical beings. The created works no more desire such servility than we desire subjection to the Turk. Nevertheless, they submit and wait — for what? The glorious liberty of the children of God. Then shall they be released from slavery and be no longer bound to serve the wicked and worthless. More than that, in their freedom they will have a grandeur far in excess of their present state and shall minister only unto God's children. They will be done with bondage to the devil. "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

[17] Paul uses forcible language here. Creation is aware, he says, not only of its future deliverance from the bondage of corruption, but of its future grandeur. It hopes for the speedy coming of its glory and waits with the eagerness of a maiden for the dance. Seeing the splendor reserved for itself, it groans and travails unceasingly. Similarly, we Christians groan and intensely desire to have done at once with the Turks, the Pope, and the tyrannical world. Who would not weary of witnessing the present knavery, ungodliness and blasphemy against Christ and his Gospel, even as Lot wearied of the ungodliness he beheld in Sodom? Thus Paul says that

creation groaneth and travaileth while waiting for the revelation and the glorious liberty of the children of God.

[18] “And not only so,” he adds, “but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” We pray, we cry with great longing, in the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come,” meaning: “Help, dear Lord, and speed the blessed day of thy second advent, that we may be delivered from the wicked world, the devil’s kingdom, and may be released from the awful distress we suffer — inwardly from our own consciences and outwardly from the wicked. Afflict to the limit these old bodies of ours so long as we may obtain others not sinful, as these; not given to iniquity and disobedience; bodies that can never know illness, persecution or death; bodies delivered from all physical and spiritual distress and made like unto thine own glorified body, dear Lord Jesus Christ. Thus may we finally realize our glorious redemption. Amen.”

[19] Paul uses a peculiar word here in the text, which we cannot render by any other in our language than “travail.” It carries the idea of pains and pangs such as a woman knows in childbirth. The mother’s ardent desire is to be delivered. She longs for it with an intensity that all the wealth, honor, pleasure and power of the world could not awaken. This is precisely the meaning of the word Paul applies to creation. He declares it to be in travail, suffering pain and anguish in the extremity of its desire for release. But who can discern the anguish of creation? Reason cannot believe, nor human wisdom imagine, the thing. “It is impossible,” declares reason. “The sun cannot be more glorious, more pleasing and beneficent. And what is lacking with the moon and stars and the earth? Who says the creature is in travail or unwillingly suffers its present state?” The writer of the text, however, declares creation to be weary of present conditions of servitude, and as eager for liberation as a mother for deliverance in the hour of her anguish. Truly it is with spiritual sight, with apostolic vision, that Paul discerns this fact in regard to creation. He turns away from this world, oblivious to the joys and the sufferings of earthly life, and boasts alone of the future, eternal life, unseen and unexperienced. Thus he administers real and effectual comfort to Christians, pointing them to a future life for themselves and all created things after this sinful life shall have an end.

[20] Therefore, believers in Christ are to be confident of eternal glory, and with sighs and groans to implore the Lord God to hasten the blessed day of the realization of their hopes. For so Christ has taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come." May he who has commanded give us grace and strength to perform, and a firm faith in our future glory. Our faith is not to be exercised for the attainment of early riches, but as a means to bring us into another life. We are not baptized unto the present life, nor do we receive the Gospel as ministering to our temporal good; these things are to point us to yonder eternal life. God grant the speedy coming of the glad day of our redemption, when we shall realize all these blessings, which now we hear of and believe in through the Word.

Fifth Sunday after Trinity. Exhortation to the Fruits of Faith. Duty of Unity and Love.

Text: 1 Peter 3:8-15.

8 Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

10 For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:

11 Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.

12 For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

13 And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: 1 Peter 3:8-15

Exhortation to the Fruits of Faith.

[1] Here you have enumerated again a long list of eminently good works enjoined upon Christians who believe and have confessed their faith in the Gospel. By such fruits is faith to be manifest. Peter classifies these works according to the obligations of Christians to each other, and their obligations to enemies and persecutors.

[2] Immediately preceding the text, Peter has been instructing concerning the domestic relations of husband and wife; how they should live together as Christians in love and companionship, giving due honor and patiently and reasonably bearing with each other. Now he extends the exhortation to Christians in general, enjoining them to live together in Christian love, like brothers and sisters of a household. In the rehearsal of many preeminently noble virtues and works, he portrays the ideal church, beautiful in its outward adornment, in the grace wherewith it shines before men. With such virtues the Church pleases and honors God, while angels behold with joy and delight. And what earthly thing is more desirable to man's sight? What happier and more pleasing society may he seek than the company of those who manifest a unity of heart, mind and will; brotherly love, meekness, kindness and patience, even toward enemies? Surely, no man is too depraved to command such goodness and to desire companionship among people of this class.

[3] The first virtue is one frequently mentioned by the apostles. Paul, for instance, in Romans 12:16, says: "Be of the same mind one toward another." Also in Ephesians 4:3: "Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Harmony is the imperative virtue for the Christian Church. Before the other virtues — love, meekness — can be manifest, there must first be concord and unity of heart among all. It is impossible that outward circumstances of human life be always the same; much dissimilarity in person, station, and occupation is inevitable. To this very unlikeness and to the natural depravity of flesh and blood is due the

discord and disagreement of men in this world. Let one become conscious of personal superiority in point of uprightness, learning, skill or natural ability, or let him become aware of his loftier station in life, and he immediately grows self-complacent, thinks himself better than his fellows, demands honor and recognition from all men, is unwilling to yield to or serve an inferior and thinks himself entitled to such right and privilege because of his superiority and virtue.

[4] Pride is the common vice of the world, and the devil fosters it among his numerous followers thereby causing every sort of misery and unhappiness, corrupting all ranks and stations, and rendering men vicious, depraved and incapable of executing good. In opposition to this vice the apostles diligently admonish Christians to be of one mind, regardless of station or occupation, since every individual must remain in the position to which he has been ordained and called of God. All ranks and stations cannot be one. Particularly is this true in the Church; for in addition to the outward difference of person, station, and so on, there are manifold divine gifts unequally distributed and varyingly imparted. Yet these many dissimilarities, both spiritual and secular, are to be amenable to the unity of the spirit, as Paul calls it, or a spiritual unity. Just as the members of the physical body have different offices and perform different functions, no one member being able to do the work of the other, and yet all are in the unity of one bodily life; so also Christians, whatever the dissimilarity of language, office and gift among them, must live, increase and be preserved in unity and harmony of mind, as in one body.

[5] This matter of harmony is the first and most necessary commandment enjoined by the doctrine of faith; ay, this virtue is the first fruit which faith is to effect among Christians, who are called in one faith and baptism. It is to be the beginning of their Christian love. For true faith necessarily creates in all believers the spirit that reasons: "We are all called by one Word, one baptism and Holy Spirit, to the same salvation; we are alike heirs of the grace and the blessings of God. Although one has more and greater gifts than another, he is not on that account better before God. By grace alone, without any merit of ours, we are pleasing to God. Before him none can boast of himself."

[6] How can I think myself better than another by reason of my person or my gifts, rank or office? Or what more than I have another to boast of

before God concerning himself? No one has a different baptism or sacrament, a different Christ, from mine, or grace and salvation other than I have. And no individual can have another faith than have Christians in general, nor does he hear any other Gospel or receive a different absolution, be he lord or servant, noble or ignoble, poor or rich, young or old, Italian or German. When one imagines himself different from or better than his fellows, desiring to exalt and glorify himself above others, he is truly no longer a Christian; because he is no longer in that unity of mind and faith essential to Christians. Christ with his grace is always the same and cannot be divided or apportioned within himself.

[7] Not without reason did the beloved apostles urge this point. They clearly saw how much depends upon it, and what evil and harm result from disregard of the commandment. Where this commandment is dishonored, schisms and factions will necessarily arise to corrupt pure doctrine and faith, and the devil will sow his seed, which afterwards can be eradicated only with difficulty. When once self-conceit rules, and one, pretending more learning, wisdom, goodness and holiness than his fellows, begins to despise others and to draw men to himself, away from the unity of mind which makes us one in Christ, and when he desires the first praise and commendation for his own doctrine and works, his own preaching, then the harm is already done; faith is overthrown and the Church is rent. When unity becomes division, certainly two sects cannot both be the true Church. If one is godly, the other must be the devil's own. On the other hand, so long as unity of faith and oneness of mind survives, the true Church of God abides, notwithstanding there may be some weakness in other points. Of this fact the devil is well aware; hence his hostility to Christian unity. His chief effort is to destroy harmony. "Having that to contend with," he tells himself, "my task will be a hard and wearisome one."

[8] Therefore, Christians should be all the more careful to cherish the virtue of harmony, both in the Church and in secular government. In each instance there is of necessity much inequality. God would have such dissimilarity balanced by love and unity of mind. Let everyone be content, then, with what God has given or ordained for him, and let him take pleasure in another's gifts, knowing that in eternal blessings he is equally rich, having the same God and Christ, the same grace and salvation; and that although his standing before God may differ from that of his fellows,

he is nevertheless in no way inferior to them, nor is anyone for the same reason at all better than or superior to himself.

[9] In temporal affairs, every inequality in the world can be harmonized by a unity of mind and heart. In relations other than spiritual there is mutual love and friendship. How great the outward dissimilarity between man and wife — in person, nature and employment! likewise between masters and their subjects. Yet, in mutual conscientiousness they mutually agree and are well satisfied with each other. So it would be possible to enjoy life upon earth in peace and happiness were it not that the devil cannot suffer it. He must divide hearts and alienate love, allowing no one to take pleasure in another. He who is illustrious, of noble birth, or has power or riches, feels bound to despise others as silly geese or witless ducks.

Sympathy a Christian Virtue

[10] The other virtues enjoined by Peter are easily recognized — “Compassionate, loving as brethren, tender-hearted, and humble-minded” These particularly teach that Christians should esteem one another. God has subjected them all to love and has united them, with the design that they shall be of one heart and soul, and each care for the other as for himself. Peter’s exhortation was especially called for at that time, when Christians were terribly persecuted. Here a pastor, there a citizen, was thrown into prison, driven from wife, child, house and home, and finally executed. Such things happen even now, and may become yet more frequent considering that unfortunate people are harassed by tyrants, or led away by the Turks, and Christians are thus dispersed in exile here and there. Wherever by his Word and faith God has gathered a church, and that spiritual unity, the bond of Christianity, exists in any measure, there the devil has no peace. If he cannot effect the destruction of that church by factiousness, he furiously persecutes it. Then it is that body, life and everything we have must be jeopardized — put to the stake — for the sake of the Church.

[11] Christians, according to Peter, should, in the bond of a common heart and mind, sympathetically share the troubles and sufferings of their brethren in the faith, whoever and wherever the brethren may be. They are to enter into such distresses as if themselves suffering, and are to reason: “Behold, these suffer for the sake of my precious faith, and standing at the

front, are exposed to the devil, while I have peace. It does not become me to rejoice in my security and to manifest my pleasure. For what befalls my dear brethren affects me, and my blessings are the cause of their misfortune. I must participate in their suffering as my own.” According to the admonition of Hebrews 13:3: “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; that is, as if in the same bonds and distress. Remember them that are illtreated, as being yourselves also in the body;” as members of the same body.

[12] We are all bound to one another, just as in the body one member is bound to another. As you know by your own physical experience, “Whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it,” as Paul says in Corinthians 12:26. Note how, when a foot is trodden upon or a finger pinched, the whole body is affected: eyes twitch, nose is contorted, mouth cries out — all the members are ready to rescue and help. No one member can forsake the others. In reality not the foot or the finger is injured, but the whole body suffers the accident. On the other hand, benefit received by one member is pleasing to all, and the whole body rejoices with it. Now the same principle should hold in the Church, because it likewise is one body of many members with one mind and heart. Such unity naturally entails the participation by each individual in the good and evil of every other one.

[13] This virtue of sympathy, resulting as it does from a unity of mind and faith, is impossible to the world. In the world every man looks only upon what benefits himself and regards not how others, especially the godly, fare. Indeed, the world is capable of scornful smiles and extreme pleasure at sight of Christians in poverty and distress, and in their sufferings it can give them vinegar and gall to drink. But you who claim to be a Christian, should know it is yours to share the sufferings of your brethren and to prove your heartfelt sympathy with them. If you cannot do more, at least show it with comforting words or prayer. Their suffering concerns you as well as themselves, and you must expect the same afflictions from the devil and the wicked world.

Of Love

[14] “Loving as brethren.” This virtue must prevail among Christians everywhere. They are to manifest toward one another the love and faithfulness of brothers according to the flesh. It is a law of nature that brothers have a peculiar confidence in one another, being of the same blood and flesh and having a common inheritance. Particularly is this true when in distress. Although they may not be united in other respects, yet when stranger blood assails and necessity comes, they of the same flesh and blood will take one another’s part, uniting person, property and honor.

[15] Likewise Christians should exercise a peculiar brotherly love and faithfulness toward one another, as having one Father in heaven and one inheritance, and in the bond of Christianity being of one faith, united in heart and mind. None may despise another. Them among us who are still weak, frail and eccentric in faith and morals, we are to treat with gentleness, kindness and patience. They must be exhorted, comforted, strengthened. We should do by them as do the brothers and sisters of a household toward the member who is weak or frail or in need. Indeed we cannot otherwise dwell in peace. If we are to live together we must bear with one another much weakness, trouble and inconvenience; for we cannot all be equally strong in faith and courage and have equal gifts and possessions. There is none without his own numerous weaknesses and faults, which he would have others tolerate.

Of Mercy

[16] “Tender-hearted, humble-minded” [friendly]. Here Peter has in mind mankind in general — friends and enemies, Christians and persecutors. Owing to original sin, man is naturally disposed to seek revenge, especially upon those who injure him without cause. If he can do no more, he at least maliciously invokes evil upon his enemy and rejoices in his misfortune. Now, Christians more than any others in this world are innocently persecuted, injured, oppressed and aggrieved, even by those having the name and honor of Christians, a thing of frequent occurrence today. God’s people are aggrieved by such treatment, and if the natural instinct of flesh and blood could have its way, they would gladly revenge themselves; just as they of the world mutually exercise their revenge, not content until passion is cooled.

[17] But a Christian should not, and indeed consistently he cannot, be unmerciful and vindictive, for he has become a child of God, whose mercy he has accepted and therein continues to live. He cannot seek pleasure in injury to his neighbor or enjoy his misfortune. He cannot maintain a bitter or hard and stubborn heart toward him. Rather he is disposed to show mercy even to his hostile neighbor, and to pity his blindness and misery; for he recognizes that neighbor as under God's wrath and hastening to everlasting ruin and condemnation. Thus the Christian is already more than revenged on his enemy. Therefore he should be friendly towards the hostile neighbor and do him every kindness he will permit, in an effort to lead him to repentance.

[18] Yet, in showing mercy, as frequently enjoined heretofore we are not to interfere with just and ordained punishments. God's Word does not teach us to demand mercy or commend kindness where sin and evil practices call for punishment, as the world would have us believe when their sins merit rebuke, particularly the vices of those in high places. These transgressors claim that when reprov'd their honor is assailed and occasion is given for contempt of their office and authority, and for rebellion, a thing not to be tolerated. This is not true. The lesson teaches the duty of each individual toward all other individuals, not toward the God-ordained office. Office and person must be clearly distinguished. The officer or ruler in his official capacity is a different man from what he is as John or Frederick. The apostle or preacher differs from the individual Peter or Paul. The preacher has not his office by virtue of his own personality; he represents it in God's stead. Now, if any person be unjustly persecuted, slandered and cursed, he ought to and will say: "Thank God;" for in God I am richly rewarded for it. But if one dishonors my baptism or sacrament, or the Word God has commanded me to speak, and so opposes not me but himself, then it is my duty not to be silent nor merciful and friendly, but to use my God-ordained office to admonish, threaten and rebuke, with all earnestness, both in season and out of season — as Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:2 — those who err in doctrine or faith or who do not amend their lives; and this regardless of who they are or how it pleases them.

[19] But the censured may say: "Nevertheless you publicly impugn my honor; you give me a bad reputation." I answer: Why do you not complain to him who committed the office to me? My honor is likewise dear to me,

but the honor of my office must be more sacred still. If I am silent where I ought to rebuke, I sully my own honor, which I should maintain before God in the proper execution of my office; hence I with you deserve to be hanged in mid-day, to the utter extinguishment of my honor and yours. No, the Gospel does not give you authority to say the preacher shall not, by the Word of God, tell you of your sin and shame. What does God care for the honor you seek from the world when you defy his Word with it? To the world you may seem to defend your honor with God and a good conscience, but in reality you have nothing to boast of before God but your shame. This very fact you must confess if you would retain your honor before him; you must place his honor above that of all creatures. The highest distinction you can achieve for yourself is that of honoring God's Word and suffering rebuke.

[20] "Yes, but still you attack the office to which I am appointed." No, dear brother, our office is not assailed when I and you are reminded of our failure to do right, to conduct the office as we should. But the Word of God rebukes us for dishonoring that divinely ordained appointment and abusing it in violation of his commandment. Therefore you cannot call me to account for reproofing you. However, were I not a pastor or preacher, and had I no authority to rebuke you, then it would be my duty and my pleasure to leave your honor and that of every other man unscathed. But if I am to fill a divine office and to represent not my own but God's dignity, then for your own sake I must not and will not be silent. If you do wrong, and disgrace and dishonor come upon you, blame yourself. "Thy blood shall be upon thine own head," says Scripture, 1 Kings 2:37. Certainly when a judge sentences a thief to the gallows, that man's honor is impugned. Who robs you of your honor but yourself, by your own theft, your contempt of God, disobedience, murder, and so on? God must give you what you deserve. If you consider it a disgrace to be punished, then consider it also no honor to rob, steal, practice usury and do public wrong; you disgrace yourself by dishonoring God's commandment.

[21] This much by way of reminder of the difference between official rebuke and personal anger and revenge. It must constantly be kept before us because of the artfulness of flesh and blood, which ever seeks to disregard that difference. True, God would have all men to be merciful and friendly, to forgive and not to avenge wrong; but the office, which is ordained for the

punishment of the wicked, will not always admit of that course. Few are willing to forgive, and therefore God must enforce his government over the merciless. They must be punished without mercy. This divine principle must not be restricted. Neither must it be applied beyond measure. Every official must be careful not to exceed the demands of his office, exercising his own revenge, his own envy and hatred, in the name and under pretense of that position.

[22] Peter continues to expatiate upon this topic — the good works he has been discussing: gentleness, mercy, friendliness — citing beautiful passages of Scripture and using other exhortations — to incite Christians to practice these virtues. He says: “Not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but contrariwise blessing: for hereunto were ye called, that ye should inherit a blessing.”

[23] We have now seen whose prerogative it is to avenge, rebuke and punish evil. This passage does not refer to official duty. When the judge declares sentence of execution upon a thief we have truly an instance of vengeance and reproach, and a public and extreme reflection upon honor. But it is God’s judgment and his doing, with which we are not here concerned. The Christian of true faith and innocent life, who confesses his doctrine and belief, and as he is commanded rebukes opposing forces, will provoke the devil and the world, and will be persecuted, oppressed and harassed in the name of office and right, even by individuals whose official duty it is to protect the godly and restrain unjust power. If these cannot do more, they will at least annoy, hinder and oppose that Christian as far as possible. If the Christian be quick-tempered and fail to curb his anger and impatience, he will effect no good. He will only bring upon himself that disquiet of heart which consumes and worries itself with thoughts of revenge and retaliation upon the offender; which when the devil perceives, he rejoices. He so urges and instigates as to cause more mischief on both sides. Thus he doubly injures the Christian — through his enemy and through the anger wherewith the Christian torments himself and spoils his own peace.

Of Patience

[24] What then shall we do, you say, when we must suffer such abuse and without redress? The only resource, Peter says, is to possess your heart in patience and commit the matter to God. This is all that remains when they whose duty it is will not help you, nor restrain and punish the wrong, but even do you violence themselves. If the evil receive not judicial punishment, let it go unpunished until God looks into it. Only see that you keep a quiet conscience and a loving heart, not allowing yourself, on account of the devil and wicked men, to be disturbed and deprived of your good conscience, your peaceful heart and your God-given blessing. But if in your official capacity you are commanded to punish the evil, or if you can obtain protection and justice from rightful authorities, avail yourself of these privileges without anger, hatred or bitterness, ay, with a heart that prompts to give good for evil and blessing for reviling.

[25] Such conduct is becoming you as Christians, the apostle says, for you are a people called to inherit a blessing. Oh, wonderful and glorious fact, that God has decreed and appropriated to you this blessing whereby all the riches of his grace and everything good are yours! and that he will abundantly give you his Spirit to remain with you, blessing body and soul, if only you hold fast his grace and do not allow yourselves to be deprived of it. What price would you not gladly pay for this blessing, were it purchasable, instead of being freely given, without your merits, and were you privileged thus to buy the assurance of having a God so gracious, one willing to bless you in time and eternity? Who would not willingly give even body and life, or joyfully undergo all suffering to have the perfect assurance of heart which says: "I know I am a child of God, who has received me into his grace and I live in the sure hope that I will be eternally blessed and saved." Think, Peter says, what a vast difference God makes between you and others because you are Christians. He has appointed you to be heirs of everlasting grace and blessing and of eternal life. But they who are not Christians — what have they but a terrible sentence like a weight about their necks? the sentence pronouncing them children of the curse and of eternal condemnation.

[26] If men would take this to heart, it would be easy by teaching and persuasion to win them to friendship and kindness toward their fellowmen; to induce them not to return evil or reviling from motive of revenge, but when their own privileges and protection and the punishment of evil cannot

be obtained, quietly and peaceably to suffer injury rather than lose their eternal comfort and joy. Christians have excellent reason, a powerful motive, for being patient and not revengeful or bitter in the fact that they are so richly blessed of God and given that great glory whereof, as Peter afterwards remarks, they cannot be deprived, nor can they suffer its loss, if only they abide in it. The apostle emphasizes this fact and further persuades Christians by citing the beautiful passage in Psalm 34:12-16: "He that would love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: and let him turn away from evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears unto their supplication: but the face of the Lord is upon them that do evil."

[27] These words the Holy Spirit uttered long ago through the prophet David, for the instruction and admonition of all saints and children of God. David presents to us the matter as he daily saw it in his own life and learned from his own experience, and as he gathered from examples of the dear fathers from the beginning of the world. "Come hither, dear children," he would say, "if you will be taught and advised, I will give you sound instruction as to how we are to fear God and become his children. Who desires peace and comfort?" "Oh, who would not desire peace and comfort?" cries the world. For these everyone seeks and strives, and all the efforts of the world are directed toward this end.

The Christian's Peace.

[28] There are two ways to the goal of peace. One is that chosen by the world. The world seeks to obtain peace by preserving its own with violence. It desires the death of all who oppose it and will suffer injury or evil in word or deed from no one. This method, it is true, is appointed to govern mental authority. It is the duty of civil rulers to faithfully employ it to arrest and hinder evil as far as possible. But they can never wholly restrain evil nor punish every offense. Much wickedness will remain, particularly secret evil, which must punish itself, either by repentance here or in hell hereafter. By this procedure Christians will not accomplish for themselves any personal advantage; the world is too wicked and it will not give them support.

[29] Therefore, if you desire peace for yourself personally, particularly as a Christian, you must choose another way. The Psalm shows it to you when it says: "Refrain thy tongue from evil, and thy lips that they speak no guile." This injunction really applies to doctrine, meaning that we are to abide by the true Word of God and not to allow ourselves to be seduced by false teaching. But Peter here extends the application to the outward life and conduct of Christians in the work, the circumstances being such as to call for this admonition in the matter of refraining the tongue. On account of the faith and confession for which men are called Christians, they must suffer much; they are endangered, hated, persecuted, oppressed and harassed by the whole world. Christ foretold (Matthew 10:22): "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." Easily, then, Christians, might believe they have cause to return evil, and being still flesh and blood mortals, they are inevitably moved to be angry and to curse, or to forsake their confession and doctrine and with unbelievers to join the false church with its idolatrous teaching. Here the Psalm admonishes: Dear Christian, let not all this move you to rave, curse, blaspheme and revile again, but abide in the blessing prepared for you to inherit; for you will not by violence remedy matters or obtain any help. The world will remain as it is, and will continue to hate and persecute the godly and believing. Of what use is it for you to hate, chafe and curse against its attitude? You only disturb your own heart with bitterness, and deprive yourself thereby of the priceless blessing bestowed upon you.

[30] We have the same teaching in the fourth verse of Psalm 4, which comforts saints and strengthens them against the temptation and provocation to anger and impatience which they must experience in the world. "Be ye angry," David says, "and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." That is, although according to the nature of flesh and blood you fret because you are compelled to witness the prosperity of the world in its ungodly life and wickedness, and how it spites, despises and persecutes you with pride and insolence, nevertheless let not yourselves be easily provoked; let wrong, displeasure, vexation and worry remain outside the inner life; let them affect only the outward life, body and possessions. By no means let them become rooted in your heart. Still your hearts and content yourselves, and regard all this vexation as not worth losing sleep over. If you desire to serve God truly and to render acceptable sacrifice to him, then with faith in his Word place your hope in

him as your dear Father who cares for you, hears you and will wondrously support you.

Guarding the Lips

[31] But the psalmist's additional words, "Refrain your lips that they speak no guile," refer, as I have said, primarily to confession of the doctrine; but there is another thought: When one is prompted to anger and to complaint about injury and wrong, in his impatience and irritation he cannot speak fairly concerning the matter of offense, but invariably exaggerates. So it is with anger and retaliation. One receiving but a pin-point wound will fly into a passion and be ready to break the offender's head. The individual that suffers a single adverse word immediately proceeds to abuse and slander in the extreme his opponent. In short, an angry heart knows no moderation and cannot equally repay, but must make of a splinter, even a mote, a great beam, or must fan a tiny spark into a volcano of flame, by retaliating with reviling and cursing. Yet it will not admit that it does wrong. It would, if possible, actually murder the offender, thus committing a greater wrong than it has suffered.

[32] So wicked and unjust is human nature that when offended it stops not with equal measure in retribution; it goes beyond and in its anger and revenge spares neither the neighbor's honor nor his body and life. James 1:20 says: "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God"; that is, it suffers not a man to abide in his faith and good conscience. But official indignation, which is God's wrath, does not so. It seeks not the destruction of man, but only the punishment of the actual fault. Man's anger and revenge, so wicked and insatiable are they, return ten blows for one, or even double that number, and repay a single abusive word with a hundred.

[33] So Peter admonishes you to restrain your tongues, to curb them, lest they suddenly escape your control and sin with wicked words, doing injury double that you have received. Guard your lips that your mouth utter not guile or falsehood through your anger, and that it may not calumniate, abuse and slander your neighbor contrary to truth and justice and in violation of the eighth commandment. Such conduct is, before God and man, unbecoming a Christian and leads to that most disgraceful vice of slander,

which God supremely hates. It is the devil's own, whence he has his name of liar or slanderer — diabolus, or devil.

Good Works

[34] The Psalm says further: "Turn away from evil and do good"; that is, beware lest on account of the wickedness of another you also become wicked, for anger and revenge meditate only harm and wickedness. Therefore be all the more diligent to do good, if you can, that your heart may retain its honor and joy and that you may abide in righteousness, and not fall from God's grace and from obedience to him into the service of the devil. By anger and revenge the devil tempts you, endeavoring to get you again into his toils and to embitter your heart and conscience until you shall exceed others in sin.

[35] "Seek peace and pursue it," continues the apostle. This is a sublime exhortation, and faithful, divine counsel. You must not think, Peter would say, that peace will run after you, or that the world — much less the devil — will bring it into your house. Rather you will find the very opposite true. From without strife will be carried to you in bales, and within your own heart will be kindled anger and bitterness to fill you with everlasting disquiet. Therefore if you desire peace, wait not until other people help you to obtain it, nor until you create it for yourself by force and revenge. Begin with yourself. Turn from the evil to the good. Even undergo suffering to provide your heart with the peace which endures in spite of all that would rob you of it. Strive ever to keep your heart firm in the resolve: I will not be angry nor seek revenge, but will commit my affairs to God and to those whose duty it is to punish evil and wrongdoing. As for my enemy, may God convert and enlighten him. And however much more of violence and wrong I may suffer, I will not allow my heart to be robbed of its peace.

[36] Notice, the way to preserve peace and to see good days even in evil times is to keep a silent tongue and a quiet heart through the comfort of divine grace and blessing. No outward occasion may be given for strife, but always peace is to be sought with good words, works and prayers. We must even pursue peace, follow after it, with genuine and strong suffering. Thus we preserve it by force. In no other way can a Christian see good days and hold fast his blessing. Remember you must make strenuous effort if you

would not reject your blessing nor be influenced by another to carelessly lie and otherwise sin with your tongue. Flesh and blood are weak and sluggish in the matter of preserving peace, therefore Peter strengthens his exhortation and further encourages us by the promise of God's help and protection for the faithful and his punishment of their enemies. He says: "For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears unto their supplication."

[37] Inscribe this verse upon your heart in firm faith and see if it does not bring you peace and blessings. Try to believe that God sits above, sleepless and with his vigilant eye ever upon you. With watchful vision he beholds the righteous as they suffer violence and wrong. Why will you complain and become discouraged by reason of the harm and grief you experience, when the gracious eyes of the true Judge and God are upon you and his intent is to help you? All the wealth of the world would I give, if I might, to purchase that watchful care, or rather to obtain the requisite faith; for surely the lack is not in his regarding, but in our faith.

God Over All

[38] More than this, God's ears, the apostle tells us, are also open to the prayers of the righteous. As he looks upon you with gracious, winning eyes, so also are his ears alert to even the faintest sound. He hears your complaint, your sighing and prayer, and hears, too, willingly and with pleasure; as soon as you open your mouth, your prayer is heard and answered.

[39] Again, Peter says: "The face of the Lord is upon them that do evil." True, God's eyes are upon the righteous, but nevertheless he sees also the others. In this case he beholds not with a friendly look or gracious countenance, but with a displeased and wrathful face. When a man is angry the forehead frowns, the nostrils dilate and the eyes flash. Such a manifestation of anger are we to understand by the Scripture when it refers here to "the face of the Lord." On the other hand it illustrates the pleased and gracious aspect of God by "the eyes of the Lord."

[40] Now, why is "the face of the Lord" upon evildoers and what is its effect? Certainly God's purpose is not to heed or to help them, to bestow blessing or success upon their evildoing. His purpose is, according to the

succeeding words in the psalm, “to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.” This is a terrible, an appalling sentence, before which a heart may well be prostrated as from a thunderbolt. And ungodly hearts would be thus appalled were they not so hardened as to despise God’s Word.

[41] Notwithstanding the indifference of the wicked, the sentence is passed. Verily it is no jest with God. It illustrates how sincerely he cares for the righteous and how he will avenge them on the wicked, toward whom his countenance bespeaks punishment in due time and the cutting off of their memory from the earth. In contrast, the righteous, because they have feared God and abode in their piety though suffering for it, shall, even here upon earth, live to see blessing and prosperity upon their children’s children. Although for a time the company of the wicked conduct themselves with pride upon the earth, and imagine themselves secure beyond the possibility of being unseated, nevertheless when their hour comes they are suddenly hurled down from earth into the abyss of hell and must suffer the righteous to remain in possession of the earth. So testifies Christ in Matthew 5:5, and Psalm 37 more fully explains the matter.

[42] It is proven by all the examples of Scripture and also by the experience of the whole world from the beginning, that God casts down those who seek only to injure. They who have despised God’s threats and angry countenance with security and defiance have at last experienced the fulfillment of these warnings and perished thereby. King Saul thought to destroy godly David, to exterminate his root and branch and blot out his name as if he had been a rebellious, accursed man. But God effected the very opposite. Because David in his sufferings and persecution walked in the fear of God and trusted him with simplicity, desiring no harm to his enemy, God’s gracious eye was ever upon him and preserved him from that enemy. On the other hand, the angry face of God was bent upon King Saul, and before David was aware of it the king had fallen, and his whole family met ruin with him; they were obliged to surrender crown and kingdom to the persecuted David.

[43] Christians should strengthen their faith with the comforting thought that God’s gracious countenance is over them and he turns eye and ear toward them; and that on the other hand he looks with angry face upon their enemies and those seeking to injure, and will take a hand in their game, obliging them either to refrain from their evildoing, or to perish by it. Such

retribution is certain. No one can live long without proving by his own experience and that of other men the truth of the proverb, "Right will assert itself." However, we lack in faith and cannot wait God's hour. We think he delays too long and that we suffer too much. But in reality his time will come speedily, and we can well wait and endure if we believe in God, who but grants our enemies a brief opportunity to be converted. But their appointed hour is already at hand and they will not escape if it overtakes them without repentance. "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be zealous of that which is good? But even if ye should suffer for righteousness' sake, blessed are ye."

[44] According to Peter's words here, you have a very great advantage over all your enemies, whoever they be, in being richly endowed by God with eternal blessing. You know he will protect, support and avenge you, hence you abide in your faith and godliness. Although your adversaries think to trouble and harm you, they can do you no real injury whatever they effect. For wherein can persecution harm if you strive for godliness and abide in it? Not by malice, might and violence can your enemies take from you, or diminish, your piety and God's grace, his help and blessing. And even from all the bodily and temporal harm they can inflict, you suffer no loss. For the more they seek to injure you, the more they hasten their own punishment and destruction, and the greater is your recompense from God. By the very fact that they slander, disgrace, persecute and trouble you, they multiply your blessing with God and further your cause, for God must the sooner consider your case, supporting you and overthrowing them. They but prepare your reward and benefit by their wicked, venomous hatred, their envy, anger and fury. At the same time they effect for themselves conditions the very reverse. Being condemned by their own evil consciences, they cannot in their hearts enjoy one good day, one peaceful hour; and they heap up for themselves God's wrath and punishment.

[45] Indeed, you are all the more blessed, temporally and eternally, Peter declares, for the very reason that you suffer for righteousness' sake. You are so to regard the situation and to praise and thank God for your suffering. The apostle looks upon tribulation in this light and exalts it as supreme blessedness and a glorious thing. Christ says in Matthew 5:11-12: "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for

great is your reward in heaven.” Oh, your adversaries should purchase a little of this comfort regardless of cost and boast of suffering a little for the sake of righteousness! Could they understand the promise and be worthy of it, how intensely might they desire to have suffered all and much more than they thought to inflict upon you, if only they might be blessed and prove the comfort of this precious, divine promise! “Fear not their fear, neither be troubled; but sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord.”

[46] Here again Peter resorts to Scripture and cites a verse from the prophet Isaiah 8:12-13 where he admonishes God’s people not to be terror-stricken by the wrath and threats of men, but firmly and confidently to trust in God. The prophet speaks similarly in Isaiah 51:7: “Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye dismayed at their revilings.” As if he would say: Why will you permit yourselves to be disturbed by the persecutions of men, however great, mighty and terrible enemies they may be, when you are blessed and happy in God to the extent that all creatures must pronounce you blessed? Moreover, you know the eyes of your God behold you and his ears are open to your cry, and whatever you desire and pray for is heard and granted. More than this, your adversaries are threatened by his angry face. What are all men — tyrants, pope, Turk, Tartars, ay, the devil himself — compared to this Lord, and what can they do against him, when and wheresoever he chooses to show his power? They are but as a straw to a mighty thunderbolt which makes the earth tremble. Therefore, if you are indeed Christians and believe in God you ought in no wise to fear all these adversaries, but rather, joyfully and with scornful courage to despise their defiance, their threatening and rage, as something utterly harmless to you; they are but effecting their own destruction in hurling themselves at the Majesty before which all creatures must tremble.

Trust in God Enjoined.

[47] But this you are to do: Sanctify God; that is, regard and honor him as holy. This is nothing else than to believe his Word; be confident that in God you have truly one who, if you suffer for righteousness’ sake, neither forgets nor forsakes, but graciously looks upon you and purposes to give his support and to revenge you on your enemies. Such faith and confession honors him as the true God, upon whom man can confidently and joyfully

call for help, reposing his whole trust in him upon the authority of his sure Word and promise, which cannot deceive or fail.

[48] In contrast, unbelievers cannot sanctify God; they cannot render him due honor, although they may talk much of him and display much divine worship. They do not accept God's Word as the truth, but always remain in doubt. In the hour of suffering they deem themselves utterly forgotten and forsaken by the Lord. Therefore they murmur and fret, being very impatient and disobedient toward God. They rashly seek to protect and revenge themselves by their own power. That very conduct betrays them as beings without a God, as blind, miserable, condemned heathen. Such are the great multitude of Turks, Jews, Papists and unbelieving saints today throughout the world.

Sixth Sunday after Trinity. Exhortation to Christian Living. Life in Christ.

Text: Romans 6:3-11.

3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

7 For he that is dead is freed from sin.

8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:

9 Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.

10 For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:3-11

Exhortation to Christian Living.

[1] In this epistle lesson Paul gives Christians instruction concerning the Christian life on earth, and connects with it the hope of the future and eternal life, in view of which they have been baptized and become Christians. He makes of our earthly life a death — a grave — with the understanding, however, that henceforth the risen man and the newness of life should be found in us. And he treats of this doctrine because of an error that always prevails: When we preach that upon us is bestowed grace and the forgiveness of sins, without any merit on our part, people are disposed to regard themselves as free from obligation and will do no works except those to which their own desires prompt them. This was Saint Paul's experience when he so strongly commended the grace of Christ and its consolation (Romans 5:20), declaring that "where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly," and that where there are many and great sins, there also reigns great, abundant and rich grace. The rude crowd cried: Oh, is it true that great grace follows upon great sin? In that case we will cheerfully load ourselves with sin so that we may receive the greater grace.

Grace Does Not Give License to Sin

[2] Such argument Paul now confutes. He says: It is not the intention of the Gospel to teach sin or to allow it; it teaches the very opposite — how we may escape from sin and from the awful wrath of God which it incurs. Escape is not effected by any doings of our own, but by the fact that God, out of pure grace, forgives us our sins for his Son's sake; for God finds in us nothing but sin and condemnation. How then can this doctrine give occasion or permission to sin when it is so diametrically opposed to it and teaches how it is to be blotted out and put away?

[3] Paul does not teach that grace is acquired through sin, nor that sin brings grace; he says quite the opposite — that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,” Romans 1:18. But because the sins of men which are taken away are so grievous and numerous, the grace which drowns and destroys them must be mighty and abundant also. Where there is great thirst, a great draft is needed to quench it. Where there is a mighty conflagration, powerful streams of water are necessary to extinguish it. In cases of severe illness, strong medicine is essential to a cure. But these facts do not give us authority to say: Let us cheerfully drink to satiety that we may become more thirsty for good wine; or, Let us injure ourselves and make ourselves ill that medicine may do us more good. Still less does it follow that we may heap up and multiply sins for the purpose of receiving more abundant grace. Grace is opposed to sin and destroys it; how then should it strengthen or increase it?

[4] Therefore he begins his sermon by inquiring, in this sixth chapter (verses 1-3): “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein?” In other words: How is it possible that because grace should destroy sin ye should live unto sin? And then, further to illustrate this, he says: “Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”

[5] He speaks here in figurative language to clearly and forcibly impress this matter upon us; ordinarily it would have been sufficient for him to ask: “We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein?” that is to say, Inasmuch as ye have been saved from sin through grace, it is not possible that grace should command you to continue in sin, for it is the business of grace to destroy sin. Now, in the figurative words above quoted, he wishes to vividly remind us what Christ has bestowed upon us. He would say to us: Do but call to mind why you are Christians — you have been baptized into Christ. Do you know why and whereunto you have been baptized, and what it signifies that you have been baptized with water? The meaning is that not only have you there been washed and cleansed in soul through the forgiveness of sins, but your flesh and blood have been condemned, given over unto death, to be drowned, and your life on earth to be a daily dying unto sin. For your baptism is simply an overwhelming by grace — a gracious overwhelming — whereby sin in you is drowned; so may you

remain subjects of grace and not be destroyed by the wrath of God because of your sin. Therefore, if you let yourself be baptized, you give yourself over to gracious drowning and merciful slaying at the hands of your God, and say to him: Drown and overwhelm me, dear Lord, for gladly would I henceforth, with thy Son, be dead to sin, that I may, with him, also live through grace.

The Power of Baptism.

[6] When he says, “All we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death,” and again, “We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death,” he speaks in his own Pauline style concerning the power of baptism, which derives its efficacy from the death of Christ. By his death he has paid for and taken away our sins; his death has been an actual strangling and putting to death of sin, and it no longer has dominion over him. So we, also, through his death have obtained forgiveness of sins; that sin may not condemn us, we die unto sin through that power which Christ — because we are baptized into him — imparts to and works in us.

[7] Yea, he further declares that we are not only baptized into his death, but, by the same baptism, we are buried with him into death; for in his death he took our sins with him into the grave, burying them completely and leaving them there. And it follows that, for those who through baptism are in Christ, sin is and shall remain completely destroyed and buried; but we, through his resurrection — which, by faith, gives us the victory over sin and death and bestows upon us everlasting righteousness and life — should henceforth walk in newness of life.

[8] Having these things through baptism, we dare no longer obey — live unto — the sin which still dwells in our flesh and blood in this life; we must daily strangle it so that it may have no power nor life in us if we desire to be found in the estate and life of Christ. For he died unto sin, destroying it by his death and burying it in his grave; and he acquired life and the victory over sin and death by his resurrection, and bestows them upon us by baptism. The fact that Christ himself had to die for sin is evidence of the severe wrath of God against sin. Sin had to be put to death and laid away in the grave in the body of Christ. Thereby God shows us that he will not

countenance sin in us, but has given us Christ and baptism for the purpose of putting to death and burying sin in our bodies.

[9] Thus Paul shows us in these words what has been affected by Christ's death and burial, and what is the signification of our being buried with him. In the first place, Christ was buried that he might, through forgiveness, cover up and destroy our sin, both that which we have actually committed and that which is inherent in us; he would not have it inculcate and condemn us. In the second place, he was buried that he might, through the Holy Spirit, mortify this flesh and blood with its inherent sinful lusts; they must no longer have dominion over us, but must be subject to the Spirit until we are utterly freed from them.

[10] Thus, we still lie with Christ in the grave according to the flesh. Although it be true that we have the forgiveness of sins, that we are God's children and possess salvation, yet all this is not perceptible to our own senses or to the world. It is hidden in Christ by faith until the judgment day. For we do not yet experience in ourselves such righteousness, such holiness, such life and such salvation as God's Word describes and as faith expects to find. Wherefore Paul says in Colossians 3:3-4 (as we have heard in the Easter sermons), "Your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory."

[11] On the other hand, we are outwardly oppressed with the cross and sufferings, and with the persecution and torments of the world and the devil, as with the weight of a heavy stone upon us, subduing our old sinful nature and checking us against antagonizing the Spirit and committing other sins. "For if we have become united [planted together] with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; for he that hath died is justified from sin."

[12] This is another distinctly apostolic discourse. Being baptized into Christ's death and buried with him, to which Paul had just referred, he here calls being united, or planted together, with Christ in the likeness of his death. Christ's death and resurrection and our baptism are intimately united with, and related to, one another. Baptism is not to be regarded a mere

empty sign, as Anabaptists erroneously hold. In it is embodied the power of both Christ's death and resurrection. Hence Paul says, "we are planted together with him," engrafted into him as a member of his body, so that he is a power in us and his death works in us. Through baptism he dedicates us to himself and imparts to us the power of his death and resurrection, to the end that both death and life may follow in us. Hence our sins are crucified through his death, taken away, that they may finally die in us and no longer live.

[13] Being placed under the water in baptism signifies that we die in Christ. Coming forth from the water teaches, and imparts to, us a new life in him, just as Christ remained not in death, but was raised again to life. Such life should not and cannot be a life of sin, because sin was crucified before in us and we had to die to it. It must be a new life of righteousness and holiness, Christ through his resurrection finally destroyed sin, because of which he had to die, and instead he brought to himself the true life of righteousness, and imparts it to us. Hence we are said to be planted together with Christ or united with him and become one, so that we both have in us the power of his death and resurrection. The fruits and results of this power will be found in us after we are baptized into him.

[14] The apostle speaks consolingly of the death of the Christian as a being planted, to show that the Christian's death and sufferings on earth are not really death and harm, but a planting unto life; being redeemed, by the resurrection, from death and sin, we shall live eternally. For that which is planted is not planted unto death and destruction, but planted that it may sprout and grow. So Christ was planted, through death, unto life; for not until he was released from this mortal life and from the sin which rested on him and brought him into death on our account, did he come into his divine glory and power. Since this planting begins in baptism, as said, and we by faith possess life in Christ, it is evident that this life must strike root in us and bear fruit. For that which is planted is not planted without purpose; it is to grow and bear fruit. So must we prove, by our new conversation and by our fruits, that we are planted in Christ unto life.

Christian Growth.

[15] Paul gives the reason for new growth. He says: “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin.” It does not become us, as baptized Christians, to desire to remain in our old sinful estate. That is already crucified with Christ, the sentence of condemnation upon it has been pronounced and carried out. For that is what being crucified means. Just so, Christ, in suffering crucifixion for our sins, bore the penalty of death and the wrath of God. Christ, innocent and sinless, being crucified for our sins, sin must be crucified in our body; it must be utterly condemned and destroyed, rendered lifeless and powerless. We dare not, then, in any wise serve sin nor consent to it. We must regard it as actually condemned, and with all our power we must resist it; we must subdue and put it to death.

[16] Paul here makes a distinction. He says, “Our old man was crucified with him [Christ],” and “that the body of sin might be done away.” He intimates that the “old man” and “the body of sin” are two different things. By the term “old man” he means not only the body — the grossly sinful deeds which the body commits with its five senses — but the whole tree with all its fruits, the whole man as he is descended from Adam. In it are included body and soul, will, reason and understanding. Both inwardly and outwardly, it is still under the sway of unbelief, impiety and disobedience. Man is called old, not because of his years; for it is possible for a man to be young and strong and vigorous and yet to be without faith or a religious spirit, to despise God, to be greedy and vainglorious, or to live in pride or the conceit of wisdom and power. But he is called the old man because he is unconverted, unchanged from his original condition as a sinful descendant of Adam. The child of a day is included as well as the man of eighty years; we all are thus from our mother’s womb. The more sins a man commits, the older and more unfit he is before God. This old man, Paul says, must be crucified — utterly condemned, executed, put out of the way, even here in this life. For where he still remains in his strength, it is impossible that faith or the spirit should be; and thus man remains in his sins, drowned under the wrath of God, troubled with an evil conscience which condemns him and keeps him out of God’s kingdom.

[17] The “new man” is one who has turned to God in repentance, one who has a new heart and understanding, who has changed his belief and through the power of the Holy Spirit lives in accordance with the Word and

will of God. This new man must be found in all Christians; it begins in baptism or in repentance and conversion. It resists and subdues the old man and its sinful lusts through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul declares, “They that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts,” Galatians 5:24.

[18] Now, although in those who are new men, the old man is crucified, there yet, Paul says, remains in them in this life “the body of sin.” By this we understand the remaining lusts of the old man, which are still felt to be active in the flesh and blood, and which would fain resist the spirit. But inasmuch as the head and life of sin are destroyed, these lusts cannot harm the Christian. Still the Christian must take care not to become obedient to them, lest the old man come to power again. The new man must keep the upper hand; the remaining sinful lusts must be weakened and subdued. And this body of ours must finally decay and turn to dust, thereby utterly annihilating sin in it.

[19] Now, he says, if ye be dead to sin under the reign of the spirit and the new man, and adjudged to death under the reign of the body, ye must no longer permit sin to bring you under its dominion, lest it inculcate and condemn you. But ye must live as those who are wholly released from it, over whom it no longer has any right or power. For we read, “He that hath died is justified from sin.” This is said of all who are dead. He that has died has paid for his sin; he need not die for it again, for he no longer commits sin and evil deeds. If sin be destroyed in man by the Spirit, and the flesh also is dead and gone, man is completely released and freed from sin.

[20] Paul comprehends the whole existence of the Christian on earth in the death of Christ, and represents it as dead and buried, in the coffin; that is, the Christian has ceased from the life of sin, and has nothing more to do with it. He speaks of sin as being dead unto the Christian and of the latter as being dead unto sin for the reason that Christians no longer take part in the sinful life of the world. And, too, they are doubly dead. First, spiritually they are dead unto sin. And this, though painful and bitter to flesh and blood, is a blessed, a comfortable and happy dying, sweet and delightful, for it produces a heavenly life, pure and perfect. Secondly, they are physically dead — the body dies. But this is not really death; rather a gentle, soothing sleep. Therefore ye are, Paul would say, beyond measure happy. In Christ ye have already escaped death by dying unto sin; that death

ye need die no more. It — the first death, which ye have inherited from Adam through sin — is already taken away from you. That being the real, the bitter and eternal death, ye are consequently freed from the necessity of dying. At the same time there is a death, or rather only the semblance of one, which ye must suffer because ye are yet on earth and are the descendants of Adam.

Spiritual and Physical Resurrection.

[21] The first death, inherited from Adam, is done away with - changed into a spiritual dying unto sin, by reason of which the soul no longer consents to sin and the body no longer commits it. Thus, in place of the death which sin has brought upon us, eternal life is already begun in you. Ye are now freed from the dreadful damning death; then accept the sweet, holy and blessed death unto sin, that ye may beware of sin and no longer serve it. Such is to be the result of the death of Christ into which ye are baptized; Christ has died and has commanded you to be baptized in order that sin might be drowned in you.

[22] The other, the “little death,” is that outward, physical death. In the Scriptures it is called a sleep. It is imposed upon the flesh, because, so long as we live on earth, the flesh never ceases to resist the spirit and its life. Paul says: “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would.” Galatians 5:17. The spirit, or soul, says: I am dead unto sin and will not sin any more. But the flesh says: I am not dead and must make use of my life while I have it. The spirit declares: I believe that God has forgiven my sins and taken them away from me through Christ. But the flesh asks: What do I know of God or his will? The spirit resolves: I must be meek, pure, chaste, humble, patient, and seek the future life. But the flesh in reply makes a loud outcry: Away with your heaven! If only I had enough of bread and money and property here! Thus the flesh does continually, as long as it lives here; it draws and drags sin after itself; it is rebellious and refuses to die. Therefore God must finally put it to death before it becomes dead unto sin.

[23] And after all, it is but a gentle and easy death. It is truly only a sleep. Since soul and spirit are no longer dead, the body shall not remain

dead; it shall come forth again, cleansed and purified, on the last day, to be united with the soul. Then shall it be a gentle, pure and obedient body, without sin or evil lust.

[24] These words of Paul are an admirable Christian picture of death, representing it not as an awful thing, but as something comforting and pleasant to contemplate. For how could Paul present a more attractive description than when he describes it as stripped of its power and repulsiveness and makes it the medium through which we attain life and joy? What is more desirable than to be freed from sin and the punishment and misery it involves, and to possess a joyful, cheerful heart and conscience? For where there is sin and real death — the sense of sin and God's wrath — there are such terror and dismay that man feels like rushing through iron walls. Christ says, in Luke 23:30, quoting from the prophet Hosea (Hosea 10:8), that such a one shall pray that the mountains and the hills may fall on him and cover him.

[25] That dreadful death which is called in the Scriptures the second death is taken away from the Christian through Christ, and is swallowed up in his life. In place of it there is left a miniature death, a death in which the bitterness is covered up. In it the Christian dies according to the flesh; that is, he passes from unbelief to faith, from the remaining sin to eternal righteousness, from woes and sadness and tribulation to perfect eternal joy. Such a death is sweeter and better than any life on earth. For not all the life and wealth and delight and joy of the world can make man as happy as he will be when he dies with a conscience at peace with God and with the sure faith and comfort of everlasting life. Therefore truly may this death of the body be said to be only a falling into a sweet and gentle slumber. The body ceases from sin. It no longer hinders or harasses the spirit. It is cleansed and freed from sin and comes forth again in the resurrection clothed with the obedience, joy and life which the spirit imparts.

[26] The only trouble is that the stupid flesh cannot understand this. It is terrified by the mask of death, and imagines that it is still suffering the old death; for it does not understand the spiritual dying unto sin. It judges only by outward appearance. It sees that man perishes, decays under the ground and is consumed. Having only this abominable and hideous mask before its eyes, it is afraid of death. But its fear is only because of its lack of understanding. If it knew, it would by no means be afraid or shudder at

death. Our reason is like a little child who has become frightened by a bugbear or a mask, and cannot be lulled to sleep; or like a poor man, bereft of his senses, who imagines when brought to his couch that he is being put into the water and drowned. What we do not understand we cannot intelligently deal with. If, for instance, a man has a penny and imagines it to be a five-dollar gold piece, he is just as proud of it as if it were a real gold piece; if he loses it he is as grieved as if he had lost that more valuable coin. But it does not follow that he has suffered such loss; he has simply deluded himself with a false idea.

[27] Thus it is not the reality of death and burial that terrifies; the terror lies in the flesh and blood, which cannot understand that death and the grave mean nothing more than that God lays us — like a little child is laid in a cradle or an easy bed — where we shall sweetly sleep till the judgment day. Flesh and blood shudders in fear at that which gives no reason for it, and finds comfort and joy in that which really gives no comfort or joy. Thus Christians must be harassed by their ignorant and insane flesh, because it will not understand its own good or harm. They must verily fight against it as long as they live, at the cost of much pain and weariness.

[28] There is none so perfect that he does not flee from and shudder at death and the grave. Paul complains and confesses of himself, and in his own person of all Christians: “For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.” Romans 7:15. In other words: By the spirit, I am well aware that when this body comes to die, God simply lays me to rest in sweetest slumber, and I would gladly have my flesh to understand this; but I cannot bring it to it. The spirit indeed is willing and desires bodily death as a gentle sleep. It does not consider it to be death; it knows no such thing as death. It knows that it is freed from sin and that where there is no sin there is no death — life only. But the flesh halts and hesitates, and is in constant dread lest I die and perish in the abyss. It will not allow itself to be tamed and brought into that obedience and into that consoling view of death which the spirit exercises. Even Saint Paul cries out in anxiety of spirit: “Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?” Romans 7:24. Now we see what is meant by the statement, “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit.” The flesh must be dragged along and compelled by the spirit to obediently follow, in spite of its resistance and trembling. It must be forced into submission until it is

finally overcome. Just so the mother so deals with the child that is fretful and restless that she constrains it to sleep.

[29] Paul says, “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified” — that is, we know that, in soul and spirit, we are already dead unto sin — “that the body of sin might be done away.” The meaning is – Because the body does not willingly and cheerfully follow the spirit, but resists and would fain linger in the old life of sin, it is already sentenced, compelled to follow and to be put to death that sin may be destroyed in it.

[30] He does not say that the body is destroyed as soon as a man has been baptized and is become a Christian, but that the body of sin is destroyed. The body which before was obstinate and disobedient to the spirit is now changed; it is no longer a body of sin but of righteousness and newness of life. So he adds, “that we should no longer be in bondage to sin.” “But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth, no more; death no more hath dominion over him. For the death that he died, he died unto sin once; but the life that he liveth, he liveth unto God.”

[31] Here he leads us out of the death and grave of sin to the resurrection of spirit and body. When we die — spiritually unto sin, and physically to the world and self — what doth it profit us? Is there nothing else in store for the Christian but to die and be buried.? By all means yes, he says; we are sure by faith that we also shall live, even as Christ rose from death and the grave and lives. For we have died with him, or, as stated above, “we have become united with him in the likeness of his death.” By his death he has destroyed our sin and death; therefore we share in his resurrection and life. There shall be no more sin and death in our spirit or body, just as there is no more death in him. Christ, having once died and been raised again, dieth no more. There is nothing to die for. He has accomplished everything. He has destroyed the sin for which he died, and has swallowed up death in victory. And that he now lives means that he lives in everlasting righteousness, life and majesty. So, when ye have once passed through both deaths, the spiritual death unto sin and the gentle death of the body, death can no more touch you, no more reign over you.

[32] This, then, is our comfort for the timidity of the poor, weak flesh which still shudders at death. If thou art a Christian, then know that thy

Lord Jesus Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. Therefore, death hath no more dominion over thee, who art baptized into him. Satan is defied and dared to try all his powers and terrors on Christ; for we are assured, “Death no more hath dominion over him.” Death may awaken anger, malice, melancholy, fear and terror in our poor, weak flesh, but it hath no more dominion over Christ. On the contrary, death must submit to the dominion of Christ, in his own person and in us. We have died unto sin; that is, we have been redeemed from the sting and power, the control, of death. Christ has fully accomplished the work by which he obtained power over death, and has bestowed that power upon us, that in him we should reign over death. So Paul says in conclusion: “Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus.”

[33] “Reckon ye also yourselves,” he says. Ye, as Christians, should be conscious of these things, and should conduct yourselves in all your walk and conversation as those who are dead to sin and who give evidence of it to the world. Ye shall not serve sin, shall not follow after it, as if it had dominion over you. Ye shall live in newness of life, which means that ye shall lead a godly life, inwardly, by faith and outwardly in your conduct; ye shall have power over sin until the flesh — the body — shall at last fall asleep, and thus both deaths be accomplished in you. Then there will remain nothing but life — no terror or fear of death and no more of its dominion.

Seventh Sunday after Trinity. Exhortation to Resist Sin. The Wages of Sin and the Gift of God.

Text: Romans 6:19-23.

19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

20 For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.

21 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:19-23

Exhortation to Resist Sin.

[1] The text properly should include several verses preceding. Paul has not yet concluded the subject of the epistle for last Sunday. There he urges that since we are baptized into Christ and believe, we should henceforth walk in a new life; that we are now dead to sin because we are in Christ, who by his death and resurrection has conquered and destroyed sin. He illustrates the power of Christ's death and resurrection by saying: "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under law, but under grace." That is, being in Christ and possessed of the power of his resurrection — in other words, having God's grace and the forgiveness of sins — you can now readily resist sin. Although you may not perfectly fulfill the letter of the Law in its demands, yet it cannot condemn you as a sinner nor subject you to God's wrath.

Good Works Not Forbidden

[2] Then Paul presents again the question raised by the obstinate world when it encounters this doctrine. "What then?" he asks, "shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?" It is the perversity of the world that, when we preach about forgiveness of sins by pure grace and without merit of man, it should either say we forbid good works, or else try

to draw the conclusion that man may continue to live in sin and follow his own pleasure; when the fact is, we should particularly strive to live a life the very reverse of sinful, that our doctrine may draw people to good works, unto the praise and honor and glory of God. Our doctrine, rightly apprehended, does not influence to pride and vice, but to humility and obedience.

[3] In affairs of temporal government, whether domestic or civil, judge or ruler, it is understood that he who asks for pardon confesses himself guilty, acknowledges his error and promises to reform — to transgress no more. For instance, when the judge extends mercy and pardon to the thief deserving of the gallows, the law is canceled by grace. Suppose now the thief continues in wrongdoing and boasts, “Now that I am under grace I may do as I please, I have no law to fear”; who would tolerate him? For though the law is indeed canceled for him and he receives not merited punishment, though grace delivers him from the rope and the sword, life is not granted him that he may continue to steal, to murder; rather he is supposed to become honest and virtuous. If he does not, the law will again overtake him and punish him as he deserves. In short, where grace fulfills the law, no one is for that reason given license to continue in wrongdoing; on the contrary, he is under increased obligation to avoid occasions of falling under condemnation of the law.

[4] Everyone can readily comprehend this principle in temporal things; no one is stupid enough to tolerate the idea of grace being granted to extend opportunity to do wrong. It is only the Gospel doctrine concerning God’s grace and the forgiveness of sin that must suffer the slanderous misrepresentation that makes it abolish good works or give occasion for sin. We are told how God, in his unfathomable grace, has canceled the sentence of eternal death and hellfire which, according to the Law and divine judgment, we deserved, and has given us instead the freedom of life eternal; thus our life is purely of grace. Yet certainly we are not pardoned that we may live as before when, under condemnation and wrath, we incurred death. Rather, forgiveness is bestowed that we in appreciation of the sublimity and sanctity of God’s unspeakably great blessing which delivers us from death unto life, should henceforth take heed that we lose it not; that we fall not from grace to pass again under judgment and the sentence of eternal death. We are to conduct ourselves as men made alive and saved.

[5] So Paul says in verse 16, “Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” Meaning, Since you now have, under grace, obtained forgiveness of sin and are become righteous, you owe it to God to live in obedience to his will. Necessarily your life must be obedient to some master. Either you obey sin, to continue in the service of which brings death and God’s wrath, or you obey God, in grace, unto a new manner of life. So, then, you are no more to obey sin, having been freed from its dominion and power. Paul continues the topic in this Sunday’s epistle text, saying: Good and Evil “After the Manner of Men” “I speak after the manner of men, because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye presented your members as members to uncleanness,” etc.

[6] Heretofore he had been speaking, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in language unusual and unintelligible to the world. To the gentiles it was a strange and incomprehensible thing he said about dying with Christ unto sin, being buried and planted into his death, and so on. But now, since his former words are obscure to the natural understanding, he will, he says, speak according to human reason — “after the manner of men.”

[7] Even reason and the laws of all the gentiles, he goes on to say, teach we are not to do evil; rather to avoid it and do good. All sovereigns establish laws to restrain evil and preserve order. How could we introduce through the Gospel a doctrine countenancing evil? Though the wisdom of the Gospel is a higher gift than human reason, it does not alter or nullify the God-implanted intelligence of the latter. Hence it is a perversion of our doctrine to say it does not teach us to love good works and practice them. “Now, if you cannot understand this truth from my explanation,” Paul would say — “that through faith you have, by baptism, died to the sinful life, even been buried — then learn it through your accustomed exercise of reason. You know for yourselves that pardon for former transgression and release from lawful punishment gives no one license to do evil — to commit theft or murder.”

[8] It is a commonly recognized fact among men that pardon does not mean license. God’s Word confirms the same. Yet the disadvantage is that although reason teaches, through the Law, good works and forbids evil, it is unable to comprehend why its teachings are not fulfilled. It perceives from

the results which follow dishonoring of the Law, that to honor is best, that it is right and praiseworthy not to steal and commit crime. But it fails to understand why, given the teachings at first, they are not naturally fulfilled. Nor, again, does it know how existing conditions may be removed or bettered. It resorts to this expedient and that to restrain evil, but it cannot attain the art of uprooting and destroying it. With the sword, rack and gallows the judge may restrain public crime, but he cannot punish more than what is known and witnessed to before the court. Whatever is done secretly and never comes before him, he cannot punish or restrain. The Word of God, however, takes hold of the difficulty in a different manner. It teaches how to crush the head of the serpent and to slay the evil. Then the judge and the executioner are no longer necessary. But where we may not control the cause of the wrong, we should, nevertheless, restrain so far as possible its manifest workings. Now, the utmost reason can teach is that we are not to do evil even in thought or desire, and the extent of its punishment relates only to outward works; it cannot punish the thought and inclination to do evil.

[9] “But we preach another doctrine,” Paul means to say, “a doctrine having power to control the heart and restrain the will. We say you believers in Christ, who are baptized into his death and buried with him, are not only to be reckoned dead, but are truly dead unto sin.” A Christian has certain knowledge that through the grace of Christ his sins are forgiven — blotted out and deprived of condemning power. Because he has obtained and believes in such grace, he receives a heart abhorrent of sin. Although feeling within himself, perhaps, the presence of evil thoughts and lusts, yet his faith and the Holy Spirit are with him to remind him of his baptism. “Notwithstanding time and opportunity permit me to do evil,” he says to himself, “and though I run no risk of being detected and punished, yet I will not do it. I will obey God and honor Christ my Lord, for I am baptized into Christ and as a Christian am dead unto sin, nor will I come again under its power.” So acted godly Joseph, who, when tempted by his master’s wife, “left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out” (Genesis 39:12); whereas another might have been glad of the invitation. He was but flesh and blood and naturally not insensible to her inducement, to the time and opportunity, the friendship of the woman and the offered enjoyment; but he restrained himself, not yielding even in thought to the temptation. Such obedience to God destroys indeed the source of evil — sin. Reason and

human wisdom know nothing of it. It is not to be effected by laws, by punishment, by prison and sword. It can be attained only by faith and a knowledge of Christ's grace, through which we die to sin and the world, and restrain the will from evil even when detection and punishment are impossible.

[10] Now, such doctrine is not to be learned from human reason; it is spiritual and taught of the Scriptures. It reveals the source of evil and how to restrain it. Since, then, we teach restraint of evil and show withal a way higher and more effectual than reason can find, the accusation that we prohibit good works and license sin is sufficiently answered and disproved. But Paul would say to the Romans, "If you cannot comprehend our superior doctrine as to the questions raised, then answer them according to the teachings of your own reason, for even that will tell you — and no man will dispute it — we are to do no wrong. The Word of God confirms this doctrine."

[11] The apostle says he will speak of the point they raise, after the manner of men. That does not mean according to corrupt flesh and blood, which are not capable of speaking anything good, but according to natural reason as God created it, where some good still remains, for there are to be found many upright individuals who make just laws. I speak thus "because of the infirmity of your flesh," Paul declares. As if he would say, "I have not yet said as much as reason, the teachers of the Law and the jurists would demand, but I will go no further because you are yet too weak spiritually, and too unaccustomed to my manner of speech, for all of you to understand it. I must come down to your apprehension and speak according to your capacity. Now, I want to say, ask your own statutes, your own laws, whether they authorize the prohibition of good works; if they license evil, though they may not be able to prevent it. Thus I convince you that such a pretense regarding our doctrine is not to be tolerated. The Teachings of Reason "Even reason teaches that your lives must conform to your business; each is in duty bound to obey him whom he serves. As Christians you are obliged to render another service than that you gave when under the dominion of sin, and obedient to it; when you were unable to escape its power and to do any work good before God. You have now come out of bondage and are relieved from obedience to sin, through grace, having

devoted yourselves to the service of God, to obeying him. Therefore, assuredly you must change your manner of life.”

[12] Truly, Paul here argues reasonably and within the scope of man’s natural understanding. We preach the same truths, but, presenting them in the form of Christian doctrine, we necessarily employ different language and a loftier tone, lest it be offensive to the world. We may say that theft, murder, envy, hate and other crimes and vices are transgressions, yet we cannot remedy the evils by the mere prohibitions of the law. The remedy must be effected through God’s grace, and is accomplished in the believer, not by our power, but by the Holy Spirit. But when we so explain, the stupid world immediately blurts out, “Oh, if it be true that our works do not remedy evils, let us enjoy ourselves and not bother about good works!”

[13] That their implication is false and a wanton perversion of the true doctrine is manifest from the fact that we exalt and endorse the command of God, and also the doctrine of reason, that teach us to do good and avoid evil. Indeed, we assist reason, which is powerless to remedy evil. If reason were itself sufficient, men would not permit themselves to be deceived by their own visionary ideas and false doctrines about worthless and vain works, as are followers of the papacy and of all false worship. No doubt such error has its rise in the principle that we are to do good and avoid evil. The principle fundamentally is true and accepted by all men; but when it comes to the theories we build upon it, the speculations as to how it is to be put into practice, there is disagreement. Only the Word of God can show how to accomplish it. Reason is easily blinded on this point and deceived by false appearances, being led by anything merely called good. Even when it has performed all it believes to be right, it is still uncertain of acceptance. Indeed, it perceives no fruits, no benefit, to result from its teaching; for at best its achievements extend no farther than outward works — the object being to make the doer appear righteous and respectable before men while inward sinfulness is unrestrained, and the soul remains captive to its former life, obedient to the lusts of sin. And the motive of such a one is not sincere; he would conduct himself quite otherwise were he not restrained by fear of shame and punishment.

Gospel Higher Than Reason.

[14] We present a higher doctrine — the Gospel. The Gospel teaches first how sin in ourselves is, through Christ, slain and buried. Thus, we obtain a good conscience, a conscience hating and opposing sin, and become obedient to another power. Being delivered from sin we would serve God and exert ourselves to do his pleasure, even though no fear, punishment, judge or executioner existed. With this point accepted — with the settlement of this minor subject of controversy as to how we are delivered from sin and attain to truly good works, we unite once more on the fundamental principle that good is to be done and evil avoided. Therefore, we immediately conclude: Since we are free from sin and converted to God, we must in obedience to him do good and live no more in sin.

[15] Thus does Paul make use of the Law, and of human reason so far as it is able to interpret the Law, to resist them who speak falsely and pervert the right doctrine. Evidently, then, the doctrine of the Gospel does not oppose the doctrine of good works but transcends it. For it reveals the source and inspiration of good works — not human reason, not human ability, but the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. Now Paul deduces the point: “For as ye presented [yielded] your members as servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now present [yield] your members as servants to righteousness unto sanctification [holiness].”

Body Not to Serve Sin.

[16] Even reason teaches that, being no more subject to sin and unrighteousness, you are no longer to serve them with your body and members — your whole physical life. And further, having yielded yourselves to obey God and righteousness, you are in duty bound to serve them with body and life. To put it concisely and clearly, let him who formerly was evil and lived contrary to his own conscience and to God’s will, now become godly and serve the Lord with a good conscience. Or, as Paul says, “Let him that stole steal no more.” Ephesians 4:28.

[17] Formerly, he tells them, their members — eyes, ears, mouth, hands, feet — even the whole body, served uncleanness. For “vice” he uses this term “uncleanness,” readily intelligible to reason and inclusive of all forms of sin. “You permitted your members to serve unrighteousness,” he would say, “and devoted them to every sort of unholy life, every wicked work,

committing one iniquity after another and exercising all manner of villainy that can be named, now reverse the order. Reasoning according to your own logic - while before you willingly witnessed, heard and uttered things shameful and unchaste, and sought lewdness, lending your bodies to it, let impurity now be distressing to your sight and hearing; let the body flee from it; be pure in words and works. All the members of the body, all its functions, are to be devoted to righteousness. Thus your members, your whole bodies, are to become holy — to be God’s own — and given over solely to his service. The longer and the more ardently they serve, the more cheerfully will they honor and obey God, being devoted to all that is divine, praiseworthy, honorable and virtuous. The instructions God has written upon your own heart would teach you this principle, even were there no Word of God. It is useless for you to protest: “Yes, but you have taught that good works do not save,” for that doctrine is not inconsistent, but beyond your understanding. Indeed, it is the true light whereby you may fulfill the teachings of reason. “For when ye were servants of sin, ye were free in regard of [free from] righteousness.”

[18] All these expressions Paul uses “after the manner of men,” adapting them from the laws and customs of the times concerning slavery, service and freedom. Then servants were bondmen, purchased by their masters, with whom they must abide until set at liberty by those owners, or otherwise freed. His allusion to a former service of unrighteousness and a present service of righteousness implies two conditions of servitude and consequently two conditions of freedom. He who serves sin, the apostle teaches, is free from righteousness; that is, he is captive under sin, unable to attain to righteousness and to do righteous works. Even reason can comprehend the principle that he is free who does not serve — who is not servant. Again, servants of righteousness means service and obedience to righteousness, and freedom from sin. Fruits of two Kinds of Service Paul now puts the matter a little differently, contrasting the experience of the Romans in the two forms of service. He leaves it with them to determine which has been productive of benefit and which of injury, and to choose accordingly as to future service and obedience. “What fruit then had ye at that time in the things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto sanctification [holiness], and the end eternal life.”

[19] Rather recall your manner of life when you were free from righteousness and obeyed only the urgings and enticements of sin. What pleasure or gain had you in it? None, except that for which you are now ashamed. Further, had you remained in it you would at last have found death. Only these two grand results — shame and death. Nothing better have you earned in its service. Munificent reward indeed for him who, choosing freedom from righteousness, lives to his own pleasure. He is deceived into thinking he has chosen a highly desirable life, for it gratifies the fleshly desires, and he thinks to go unpunished. But gratification is succeeded by two severe punishments: First, shame — confession of disgrace before God and the world. Thus Adam and Eve in Paradise, when they chose to violate God's command and, enticed by the devil, followed their desire for a forbidden thing, were made to feel the disgrace of their sin; they were in their hearts ashamed to appear in the presence of God. The other and added punishment is eternal death and the fires of hell, into which also fell our first parents.

[20] Is it not better, then, to be free from the service of sin and to serve righteousness? So doing, you would never suffer shame nor injury but would receive a double blessing: First, a clear conscience before God and all creatures, proof in itself that you live a holy life and belong to God; second and chief, the rich and incorruptible reward of eternal life.

[21] In all these observations Paul is still speaking after the manner of men; in a way comprehended and accepted by reason, even without knowledge of Christ. It is universally true in the world that evildoers — thieves, murderers and the like — are punished in addition to the public disgrace they feel. Similarly, they who do good receive, in addition to the honor of men, all manner of happy reward. "For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

[22] It seems a strange saying, that evil-doers are to receive wages, seemingly implying right and deserving action on their part. Ordinarily the term "wages" signifies a good reward, given to those who acquit themselves righteously and bravely. Paul uses the word to discomfit them who pervert his teaching. For they say, "Ah, Paul preaches of grace alone, yet he promises wages to sin." "Yes," Paul would respond, "boast as you will, you will receive a reward — death and hellfire. You must confidently expect it if you interpret the Gospel to teach that God shall reward you who

serve sin.” With the convincing words of the text, Paul would undeceive those who advocate, or suffer themselves to believe, that man can serve God in sin and can receive a happy reward. He chooses words familiar to them. “Yes, if, as you maintain, wages must be the reward of every service, you will of course receive yours — death and hell. These any may have who desire them and regard them precious.”

[23] Paul says further, “The free gift of God is eternal life.” Observe his choice of words. He does not here use the term “wages,” because he has previously taught that eternal life is not the reward of our works, but is given of pure grace, through faith and for Christ’s sake. So he speaks of it as a “free gift of God, through Christ Jesus our Lord.” The soul possessing eternal life is furnished with power to crush the serpent’s head, and none can deprive him of his priceless blessing. He has also power to avoid sin and to constantly crucify his flesh. These are things not to be affected by any law, any human ability; faith is requisite. Through faith we are incorporated into Christ and planted with him in the death of sin, unto eternal life and truly good works.

Eighth Sunday after Trinity. Exhortation to Live in the Spirit Since We Have Become the Children of God, Sons and Heirs.

Text: Romans 8:12-17.

12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

Romans 8:12-17

Living in the Spirit as God's Children.

[1] This text, like the preceding one, is an exhortation to Christian life and works. The language employed, however, is of different construction. The hateful machinations of the devil, by which he produces so much disaster in the world, make it necessary to urge this exhortation in many different

forms upon those who have become Christians. For when God out of grace, without any merit on our part, bestows upon us the forgiveness of sins which we ourselves are unable to buy or acquire, the devil instigates men at once to conclude and exclaim: Oh, in that case we need no longer do good! Whenever, therefore, the apostle speaks of the doctrine of faith, he is obliged continually to maintain that grace implies nothing of that kind. For our sins are not forgiven with the design that we should continue to commit sin, but that we should cease from it. Otherwise it would more justly be called, not forgiveness of sin but permission to sin.

[2] It is a shameful perversion of the salutary doctrine of the Gospel and great and damnable ingratitude for the unfathomable grace and salvation received, to be unwilling to do good. For we ought in fact to be impelled by this very grace to do, with all diligence and to the utmost of our knowledge and ability, everything that is good and well-pleasing to God, to the praise and glory of his name.

[3] Of this Paul reminds and admonishes us here, in plain and simple but earnest and important words, in which he points out to us how much we owe to God for that which we have received from him, and what injury we shall suffer if we do not value it as we should, and act accordingly. He says: “We are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.”

[4] Because we have been redeemed from the condemnation we deserved by our sins, and now have eternal life through the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us (he speaks of this in the preceding verses), therefore we are debtors to live after the Spirit and obey God. This Paul declares also in the text for last Sunday: “Now being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto sanctification.” Romans 6:22. Therefore, he says, ye are debtors; your new calling, station, and nature require of you that, since ye have become Christians and have the Holy Spirit, ye should live as the Holy Spirit directs and teaches. It is not left to your own caprice to do or to leave undone. If ye desire to glory in the possession of grace and the Holy Spirit, ye must confess yourselves debtors to live, not after the flesh, the only desire of which is to continue in sin, but after the Spirit; the Spirit shows you that, having been baptized and redeemed from sin, ye must turn from sin to the new life of righteousness and not from that new life to sin. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye must die.”

[5] Here judgment is plainly and tersely pronounced on the pretensions of those foolish people who seek to make the freedom of grace a pretext for giving license to the flesh. The apostle speaks these words that he may deter them from presumption, lest in place of the life and grace in which they pride themselves, they bring upon themselves again eternal wrath and death. It would be utterly inconsistent in you who are now saved and freed from eternal death to desire henceforth to live after the flesh. For if ye do that, ye need not imagine that ye shall retain eternal life; ye will be subject to death and condemned to hell. For ye know that it was solely because of your sins that ye lay under the wrath of God and had incurred death, and that it was because ye lived after the flesh that ye deserved condemnation. Most assuredly Christ has not died for those who are determined to remain in their sins; he has died that he might rescue from their sins those who would gladly be released but cannot liberate themselves.

[6] Therefore, let him that is a Christian take care not to be guilty of such nonsense as to say: I am free from the Law, therefore I may do as I please. Rather let him say and do the contrary. Let him, because he is a Christian, fear and shun sin, lest he fall from his freedom into his former state of bondage to sin under the Law and God's wrath; or lest the life, begun in God, lapse again into death. For here stands the express declaration, "If ye live after the flesh, ye must die ;" as if the apostle meant: It will not avail you that ye have heard the Gospel, that ye boast of Christ, that ye receive the sacraments, so long as ye do not, through the faith and Holy Spirit received, subdue your sinful lusts, your ungodliness and impiety, your avarice, malice, pride, hatred, envy and the like.

[7] For the meaning of "living after the flesh" has been repeatedly stated and is readily understood. It includes not only the gross, sensual lust of fornication or other uncleanness, but everything man has inherited by his natural birth; not only the physical body, but also the soul and all the faculties of our nature, both mental and corporal — our reason, will and senses — which are by nature without the Spirit and are not regulated by God's Word. It includes particularly those things which the reason is not inclined to regard as sin; for instance, living in unbelief, idolatry, contempt of God's Word, presumption and dependence on our own wisdom and strength, our own honor, and the like. Everything of this nature must be shunned by Christians (who have the Holy Spirit and are hence able to

judge what is carnal) as a fatal poison which produces death and damnation. Putting to Death Sin “But if by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”

[8] Here the apostle confesses that even in the Christian there is a remnant of the flesh, that must be put to death — all manner of temptation and lusts in opposition to God’s commandments. These are active in the flesh and prompt to sin. They are here called the “deeds of the body.” Of this nature are thoughts of unbelief and distrust, carnal security and presumption instead of the fear of God, coldness and indolence with respect to God’s Word and prayer, impatience and murmurings under suffering, anger and vindictiveness or envy and hatred against our neighbor, avarice, unchastity and the like. Such inclinations as these dwell in flesh and blood and cease not to move and tempt man. Yea, because of human infirmity they at times overtake him when he is not careful enough about transgression. They will certainly overpower him unless he resolutely opposes them and, as here stated, “puts to death the deeds of the body.” To do this means a severe struggle, a battle, which never abates nor ceases so long as we live. The Christian dare never become slothful or negligent in this matter. He must arouse himself through the Spirit so as not to give place to the flesh. He must constantly put to death the flesh lest he himself be put to death by it. The apostle declares, “If ye live after the flesh, ye must die,” and again comforts us, “If by the Spirit ye put to death [mortify] the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” For the Christian receives the gift of the Holy Spirit that he may become willing and able to mortify these sinful lusts.

[9] This mortifying of sin through the Spirit is accomplished on this wise: Man recognizes his sin and infirmity, at once repents, remembers God’s Word, and, through faith in the forgiveness of sins, strengthens himself against sin, and so resists it that he does not consent to it nor permit it to come to deeds.

[10] This constitutes the difference between those who are Christians and sanctified and those who are without faith and the Holy Spirit or who grieve and lose the Spirit. For although believers, as well as unbelievers, are not wholly free from the sinful lusts of the flesh, they yet remain in repentance and the fear of God; they hold fast to the belief that their sins are forgiven, for Christ’s sake, because they do not yield to them but resist

them. Therefore they continue under forgiveness, and their remaining infirmity is not fatal nor damning to them as it is to those who, without repentance and faith, go on in carnal security and purposely follow their evil lusts against their own conscience; who thus cast away from themselves both faith and the Holy Spirit.

[11] So Paul admonishes the Christians to remember what they have received, and whereunto they are called. Having received the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit, they are to be careful not to lose these again; they must use them in contending against the sinful lusts of the flesh. They are to comfort themselves with the fact that they have the Holy Spirit, that is, have help and strength by means of which they can resist and mortify sin. These things are impossible to those who have not faith. Therefore Paul declares further: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.”

[12] Like ourselves, Paul had to deal with two classes of people, the true and the false Christians. There is not so much danger from the adversaries of the doctrine; for instance, from popery: their opposition is so open that we can readily beware of them. But since the devil sows even among us his seed — they are called Christians and boast of the Gospel — it behooves us to take heed, not to the mouth, but to the works, of those who claim to be Christians. Not what they say, but what they do, is the question. It is easy enough to boast of God and of Christ and of the Spirit. But whether such boasting has any foundation or not, depends on whether or not the Spirit so works and rules in one as to subdue and mortify sin. For where the Spirit is, there assuredly the Spirit is not idle nor powerless. He proves his presence by ruling and directing man and prevailing on man to obey and follow his promptings. Such a man has the comfort that he is a child of God, and that God so reigns and works in him that he is not subject to death; he has life. Meaning of “Led by the Spirit of God”

[13] To be “led by the Spirit of God” means, then, to be given a heart which gladly hears God’s Word and believes that in Christ it has grace and the forgiveness of sins; a heart which confesses and proves its faith before the world; a heart which seeks, above all things, the glory of God, and endeavors to live without giving offense, to serve others and to be obedient, patient, pure and chaste, mild and gentle; a heart which, though at times overtaken in a fault and it stumble, soon rises again by repentance, and

ceases to sin. All these things the Holy Spirit teaches one if he hears and receives the Word, and does not willfully resist the Spirit.

[14] On the other hand, the devil, who also is a spirit, persuades the hearts of the worldlings. But it soon becomes evident that his work is not that of a good spirit or a divine spirit. For he only leads men to do the reverse of that which the Spirit of God leads them to do; then they find no pleasure in hearing and obeying God's Word, but despise God, and become proud and haughty, avaricious, unmerciful.

[15] Let everyone therefore take heed that he do not deceive himself. For there are many who claim to be Christians and yet are not. We perceive this from the fact that not all are led by the Spirit of God. Some spirit there must be by which men are led. If it is not the Spirit of God leading them to oppose the flesh, then it must be the other and evil spirit leading them to give way to the flesh and its lusts and to oppose the Spirit of God. They must, therefore, either be God's own, his dear children, his sons and his daughters, called to eternal life and glory; or they must be rejected and abandoned, children of the devil; and with him heirs of eternal fire.

[16] Paul takes occasion to speak more at length on the words "sons of God," and proceeds in beautiful and comforting words to describe the nature and glory of this sonship. He only begins the subject, however, in today's text. He says: "For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

[17] This is a noble and comforting text, worthy of being written in letters of gold. Because ye now through faith, he means to say, have the Holy Spirit and are led by him, ye are no longer in bondage as ye were when under the Law; ye need no longer be afraid of its terrors and its demands, as if God would condemn and reject you on account of your unworthiness and the remaining infirmity of your flesh. On the contrary, ye have the consolation that, through faith, ye have the assurance of God's grace, and may consider God your Father and call upon him as his children.

Two Kinds of Preach and Works

[18] Thus he contrasts the two kinds of works which spring from the two kinds of preaching and doctrine — of the Law and of the Gospel — and which constitute the difference between the Christians and those still

without faith and the knowledge of Christ. They who have nothing and know nothing but the Law, can never attain to true, heartfelt trust and confidence in God, though they do ever so much and exercise themselves ever so earnestly in the Law. For when the Law shines upon them in real clearness and they see what it demands of them and how far they come short of its fulfillment, when it thus discloses to them God's wrath, it produces in them only a terror, a fear and dread, of God under which they must at last perish if they be not rescued by the Gospel. This is what Paul here terms "the spirit of bondage," one that produces only fear and dread of God. But, on the other hand, if the heart grasps the preaching of the Gospel, which declares that, without any merit or worthiness on our part, God forgives us our sins, for Christ's sake, if we believe in him — then it finds in God's grace comfort against the terrors of the Law; then the Holy Spirit enables it to abide in that confidence, to hold fast to that comfort, and to call upon God sincerely in that faith, even though it feels and confesses to be still weak and sinful. This is what is meant by receiving "the spirit of adoption."

[19] Paul speaks of the "spirit of bondage" and the "spirit of adoption" according to the customs of his times. In those days menservants and maidservants were the property of the master of the house in the same sense that a cow was his property. He bought them with his money; he did with them as he pleased, just as with his cattle. They were afraid of their master and had to expect stripes, imprisonment and punishment even unto death. They could not say, So much of my master's property belongs to me, and he must give it to me. But they had always to reflect: Here I serve for my bread only; I have nothing to expect but stripes, and must be content to have my master cast me out or sell me to someone else whenever he chooses. They could never have a well-grounded hope of release from such fear and bondage and coercion.

[20] Such a slavish spirit, such a captive, fearful and uncertain spirit, ye do not have, says the apostle. Ye are not compelled to live continually in fear of wrath and condemnation as are the followers of Moses and all who are under the Law. On the contrary, ye have a delightful, free spirit, one confident and contented, such as a child entertains toward its father, and ye need not fear that God is angry with you or will cast you off and condemn you. For ye have the Spirit of his Son (as he says above and in Galatians

4:6) in your heart and know that ye shall remain in his house and receive the inheritance, and that ye may comfort yourselves with it and boast of it as being your own.

Children of God.

[21] On this “spirit of adoption,” that is on what the apostle means when he says “whereby we cry, Abba, Father,” I have spoken at some length in my sermon on the text Galatians 4:6, where the same words are used. In short, Paul describes here the power of the kingdom of Christ, the real work and the true exalted worship the Holy Spirit effects in believers: the comfort by which the heart is freed from the terror and fear of sin and given peace, and the heartfelt supplication which in faith expects of God an answer and his help. These blessings cannot be secured through the Law or our own holiness. By such means man could never obtain the comfort of God’s grace and love to him; he would always remain in fear and dread of wrath and condemnation, and, because of such doubt, would flee from God, not daring to call upon him. But where there is faith in Christ, there the Holy Spirit brings the comfort spoken of, and a childlike trust which does not doubt that God is gracious and will answer prayer, because he has promised all these — grace and help, comfort, and answer to prayer — not for the sake of our worthiness, but for the sake of the name and merit of Christ, his Son.

[22] Of these two works of the Holy Spirit, comfort and supplication, the prophet Zechariah 12:10 said that God would establish a new dispensation in the kingdom of Christ when he should pour out “the spirit of grace and of supplication.” The spirit he speaks of is the same who assures us that we are God’s children, and desires us to cry to him with heartfelt supplications.

[23] The Hebrew word “Abba” — which, as the apostle himself interprets it, means “Father” — is the word which the tiny heir lisps in childlike confidence to its father, calling him “Ab, Ab”; for it is the easiest word the child can learn to speak: or, as the old German language has it, almost easier still, “Etha, Etha.” Such simple, childlike words faith uses toward God through the Holy Spirit, but they proceed out of the depth of the heart and, as afterwards stated, “with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Rom 8:26. Especially is this the case when the doubtings of the flesh and the terrors and torments of the devil bring conflict and distress.

Man must defend himself against these and cries out: O dear Father! Thou art, indeed, my Father, for thou hast given thine only and beloved Son for me. Thou wilt not be angry with me or disown me. Or: Thou seest my distress and my weakness; do thou help and save me. “The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God.”

[24] That we are children of God and may confidently regard ourselves as such, we do not learn from ourselves nor from the Law. We learn it from the witness of the Spirit, who, in spite of the Law and of our unworthiness, testifies to it in our weakness and assures us of it. This witness is the experience within ourselves of the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, and the knowledge that our experience accords with the Word and the preaching of the Gospel. For thou art surely aware whether or no, when thou art in fear and distress, thou dost obtain comfort from the Gospel, and art able to overcome thy doubts and terror; to so overcome that thy heart is assured of God’s graciousness, and thou no longer fleest from him, but canst cheerfully call upon him in faith, expecting help. Where such a faith exists, consciousness of help must follow. So Saint Paul says, Romans 5:4-5: “Steadfastness worketh approvedness; and approvedness, hope: and hope putteth not to shame.”

[25] This is the true inward witness by which thou mayest perceive that the Holy Spirit is at work in thee. In addition to this, thou hast also external witnesses and signs: for instance, it is a witness of the Holy Spirit in thee that he gives thee special gifts, acute spiritual understanding, grace and success in thy calling; that thou hast pleasure and delight in God’s Word, confessing it before the world at the peril of life and limb; that thou hatest and resistest ungodliness and sin. Those who have not the Holy Spirit are neither willing nor able to do these things. It is true, that even in the Christian, these things are accomplished in great weakness; but the Holy Spirit governs them in their weakness, and strengthens in them this witness, as Paul says again: “The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity.” Romans 8:26. Heirs of God “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him.”

[26] Here, then, thou hast the high boast, the honor and the glory of the Christian. Leave to the world its splendor, its pride and its honors, which mean nothing else — when it comes to the point — than that they are the

children of the devil. But do thou consider the marvel of this, that a poor, miserable sinner should obtain such honor with God as to be called, not a slave nor a servant of God, but a son and an heir of God! Any man, yea the whole world, might well consider it privilege enough to be called one of God's lowest creatures, only so that they might have the honor of being God's property. For who would not wish to belong to such a Lord and Creator? But the apostle declares here that we who believe in Christ shall be not his servants, but his own sons and daughters, his heirs. Who can sufficiently magnify or utter God's grace? It is beyond the power of our expression or comprehension.

[27] Yet here our great human weakness discovers itself. If we fully and confidently believed this, then of what should we be afraid or who could do us harm? He who from the heart can say to God, Thou art my Father and I am thy child — he who can say this can surely bid defiance to all the devils in hell, and joyfully despise the threatenings and ragings of the whole world. For he possesses, in his Father, a Lord before whom all creatures must tremble and without whose will they can do nothing; and he possesses a heritage which no creature can harm, a dominion which none can reduce.

[28] But the apostle adds here the words, "if so be that we suffer with him," to teach us that while we are on earth we must so live as to approve ourselves good, obedient children, who do not obey the flesh, but who, for the sake of this dominion, endure whatever befalls them or causes pain to the flesh. If we do this, then we may well comfort ourselves and with reason rejoice and glory in the fact the apostle declares, that "as many as are led by the Spirit of God," and do not obey the promptings of the flesh, "these are the sons of God."

[29] O how noble it is in a man not to obey his lusts, but to resist them with a strong faith, even though he suffers for it! To be the child of a mighty and renowned king or emperor means to possess nobility, honor and glory on earth. How much more glorious it would be, could a man truthfully boast that he is the son of one of the highest of the angels! Yet what would be all that compared with one who is named and chosen by God himself, and called his son, the heir of exalted divine majesty? Such sonship and heritage must assuredly imply great and unspeakable glory and riches, and power and honor, above all else that is in heaven or in earth. This very honor, even though we had nothing but the name and fame of it, ought to move us to

become the enemies of this sinful life on earth and to strive against it with all our powers, notwithstanding we should have to surrender all for its sake and suffer all things possible for a human being to suffer. But the human heart cannot grasp the greatness of the honor and glory to which we shall be exalted with Christ. It is altogether above our comprehension or imagination. This Paul declares in what follows, in verse 18, where he says: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to usward," as we have heard in the text for the fifth Sunday after Trinity.

Ninth Sunday after Trinity. Warning to Christians Against Carnal Security and Its Evils.

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:6-13.

6 Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

7 Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

8 Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.

9 Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.

10 Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

11 Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are

able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. 1 Corinthians 10:6-13

Carnal Security and Its Vices.

[1] Here is a very earnest admonition, a message as severe as Paul ever indicted, although he is writing to baptized Christians, who always compose the true Church of Christ. He confronts them with several awful examples selected from the very Church, from Israel the chosen people of God.

[2] Paul's occasion and meaning in writing this epistle was the security of the Corinthians. Conscious of their privileged enjoyment of Christ, of baptism and the Sacrament, they thought they lacked nothing and fell to creating sects and schisms among themselves. Forgetting charity, they despised one another. So far from reforming in life, and retrieving their works of iniquity, they became more and more secure, and followed their own inclinations, even allowing a man to have his father's wife. At the same time they desired to be regarded Christians, and boastfully prided themselves on having received the Gospel from the great apostles. So Paul was impelled to write them a stern letter, dealing them severity such as he nowhere else employs. In fact, it seems almost as if it were going too far to so address Christians; the rebuke might easily have struck weak and tender consciences with intolerable harshness. But, as in the second epistle, seeing how his sternness has startled the Corinthians, he modifies it to some extent, and deals tenderly with the repentant.

[3] However, in the striking Scripture examples of the text here, he sufficiently shows the need for such admonition to them who would, after having received grace, become carnally secure and abandon the repentant life.

[4] The text should properly include the beginning of this tenth chapter, which is read in the passage for Third Sunday before Lent. He begins with: "I would not, brethren, have you ignorant, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual food; and did all drink the same spiritual drink Howbeit with most of them God was

not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.” Then follows our text here — “Now these things were our examples.”

[5] As we said, the admonition is to those already Christians. Paul would have them know that although they are baptized unto Christ, and have received and still enjoy his blessing through grace alone, without their own merit, yet they are under obligation ever to obey him; they are not to be proud and boastful, nor to misuse his grace. Christ desires obedience on our part, though obedience does not justify us in his sight nor merit his grace. For instance, a bride’s fidelity to her husband cannot be the merit that purchased his favor when he chose her. She is the bridegroom’s own because it pleased him to make her so, even had she been a harlot. But now that he has honored her, he would have her maintain that honor henceforth by her purity; if she fails therein, the bridegroom has the right and power to put her away. Again, a poor, wretched orphan, a bastard, a foundling, may be adopted as a son by some godly man and made his heir, though not meriting the honor. Now, if in return for such kindness the child becomes disobedient and refractory, he justly may be cut off from the inheritance. Not by the merit of their devotion, as Moses often hinted, did the Jews become the people of God; they were ever stiff-necked and continually rebelled against him. God, having chosen them and led them out of Egypt, urgently commanded them to serve him and obey his Word. But when they failed to fulfil the commandments; they had to feel the terrific force of his punishment.

Israel’s Carnal Security a Warning to Us.

[6] Their example Paul here, with great earnestness, holds up to the world as a warning against carnally and confidently presuming upon the grace and goodness of God because we have already received of them. In unmistakable colors the apostle portrays the teaching of this striking and important, this weighty and specific, example. Rightly viewed, there certainly is no greater, more wonderful, story from the creation of the world down to the present time, nothing more marvelous to be found in any book — except that supremely wonderful work, the death and resurrection of the Son of God — than this history of a people led by God’s power out of Egypt, through the wilderness and into the promised land. It is filled with

the remarkably wonderful works of God, with striking examples of his anger and of his great kindness.

[7] Referring to these examples, Paul goes on to imply: “As Christians and baptized, you should be familiar with them. If you are not, I would not fail to bring them before you for reflection on what befell other people of God, according to the Scripture record. They were our fathers, a noble, intelligent and great company and congregation of men, numbering over six hundred thousand, not counting wives and children.” They, Paul tells us, were termed, and rightly, the holy people of God. God designed their welfare; and through Moses, their bishop and pope, they had the Word of God, the promise and the Sacrament. Under Moses they were all baptized, when he led them through the sea, and by the cloud, under the shadow of which, sheltered from the heat, they daily pursued their journey. At night a beautiful pillar of fire, an intense lightning-like brilliance, protected them. In addition, their bread came daily from heaven and they drank water from the rock. These providences were their Sacrament, and their sign that God was with them to protect. They believed on the promised Christ, the Son of God, their guide in the wilderness. Thus, they were a noble, highly-favored and holy people.

[8] But with the great mass of the people, how long did faith last? No longer than until they came into the wilderness. There they began to despise God’s Word, to murmur against Moses and against God and to fall into idolatry. Whereupon God vindicated himself among them; of all that great nation which came out from Egypt, of all the illustrious ones who assisted Moses in leading and governing, only two individuals passed from the wilderness into Canaan. Plainly, then, God had no pleasure in the great mass of that host. It did not avail them to be called the people of God, a holy people, a company to whom God had shown marvelous kindness and great wonders; because they refused to believe and obey the Word of God. The prospect was good when they were so wonderfully and gloriously delivered from their enemies and had at Mount Sinai received from God the Law and a noble order of worship — their prospect was good for them to enter into the land; they were already at the gate. But even in that auspicious moment they provoked God until he turned them back to wander forty years in the wilderness, where they perished.

[9] Their punishment was wholly the result of their odious arrogance in boasting in the face of God's Word, of their privileges as the people of God, upon whom he daily bestowed great kindness. "Do you not recognize," they bragged, "the holiness of this entire congregation, among whom God dwells, daily performing his marvelous wonders?" In their pride and defiance, they became stiff-necked and obstinate enough to continually complain against Moses and to oppose him whatever course he took with them. Thus, they day by day awakened God's wrath against themselves, forcing him to visit them with many terrible plagues. These failing to humble, he was compelled to remove the entire nation. Many times God would have destroyed them all at once had not Moses prostrated himself before him in their behalf and with earnest entreaty and strong supplication turned aside his wrath. Because of their perversity, Moses was a most wretched and harassed man. "The man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth." Numbers 12:3. For he was daily vexed with the defiance, disobedience and opposition of this great company of people; and further, he had to witness and endure for the entire forty years the numerous and awful plagues sent upon his people, his heart being filled with anguish for them. Then, too, it was his continually to withstand God's wrath.

[10] Terrible indeed is the thing we learn of this famously great people — God's own nation, unto whom he reveals himself, to whom God and Christ himself are revealed; a nation God governs and leads by his angels; a people he honors by wonders marvelous beyond anything ever heard on earth of any nation. As Moses says in Deuteronomy 4:7: "What great nation is there, that hath a god so nigh unto them, as Jehovah our God is whensoever we call upon him?" Yet all who came out of Egypt and had witnessed the mighty wonders God wrought among themselves and among their enemies, fell and glaringly sinned; not according to the measure of the mere weakness and imperfection of human nature, but they sinned disobediently and in willful contempt of God. Hardened in unbelief unto insensibility, they brought upon themselves overwhelming punishment.

[11] Paul mentions several instances of the sin whereby they merited the wrath of God, to illustrate how they fell from faith and disregarded God's Word. First, he makes the general assertion that with many of them God was not well pleased. He means to include the great mass of the people;

particularly the officials and leaders, the eminent of their number, individuals looked up to as the worthiest and holiest of the congregation, and who actually had wrought great things. Many of these fell into hypocrisy through boasting of the divine name, the divine office and spirit; Korah, for instance, with his faction, including two hundred and fifty princes of the congregation. Numbers 16:1-2. He and his leaders claimed right to the priesthood and government equal with Moses and Aaron, and so ostentatiously and boastfully that only God could say whether they were right. Necessarily God had to make it manifest that he had no pleasure in them; for they boasted until the earth swallowed them up alive, and many who adhered to and upheld them were consumed by fire.

Israel's Vices in the Wilderness Punished.

[12] Proceeding, Paul recounts the vices which occasioned God's punishment and overthrow of the people in the wilderness. First, he says, they lusted after evil things. In the second year from the departure, when they actually had come into Canaan, they forgot God's kindness and wonderful works in their behalf and, becoming dissatisfied, longed to be back in Egypt to sit by the flesh pots. They murmured against God and Moses until God was forced summarily to stop them with fire from heaven. Many of the people were consumed and a multitude more were smitten with a great plague while yet they ate of the flesh they craved; therefore the place of the camp was named the "Graves of Lust." Numbers 11. Such was the reward of their concupiscence, which Paul here aptly explains as "lusting after evil things."

[13] Truly it is but lusting after the wrath and punishment of God when, in forgetfulness of and ingratitude for his grace and goodness we seek something new. The world is coming to be filled with the spirit of concupiscence, for the multitude is weary of the Gospel. Particularly are they dissatisfied with it because it profits not the flesh; contributes not to power, wealth and luxury. Men desire again the old and formal things of popery, notwithstanding they suffered therein extreme oppression and were burdened not less than were the people of Israel in Egypt. But they will eventually have to pay a grievous penalty for their concupiscence.

[14] In the third place, the apostle mentions the great sin — idolatry. “Neither be ye idolaters,” he counsels, “as were some of them.” Not simply the lower class of people were guilty in this respect, but the leaders and examples. As they led, the multitude followed. Even Aaron, the brother of Moses, himself high priest, swayed by the influential ones, yielded and set up the golden calf (Exodus 32:4) while Moses tarried in the mount. We are astounded that those eminently worthy individuals, having heard God’s Word and seen his wonders liberally displayed, should so soon fall unrestrainedly into the false worship of idolatry, as if they were heathen and possessed not the Word. Much less need we wonder that the blind world always is entangled with idol worship.

[15] Where the Word of God is lacking, or disregarded, human wisdom makes for itself a worship. It will find its pleasure in the thing of its own construction and regard it something to be prized, though it may be imperatively forbidden in God’s Word, perhaps even an abomination before him. Human reason thinks it may handle divine matters according to its own judgment; that God must be pleased with what suits its pleasure. Accordingly, to sanction idolatry, it appropriates the name of the Word of God. The Word must be forced into harmony with the false worship to give the latter an admirable appearance, notwithstanding the worship is essentially the reverse of what it is made to appear. Similarly popery set off its abominations of the mass, of monkery and the worship of saints; and the world in turn seeks to set off that idolatry to make it stand before God’s Word. Such is the conduct of the eminent Aaron when he makes for the people the golden calf (Exodus 32:5-6), an image or sign of their offerings and worship. He builds an altar to it and causes to be proclaimed a feast to the Lord who has led them out of the land of Egypt. They must imitate the worship of the true God, a worship of sincere devotion and honest intention, with their offering, the calf, in the attempt to introduce a refined and ennobling worship.

[16] Thereupon follows what is recorded in Exodus 32:6, to which Paul here refers: “And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.” That is, they rejoiced and were well pleased with themselves, content to have performed such worship, and deemed they had done well. Next they proceed to their own pleasure, as if having

provided against God's anger. Thenceforth they would live according to their inclinations, wholly unrestrained and unreprieved by the Word of God; for, as they said, Aaron made the people free.

[17] Such is the usual course of idolatry. Refusing to be considered a sin, it presumes to merit grace and boasts of the liberty of the people of God. It continues unrepentant and self-assured, even in the practice of open vice, imagining every offense to be forgiven before God for the sake of its holy worship. Thus have the priestly rabble of popery been doing hitherto; and they still adorn — yes, strengthen and defend — their shameful adultery, unchastity and all vices, with the name of the Church, the holy worship, the mass, and so on.

Israel's Trial of God.

[18] In the fourth admonition, the apostle says, "Neither let us make trial of the Lord, as some of them made trial, and perished by the serpents." This, too, is a heinous sin, as is proven by the terrible punishment. In Numbers 21 we read that after the people had journeyed for forty years in the wilderness and God had brought them through all their difficulties and given them victory over their enemies, as they drew near to the promised land, they became dissatisfied and impatient. They were setting out to go around the land of the Edomites, who refused them a passage through their country, when they began to murmur against God and Moses for leading them out of Egypt. Thereupon God sent among them fiery serpents and they were bitten, a multitude of the people perishing. Complaining against God is here called tempting him. Men set themselves against the Word of God and blaspheme as if God and his Word were utterly insignificant, because his disposing is not as they desire. Properly speaking, it is tempting God when we not only disbelieve him but oppose him, refusing to accept what he says as true and desiring that our own wisdom rule. That is boasting ourselves against him. Paul says in Corinthians 10:22: "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?"

[19] Such was the conduct of the Jews. Notwithstanding God's promise to be their God, to remain with them and to preserve them in trouble, if only they would believe in him and trust him; and notwithstanding he proved his care by daily providences expressed as special blessings and strange

wonders, yet all these things availed not to save them from murmuring. When the ordering of events accorded not exactly with their wisdom or desire, or when, perhaps, disaster or failure threatened, immediately they began to make outcry against Moses; in other words, against his God-given office and message. “Why have you led us out of Egypt?” they would complain, meaning: “If you bore, as you say you do, the word and command of God, and if he truly designed to work such marvels with us, he would not permit us to suffer want like this.” In fact, they could not believe God’s dealings with them were in accord with his promise and design. They insisted that he should, through Moses, perform what they dictated; otherwise he should not be their God. At the outset, when they entered the wilderness, after having come out of Egypt and having experienced God’s wonderful preservation of them in the Red Sea and his deliverance from their enemy, and having received from him bread and flesh, they immediately began to murmur against Moses and Aaron and to chide them for leading into the wilderness where no water was. “Is Jehovah among us, or not?” they burst forth. Exodus 17:7. This was, indeed, as our text says, tempting God; for abundantly as his word and his wonders had been revealed to them, they refused to believe unless he should fulfill their desires.

[20] And they persisted in so opposing and tempting God as long as they were in the wilderness, unto the fortieth year; to which God testifies when he says to Moses: “Because all those men that have seen my glory, and my signs, which I wrought in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have tempted me these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice,” etc., Numbers 14:22. It was in the second year after the departure from Egypt that the Jews murmured about the water, and now in the fortieth year, when they should have been humbled after so long experience, and when they whose lives covered that period ought to have been conscious of the wonderful deliverances they had experienced in not being destroyed with others of their number, but being brought safely to the promised land — now they begin anew to complain with great impatience and bitterness: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?” Or, in other words: “You often remind us you represent God’s command, and you have promised us great things. This is a fine way you take to lead us into the land when here we have yet farther to journey and are all going to die in the wilderness!”

[21] Notice, Paul in speaking of how they tempted God says, “They tempted Christ,” pointing to the fact that the eternal Son of God was from the beginning with his Church and with the people who received from the ancient fathers the promise of his coming in the form of man. They believed as we do that Christ — to use Paul’s words in the beginning — was the rock that followed them. Therefore the apostle gives us to understand, the point of the Israelites’ insult was directed against faith in Christ, against the promise concerning him. Moses was compelled to hear them protest after this manner: “Yes, you boast about a Messiah who is one with God, and who is with us to lead us; one revealed to the fathers and promised to be born unto us of our flesh and blood, to redeem us and bring relief to all men; a Messiah who for that reason adopts us for his own people, to bring us into the land; but where is he? This is a fine way he relieves us! Is our God one to permit us to wander for forty years in the wilderness until we all perish?”

[22] That such sin and blasphemy was the real meaning of their murmurings is indicated by the fact that Moses afterward, in the terrible punishment of the fiery serpents by which the people were bitten and died, erected at God’s command a brazen serpent and whoever looked upon it lived. It was to them a sign of Christ who was to be offered for the salvation of sinners. It taught the people they had blasphemed against God, incurred his wrath and deserved punishment, and therefore in order to be saved from wrath and condemnation, they had no possible alternative but to believe again in Christ.

Murmuring against God Open Revolt.

[23] This last point is akin to the one preceding. Paul defines murmuring against God as an open revolt actuated by unbelief in the Word, a manifestation of anger and impatience, an unwillingness to obey when events are not ordered according to the pleasure of flesh and blood, and a readiness instantly to see God as hating and unwilling to help. Just so the Jews persistently behaved, despite Moses’ efforts to reconcile. Being also continually punished for their perversity, they ought prudently to have abandoned their murmurings; but they only murmured the more.

[24] The apostle's intent in the narration is to warn all who profess to be Christians, or people of God, as we shall hear later. He holds that the example of the Israelites ought deeply to impress us, teaching us to continue in the fear of God and to be conscious of it, and to guard against self-confidence. For God by the punishments mentioned shows forcibly enough to the world that he will not trifle with, nor excuse, our sin — as the world and our own flesh fondly imagine — if we, under cover of his high and sacred name, dare despise and pervert his Word; if we, actuated by presumptuous confidence in our own wisdom, our own holiness and the gifts of God, follow our private opinions, our own judgment and inclinations, and vainly satisfy ourselves with the delusion: “God is not angry with me, one so meritorious, so superior, in his sight.”

[25] You learn here that God spared none of the great throng from Egypt, among whom were many worthy and eminent individuals, even the progenitors of Christ in the tribe of Judah. He visited terrible punishment upon the distinguished princes and the leaders among the priesthood and other classes, and that in the sight of the entire people among whom he had performed so many marvelous wonders. Having by Moses delivered them from temporal bondage in Egypt, and through his office spiritually baptized and sanctified them; having given Christ, to speak with, lead, defend and help them; having dealt kindly with them as would a father with his children: yet he visits terrible destruction upon these Jews because they have abused his grace and brought forth no fruits of faith, and have become proud, boasting themselves the people of God, children of Abraham and circumcised, sole possessors of the promise of a Messiah, and consequently sure of participating in the kingdom of God and enjoying his grace.

[26] Now, as Paul teaches, if terrible judgment and awful punishment came upon these illustrious and good people, let us not be proud and presumptuous. We are far inferior to them and cannot hope, in these last ages of the world, to know gifts and wonders as great and glorious as they knew. Let us see ourselves mirrored in them and profit by their example, being mindful that while we are privileged to glory in Christ, in the forgiveness of sins and the grace of God, we must be faithfully careful not to lose what we have received and fall into the same condemnation and punishment before God which was the fate of this people. For we have not yet completed our pilgrimage; we have not arrived at the place toward

which we journey. We are still on the way and must constantly go forward in the undertaking, in spite of dangers and hindrances that may assail. The work of salvation is indeed begun in us, but as yet is incomplete. We have come out of Egypt and have passed through the Red Sea; that is, have been led out of the devil's dominion into the kingdom of God, through Christian baptism. But we are not yet through the wilderness and in the promised land. There is a possibility of our still wandering from the way, into defeat, and missing salvation.

[27] Nothing is lacking on God's part; he has given us his Word and the Sacraments, has bestowed the Spirit, given grace and the necessary gifts, and is willing to help us even further. It rests with ourselves not to fall from grace, not to thrust it from us through unbelief, ingratitude, disobedience and contempt of God's Word. For salvation is not to him who only begins well, but, as Christ says (Matthew 24:13), "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." But the apostle continues: "Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come."

Israel's Career an Admonition to Individuals.

[28] When you read or hear this historical example, the terrible punishment the Jewish people suffered in the wilderness, think not it is an obsolete record and without present significance. The narrative is certainly not written for the dead, but for us who live. It is intended to restrain us, to be a permanent example to the whole Church. For God's dealings with his own flock are always the same, from the beginning of time to the end. Likewise, must the people of God, or the Church, be always the same. This history is a portrait of the Church in every age, representing largely its actual life — the vital part; for it shows on what the success of the Church on earth always depends and how it acts. The record teaches that the Church is at all times wonderfully governed and preserved by God, without human agency, in the midst of manifold temptations, trials, suffering and defeat; that it does not exist as an established government regulated according to human wisdom, with harmony of parts and logical action, but is continually agitated, impaired and weakened in itself by much confusion and numerous penalties; that the great and best part, who bear the name of the Church, fall and bring about a state of things so deplorable God can no longer spare, but

is compelled to send punishments in the nature of mutinies and similar disorders, the terrible character of which leaves but a small proportion of the people upright.

[29] Now, if such disaster befell the nation selected of God, chosen from the first as his people, among whom he performed works marvelous and manifest beyond anything ever known since, what better thing may we expect for ourselves? Indeed, how much greater the danger threatening us; how much reason we have to take heed that the same fate, or worse, overtake not ourselves! With reference to the things chronicled in our text, Paul tells us: “They were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come.” That is, we are now in the last and most evil of days, a time bringing many awful dangers and severe punishments. It is foretold in the Scriptures, predicted by Christ and the apostles, that awful and distressing times will come, when there shall be wide wanderings from the true faith and sad desolations of the Church. And, alas, we see the prophecies only too painfully fulfilled in past heresy, and later in Mohammedanism and the papacy.

[30] The era constituting the “last time” began with the apostles. The Christians living since Christ’s ascension constitute the people of the latter times, the little company left for heaven; and we gentiles, amidst the innumerable multitude of the ungodly generation in the wide world, must experience worse calamities than befell the Jews, who lived under the law of Moses and the Word of God, under an admirable external discipline and a well-regulated government. Yet even in this final age so near the end of time, when we should be occupied with proclaiming the Gospel everywhere, the great multitude are chiefly employed with boasting their Christian name. We see how extravagantly the Pope extols his church, teaching that outside its pale no Christians are to be found on earth, and that the entire world must regard him as the head of the Church.

[31] True, his subjects were baptized unto Christ, called to the kingdom of God and granted the Sacrament and the name of Christ. But how do they conduct themselves? Under that superior name and honor, they suppress Christ’s Word and his kingdom. For more than a thousand years now they have desolated the Church, and to this hour most deplorably persecute it. On the other hand, great countries, vast kingdoms, claiming to be Christian but disregarding the true doctrine of faith, are punished by the Turk’s

desolating hand, and instead of the incense of Christianity, with them is the revolting odor of Mohammed's faith.

[32] Great and terrible was the punishment of the Jewish people. Seemingly no disaster could befall man more awful than overtook them in the wilderness. Yet it was physical punishment, and although many, through unbelief and contempt of God, fell and incurred everlasting condemnation, still the Word of God remained with a remnant — Moses and the true Church. But the punishment of this last age is infinitely more awful, for God permits the pure doctrine to be lost, and sends strong delusions, that they who receive not the truth nor love it shall believe falsehood and be eternally lost. 2 Thessalonians 2:10. Such has been our reward; we have only too terribly suffered punishment. And if we are not more thankful for the grace God extends in his Word — a last gleam of light, on the point of extinction — we shall meet with retribution even more appalling. “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

[33] Here is summed up the teaching of the above examples. The sermon is directed against the self-confident. Some there were among the Christian Corinthians who boasted they were disciples of the great apostles, and who had even received the Holy Spirit, but who stirred up sects and desired to be commended in all their acts. To these Paul would say: “No, dear brother, be not too secure, not too sure where you stand. When you think you stand most firmly you are perhaps nearest to falling, and you may fall too far to rise again. They of the wilderness were worthy people and began well, doing great deeds, yet they fell deplorably and were destroyed. Therefore, be cautious and suffer not the devil to deceive you. You will need to be vigilant, for you are in the flesh, which always strives against the spirit; and you have the devil for enemy, and dangers and difficulties beset you on all sides. Be careful lest you lose what you have received. You have only made a beginning; the end is yet to be attained.” So we must be wary and steadfast, that we may, as Paul has it, work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Philippians 2:12. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear

[34] Paul's meaning is: “I must not terrify you too much. I would in a measure comfort you. So far you have had no temptations greater than flesh and blood offer. They have risen among yourselves — one holding another in contempt, one doing another injustice; allowing adulteries and other evils

to creep in, which things are indeed not right nor decent. You must resolve to reform in these things lest worse error befall you. For should Satan get hold of you in earnest with his false doctrine and spiritual delusions, his strong temptations of the soul — contempt of God, for instance — such as assailed Peter and many others of the saints, you could not stand. You are yet weak; you are new and untried Christians. Then thank God who gives you strength to bear your present temptations; who, to retain you, presents what is best for you, admonishing you, through his Word, to be on your guard against falling yet deeper into temptation.

Tenth Sunday after Trinity. Spiritual Counsel for Church Officers. The Use of the Spiritual Gifts.

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11.

1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

3 And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.

4 And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

5 That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

6 Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:

8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 2:1-11

Spiritual Counsel for Church Officers.

[1] This epistle selection treats of spiritual things, things which chiefly pertain to the office of the ministry and concern the Church authorities. Paul instructs how those in office should employ their gifts for the benefit of one another and thus further the unity and advancement of the Churches. Inharmony is a deplorable offense in the case of Christians, putting them in the worst possible light, and making it impossible for them to steer clear of factions. Divisions are an offense to the world's wisest and best, who cry out, "If the Christians' doctrine were true, they would preserve unity among themselves, but as it is they envy and slander and devour one another." For, though the world carries its own great beam in its eye, it cannot refrain from judging us for our mote, and thus exalting itself as if it were pure and beautiful.

Perfect Harmony Not to Be Expected.

[2] Well, we cannot altogether prevent inharmony in the Church. Paul says (1 Corinthians 11:19), "For there must be also factions among you, that they that are approved may be made manifest among you." Wherever the Word of God has a foothold, there the devil will be. By the agency of his factions he will always build his taverns and kitchens beside God's house. So he did at first, in Paradise. In the family of Adam he entrenched himself, establishing there his church. And such has been his practice ever since, and doubtless will ever be. He who takes offense at differences in the Church,

who when he sees any inharmony at once concludes there is no Church there, will in the end miss both the Church and Christ. You will never find any congregation of such purity that all its members are unanimous on every point of belief and teaching and all live in perfect harmony.

[3] Paul had experience in this matter in the case of the beautiful and famed Church at Corinth in Achaia, which he himself planted and where he taught two years. Soon after his departure they began to disagree about their preachers and to attach themselves to certain ones — some to Paul, some to Peter, some to Apollos. Though these had all taught correctly, though they had been unanimous in their doctrine, yet men would cleave to a certain one because he was more or differently gifted than the others, could speak better, or was more attractive in personal appearance. And among the ministers of the Church, if one had a special gift or office, he thought he ought to be a little better and a little greater than the others. Necessarily, from such division and inharmony, grew hatred, strife and jealousy, resulting in great injury and disorder to the Church.

[4] We must, then, so far as possible, guard against this fatal evil, though we cannot altogether keep it out of the Church. Were we to offer no resistance at all, the devil would seize all authority and bring every element into discord. But when we resist Satan, God will continue to extend his grace and favor, and some fruit and improvement will follow. Even were it not possible for us to accomplish anything, yet as faithful ministers we must not keep silent if we would not be regarded indolent hirelings who flee when the wolf comes. See John 10:12.

[5] Such is the tenor of this text from Paul. He begins by preaching on spiritual gifts and admonishing the Corinthians how to conduct themselves in respect to them. In proportion to the greatness and excellence of the gifts are flesh and blood inclined to discord and to coveting personal honor. Let one have a good understanding of the Scriptures and be able to explain them, or let him have the power to work miracles, and he will soon begin to have an extravagantly good opinion of himself, deeming himself worthy the honor of all men, desiring the multitude to follow only him, and positively refusing to regard anyone his equal. He will seek to create something new in doctrine, to change the old order, as if he could introduce something better than others, who must be infinitely below him or at least his inferiors.

[6] The same thing has taken place in our day — and will continue to take place — with respect to the Gospel. But through the grace of God that Gospel is brought to light again, and rightly instructs and harmonizes the people. The devil, unable to rest, had to rouse his factious rabble, his selfish souls, who desired the name of being superior and inspired people, a people who could preach, write and explain the Scriptures better than others; for they had learned a little from us. They conceded that the Gospel had indeed made a beginning, had somewhat purified ecclesiastical doctrine, but claimed it had not gone far enough; it was necessary that greater improvement be made — Church doctrine must be brought to far greater perfection. But as Paul says (1 Corinthians 3:11), they could, with their doctrine, lay no other foundation, could preach no other Christ, than the Christ of the Gospel. Nevertheless, they pretended to teach something better and higher. They hindered and perverted the true doctrine. Their work could not be called building up the faith but was rather breaking up and destroying its foundation and leading the people back into error and blindness. So, Paul begins his admonition in these words: “Ye know that when ye were Gentiles ye were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever ye might be led.”

[7] Paul reminds the Corinthians of their manner of life before they became Christians, for he would have them pause to think that their gifts, past and present, are not of their own procuring, nor are any gifts bestowed upon them because of merit on their part. It is his intent to restrain them from pride in their gifts and from disputations concerning them; to keep them from divisions and from pretending to teach and introduce into the Church something new and better. But at the same time he deals a blow to those who take offense at inharmony among Christians.

[8] “Recall, all of you,” Paul would say, “your manner of life before you came to Christ. What were you? Mere darkened heathen, having no knowledge of God but suffering yourselves blindly to be led by anyone who should say aught to you of God. All your devotion was but a discordant worship. Each one — even the child in the cradle, the infant at the mother’s breast — must find his own idol wherever he might turn.” St. Augustine tells us that the city of Rome alone had more than four hundred gods, and that it erected a church for all the gods in the world, which building still stands — the Pantheon. “These superstitions,” Paul’s word imply, “you

followed as you were led; you flocked after them, praying and sacrificing, hanging your hearts upon dumb idols which could not teach and advise you, could not comfort, relieve or help you. In return for your devotion you obtained only the privilege of being a blind, wretched, divided, miserable people, unable to fortify yourselves against any error, and allowing yourselves to be distracted by the advocate of any doctrine. You were like a flock of helpless sheep scattered by wolves.

[9] “But now you have been turned from that manifold idolatry to the one true worship and have been enlightened by God’s Word. More than that, in Christ have been bestowed upon you great and glorious gifts — discerning of the Scriptures, diversities of tongues, power to work miracles — things impossible to the world. It is unmistakably evident that you embrace the true God, who does not, like dumb idols, leave you to wander in the error of your own speculations, uncounseled by the Word; a living God, who speaks to you that you may know what to expect from him, and works among you publicly and visibly. “Therefore, it is not for you to make divisions among yourselves after the manner of the heathen as you see in the great Babel confusion and divisions of the world, where no one agrees with another, where one runs to this his idol and another to that, each claiming superiority for his own. Knowing that you all embrace the one true God and his Word, you are to hold together in one faith and one mind, not disagreeing among yourselves as if you had a variety of gods, of faiths, of baptisms, spirits and salvations.”

Cavilers Themselves Led Astray.

[10] Paul speaks with particular plainness to the faultfinding and insolent cavilers against Christians and to other factious leaders when he says, “Ye were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever ye might be led.” This class peremptorily judge and criticize the life and doctrine of the Church because they see therein a measure of defects, and even some divisions and disagreements; notwithstanding the fact is plainly evident to them that the Church possesses the Word of God in purity, a knowledge of Christ, an illumined understanding of God’s will and his grace, and true comfort for all distress of conscience, and that, in addition to all these, the Holy Spirit manifestly operates with them. At the same time, these same uncalled-for and self-constituted critics would never have been able to say anything

about the Christian religion had they not witnessed that religion in the little company of Christians who have the Word of God and the Spirit's gifts.

[11] These fault-finders were individuals who, undoubtedly to a greater extent than others, suffered themselves to be blindly led in whatever way was pointed out, and who gave credence to what was taught and preached to them concerning the way to serve God, yet who all the time were but worshipers of dumb idols, possessing not the Word of God and having no witness to the truth of their faith and their works. Each believed and followed the devices of his own imagination or the popular choice. No man was able to teach anything certain and steadfast, anything to give the heart satisfaction and perfect security. They continually changed from one thing to another, accepting every new thing presented as real worship and true doctrine.

[12] And the world, ever from the beginning, has had naught but dumb idols in the countless forms of worship offered to the numerous gods — gods which never existed, but of which images were made and to which divine honors were shown. Worship has been rendered to the mere names of misfortune, disaster and disease, of all sorts; yes, to insects, and to garlic and onions even. Yet, in the practice of all this idolatry, supposed to be evidence of great holiness, each one sacrificing to the idol of his choice — in it all no one could have the assurance of being heard and answered by his god. Men had no word or sign of the divine will or work; they possessed naught but a vain dream and delusion of the human imagination; man devised and made his own idols.

[13] And what did we under the papacy but walk blindly? We suffered ourselves to be led just as we were directed by the names of God and the saints. I was myself a pious monk and priest, holding mass daily, wherein I worshipped St. Barbara, St. Anna, St. Christopher and others — more saints than the calendar mentions, some of whom no one knew anything about. I had no knowledge of Christ, I knew not why I should find comfort in him nor what I should expect of him. I was as much afraid of him as of the devil himself, regarding him more a stern Judge than a Savior. How many shameful pilgrimages were made to dead idols of wood and stone, images of Mary and of the saints! How many were the pilgrimages to the graves of the dead, and to bones called “holy relics”! These relics were mere open

deception, devised by shameless impostors; yet such worship was established by popes and bishops, and indulgences granted therefor.

[14] How many new saints, new brotherhoods, new psalms to Mary, and new rosaries and crowns did the monks daily invent! In fact, everything each individual monk might dream of had to be a special form of worship, and no one inquired whether or not it was at all authorized by God's Word. When we had done all, we were uncertain that we had pleased God. What was this sort of worship but a worship of dumb idols in the place of the living God — idols which could not talk with us and could not give any definite information or comfort, but left the people fettered and ruined with eternal doubts?

Faith in the One Christ Productive of Unity.

[15] But Christians, as Paul says, have not a dead and dumb god, for which the Lord be praised! Nor will we countenance such idols. We have a living, speaking God, who gives us his infallible Word. We know how he is disposed toward us and what we may expect from him; namely: through faith in Christ we have forgiveness of sins and are his beloved children; and as evidence of acceptance with God, we have baptism and the Holy Supper, the office and gifts of the Holy Spirit, by which he works in our hearts. We know that in the faith of Christ our works and lives are pleasing to God, and that he will hear and help when in our distress and weakness we cry unto him.

[16] Where this confidence obtains, where hearts enjoy such faith, there will be unity in the Church; for verily no one then will allow himself to be led into the manifold doctrines of insensible idols. But dissensions, sects and divisions are sure signs that the true doctrine is either ignored or misunderstood, men thus being left in a condition to be "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine," as Paul says (Ephesians 4: 14); which is indisputably the case with these same schismatics who condemn the Church and her doctrines because of some discordant ones. The schismatics show by their very instability that they do not embrace the true, uniform and established doctrine, nor can exhibit any substitute for it. They refuse to see that in cases where the Christian doctrine does not obtain, there is only blindness, distraction and confusion, and warring

factions and sects, none agreeing with another, each claiming to be better than the other. Numerous have been the sects of monks, and of saints of the Pope and his god the devil, no two of which agreed. Each class regarded its own whims and speculations and claimed to be holier than the others. The Pope, however, gave validity to them all, granting great indulgence to these factious fraternities. And I am not saying anything of other discords in the papacy — among the monasteries and in the parishes, and between these and the cloisters everywhere, perpetual quarreling, rioting and bitter contention. Such is inevitably the case when righteousness and divine worship are made to consist in external self-devised works and forms, for then each individual, pleased with his own ideas, thinks his way right; under such circumstances, there can never be unanimity of opinion as to what is right and the best.

[17] “From these numerous sources of disunion and idolatry,” Paul would say to the Corinthians, “you are now delivered. You know you embrace the real Word of God, the true faith. You worship one God, one Lord, and enjoy the same grace, the same Spirit, the same salvation. You need not seek other forms and ceremonies as essential to salvation — wearing a white or a gray cowl, refraining from this or that food, forbearing to touch certain things. No diversity of external service, of persons, offices and conditions, destroys the unity in Christ. “But take heed to continue in unity, to hold fast to it.” Unquestionably, you should be made wiser by the experience you have had with error; in the future you ought to be prudent, and watchful against being allured from the unity of this settled mind and true faith into your former blindness again. But so it will certainly befall you if you forget such grace and seek your own honor and praise more than the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and his gifts, and come to despise one another and to conduct yourselves as if you had many and not the same God, the same Christ, the same Spirit. God’s gifts cannot be different from, but must be one with his nature, and hence he cannot give to one a better Gospel or a different baptism from that given another.” In short, Paul teaches there must be unity in Christ, otherwise we have no Christ, no God and Holy Spirit, no grace nor salvation; as the next verse emphasizes. “Wherefore I make known unto you that no man speaking in the Spirit of God saith, Jesus is anathema [callesh Jesus accursed]; and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit.”

[18] “Why make divisions and differences,” Paul inquires, “in the doctrine and faith of the Church, which rests wholly upon the one Christ? In him you are to be one if you are Christians at all; you must harmoniously praise him, according to your individual gifts. No one can possibly possess the Holy Spirit if he does not regard Christ as the Lord, much less if he call him accursed. Destroy the foundation and you destroy all; there will be no God, no Spirit, and all your claims, teaching and works are naught. You must recognize and be governed by the fact that either Christ must be received and believed in as the one true Lord, and praised and glorified as such, or else he will be cursed; between these alternatives is no medium.” The Spirit, The Test of the True Teacher It is easy, then, to judge the doctrine of every official teacher of the Christian Church. No one need resort to faction, no one need gaze hither and thither in uncertainty and hesitate as to which gift or which person is most to be regarded. We are to make the doctrine of this verse the standard and authority as to what and how we preach concerning Christ. He who speaks by inspiration of the Holy Spirit certainly will not curse Christ; he will glorify and praise him. So doing, he surely will not teach error, or give occasion for divisions. If his teaching is not to the glory of God, you may safely conclude that he is not true, not inspired by the Holy Spirit.

[19] Thus Paul rejects the glorying and boasting of the sects over their offices and gifts — they who pretend to be filled with the Spirit and to teach the people correctly, and who make out that Paul and other teachers are of no consequence. Themselves the chief of apostles, the people must hear them and accept their baptism. More than that, they demand a higher attainment in the Spirit for Gospel ministers, deeming faith, the Sacrament and the outward office not sufficient. But Paul says: “Boast as you will about the great measure of the Spirit you possess, it is certain that the Spirit-inspired teacher will not curse Christ.” In other words, such boasting of the Spirit will not answer the purpose. What you believe and teach concerning Christ must receive attention. You are either reproaching and cursing Jesus, or praising him and owning him your Lord. If your preaching and teaching fail to point to Christ, something else being offered, and you nevertheless boast of the Spirit, you are already judged: the spirit you boast is not the Holy Spirit, not the true Spirit, but a false one. To it we are not to listen. Rather we are to condemn it to the abyss of hell, as Paul declares (Galatians 1:8), saying: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto

you any Gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema.”

[20] When Paul here speaks of calling Jesus accursed, he does not only have reference to openly blaspheming or cursing Christ’s name or person after the manner of heathen and of ungodly Jews; with them Paul has nothing to do here, nor are the Corinthians supposed to be of that character. Paul refers rather to the Christian who, though boasting of the Holy Spirit, does not preach Christ as the ground of our salvation as he should, but, neglecting this truth, points the soul away to something else, pretending that this substitute is of the Holy Spirit and is something better and more essential than the common doctrine of the Gospel. All such teachers are in reality simply guilty of condemning, reproaching and cursing Christ, though themselves bearing and boasting that name. To slight Christ’s Word and ministry, and exalt in their stead other things as mediums for obtaining the Holy Spirit and eternal life, or at least as being equally efficacious and essential — what is this but scorning Christ and making him of no consequence? Indeed, according to Hebrews 6:6 and 10:29, it is crucifying the Son of God afresh, and treading under foot his blood.

[21] Christ himself explains the office and ministry of the Holy Spirit — what he is to teach in the Church — saying (John 15:26), “He shall bear witness of me.” Again (John 16:14): “He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you.” The tongue of a minister of Christ — the language he employs — must be of that simplicity which preaches naught but Christ. If he is to testify of the Savior and glorify him, he cannot present other things whereby Christ would be ignored and robbed of his glory. He who does so, certainly is not inspired by the Holy Spirit, even though he possess great gifts and be called a teacher, a bishop, a pope, a council, an apostle even — yes, an angel from heaven. There were among the Corinthians some who thus neglected to preach only Christ, and presented instead the apostles, making choice of them — one Cephas, another Apollos and a third Paul. And just so our monks have done. They have in a way highly extolled Jesus, have in words honored and worshiped his name and used it to clothe all their lying nonsense and idolatry. For instance, they exalt Mary as the mother of Jesus and Anna as his grandmother. But they have thus torn men’s hearts away from Christ, turning over to Mary and the saints the honor due him alone, and teaching

the people to invoke these as mediators and intercessors having power to protect us in the hour of death. This is substituting dumb idols for Christ. No saint has ever taught such things; still less does the Word of God enjoin them. Thus the monks really curse and insult Christ.

[22] The Pope, throughout his whole administration, has been guilty of such insult to Christ, notwithstanding his boast that his kingdom represents the Christian Church, that he truly possesses the Holy Spirit and that his decrees and ordinances must be respected. Nothing can dissuade the Papists from their practice. They ever boast of being led by the Spirit, yet their vaunting is mere malediction, not only of Christ in person, but of his Word and his sacraments. For they openly condemn, and denounce as heresy, the doctrine of the Gospel, which Gospel assures us that to Christ alone we owe the unmerited forgiveness of our sins; they condemn also the use of the sacraments according to Christ's command and institution. And they destroy the people who thus offend them. The fact is, the Pope has in our doctrine nothing to curse but Jesus Christ, its foundation and principle, expressed by his Word and sacraments. The same is true of other factions — the Anabaptists and similar sects. What else do they but slander baptism and the Lord's Supper when they pretend that the external Word and outward sacraments do not benefit the soul, that the Spirit alone can do that? But in these matters you have Paul's sure word of judgment to strengthen your faith. You may be assured that the factions of the Pope and other sects are not, as they boast, the Church of Christ, but accursed schisms of the devil. The true Church, the righteous bride of Christ, certainly will not curse him nor persecute his Word. Let no one be moved by hearing men loudly boast about Christ after the manner of the false apostles who called themselves disciples of the true apostles of Jesus, and claimed that certain of their number had even seen Christ in person. The Savior himself warns us against this class when he says (Matthew 25:5,24), "Many shall come in my name.. and shall show wonders"; and (Matthew 7:21), "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Holy Spirit Alone Gives Assurance.

[23] Paul has the same thought here when he says, "No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit." To call Jesus "Lord" is to confess one's self

his servant and to seek his honor alone; to act as his messenger or the bearer of his Word and command. Paul's reference here is chiefly to the office representative of Christ and bearing his Word. Where the office answers these conditions and points to Christ as the Lord, it is truly the message of the Holy Spirit, even though the occupant of the office does not in his own person possess the Spirit; the office itself is essentially the Holy Spirit. Hypocrisy and invention have no place here. One must proceed in sincerity if he would be certain he is Christ's minister, or apostle, and really handles his Word. Only the inspiration of the Holy Spirit can give one this assurance.

[24] All Christians — each in his own work or sphere — equally may call Christ "Lord." One may be assured he serves Christ if he can call him "Lord," for only by the Holy Spirit is he enabled to do that. Let him try for a single day — from morning until evening — whether or no he can truly say at all times that he is the servant of God and of Christ in what he does. When delivering a sermon or listening to one, when baptizing a child or bringing a child to baptism, when pursuing your daily home duties, ask yourself if the act is attended by such faith that you can, without misgiving and not hypocritically nor mechanically, boast — and if necessary die by your word — that you serve and please Christ therein. This is calling Christ "Lord." Unquestionably you will often feel your heart doubting and trembling over the matter.

[25] In the papacy we were altogether hindered from feeling thus confident — yes, frightened from it by accursed skepticism. No one could — no one dared — say, "I know I am a servant, a bondsman, of Christ, and that my conduct pleases him." Flesh and blood are too weak to obtain this glorious confidence; the Holy Spirit is essential. Reason and our own hearts cry out in protest: "Alas, I am far too evil and unworthy! How could I be proud and presumptuous enough to boast myself the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ? I might if I were as holy as St. Peter, St. Paul and others."

[26] I used often to wonder that St. Ambrose was so bold as, in his letters, to call himself a servant of Jesus Christ. I supposed we all ought to be terrified at thoughts of this kind, and that none but the apostles might boast of such honor. But the fact is, we must all say to Christ: "Thou art my Lord and I am thy servant; for I believe on thee and aspire to be with thee and all the faithful and to possess thy Word and Sacrament." Otherwise

Christ will not acknowledge us. Christians To Give all Glory to God It is written (Matthew 4:10) — indeed, it is the first commandment — “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” There Christ requires of us, under the penalty of forfeiting eternal life, to honor him as our Lord and so to regulate our lives that we shall know we serve him. Peter also teaches (1 Peter 4:11) that all the Christian’s words and deeds should be regarded not as his own, but as God’s. The word and the act are to be of the ability which God gives, that in it all God may be glorified. Of necessity this condition can obtain only through the Holy Spirit.

[27] In this point — the glorification of Christ — do the true Christians distinguish themselves from false Christians, hypocrites and factious spirits, who likewise triumphantly boast of the Spirit and of their divine office. But the vanity of their boasting is evident from the fact that they do not hold to the doctrine that glorifies Christ but preach that which leads to other evils and deceives; yes, which condemns and persecutes the right doctrine and the true faith of Christ. Further evidence of the emptiness of their boasting is apparent in the fact that they have no conscious testimony that they serve Christ, nor can their followers give assurance on the same point. You have here the clear sentence of Paul declaring this class devoid of the Holy Spirit and thus separated from the true Church and from Christians. He exhorts us to be on our guard against them and would bring Christians together in one faith and under one Lord and Spirit. Now he teaches how to employ rightly the manifold gifts of a united Church for the general benefit of its members. “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.”

[28] “In former time, when you were heathen, you followed many kinds of idolatrous worship, many doctrines and spirits; but it was only a divided religion, and representative of blindness and error. Now, however, you possess various beautiful divine gifts and offices. These are mutually related, and all emanate, not from man’s reason or faculties, but from the one true God. They are his work — the expression of his power. Notwithstanding the dissimilarity of gifts, offices and works, of a certain order in one and otherwise in another, many and few, great and small, weak and strong — notwithstanding all, we are not to divide the Spirit, God and faith; we are not to create factions, exalting this individual or that one solely because of his gifts, and despising others. All gifts are direct from one God,

one Lord, one Spirit, and to serve the same purpose — to bring men to the knowledge of the one God and to build up the Church in the unity of faith. Therefore, you are united in the one doctrine, your object being to serve God and the Church in a harmonious way.” This verse is briefly the substance of all that follows in the text.

The Trinity.

[29] Paul presents three different points: “Diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit ;” “diversities of administrations, and the same Lord;” “diversities of workings, but the same God.” Unquestionably, Paul touches the article of faith concerning the Trinity, or three persons in the Divine Essence, and shows that both Christ and the Holy Spirit are true God and yet different in person from the Father and from each other. He teaches the same elsewhere (1 Corinthians 8:5-6), saying: “For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth; as there are gods many, and lords many; yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him.”

[30] In the text before us, the apostle likewise distinguishes the three — one God, one Lord, one Spirit. He assigns to each the particular operation whereby he manifests himself. One is God the Father, and from him as the origin and first person emanates all power. Another is the Lord, Christ the Son of God, who as the head of the Church appoints all offices. The third is the Spirit, who produces and dispenses all gifts in the Church. Yet all three are of one divine, almighty and eternal essence. They are of the same name, and are truly one since God must be an indivisible essence. To each individual is attributed only the characteristics of the Divine Majesty. As he who is the source of all operative power in the Church and in the entire creation is true God; so also must the Lord who appoints all offices, and the Spirit who confers all gifts, be true God. No creature is able to impart spiritual offices and gifts; that is impossible to any but God. These three — God, Lord and Spirit — are not Gods of unlike nature, but one in divine essence. The Lord is no other God than God the Father; and the Spirit is none other than God and the Lord. But more on this topic elsewhere.

Spiritual Gifts Specified.

[31] The names and nature of the spiritual gifts, the apostle here specifies. He names wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, power to discern spirits, capacity to speak with tongues and to interpret, extraordinary gifts of faith, and power to work miracles. “The word of wisdom” is the doctrine which teaches a knowledge of God, revealing his will, counsel and design. It embraces every article of belief and justification. The world knows nothing of this loftiest, most exalted gift of the Spirit. The Word of Knowledge The “word of knowledge” also teaches of the outward life and interests of the Christian: how we are to conduct ourselves toward all others, making a profitable use of the Gospel doctrine according as necessity of time and person demands; it teaches us the wisest course toward the weak and the strong, the timid and the obstinate.

The Gift of Prophecy

The gift of prophecy is the ability to rightly interpret and explain the Scriptures, and powerfully to reveal therefrom the doctrine of faith and the overthrow of false doctrine. The gift of prophecy includes, further, the ability to employ the Scriptures for admonition and reproof, for imparting strength and comfort, by pointing out, on the one hand, the certainty of future indignation, vengeance and punishment for the unbelieving and disobedient, and on the other hand presenting divine aid and reward to godly believers. Thus did the prophets with the Word of God, both the Law and the promises.

The Gift of Faith

[32] Paul is making mention of gifts not common to all. Only to certain ones are they given, and the gifts in themselves are unlike. “To another faith,” he says, “to another workings of miracles, and to another prophecy.” In “faith” here the reference is not to ordinary faith in Christ which brings justification before God and forgiveness of sin; such faith is essentially the property of every Christian, even if they do not possess the particular gifts here enumerated. Paul is speaking of a particular virtue or power of the Spirit operating in the Church, whereby certain ones can affect great and glorious things by reason of their remarkable and confident courage; as instanced in Paul’s words later on (1 Corinthians 13:2), “If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains.” To work such wonders, a very strong and sure

faith is certainly necessary. An unwavering, vigorous, courageous faith may accomplish a special work in the name and power of Christ although the worker may not himself be truly repentant nor possess the right kind of faith to secure forgiveness of sins and grace in Christ. He may be a hypocrite, a false saint. Christ says (Matthew 7:22), "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works?" It is true that such gifts are exercised, such works performed, in the name of Christ, and that the gifts are granted to none but individuals in the Church of Christ, and yet the possessor may not be altogether righteous, may even be a false Christian. For the effects wrought do not emanate from the individual but from the office he represents, being the operation of the Spirit given in behalf of the Church. Thus, as occupants of the office and by virtue of the Church, these persons perform many and great works, benefiting not themselves but others.

[33] Paul says of all these, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit," by way of admonishing us against creating sects. The Spirit is equally effective through him whose gifts are few and less significant and through him of remarkable gifts. And as with gifts, so it is with workings and ministrations. Meaning of "Workings"

[34] The term "workings," or operations, has reference to remarkable works of God wrought through certain individuals in an exceptional way. For instance, he grants to Paul a ministerial office of unusual influence: Paul is permitted to convert more souls than other apostles, to perform more wonders and accomplish more. He says himself (1 Corinthians 15:10) that by the grace of God he labored more abundantly than all. Meaning of "Administrations"

[35] The meaning of "administrations" is easily apparent. Office is an ordained and essential feature of every government. It represents various duties imposed and commanded by sovereign authority. It may have reference to the duties enjoined upon a society collectively, in the service of others. There are various offices in the Church; for instance, one individual is an apostle, another an evangelist, another a teacher, as Paul mentions in Ephesians 4:11. And as he says in 1 Corinthians 14:26 and also hints in this text, the office of one is to read the Scriptures in different languages, of another to interpret and explain. So it was ordained in the Church at that

time, and similarly today are ordained certain offices — of pastors, preachers, deacons or priests, their duties being to hear confessions, to administer the Sacrament, and so on.

[36] Not every Christian is obliged, nor is able, to execute such duties; only upon certain ones are they enjoined. “Administrations” differ from what Paul terms “workings” and gifts. There have ever been many Christians who, though possessing the Holy Spirit, were not “administrators;” for instance, virgins and wives — Agnes Anastasia and others — and martyrs, many of whom wrought miracles and had other gifts. True, both gifts and workings are imparted chiefly for the execution of Christian duties. It is essential here, especially in the superior office of preaching, that the occupant be peculiarly qualified for the place. The preacher must be able to understand and explain the Scriptures and be familiar with the languages. It is necessary to the effectiveness of his labors that he be accompanied by God’s operative power. Thus the three — gifts, workings, administrations are harmonious features of one divine government in the Church; Christ is the Lord, who regulates and maintains the offices, while God works and the Holy Spirit bestows his gifts.

Diversity of Gifts No Reason for Sects

[37] As we said, offices are many and varied, even as one gift is greater than another, an apostle, for instance, is superior to a teacher or expounder, while the office of a baptizer is inferior to that of a preacher. Yet notwithstanding, we are to remember, Paul says, that all are ordained of the same Lord, and the occupant of a superior office is not to consider himself any better by reason of his position and to despise others. He must bear in mind that all serve the same Lord, the least as well as the greatest, and consequently the holder of the inferior office is not necessarily inferior with his Lord, nor the executor of the higher office greater with him. Christ is ever Lord of all; one belongs as much to his realm as another. Therefore, he will have no divisions and sects over this point; rather he wills that such diversity of gifts and offices be promotive of unity.

[38] When I preach, and you listen, we are not exercising the same gift and office, yet you as truly serve Christ by listening as I by preaching. If you preach, explain the Scriptures, baptize, comfort or aught else, through

you works the same Christ who works through another. All is wrought in obedience to the order of him who commands me to hear his Word as well as to preach to you, and to exercise the same faith and Spirit with you. Thus, all alike praise the one Lord. You say, “The Word I hear is the true Word of God,” and I as a preacher prove and declare the very same thing. When I baptize, administer the Sacrament or absolve, and you accept my administrations, we are both engaged in the service of the same Lord and harmoniously execute his command. You and I, however, so far as office and gifts are considered, may be of different capacities.

[39] A peculiarity of the Christian profession, and the chief point of distinction between Christians and the heathen, is their recognition of the fact that workings, offices and gifts are of God, Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. The world does not perceive this truth, though it, too, enjoys the gifts of God. For God remembers all his creatures, though, like swine that enter the trough on all fours with no thought but of eating and rooting therein, not even lifting their eyes, they cannot raise their thoughts to the source of all their good and have not a thought as to whom they should thank for it. He who is not a Christian comes before God in an insensible and beastly attitude. The world is but a pen of animals indifferent to the kingdom of God and with no idea of gratitude for his rich beneficence, his gifts for body and soul. The worldly seek only their husks and their troughs. To these they cleave like fattening swine intended for slaughter. Jeremiah (Jeremiah 12:3) says concerning the ungodly, who with great satisfaction persecute the righteous: “Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter and prepare them for the day of slaughter.”

[40] God gives the ungodly mighty kingdoms, riches, lands and houses, making them to enjoy greatness and abundance. But when the swine are fed and fat, the question of bacon and sausage introduces a struggle. A slaughterer — a sausage-maker — appears, perchance, to slaughter the swine in their sty; one comes desolating the country, overthrowing the kingdom, destroying people and all; for, desiring to be but swine, the people must be destroyed like swine. Even though the world have personal knowledge of such punishment, it continues its course so long as possible — until the slaughterer comes. Swine remain swine; they are capable of standing ever unmoved by their trough, one perfectly indifferent if another be struck dead before its eyes.

Christians Recognize the Divine Source of Their Gifts

[41] Christians, however, though obliged to live among swine and to be at times trampled underfoot and rooted about, have nevertheless surpassing glory; for they can look up and intelligently behold their Lord and his gifts. They are not of the pen of swine intended only for slaughter; they know themselves children of God, adorned by him with gifts and graces not merely temporal. They are conscious that, having given them body and life — for these they realize are not of their own obtaining — he will also supply their further needs, providing for them forever.

[42] Christians are able to recognize even God's least blessing as most precious, as truly excellent; not only because it comes from him, but because of its inherent value. No one who recognizes even temporal blessings would give an eye, or a less important member of the body, to redeem the riches of the entire world. How much loftier and more precious to the Christian are the spiritual gifts concerning which Paul here speaks — gifts bestowed as means unto salvation! The baptizing of a child or the absolution of a penitent makes no great show, but were the office viewed in the true light, the bestowed treasure rightly appreciated, all the officers, authority and riches of kings and emperors would be nothing at all in comparison.

[43] Regarding the baptizer — who may be a woman even — and the baptized, we certainly can see nothing wonderful. The humanity in the case does not effect any great work; the work is wrought by him who is God, Lord and Spirit. It is he who gives to the office power and greatness above that of all emperors, kings and lords, however inferior the instrumentality — the occupants of the sacred offices. By these ministrations souls are won from the devil, snatched out of hell and transformed into saints blessed forever. Person and office may be apparently inferior, but the office is of God and God is no inferior being. His greatness cannot be equaled by a hundred thousand worlds. He accomplishes things incomprehensible to the world and impossible to angels. The combined efforts of all creation could not produce baptism. Were the world to unite in baptizing an infant, the infant would receive no good therefrom unless God the Lord commanded the deed. Let the Sultan be many thousands of times more powerful than at present and he could not, with all his riches, his dominion and peoples, free

himself or any other from the power of the least sin. He could not effectively pronounce the absolution, "God has forgiven you your sins." For the Sultan has neither gift, office nor work; indeed, he knows nothing about them. They belong to God alone, though human mouths and hands are instrumental therein.

[44] Note why Paul boasts of the fact that God bestows such great blessings. It is that Christians may discern them and thank him; and that such discernment may lead them to serve one another in humility, with mutual faith and love, each one learning to praise God fervently wherever he beholds God's gifts and offices operative in the Church, and to esteem them as he would esteem God himself. For, unquestionably, none would possess office and gifts had not God ordained and bestowed them.

[45] How we have exalted our own nonsense — pilgrimages, cloisters, cords, cowls, running to the dead in the wilderness and so on! But to what purpose? What benefit have we derived therefrom, notwithstanding we walked until our feet were bleeding, and watched and fasted and tormented ourselves to death? Such a life, it is true, may be called holy, divine, yet it is not at all the gift, the work, the office, of God. No God, no Lord, no Spirit, is in that practice. God has nowhere commanded such a life. We have devised it and may reward and help ourselves for so doing. We cannot boast his authority for it nor find divine comfort therein. But the discerning Christian can with satisfaction boast on this wise: "My baptism or my absolution is not of my own devising or ordaining, nor of another man's. It is of Christ my Lord. For here is his command ordaining the office: 'Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' Matthew 28:19. Upon authority of the office, work and gift here presented, I can boast and be strong in faith against the devil and all the gates of hell; otherwise I cannot withstand Satan for one moment. He would not be afraid of me and my works though I should be able to boast of having lived seventy years as a member of a holy order, serving God every day and hour, praying, fasting, and so on."

[46] The devil hurls both person and work, as he finds them, into the abyss of hell. If he asks you where God has commanded such works as yours, you have no answer. But let him hear you boast in the confident faith God's command inspires: "I have received from Christ my Lord baptism

and absolution; of this I am certain, and what I do is done at his command and by his power” — let him hear that and he is forced immediately to leave you. He must flee, not from your person or works, but from Christ’s office and gifts found with you.

[47] Paul presents these thoughts to teach us what we Christians have from God in the three forms, blessings superior to those enjoyed by all others in the world. The apostle would have us be grateful for these things and make use of them in a spirit of Christian love. He desires that the possessor of gifts devote them to the service of others. He teaches we are to honor God in the gifts another possesses; that we are highly to esteem them, remembering they are not of man’s production, not wrought of man’s ability or skill, but are the offices, gifts and works of God. They are not the inferior and trivial things they seem to the world because making no show and noise. God does not give unredeemable coin or empty shells and mere husks. His gifts and works in his Church must effect inexpressible results, taking souls from the jaws of the devil and translating them into eternal life and glory.

Eleventh Sunday after Trinity. Paul's Witness to Christ's Resurrection.

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-10.

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 1 Corinthians 15:1-10

Paul's Witness to Christ's Resurrection

This text is fully explained in the sermons on the entire chapter, which have been published separately. He who desires may read them there. It speaks almost exclusively of the resurrection of the dead, and therefore ought properly to be read and preached at the Easter season. The reason of its selection for this Sunday seems to be that the latter part of it corresponds with the Gospel for this Sunday. For Saint Paul, though he was an exalted apostle, and had labored in that office more than all the others together, boasts not of his own deeds, as did the proud Pharisee. Like the poor publican he confessed his sin and unworthiness, and ascribed all that he is to the grace of God alone, which made a Christian and an apostle of him who had been a persecutor.

Twelfth Sunday after Trinity. The Twofold Use of the Law and the Gospel. “Letter” and “Spirit”.

Text: 2 Corinthians 3:4-11.

4 And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward:

5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away:

8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

9 For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.

11 For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. 2 Corinthians 3:4-11

Gospel Transcends Law

[1] This epistle lesson sounds altogether strange and wonderful to individuals unaccustomed to Scripture language, particularly to that of Paul. To the inexperienced ear and heart it is not intelligible. In popedom thus far it has remained quite unapprehended, although reading of the words has been practiced.

[2] That we may understand it, we must first get an idea of Paul's theme. Briefly, he would oppose the vain boasting of false apostles and preachers concerning their possession of the spirit and their peculiar skill and gifts, by praising and glorifying the office of a preacher of the Gospel with which he is entrusted. For he found that, especially in the Church at Corinth, which he had converted by the words of his own lips and brought to faith in Christ, soon after his departure the devil introduced his heresies whereby the people were turned from the truth and betrayed into other ways. Since it became his duty to make an attack upon such heresies, he devoted both his epistles to the purpose of keeping the Corinthians in the right way, so that they might retain the pure doctrine received from him and beware of false spirits. The main thing which moved him to write this second epistle was his desire to emphasize to them his apostolic office of a preacher of the Gospel, in order to put to shame the glory of those other teachers — the glory they boasted with many words and great pretense.

[3] He starts in on this theme just before he reaches our text. And this is how it is he comes to speak in high terms of praise of the ministration of the Gospel and to contrast and compare the twofold ministration or message which may be proclaimed in the Church, provided, of course, that God's Word is to be preached and not the nonsense of human falsehood and the doctrine of the devil. One is that of the Old Testament, the other of the New; in other words, the office of Moses, or the Law, and the office of the Gospel of Christ. He contrasts the glory and power of the latter with those

of the former, which, it is true, is also the Word of God. In this manner he endeavors to defeat the teachings and pretensions of those seductive spirits who, as he but lately foretold, pervert God's Word, in that they greatly extol the Law of God, yet at best do not teach its right use, but, instead of making it tributary to faith in Christ, misuse it to teach work-righteousness.

[4] Since the words before us are in reality a continuation of those with which the chapter opens, the latter must be considered in this connection. We read: "Are we beginning again to commend ourselves? or need we, as do some, epistles of commendation to you or from you? Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men; being made manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh." "We, my fellow apostles and co-laborers and I," he says, "do not ask for letters and seals from others commending us to you, or from you commending us to others, in order to seduce people after gaining their good will in your church and in others as well. Such is the practice of the false apostles, and many even now present letters and certificates from honest preachers and Churches, and make them the means whereby their unrighteous plotting may be received in good faith. Such letters, thank God, we stand not in need of, and you need not fear we shall use such means of deception. For you are yourselves the letter we have written and wherein we may pride ourselves and which we present everywhere. For it is a matter of common knowledge that you have been taught by us, and brought to Christ through our ministry."

Paul's Converts Living Epistles

[5] Inasmuch as his activity among them is his testimonial, and they themselves are aware that through his ministerial office he has constituted them a church, he calls them an epistle written by himself; not with ink and in paragraphs, not on paper or wood, nor engraved upon hard rock as the Ten Commandments written upon tables of stone, which Moses placed before the people, but written by the Holy Spirit upon fleshly tables — hearts of tender flesh. The Spirit is the ink or the inscription, yes, even the writer himself; but the pencil or pen and the hand of the writer is the ministry of Paul.

[6] This figure of a written epistle is, however, in accord with Scripture usage. Moses commands (Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 11, 18) that the Israelites write the Ten Commandments in all places where they walked or stood — upon the posts of their houses, and upon their gates, and ever have them before their eyes and in their hearts. Again (Proverbs 7:2-3), Solomon says: “Keep my commandments and . . . my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers; write them upon the tablet of thy heart.” He speaks as a father to his child when giving the child an earnest charge to remember a certain thing — “Dear child, remember this; forget it not; keep it in thy heart.” Likewise, God says in the book of Jeremiah the prophet (Jeremiah 31:33), “I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it.” Here man’s heart is represented as a sheet, or slate, or page, whereon is written the preached Word; for the heart is to receive and securely keep the Word. In this sense Paul says: “We have, by our ministry, written a booklet or letter upon your heart, which witnesses that you believe in God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost and have the assurance that through Christ you are redeemed and saved. This testimony is what is written on your heart. The letters are not characters traced with ink or crayon, but the living thoughts, the fire and force of the heart.

[7] Note further, that it is his ministry to which Paul ascribes the preparation of their heart thereon and the inscription which constitutes them “living epistles of Christ.” He contrasts his ministry with the blind fancies of those fanatics who seek to receive, and dream of having, the Holy Spirit without the oral word; who, perchance, creep into a corner and grasp the Spirit through dreams, directing the people away from the preached Word and visible ministry. But Paul says that the Spirit, through his preaching, has wrought in the hearts of his Corinthians, to the end that Christ lives and is mighty in them. After such statement he bursts into praise of the ministerial office, comparing the message, or preaching, of Moses with that of himself and the apostles. He says: “Such confidence have we through Christ to God-ward: not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God.”

True Preachers Commissioned by God

[8] These words are blows and thrusts for the false apostles and preachers. Paul is mortal enemy to the blockheads who make great boast, pretending to

what they do not possess and to what they cannot do; who boast of having the Spirit in great measure; who are ready to counsel and aid the whole world; who pride themselves on the ability to invent something new. It is to be a surpassingly precious and heavenly thing they are to spin out of their heads, as the dreams of pope and monks have been in time past. “We do not so,” says Paul. “We rely not upon ourselves or our wisdom and ability. We preach not what we have ourselves invented. But this is our boast and trust in Christ before God, that we have made of you a divine epistle; have written upon your hearts, not our thoughts, but the Word of God. We are not, however, glorifying our own power, but the works and the power of him who has called and equipped us for such an office; from whom proceeds all you have heard and believed.

[9] It is a glory which every preacher may claim, to be able to say with full confidence of heart: “This trust have I toward God in Christ, that what I teach and preach is truly the Word of God.” Likewise, when he performs other official duties in the Church — baptizes a child, absolves and comforts a sinner — it must be done in the same firm conviction that such is the command of Christ.

[10] He who would teach and exercise authority in the Church without this glory, “it is profitable for him,” as Christ says (Matthew 18:6), “that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depths of the sea.” For the devil’s lies he preaches, and death is what he effects. Our Papists, in time past, after much and long-continued teaching, after many inventions and works whereby they hoped to be saved, nevertheless always doubted in heart and mind whether or no they had pleased God. The teaching and works of all heretics and seditious spirits certainly do not bespeak for them trust in Christ; their own glory is the object of their teaching, and the homage and praise of the people is the goal of their desire. “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves.”

[11] As said before, this is spoken in denunciation of the false spirits who believe that by reason of eminent equipment of special creation and election, they are called to come to the rescue of the people, expecting wonders from whatever they say and do.

Human Doctrine No Place in the Church

[12] Now, we know ourselves to be of the same clay whereof they are made; indeed, we perhaps have the greater call from God: yet we cannot boast of being capable of ourselves to advise or aid men. We cannot even originate an idea calculated to give help. And when it comes to the knowledge of how one may stand before God and attain to eternal life, that is truly not to be achieved by our work or power, nor to originate in our brain. In other things, those pertaining to this temporal life, you may glory in what you know, you may advance the teachings of reason, you may invent ideas of your own; for example: how to make shoes or clothes, how to govern a household, how to manage a herd. In such things exercise your mind to the best of your ability. Cloth or leather of this sort will permit itself to be stretched and cut according to the good pleasure of the tailor or shoemaker. But in spiritual matters, human reasoning certainly is not in order; other intelligence, other skill and power, are requisite here — something to be granted by God himself and revealed through his Word.

[13] What mortal has ever discovered or fathomed the truth that the three persons in the eternal divine essence are one God; that the second person, the Son of God, was obliged to become man, born of a virgin; and that no way of life could be opened for us, save through his crucifixion? Such truth never would have been heard nor preached, would never in all eternity have been published, learned and believed, had not God himself revealed it.

[14] For this season they are blind fools of first magnitude and dangerous characters who would boast of their grand performances, and think that the people are served when they preach their own fancies and inventions. It has been the practice in the Church for anyone to introduce any teaching he saw fit; for example, the monks and priests have daily produced new saints, pilgrimages, special prayers, works and sacrifices in the effort to blot out sin, redeem souls from purgatory, and so on. They who make up things of this kind are not such as put their trust in God through Christ, but rather such as defy God and Christ. Into the hearts of men, where Christ alone should be, they shove the filth and write the lies of the devil. Yet they think themselves, and themselves only, qualified for all essential teaching and work, self-grown doctors that they are, saints all-powerful without the help of God and Christ. “But our sufficiency is from God.”

[15] Of ourselves — in our own wisdom and strength — we cannot effect, discover nor teach any counsel or help for man, whether for ourselves or others. Any good work we perform among you, any doctrine we write upon your heart — that is God’s own work. He puts into our heart and mouth what we should say, and impresses it upon your heart through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we cannot ascribe to ourselves any honor therein, cannot seek our own glory as the self-instructed and proud spirits do; we must give to God alone the honor, and must glory in the fact that by his grace and power he works in you unto salvation, through the office committed unto us.

[16] Now, Paul’s thought here is that nothing should be taught and practiced in the Church but what is unquestionably God’s Word. It will not do to introduce or perform anything whatever upon the strength of man’s judgment. Man’s achievements, man’s reasoning and power, are of no avail save in so far as they come from God. As Peter says in his first epistle (1 Peter 4:11): “If any man speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth.” In short, let him who would be wise, who would boast of great skill, talents and power, confine himself to things other than spiritual; with respect to spiritual matters, let him keep his place and refrain from boasting and pretense. For it is of no moment that men observe your greatness and ability; the important thing is that poor souls may rest assured of being presented with God’s Word and works, whereby they may be saved. “Who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

The New Covenant

[17] Paul here proceeds to exalt the office and power of the Gospel over the glorying of the false apostles, and to elevate the power of the Word above that of all other doctrine, even of the Law of God. Truly we are not sufficient of ourselves and have nothing to boast of so far as human activity is considered. For that is without merit or power, however strenuous the effort may be to fulfill God’s Law. We have, however, something infinitely better to boast of, something not grounded in our own activity: by God we have been made sufficient for a noble ministry, termed the ministry “of a New Covenant.” This ministry is not only exalted far above any teaching to

be evolved by human wisdom, skill and power, but is more glorious than the ministry termed the “Old Covenant,” which in time past was delivered to the Jews through Moses. While this ministry clings, in common with other doctrine, to the Word given by revelation, it is the agency whereby the Holy Spirit works in the heart. Therefore, Paul says it is not a ministration of the letter, but “of the spirit.” “Spirit” and “Letter”

[18] This passage relative to spirit and letter has in the past been wholly strange language to us. Indeed, to such extent has man’s nonsensical interpretation perverted and weakened it that I, though a learned doctor of the holy Scriptures, failed to understand it altogether, and I could find no one to teach me. And to this day it is unintelligible to all popedom. In fact, even the old teachers — Origen, Jerome and others — have not caught Paul’s thought. And no wonder, truly! For it is essentially a doctrine far beyond the power of man’s intelligence to comprehend. When human reason meddles with it, it becomes perplexed. The doctrine is wholly unintelligible to it, for human thought goes no farther than the Law and the Ten Commandments. Laying hold upon these it confines itself to them. It does not attempt to do more, being governed by the principle that unto him who fulfils the demands of the Law, or commandments, God is gracious. Reason knows nothing about the wretchedness of depraved nature. It does not recognize the fact that no man is able to keep God’s commandments; that all are under sin and condemnation; and that the only way whereby help could be received was for God to give his Son for the world, ordaining another ministration, one through which grace and reconciliation might be proclaimed to us. Now, he who does not understand the sublime subject of which Paul speaks cannot but miss the true meaning of his words. How much more did we invite this fate when we threw the Scriptures and Saint Paul’s epistles under the bench, and, like swine in husks, wallowed in man’s nonsense! Therefore, we must submit to correction and learn to understand the apostle’s utterance aright.

[19] “Letter” and “spirit” have been understood to mean, according to Origen and Jerome, the obvious sense of the written word. St. Augustine, it must be admitted, has gotten an inkling of the truth. Now, the position of the former teachers would perhaps not be quite incorrect did they correctly explain the words. By “literary sense” they signify the meaning of a Scripture narrative according to the ordinary interpretation of the words. By

“spiritual sense” they signify the secondary, hidden, sense found in the words. For instance: The Scripture narrative in Genesis third records how the serpent persuaded the woman to eat of the forbidden fruit and to give to her husband, who also ate. This narrative in its simplest meaning represents what they understand by “letter.” “Spirit,” however, they understand to mean the spiritual interpretation, which is thus: The serpent signifies the evil temptation which lures to sin. The woman represents the sensual state, or the sphere in which such enticements and temptations make themselves felt. Adam, the man, stands for reason, which is called man’s highest endowment. Now, when reason does not yield to the allurements of external sense, all is well; but when it permits itself to waver and consent, the fall has taken place.

[20] Origen was the first to trifle thus with the holy Scriptures, and many others followed, until now it is thought to be the sign of great cleverness for the Church to be filled with such quibblings. The aim is to imitate Paul, who (Galatians 4:22-24) figuratively interprets the story of Abraham’s two sons, the one by the free woman, or the mistress of the house, and the other by the handmaid. The two women, Paul says, represent the two covenants: one covenant makes only bondservants, which is just what he in our text terms the ministration of the letter; the other leads to liberty, or, as he says here, the ministration of the spirit, which gives life. And the two sons are the two peoples, one of which does not go farther than the Law, while the other accepts in faith the Gospel. True, this is an interpretation not directly suggested by the narrative and the text. Paul himself calls it an allegory; that is, a mystic narrative, or a story with a hidden meaning. But he does not say that the literal text is necessarily the letter that killeth, and the allegory, or hidden meaning, the spirit. But the false teachers assert of all Scripture that the text, or record itself, is but a dead “letter,” its interpretation being “the spirit.” Yet they have not pushed interpretation farther than the teaching of the Law; and it is precisely the Law which Paul means when he speaks of “the letter.”*

[21] Paul employs the word “letter” in such contemptuous sense in reference to the Law — though the Law is, nevertheless, the Word of God — when he compares it with the ministry of the Gospel. The letter is to him the doctrine of the Ten Commandments, which teach how we should obey God, honor parents, love our neighbor, and so on — the very best doctrine

to be found in all books, sermons and schools. The word “letter” is to the apostle Paul everything which may take the form of doctrine of literary arrangement, of record, so long as it remains something spoken or written. Also thoughts which may be pictured or expressed by word or writing, but it is not that which is written in the heart, to become its life. “Letter” is the whole Law of Moses, or the Ten Commandments, though the supreme authority of such teaching is not denied. It matters not whether you hear them, read them, or reproduce them mentally. For instance, when I sit down to meditate upon the first commandment: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” or the second, or the third, and so forth, I have something which I can read, write, discuss, and aim to fulfill with all my might. The process is quite similar when the emperor or prince gives a command and says: “This you shall do, that you shall eschew.” This is what the apostle calls “the letter,” or, as we have called it on another occasion, the written sense.

[22] Now, as opposed to “the letter,” there is another doctrine or message, which he terms the “ministration of a New Covenant” and “of the Spirit.” This doctrine does not teach what works are required of man, for that man has already heard; but it makes known to him what God would do for him and bestow upon him, indeed what he has already done: he has given his Son Christ for us; because, for our disobedience to the Law, which no man fulfils, we were under God’s wrath and condemnation. Christ made satisfaction for our sins, effected a reconciliation with God and gave to us his own righteousness. Nothing is said in this ministration of man’s deeds; it tells rather of the works of Christ, who is unique in that he was born of a virgin, died for sin and rose from the dead, something no other man has been able to do. This doctrine is revealed through none but the Holy Spirit, and none other confers the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in the hearts of them who hear and accept the doctrine. Therefore, this ministration is termed a ministration “of the Spirit.”

[23] The apostle employs the words “letter” and “spirit,” to contrast the two doctrines; to emphasize his office and show its advantage over all others, however eminent the teachers whom they boast, and however great the spiritual unction which they vaunt. It is of design that he does not term the two dispensations “Law” and “Gospel,” but names them according to the respective effects produced. He honors the Gospel with a superior term

— “ministration of the Spirit.” Of the Law, on the contrary, he speaks almost contemptuously, as if he would not honor it with the title of God’s commandment, which in reality it is, according to his own admission later on that its deliverance to Moses and its injunction upon the children of Israel was an occasion of surpassing glory.

[24] Why does Paul choose this method? Is it right for one to despise or dishonor God’s Law? Is not a chaste and honorable life a matter of beauty and godliness? Such facts, it may be contended, are implanted by God in reason itself, and all books teach them; they are the governing force in the world. I reply: Paul’s chief concern is to defeat the vainglory and pretensions of false preachers, and to teach them the right conception and appreciation of the Gospel which he proclaimed. What Paul means is this: When the Jews vaunt their Law of Moses, which was received as Law from God and recorded upon two tables of stone; when they vaunt their learned and saintly preachers of the Law and its exponents, and hold their deeds and manner of life up to admiration, what is all that compared to the Gospel message? The claim may be well made: a fine sermon, a splendid exposition; but, after all, nothing more comes of it than precepts, expositions, written comments. The precept, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself,” remains a mere array of words. When much time and effort have been spent in conforming one’s life to it, nothing has been accomplished. You have pods without peas, husks without kernels.

[25] For it is impossible to keep the Law without Christ, though man may, for the sake of honor or property, or from fear of punishment, feign outward holiness. The heart which does not discern God’s grace in Christ cannot turn to God nor trust in him; it cannot love his commandments and delight in them, but rather resists them. For nature rebels at compulsion. No man likes to be a captive in chains. One does not voluntarily bow to the rod of punishment or submit to the executioner’s sword; rather, because of these things, his anger against the Law is but increased, and he ever thinks: “Would that I might unhindered steal, rob, hoard, gratify my lust, and so on!” And when restrained by force, he would there were no Law and no God. And this is the case where conduct shows some effects of discipline, in that the outer man has been subjected to the teaching of the Law.

[26] But in a far more appalling degree does inward rebellion ensue when the heart feels the full force of the Law; when, standing before God's judgment, it feels the sentence of condemnation; as we shall presently hear, for the apostle says "the letter killeth." Then the truly hard knots appear. Human nature fumes and rages against the Law; offenses appear in the heart, the fruit of hate and enmity against the Law; and presently human nature flees before God and is incensed at God's judgment. It begins to question the equity of his dealings, to ask if he is a just God. Influenced by such thoughts, it falls ever deeper into doubt, it murmurs and chafes, until finally, unless the Gospel comes to the rescue, it utterly despairs, as did Judas, and Saul, and perhaps pass out of this life with God and creation. This is what Paul means when he says (Romans 7:8-9) that the Law works sin in the heart of man, and sin works death, or kills.

[27] You see, then, why the Law is called "the letter": though noble doctrine, it remains on the surface; it does not enter the heart as a vital force which begets obedience. Such is the baseness of human nature, it will not and cannot conform to the Law; and so corrupt is mankind, there is no individual who does not violate all God's commandments inspite of daily hearing the preached Word and having held up to view God's wrath and eternal condemnation. Indeed, the harder pressed man is, the more furiously he storms against the Law.

[28] The substance of the matter is this: When all the commandments have been put together, when their message receives every particle of praise to which it is entitled, it is still a mere letter. That is, teaching not put into practice. By "letter" is signified all manner of law, doctrine and message, which goes no farther than the oral or written word, which consists only of the powerless letter. To illustrate: A law promulgated by a prince or the authorities of a city, if not enforced, remains merely an open letter, which makes a demand indeed, but ineffectually. Similarly, God's Law, although a teaching of supreme authority and the eternal will of God, must suffer itself to become a mere empty letter or husk. Without a quickening heart, and devoid of fruit, the Law is powerless to effect life and salvation. It may well be called a veritable table of omissions (Lass-tafel); that is, it is a written enumeration, not of duties performed but of duties cast aside. In the languages of the world, it is a royal edict which remains unobserved and unperformed. In this light St. Augustine understood the Law. He says,

commenting on Psalm 17, “What is Law without grace but a letter without spirit?” Human nature, without the aid of Christ and his grace, cannot keep it.

[29] Again, Paul in terming the Gospel a “ministration of the spirit” would call attention to its power to produce in the hearts of men an effect wholly different from that of the Law: it is accompanied by the Holy Spirit and it creates a new heart. Man, driven into fear and anxiety by the preaching of the Law, hears this Gospel message, which, instead of reminding him of God’s demands, tells him what God has done for him. It points not to man’s works, but to the works of Christ, and bids him confidently believe that for the sake of his Son God will forgive his sins and accept him as his child. And this message, when received in faith, immediately cheers and comforts the heart. The heart will no longer flee from God; rather it turns to him. Finding grace with God and experiencing his mercy, the heart feels drawn to him. It commences to call upon him and to treat and revere him as its beloved God. In proportion as such faith and solace grow, also love for the commandments will grow and obedience to them will be man’s delight. Therefore, God would have his Gospel message urged unceasingly as the means of awakening man’s heart to discern his state and recall the great grace and lovingkindness of God, with the result that the power of the Holy Spirit is increased constantly. Note, no influence of the Law, no work of man is present here. The force is a new and heavenly one — the power of the Holy Spirit. He impresses upon the heart Christ and his works, making of it a true book which does not consist in the tracery of mere letters and words, but in true life and action.

[30] God promised of old, in Joel 2:28 and other passages, to give the Spirit through the new message, the Gospel. And he has verified his promise by public manifestations in connection with the preaching of that Gospel, as on the day of Pentecost and again later. When the apostles, Peter and others, began to preach, the Holy Spirit descended visibly from heaven upon their hearts. Acts 8:17; Acts 10:44. Up to that time, throughout the period the Law was preached, no one had heard or seen such manifestation. The fact could not but be grasped that this was a vastly different message from that of the Law when such mighty results followed in its train. And yet its substance was no more than what Paul declared (Acts 13, 38-39): “Through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins: and by him

everyone that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

[31] In this teaching you see no more the empty letters, the valueless husks or shells, of the Law, which unceasingly enjoins, “This thou shalt do and observe,” and ever in vain. You see instead the true kernel and power which confers Christ and the fullness of His Spirit. In consequence, men heartily believe the message of the Gospel and enjoy its riches. They are accounted as having fulfilled the Ten Commandments. John says (John 1:16-17): “Of his fullness we all received, and grace for grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” John’s thought is: The Law has indeed been given by Moses, but what avails that fact? To be sure, it is a noble doctrine and portrays a beautiful and instructive picture of man’s duty to God and all mankind; it is really excellent as to the letter. Yet it remains empty; it does not enter into the heart. Therefore it is called “law,” nor can it become aught else, so long as nothing more is given. Christ Supersedes Moses Before there can be fulfillment, another than Moses must come, bringing another doctrine. Instead of a law enjoined, there must be grace and truth revealed. For to enjoin a command and to embody the truth are two different things; just as teaching and doing differ. Moses, it is true, teaches the doctrine of the Law, so far as exposition is concerned, but he can neither fulfill it himself nor give others the ability to do so. That it might be fulfilled, God’s Son had to come with his fullness; he has fulfilled the Law for himself and it is he who communicates to our empty heart the power to attain to the same fullness. This becomes possible when we receive grace for grace, that is, when we come to the enjoyment of Christ, and for the sake of him who enjoys with God fullness of grace, although our own obedience to the Law is still imperfect. Being possessed of solace and grace, we receive by his power the Holy Spirit also, so that, instead of harboring mere empty letters within us, we come to the truth and begin to fulfill God’s Law, in such a way, however, that we draw from his fullness and drink from that as a fountain.

Christ the Source of Life Greater than Adam the Source of Death

[32] Paul gives us the same thought in Romans 5, 17-18, where he compares Adam and Christ. Adam, he says, by his disobedience in

Paradise, became the source of sin and death in the world; by the sin of this one man, condemnation passed upon all men. But on the other hand, Christ, by his obedience and righteousness, has become for us the abundant source wherefrom all may obtain righteousness and the power of obedience. And with respect to the latter source, it is far richer and more abundant than the former. While by the single sin of one man, sin and death passed upon all men, to wax still more powerful with the advent of the Law, of such surpassing strength and greatness, on the other hand, is the grace and bounty which we have in Christ that it not only washes away the particular sin of the one man Adam, which, until Christ came, overwhelmed all men in death, but overwhelms and blots out all sin whatever. Thus they who receive his fullness of grace and bounty unto righteousness are, according to Paul, lords of life through Jesus Christ alone.

The Law Ineffectual

[33] You see now how the two messages differ, and why Paul exalts the one, the preaching of the Gospel, and calls it a “ministration of the spirit,” but terms the other, the Law, a mere empty “letter.” His object is to humble the pride of the false apostles and preachers which they felt in their Judaism and the law of Moses, telling the people with bold pretensions: “Beloved, let Paul preach what he will, he cannot overthrow Moses, who on Mount Sinai received the Law, God’s irrevocable command, obedience to which is ever the only way to salvation.”

[34] Similarly today, Papists, Anabaptists and other sects make outcry: “What mean you by preaching so much about faith and Christ? Are the people thereby made better? Surely works are essential.” Arguments of this character have indeed a semblance of merit, but, when examined by the light of truth, are mere empty, worthless twaddle. For if deeds, or works, are to be considered, there are the Ten Commandments; we teach and practice these as well as they. The Commandments would answer the purpose indeed — if one could preach them so effectively as to compel their fulfilment. But the question is, whether what is preached is also practiced. Is there something more than mere words — or letters, as Paul says? do the words result in life and spirit? This message we have in common; unquestionably, one must teach the Ten Commandments, and, what is more, live them. But we charge that they are not observed. Therefore something

else is requisite in order to render obedience to them possible. When Moses and the Law are made to say: “You should do thus; God demands this of you,” what does it profit? Ay, beloved Moses, I hear that plainly, and it is certainly a righteous command; but pray tell me whence shall I obtain ability to do what, alas, I never have done nor can do? It is not easy to spend money from an empty pocket, or to drink from an empty can. If I am to pay my debt, or to quench my thirst, tell me how first to fill pocket or can. But upon this point such prattlers are silent; they but continue to drive and plague with the Law, let the people stick to their sins, and make merry of them to their own hurt.

[35] In this light Paul here portrays the false apostles and like pernicious schismatics, who make great boasts of having a clearer understanding and of knowing much better what to teach than is the case with true preachers of the Gospel. And when they do their very best, when they pretend great things, and do wonders with their preaching, there is naught but the mere empty “letter.” Indeed, their message falls far short of Moses. Moses was a noble preacher, truly, and wrought greater things than any of them may do. Nevertheless, the doctrine of the Law could do no more than remain a letter, an Old Testament, and God had to ordain a different doctrine, a New Testament, which should impart the “spirit.” “It is the letter,” says Paul, “which we preach. If any glorying is to be done, we can glory in better things and make the defiant plea that they are not the only teachers of what ought to be done, incapable as they are of carrying out their own precepts. We give direction and power as to performing and living those precepts. For this reason our message is not called the Old Testament, or the message of the dead letter, but that of the New Testament and of the living Spirit.”

[36] No seditious spirit, it is certain, ever carries out its own precepts, nor will he ever be capable of doing so, though he may loudly boast the Spirit alone as his guide. Of this fact you may rest assured. For such individuals know nothing more than the doctrine of works — nor can they rise higher and point you to anything else. They may indeed speak of Christ, but it is only to hold him up as an example of patience in suffering. In short, there can be no New Testament preached if the doctrine of faith in Christ be left out; the spirit cannot enter into the heart, but all teaching, endeavor, reflection, works and power remain mere “letters,” devoid of grace, truth, and life. Without Christ the heart remains unchanged and

unrenewed. It has no more power to fulfill the Law than the book in which the Ten Commandments are written, or the stones upon which engraved. “For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

[37] Here is yet stronger condemnation of the glory of the doctrine of the Law; yet higher exaltation of the Gospel ministry. Is the apostle overbold in that he dares thus to assail the Law and say: “The Law is not only a lifeless letter, but qualified merely to kill”? Surely that is not calling the Law a good and profitable message, but one altogether harmful. Who, unless he would be a cursed heretic in the eyes of the world and invite execution as a blasphemer, would dare to speak thus, except Paul himself? Even Paul must praise the Law, which is God’s command, declaring it good and not to be despised nor in any way modified, but to be confirmed and fulfilled so completely, as Christ says (Matthew 5:18), that not a tittle of it shall pass away. How, then, does Paul come to speak so disparagingly, even abusively, of the Law, actually presenting it as veritable death and poison? Well, his is a sublime doctrine, one that reason does not understand. The world, particularly they who would be called holy and godly, cannot tolerate it at all; for it amounts to nothing short of pronouncing all our works, however precious, mere death and poison.

[38] Paul’s purpose is to bring about the complete overthrow of the boast of the false teachers and hypocrites, and to reveal the weakness of their doctrine, showing how little it effects even at its best, since it offers only the Law, Christ remaining unproclaimed and unknown. They say in terms of vainglorious eloquence that if a man diligently keep the commandments and do many good works, he shall be saved. But theirs are only vain words, a pernicious doctrine. This fact is eventually learned by him who, having heard no other doctrine, trusts in their false one. He finds out that it holds neither comfort nor power of life, but only doubt and anxiety, followed by death and destruction.

Terrors of the Law

[39] When man, conscious of his failure to keep God’s command, is constantly urged by the Law to make payment of his debt and confronted with nothing but the terrible wrath of God and eternal condemnation, he cannot but sink into despair over his sins. Such is the inevitable

consequence where the Law alone is taught with a view to attaining heaven thereby. The vanity of such trust in works is illustrated in the case of the noted hermit mentioned in *Vitae Patrum* (Lives of the Fathers). For over seventy years this hermit had led a life of utmost austerity, and had many followers. When the hour of death came he began to tremble, and for three days was in a state of agony. His disciples came to comfort him, exhorting him to die in peace since he had led so holy a life. But he replied: "Alas, I truly have all my life served Christ and lived austere; but God's judgment greatly differs from that of men."

[40] Note, this worthy man, despite the holiness of his life, has no acquaintance with any article but that of the divine judgment according to the Law. He knows not the comfort of Christ's Gospel. After a long life spent in the attempt to keep God's commandments and secure salvation, the Law now slays him through his own works. He is compelled to exclaim: "Alas, who knows how God will look upon my efforts? Who may stand before him?" That means, to forfeit heaven through the verdict of his own conscience. The work he has wrought and his holiness of life avail nothing. They merely push him deeper into death, since he is without the solace of the Gospel, while others, such as the thief on the cross and the publican, grasp the comfort of the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins in Christ. Thus sin is conquered; they escape the sentence of the Law, and pass through death into life eternal.

Efficacy of the Gospel

[41] Now the meaning of the contrasting clause, "the spirit giveth life," becomes clear. The reference is to naught else but the holy Gospel, a message of healing and salvation; a precious, comforting word. It comforts and refreshes the sad heart. It wrests it out of the jaws of death and hell, as it were, and transports it to the certain hope of eternal life, through faith in Christ. When the last hour comes to the believer, and death and God's judgment appear before his eyes, he does not base his comfort upon his works. Even though he may have lived the holiest life possible, he says with Paul (1 Corinthians 4:4): "I know nothing against myself, yet am I not hereby justified."

[42] These words imply being ill pleased with self, with the whole life; indeed, even the putting to death of self. Though the heart says, “By my works I am neither made righteous nor saved,” which is practically admitting oneself to be worthy of death and condemnation, the Spirit extricates from despair, through the Gospel faith, which confesses, as did St. Bernard in the hour of death: “Dear Lord Jesus, I am aware that my life at its best has been but worthy of condemnation, but I trust in the fact that thou hast died for me and hast sprinkled me with blood from thy holy wounds. For I have been baptized in thy name and have given heed to thy Word whereby thou hast called me, awarded me grace and life, and bidden me believe. In this assurance will I pass out of life; not in uncertainty and anxiety, thinking, Who knows what sentence God in heaven will pass upon me?” The Christian must not utter such a question. The sentence against his life and works has long since been passed by the Law. Therefore, he must confess himself guilty and condemned. But he lives by the gracious judgment of God declared from heaven, whereby the sentence of the Law is overruled and reversed. It is this: “He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life.” John 3:36.

[43] When the consolation of the Gospel has once been received and it has wrested the heart from death and the terrors of hell, the Spirit’s influence is felt. By its power God’s Law begins to live in man’s heart; he loves it, delights in it and enters upon its fulfillment. Thus eternal life begins here, being continued forever and perfected in the life to come.

[44] Now you see how much more glorious, how much better, is the doctrine of the apostles — the New Testament — than the doctrine of those who preach merely great works and holiness without Christ. We should see in this fact an incentive to hear the Gospel with gladness. We ought joyfully to thank God for it when we learn how it has power to bring to men life and eternal salvation, and when it gives us assurance that the Holy Spirit accompanies it and is imparted to believers. “But if the ministration of death, written, and engraven on stones, came with glory, so that the children of Israel could not look steadfastly upon the face of Moses for the glory of his face; which glory was passing away: how shall not rather the ministration of the Spirit be with glory? For if the ministration of condemnation hath glory, much rather doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.”

Glory of the Gospel

[45] Paul is in an ecstasy of delight, and his heart overflows in words of praise for the Gospel. Again he handles the Law severely, calling it a ministration, or doctrine, of death and condemnation. What term significant of greater abomination could he apply to God's Law than to call it a doctrine of death and hell? And again (Galatians 2:17), he calls it a "minister (or preacher) of sin;" and (Galatians 3:10) the message which proclaims a curse, saying, "As many as are of the works of the law are under a curse." Absolute, then, is the conclusion that Law and works are powerless to justify before God; for how can a doctrine proclaiming only sin, death and condemnation justify and save?

[46] Paul is compelled to speak thus, as we said above because of the infamous presumption of both teachers and pupils, in that they permit flesh and blood to coquet with the Law, and make their own works which they bring before God their boast. Yet, nothing is effected but self-deception and destruction. For, when the Law is viewed in its true light, when its "glory," as Paul has it, is revealed, it is found to do nothing more than to kill man and sink him into condemnation.

[47] Therefore, the Christian will do well to learn this text of Paul and have an armor against the boasting of false teachers, and the torments and trials of the devil when he urges the Law and induces men to seek righteousness in their own works, tormenting their heart with the thought that salvation is dependent upon the achievements of the individual. The Christian will do well to learn this text, I say, so that in such conflicts he may take the devil's own sword, saying: "Why dost thou annoy me with talk of the Law and my works? What is the Law after all, however much you may preach it to me, but that which makes me feel the weight of sin, death and condemnation? Why should I seek therein righteousness before God?"

[48] When Paul speaks of the "glory of the Law," of which the Jewish teachers of work-righteousness boast, he has reference to the things narrated in the twentieth and thirty-fourth chapters of Exodus — how, when the Law was given, God descended in majesty and glory from heaven, and there were thunderings and lightnings, and the mountain was encircled with fire; and how when Moses returned from the mountain, bringing the Law, his

face shone with a glory so dazzling that the people could not look upon his face and he was obliged to veil it.

[49] Turning their glory against them, Paul says: “Truly, we do not deny the glory; splendor and majesty were there: but what does such glory do but compel souls to flee before God, and drive into death and hell? We believers, however, boast another glory—that of our ministration. The Gospel record tells us (Matthew 17:2-4) that Christ clearly revealed such glory to his disciples when his face shone as the sun, and Moses and Elijah were present. Before the manifestation of such glory, the disciples did not flee; they beheld with amazed joy and said: “Lord, it is good for us to be here. We will make here tabernacles for thee and for Moses,” etc.

[50] Compare the two scenes and you will understand plainly the import of Paul’s words here. As before said, this is the substance of his meaning: “The Law produces naught but terror and death when it dazzles the heart with its glory and stands revealed in its true nature. On the other hand, the Gospel yields comfort and joy.” But to explain in detail the signification of the veiled face of Moses, and of his shining uncovered face, would take too long to enter upon here.

[51] There is also especial comfort to be derived from Paul’s assertion that the “ministration,” or doctrine, of the Law “passeth away”; for otherwise there would be naught but eternal condemnation. The doctrine of the Law “passes away” when the preaching of the Gospel of Christ finds place. To Christ, Moses shall yield, that he alone may hold sway. Moses shall not terrify the conscience of the believer. When, perceiving the glory of Moses, the conscience trembles and despairs before God’s wrath, then it is time for Christ’s glory to shine with its gracious, comforting light into the heart. Then can the heart endure Moses and Elijah. For the glory of the Law, or the unveiled face of Moses, shall shine only until man is humbled and driven to desire the blessed countenance of Christ. If you come to Christ, you shall no longer hear Moses to your fright and terror; you shall hear him as one who remains servant to the Lord Christ, leaving the solace and the joy of his countenance unobscured. In conclusion: “For verily that which hath been made glorious hath not been made glorious in this respect, by reason of the glory that surpasseth.”

[52] The meaning here is: When the glory and holiness of Christ, revealed through the preaching of the Gospel, is rightly perceived, then the glory of the Law — which is but a feeble and transitory glory — is seen to be not really glorious. It is mere dark clouds in contrast to the light of Christ shining to lead us out of sin, death and hell unto God and eternal life.

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity. God's Testament and Promise in Christ, and Use of the Law.

Text: Galatians 3:15-22.

15 Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.

16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

17 And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

18 For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

19 Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

20 Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.

21 Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. Galatians 3:15-22

God's Testament and Promise in Christ

[1] This is a keen, severe epistle, one that is unintelligible to the ordinary man. Because the doctrine it contains has not hitherto been employed and enforced, it has not been understood. It is also too long and rich to be treated briefly. But it is fully explained in the complete commentary on this epistle to the Galatians, where those who will may read it. The substance of it is, that here, as in the whole epistle, Paul would earnestly constrain the Christian to distinguish between the righteousness of faith and the righteousness of works or of the Law. In order that we may note to some extent the main points Paul makes in this text, we remark that he emphasizes two things. He treats first of the doctrine that we are justified by faith alone, and he maintains this, after giving many reasons and proofs, by saying in effect:

[2] In this connection you should note that no one, whether Jew or gentile, is justified by works or by the Law. For the Law was given four hundred and thirty years after the promise of a Savior had been made to Abraham (who was to be the father of all the people of God) and the assurance that all nations should be blessed in him. It was given after it had been testified of Abraham that his faith was imputed to him for righteousness. And as he was justified and received the blessing by reason of his faith, so also his children and descendants were justified and received the blessing through the same faith in that seed for whose sake the blessing had been promised to all the world. For in his dealings with the Jews and with the whole world, God always promised his grace and the forgiveness of sins (and that means to be blessed of God) even when there was as yet no Law by which they might pretend to become righteous, and before Moses was born.

[3] Therefore the Law, being given to this people only after the lapse of so long a period, could not have been given to them for justification; otherwise it would have been given earlier. Or if it had been necessary for righteousness, then Abraham and his children up to that date could not have been justified at all. Indeed God designed that the Law should be given so long after Abraham. Undoubtedly, he would have been able to give it to the fathers much earlier if he had seen fit to do so. Apparently, he desired thereby to teach that the Law was not given to the end that God's grace and

blessing should be acquired through it, but that these come from the pure mercy of God which was promised and bestowed so long before upon Abraham and those who believed.

[4] Therefore Paul concludes: How could the Law produce righteousness for those who lived before Moses, since Moses was the first through whom the Law was given; and since even before his time there were holy people and people who were saved? Whence did they derive their righteousness? Certainly not from the fact that they had offered sacrifice at Jerusalem, but from the fact that they believed the Word in which God promised to bless them through the coming seed, Christ. Hence, those also who lived afterwards could not have been justified by the Law; for they did not receive the grace of God in a different way from that in which those who went before had received it. God did not annul or revoke by the Law the promise of blessing which he had made and freely bestowed without the Law.

[5] Here some might desire to show their wisdom and say to Paul: Although the fathers did not have the Law of Moses, they had the same Word of God which teaches the ten commandments and which was implanted in the human heart from the beginning of the world, whence also it is called the law of nature or the natural law; and the same law was afterwards given publicly to the Jewish people and comprehended in the ten commandments. It might also be said that Moses borrowed the ten commandments from the fathers, to which Christ testifies in John 7:22. For it is certain that the fathers from the beginning taught them and urged them upon their children and descendants. With what consistency, then, does Paul conclude that the fathers were not justified by the Law because it was not given until four hundred years after Abraham's time; as if the fathers before that time had no Law?

[6] To answer this question we must observe the meaning and purpose of Paul's words; for he so speaks because of the boasting of the Jews, who placed their dependence on the Law and claimed that it was given to them that they might be God's people. They considered their attempts at keeping his Law, sufficient to procure justification. Why else did God give the Law, they said, and distinguish us from all heathen peoples, if we were not thereby to be preeminent before God and more pleasing to him than they who have it not? They made so much of this boasting that they paid no

respect at all to the promise of blessing in the coming seed, given to the fathers, nor thought that faith therein was necessary to their justification. Thus they practically considered it as annulled and made void, excepting for a temporal interpretation which they put upon it — that the Messiah would come and, because of their Law and piety, give to them the dominion of the world and other great rewards.

The Jews God's People by Promise

[7] To rout such vain delusions and boasts, and to show that the Jews were not justified through the Law and did not become God's children thereby, Paul cites the fact that the holy patriarchs, their fathers, were justified neither by the Law of which they boast, because it was not yet given, nor by their own deeds, whether of the natural law or the ten commandments. God had based no promise of blessing or salvation on their works. He had promised out of pure grace to give them the blessing freely (that is, to give them grace or righteousness and all eternal blessing), through the coming seed, which had been promised also to our first parents without their merit, when by their transgression they had fallen under God's wrath and condemnation. Therefore, although the fathers had a knowledge of the Law, or God's commandments, these did not help them to become righteous before God. They had to hear and apprehend by faith the promise of God, which was based not on works but only on the coming seed. For if they had been able by means of the Law or of good works to become righteous, it would have been wholly unnecessary to give the promise of blessing in Christ.

[8] Now, if Abraham and the fathers could not be justified by works, and in fact were not justified by them, no more were their children and descendants justified by the Law or by works. They were justified in no other way than by faith in the promise given to Abraham and to his seed, a promise by which not only the Jews but all the heathen (through the same faith) were blessed.

[9] This truth Paul now further enforces and establishes on the basis of these two particulars — God's promise, and his free grace or gift — in opposition to the boasting of the Law and our own merit. First, he makes a declaration concerning the value and weight which every testament or

promise of the last will possesses. Likewise in the fourth commandment is implied an ordinance that the last will of parents should be honored by their children and heirs.

[10] In regard to this subject he asserts that the rule is, if a man's testament be confirmed (and it is confirmed by his death) no man dare alter it nor add to it nor take away from it. So the jurists declare it to be a divine law that no one should break a man's last will. How much more then should God's testament be honored intact? Now, God has made a testament, which is to be his final last will; namely, that he will bless all nations through the seed which at first he promised to the fathers. This he determined upon, and assured to Abraham, and in him to all the world — to us all. And he has confirmed it by the death of this seed, his only Son, who had to become man and die (as was typified by the sacrifice of Isaac on the part of Abraham) in order that the inheritance of the blessing and eternal life might be bestowed upon us. This is God's last will. He does not desire to make any other. Therefore, no man can or dare change it or add anything to it. Now, it is adding to it, it is breaking or revoking it — since this testament has been opened and the blessing proclaimed to all the world — if anyone claims that we must first earn that blessing through the Law, proceeding as if, without the Law, this testament, by mere virtue of its promise and will, had no force at all.

[11] In short, this testament, Paul concludes, is a simple promise of blessing and sonship with God. Accordingly, there is no law which we must keep in order to merit it. Here nothing avails but the will which promises saying, I will not regard your deeds, but promise the blessing — that is, grace and eternal life — to you who are found in sin and death. This I will confirm by the death of my Son, who shall merit and obtain this inheritance for you. Now, God made this testament in the first place without the Law, and has thus confirmed it; therefore, the Law, published and confirmed long afterwards, cannot take aught from it, much less annul or revoke it. And he who declares or teaches that we are to be justified by the Law — are to obtain God's blessing by it — does nothing else but interfere with God's testament and destroy and annul his last will. This is one argument of Paul, based on the word "promise," or "testament," and is readily understood; for no one is so stupid that he cannot distinguish between these two — law or commandment, and promise.

[12] The second argument of Paul is based on the words, “God gave it to Abraham by promise.” Here also it is easy for one who is possessed of common sense to perceive there is a marked difference between receiving something as a gift and earning it. What is earned is given because of obligation and debt, as wages, and he who receives it may boast of it, rather than he who gives it, and may insist upon his right. But when something is given for nothing and, as Paul here says, is bestowed freely — out of grace — then there can be no boasting of right or of merit on the part of the recipient. On the contrary, he must praise the goodness and kindness of his benefactor. So Paul concludes: God freely gave the blessing and the inheritance to Abraham by promise. Therefore, Abraham did not earn it by his works; nor was it given to him as a reward, much less to his children.

[13] It is evident enough to even a child that what is earned by works as a reward is not identical with what is promised or bestowed gratis, out of grace and pure free will. There is a distinction between them. God has stopped the mouth of all the world and deprived it of all occasion for boasting that it has received God’s grace by reason of the Law. For he promised and bestowed that as a gift, before the Law or merit through the Law had any existence. In his dealings with his own people, with Abraham and his descendants, God promised to bless the patriarch and all his race and said nothing of any law, works or reward; he based all solely on the coming seed.

[14] In the faith of this promise they lived and died — Abraham himself and his children’s children — till over four hundred and thirty years had elapsed. Then only did God give the Law, institute an outward form of worship, a priesthood, etc., and direct them how to live and govern themselves. They had now become a separate people, released from foreign domination, and brought into their own land, and they needed an external form of government. It was not intended that only now and by means of these gifts they should obtain forgiveness of sins and God’s blessing.

[15] This is the substance of the first part of this epistle. In teaching how we are to be justified before God, Paul would have us distinguish well these two points, promise and law; or again, gift and reward. If we teach that God, out of pure grace, and not because of any law or merit, bestows forgiveness of sins and eternal life, the question at once presents itself: Why is the Law given, or of what use is it? Shall we not perform any good

works? Why do we teach the ten commandments at all? Paul takes up this matter and asks the question, “What then is the Law?” Then he proceeds to discuss at length what is the office and use of the Law, and shows the difference between it and the Gospel. Of this enough has been said elsewhere, in other postils.

Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity. Works of the Flesh and Fruits of the Spirit.

Text: Galatians 5:16-24.

16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. Galatians 5:16-24

Works of the Flesh and Fruits of the Spirit

This Epistle has been treated at length in the complete commentary (Luther's Commentary on Galatians). It exhorts to good works or fruits of faith in those who have the Holy Spirit through faith. And it does so in a way to show that it is not the design of this doctrine to forbid good works or to tolerate and refrain from censuring bad ones, or to prevent the preaching of the Law. On the contrary it shows clearly that God earnestly wills that Christians should flee and avoid the lusts of the flesh, if they would remain in the Spirit. To have and retain the Spirit and faith, and yet to fulfil the lusts of the flesh, are two things that cannot harmonize; for "these," Paul says, "are contrary the one to the other," and there is between them a vehement conflict. They cannot tolerate each other; one must be supreme and cast the other out. For this reason he clearly mentions some works of the flesh which plainly and evidently are not of the Spirit, and immediately concludes that those who commit and practice these are not in a condition to inherit God's kingdom. They have lost the Holy Spirit and faith. But he also shows whence the Christians obtain strength to enable them to resist the lusts of the flesh; namely, from the fact that they have received the Holy Spirit through faith, and from the knowledge that they have a gracious God. Thus their hearts become filled with love and a desire to obey God and to shun sin. Consequently, they resist and refuse to obey the lusts of the flesh, lest they make God angry again. And although in this conflict they still feel their weakness, the Law nevertheless cannot condemn them, because through faith they are and remain in Christ.

**Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.
Conduct of Christians to One
Another in Church Government.
Sowing and Reaping.**

Text: Galatians 5:25-6:10.

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:25-26

1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

4 But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

5 For every man shall bear his own burden.

6 Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:1-10

Church Officers Warned of Vainglory

The chief aim of this epistle text is to instruct those in official authority in the Church. Since Christians are under obligation to honor their pastors and teachers, they are admonished by the apostle to guard against the sin of vain-glory, that those in authority may not become proud nor misuse their office against unity in doctrine and in love, and that they may not despise or pass by the wounded and helpless, as the priest and Levite did. Luke 10:31-32. Finally, Paul exhorts all diligently to do the good and thus serve everyone, as Christ also teaches in the Gospel (Matthew 6:34) that everyone

should do the work of each day and not be anxious about the future. [See the explanation of these verses in Luther's Commentary on the Galatians.]

Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity. Paul's Care and Prayer for the Church That It May Continue to Abide in Christ.

Text: Ephesians 3:13-21.

13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. Ephesians 3:13-21

Paul's Care and Prayer for the Church

[1] Up to this time Paul has been extolling the office of the ministry, which proclaims the Gospel of the New Testament. In lofty and impressive terms he introduces its purpose, power and wisdom — in a word, the great benefits the office effects, since God thereby bestows upon us abundantly all manner of wisdom, strength and blessings, all which things, in heaven or earth, are of his dispensing. The Gospel proclaims to us life from death, righteousness from sin, redemption from hell and all evil, and brings us out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God. So sublime is the whole subject, Paul does not venture to compass it with words but in the loftiest of language suggests much.

[2] In the first part of the text he shows the depth of his concern that the Ephesians should retain the Gospel preaching received from him, not allowing themselves to be torn away from it. To this end he employs two expedients: first, he consoles and admonishes; second, he prays and desires. “Wherefore I ask that ye may not faint at my tribulations for you, which are your glory.”

Paul Consoles His Converts

[3] Having been imprisoned at Rome by order of the emperor, Paul thus consoles his beloved converts at Ephesus, admonishing them to cleave to the doctrine learned from him; not to be frightened from it by beholding his fate, nor permit themselves to be alienated by such comment as this: “This man Paul in his preaching to you made great pretensions to being commissioned of Christ himself, and to outdoing all the other apostles. And you made your boast in him and relied upon him as if he were the only and all-deserving one. Where is he now? What assistance can he render you? There he lies in Rome, by the Jews condemned to death; more than that, he is in the hands of that cruel tyrant, Emperor Nero. Did we not long ago tell you he would meet such fate? Presumably this puts an end to his boastings over every other man.”

[4] To prevent the offense that threatened, Paul writes from his prison, and his message is, in effect, this: “Dear friends, you see I am imprisoned; the devil and the world have me in their hands. This may perhaps alarm you, and rouse in you the evil suspicion, ‘If his doctrine were all right and if he were the great apostle of Christ he claims to be, God would not permit

him to suffer such fate.” For some of the false apostles thus taunted Paul’s disciples. “But I entreat and exhort you,” Paul would say, “not to be offended, or alarmed, not to grow faint, though I am in prison. Whether we be tempted and suffer tribulation, whether we be honored or dishonored, no matter what comes, only cleave to the doctrine I have preached to you — the Gospel, God’s sure Word, as you know.” He reminds them, as before he has done, of that whereunto God has called them, and of what they have received through his preaching.

[5] Such admonition is still, and will ever be, necessary in the Christian community. The weak must endure severe conflicts in the tribulations the Gospel inevitably entails. The trial is especially hard when they must lose their leaders and teachers, and in addition hear the shameful, bitter taunts of the calumniators. We in this day have to expect that some will be offended when teachers are assailed. We should therefore be prepared, and when any of our number fall away from our faith to flatter tyrants and the Pope, and to become liars and knaves, we must individually lay hold of the Gospel in a way to enable us to stand and say: “Not because a certain one has so taught, do I believe. It matters not what becomes of him or what he may be, the doctrine itself is right. This I know, whatever God may permit to befall myself or others because of it.”

The Christian’s Confidence Must Be in God

[6] So have I personally had to do, and must still do. Otherwise I would have been terrified and enervated when I saw the Pope, and bishops, emperors, kings and all the world, opposed to the doctrine they ought to sustain. I would have been overwhelmed, thinking, “They, too, are men and cannot all be followers of the devil.” How could I comfort myself and stand firm unless I were able to say: “Though ten other worlds and everything great, lofty, wise and prudent, and all my dear friends and brethren as well, should turn from me, the doctrine still remains true. It stands; it will not, like men, totter and fall. I will adhere to the Word of God, stand or fall what may.”

[7] The Christian must be discerning enough to strip the individual of his mask — of his great pomp and majesty — and distinguish it from the Word.

He who cannot so do, cannot stand under temptation; let one fall, and he will soon follow suit.

[8] Such is the nature of the Church in its earthly government that human wisdom must stumble thereat; various sects of the offended must rise in opposition to the faith. But God delights to rule, not with the sword or with visible power, but through weakness and in opposition to the devil and the world. Seemingly, he would permit his Church to be utterly overthrown. Guard against and resist offenses as well as we may — and the practice is not without its efficacy — still we must ultimately be driven to say defiantly: “He who established the Church and has to this time preserved it, will continue to protect it. Man would not rule it wisely, but the living Christ is seated upon the throne whereon God placed him, and we shall see who can pull him down and destroy his Church.”

Paul’s Sufferings for the Church’s Good

[9] When the trying hour arrives, we are able to accomplish about as little against the enemy as Paul when he lay in chains powerless to succor a soul. He was obliged to commit his cause to the Lord. At the same time, as a faithful apostle, he ceased not, though removed from his followers, to admonish and warn to the full extent of his power. Well he knew that many false apostles were ready, so sure as he said a word, to pervert it and to fill the ears of the people with their own empty words and poisonous teaching. He elsewhere complains (2 Timothy 1:15) that by the influence of this class all Asia was turned away from him. He had reference to the nearest neighbors of the Ephesians in Asia.

[10] For the sake of affording his converts comfort and strength, Paul proceeds to make his sufferings and tribulations pleasing to them by speaking of these afflictions in unusual and beautiful terms. He presents a view quite opposed to the opinion of the world and the judgment of calumniators. “My sufferings and tribulations,” says Paul, “which to you and the world, viewed in a fleshy way, are most disastrous, really work you no injury nor disadvantage, notwithstanding what the pernicious babblers claim about such trials. Rather, they are beneficial to you and me. Though your enemies seek thus to injure you to the fullest extent, benefits they never foresee will accrue to us. “My sufferings are not for my own sake, but

yours. They work your benefit; it is better for you as it is, than for me to be present and preach to you. And how so? Because I suffer only for the sake of the ministry, for that Gospel I delivered you. I risk my life and all I have that you may hold it fast; such is my earnest desire. I contend for and cleave to, at the risk of my life, that which Christ gave me and enjoined upon me. Thus by my chains and bands I honor and establish the Gospel, that you may be strengthened and may cleave more firmly to it.

[11] “So we shall joyfully transform the tribulation imposed by the world in an attempt to inflict great evils: God will have to pronounce the sentence: ‘Hear, O world, devil, emperor, tyrant! Thou hast imprisoned my apostle Paul for the sake of my godly Christians. What injury have they done thee? What fault committed? With no wrong on their part, thou persecutest them. It is simply because I gave them my Word; therefore thou art opposing and defying me. What shall I say but that thou hast imprisoned and bound, not Paul, but me? Is it not insupportable that a perishable worm, be he emperor or prince, should presume to apprehend God in heaven? But thinkest thou I will remain silent and unprotesting? Thinkest thou I will not break chains, stocks and bands, and give command: Hold thou, devil and tyrant, and submit! Let me rule, substituting for one Paul, ten; and for one Church at Ephesus establishing thirty, yes, a hundred.’”

[12] And as in Paul’s time, so today: when our enemies get hold of an evangelical preacher, either he must secretly be drowned or murdered, or he must publicly be hanged or burned. Why is it? Because of the Christians to whom he has taught his doctrine. For a while God looks on serenely. He says: “Beloved lords, be not enraged. Know you whom you have apprehended and murdered? It is I, the Divine Majesty. It was not their own word and command but mine which these preachers taught, and my Christians believed. You cannot deny the fact. I must, then, consider how to secure myself against your wrath. How shall I do it? Indeed, by way of returning your favors and kindnesses, I must so arrange that where one town had a minister and the Gospel, ten, yes twenty, towns must have their pastor and preachers. I will, O Pope and bishops, invade your own dioceses and you must tolerate and accept the Gospel, whether to your joy or your grief. If you begin to rave, I will give you cause for alarm, for you shall be overthrown, bishops, hats and all.”

[13] Note, when Paul says he suffers for the Ephesians, he means that his suffering is for their profit, to teach them they have nothing to fear in suffering. They, not he, are the subjects of concern in this matter. His pains are not merely those of Paul — upon whom not so much depends — but of an apostle or preacher of the Church of Christ. When the latter name is associated with the suffering, when it is not John or Peter who is cast into prison — that God might tolerate — but a minister of the Church, then the deed is a too gross jesting with the majesty of God; it is tempting him too far, yes apprehending him.

[14] It was necessary that Paul give his converts this admonition: “Dear children, fear not. Do not be alarmed at my arrest and intended execution. Let our enemies put forth their utmost effort. You shall see how I will rend the cords and burst the prison, humiliating them until they lie in ashes; the place of one resister of the Gospel will be filled by ten who preach it.” Christ Persecuted in Christians Since Paul’s enemies refuse instruction and will not cease their raging, since they refuse to learn against whom they rage, he must make known to them who is the object of their persecution. It is neither Paul nor an apostle, but he to whom it was said (Psalm 110:1), “Sit thou at my right hand.” It is a perilous thing to take liberties with him. He is now seated where he will brook no suffering. The enemies of the Christians must behold such things as did the Jews who delivered Paul into the Emperor’s hands, and as the Romans witnessed. Soon after Paul’s execution, Jerusalem lay in ashes, and not a great while after, the city of Rome was destroyed. For when Christ was oppressed, when in the person of his apostles and martyrs he was seized and put to death, he had no alternative but to destroy a whole city. And Germany may expect a similar fate.

No Man Can Merit Eternal Life for Another

[15] It is unnecessary here to reply to those wicked and illiterate dolts, the Papists and Anabaptist factions, who explain Paul’s words, “my tribulations for you,” and similar passages, as teaching that one Christian can by his sufferings merit or aid in the salvation of others. Paul does not say, “My tribulations for you are designed to secure for you forgiveness of sins and salvation.” He clearly declares, as the Scriptures everywhere do, that only Christ’s sufferings are thus effective and for all men. Paul’s thought may

well be expressed — and every minister may say the same — in these words: “My preaching and my suffering are for your sake.” Just as a parent may say to a child, “I must do or endure this for you.” True, works wrought and sufferings endured for another’s sake are productive of the good and comfort of that one or of many, but the worker or sufferer does not thereby merit, either for himself or another, God’s grace and eternal life. No, these things demand the offices of a being of another order — Christ. He through his sufferings exterminates your sins, and through his death gives you life. Then again, Paul is addressing those already Christians and having forgiveness of sins and all the requirements of a Christian; yet he suffers for them; that is, for their good — that in proportion as his enemies seek to oppose the Gospel, its influence may be widened and the faith of his followers strengthened.

[16] In the effort to comfort and strengthen the Ephesians, Paul yet further glorifies and extols his tribulations in the words “which are your glory.” What unheard of talk is this? Is it not much rather, as reason dictates and as all the world affirms, a disgrace to his followers that he lies there in prison? What greater dishonor can Christians suffer than to have their ministers and pastors — their instructors and consolers — shamefully arrested? So it seems to the world, it is true; but I tell you, in God’s sight and in reality, this trial is a great honor to you, one of which you may proudly boast. This very disgrace and provocation you may turn squarely to your good, saying: “From the very fact of our disgrace, I know the doctrine is true and divine. For it is the lot of the Word of God and of salutary doctrine, together with the supporters of the same, to be defamed and persecuted by the world and the devil.” Such persecution is but glory and honor to Christians. Paul says in Romans 5:3, “We rejoice in our tribulations.” In other words, we regard them as glorious, beneficial, precious, blessed.

Christians To Rejoice in Persecutions

[17] Christians should not, and cannot, have their glory in the things the world esteems and honors; for the world will not, nor can it, honor even God and his Word. Christ’s followers, then, should not be terrified at such treatment as Paul received nor feel disgraced. Let them rather rejoice, deriving comfort and glory therefrom, as did the apostles. We read (Acts

4:13) of their boldness, and (Acts 5:41) that they rejoiced in being “counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name.” So it fared with Christ himself, and Christians ought to be grieved if it be otherwise with them and if the world regard them in a kindly way. In proportion as the world persecutes them and heaps upon them its malice, should they rejoice. Let them accept persecution as a good indication, regarding themselves blessed, as Christ teaches in Matthew 5:11. So much for the first part of our text; now follows the second: “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father [of our Lord Jesus Christ], from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.”

Preaching Must Be Followed by Practice

[18] Having comforted his followers concerning his tribulations, Paul tells them it is his earnest petition, his longing, that God would grant them power to cleave in firm faith to the Gospel, not forsaking it or growing weary when they have to endure affronts and tribulations, but firmly resisting these. It is not enough merely to accept the Gospel, or even to preach it. Acceptance must be followed by that spiritual power which renders faith firm and manifests steadfastness in conflicts and temptations; for “the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power,” as Paul says, Corinthians 4:20. There must be a motive force consisting of the inner belief of the heart and the outward proofs of faith: not mere speaking, but doing: not mere talking, but living. Conditions must be such that the Word does not simply remain on the tongue and in the ears but becomes operative and accomplishes something. In the Old Testament dispensation, Moses preached much indeed, and the people practiced little; but here Paul desires that much be done, and little said. He would not have the Gospel preached in vain, but desires that it accomplish the object of its revelation.

[19] Note how Paul devotes himself to the welfare of the Christian community. He sets an example, to us ministers in particular, of how to affect the good of the people. But we do not rightly heed his example. We imagine it sufficient to hear the Gospel and be able to discourse about it; we stop at the mere knowledge of it; we never avail ourselves of the Gospel’s power in the struggles of life. Unquestionably, the trouble is, we do not earnestly pray. We ought constantly to come to God with great longing, entreating him day and night to give the Word power to move men’s hearts. David says (Psalm 68:33), “Lo, he uttereth his voice, a mighty voice.”

[20] Not only preachers, but all Christians, should constantly entreat the God who grants knowledge to grant also efficacy; should beseech him that the Word may not pass with the utterance, but may manifest itself in power. The prevailing complaint at present is that much preaching obtains, but no practice; that the people are shamefully rude, cold and indolent, and less active than ever, while at the same time they enjoy the strong, clear light of revelation concerning all right and wrong in the world. Well may we pray, then, as Paul does here. He says, in effect: “You are well supplied: the Word is richly proclaimed to you — abundantly poured out upon you. But I bend my knees to God, praying that he may add his blessing to the Word and grant you to behold his honor and praise and to be firmly established, that the Word may grow in you and yield fruit.”

[21] Feelingly does Paul speak of praying for his followers. He seems to say: “I must lie here imprisoned, not privileged to be with you or to aid you in any way but by bending my knees — that is, entreating and imploring God earnestly and in deep humility — to the end that God may grant you, may affect in you, what neither myself nor any other human being can accomplish — what I could not do even were I free and ever present with you.”

True Prayer Consists Not in Outward Things

[22] Observe, the apostle alludes to his prayer by naming its outward expression — bending the knees. But the external posture, if accompanied by nothing else, is sheer hypocrisy. When prayer is genuine, possessing the fire by which it is kindled, prompted by a sincere heart which recognizes its need and likewise the blessings that are ours as proclaimed in the Word, and when faith in God’s Word — in his promise — revives, then the individual will be possessed with a fervor prompting him to fall upon his knees and pray for strength and for the power of the Spirit. When the Spirit of prayer is enkindled and burns within the heart, the body will responsively assume the proper attitude; involuntarily, eyes and hands will be upraised and knees bended. Witness the examples of Moses, David and even Christ himself. When we pray with glowing hearts, external gestures will take care of themselves. They are prompted by the Spirit, and therefore are not to be denounced. If assumed, unbidden of the Spirit, they are hypocritical; as, for instance, when one presumes outwardly to serve God and perform good

works while his heart is far away. The prophet says (Isaiah 29:13), “This people draw nigh unto me, and with their mouth and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me?”

[23] By the declaration, “I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” Paul establishes the doctrine that no one should presume to speak to God, to entreat him for any favor, unless approaching, as Paul does here, in the name of “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” For Christ is our sole Mediator, and no one need expect to be heard unless he approaches the Father in the name of that Mediator and confess him Lord given of God as intercessor for us and ruler of our bodies and souls. Prayer according to these conditions is approved. Strong faith, however is necessary to lay hold of the comforting Word, picturing God in our hearts as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[24] The statement that Christ is our Lord is very comforting, though we have made it terrifying by regarding Christ as a stern and angry judge, But the fact is, he is Lord for the sole purpose of securing us against harsh lords, tyrants, the devil, the world, death, sin and every sort of misfortune. We are his inheritance, and therefore he will espouse our cause, deliver us from violence and oppression of all kinds and better our condition. The name “Lord,” then, is altogether lovable and comforting to us who believe, and gives us confidence of heart. But still more comforting is it to know that our God, our Lord, is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The name “Lord” stands for the complete Godhead, who gives himself to us. Therefore, all we ask in this name must be abundantly bestowed. Naught is here for me but real help and pure grace. For God designs to have me his child in Christ, placed above all things temporal and eternal.

God Our Father

[25] Paul further declares that God is not merely a father, but the true Father, “from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.” Earthly fathers are so called because in a flesh and blood way they have begotten us, or on account of their age and their claim to honor. It is the universal custom to apply the term “father” to an old master. In 2 Kings 5:13, for instance, the servants of Naaman called their lord “father.” Paul’s thought

is: “All fatherhood on earth is but a semblance, a shadow, a painted image, in comparison with the divine Fatherhood of God.”

[26] But reason can never see it so. And only by the Spirit’s work can the heart recognize the fact. Reason may go so far as to regard God an angry and terrible judge, one who makes the world, even hell itself, too narrow for it and leaves it without a foothold. But it is impossible for natural reason to call God a father in sincerity; much less to regard him the divine Father, preeminent over all who bear the name of “father” in heaven or on earth, of whom all other fathers are as mirror reflections.

[27] Think of the attitude of an earthly father toward his child, and of the child toward his father. Even where actual parenthood is lacking, the name engenders a confidence affectionate and pleasing enough to kindle the brightest anticipations of great good to be received. Now, if the sincere, loyal designs of earthly fathers for their children are mere pretense compared to the blessed purposes of our heavenly Father, what must we look for from this heavenly Father, this Father above all others? Paul would teach us to look at the proportions, and from the confidence we repose in our natural fathers estimate the character of God as a Father and what we may expect from him.

[28] He who can put his trust in God, who can confidently rely upon him and sincerely cry, “Thou art my beloved Father!” need not fear to ask anything of God, or that God will at all deny him. His own heart will tell him that his petitions will be granted. Because of the strength of his confidence, he cannot fail to secure his heart’s desires. Thus God himself teaches us to break open heaven and lay him bare before our eyes that we may see who this Father is. [Thus Paul is confident what he asks is pleasing to God and will be granted. If we did the same we would, doubtless, have a like experience. There are still people who pray. It would be a blessing if there were many more. Then the Gospel would make greater progress and impart to us greater power. It is evident, God be praised, that all who rage against the Gospel must be put to shame. The more they rage, the more the Gospel spreads, and all without our help or counsel, only because God awakens hearts to pray that it may prosper, even without our help. The more fervently we pray, the greater is God’s pleasure to hear.]

[29] What is the nature of the prayer Paul here presents? It is the same as the Lord's Prayer, being particularly identical with the first, second and third petitions. In words of different sound but implying the very same thing, Paul briefly embraces these petitions — the hallowing of God's name and Word in our midst, and the destruction of the devil's kingdom and all evil — whatever is opposed to the Word and will of God. He says: "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, that ye may be strengthened with power."

God Lavish in His Blessings

[30] Sublime words are these, wrung from a fervent heart. Evidently, in the effort to express himself fully, clearly and in language worthy of his subject, the apostle finds words too weak and rare. The fervor of his heart can be but poorly portrayed. By the phrase, "according to the riches of his glory," Paul means to say: "Such is the greatness of God's glory, it deserves the title of riches. For it is conducive to God's honor and praise that he gives abundantly." These words reveal the nature of God, proclaiming him the source whence we may expect all good, and all aid in time of need. He is God of all the world. The reason the world has made many gods, has invoked many saints, is because it looks to them for aid and benefit. The Scriptures term "gods" certain individuals who do good and lend assistance to their fellows. God says to Moses (Exodus 7:1), "I have made thee as God [a god] to Pharaoh."

[31] But God, because of the abundance and lavishness of his gifts, is entitled to greater honor and glory. He is the true God, to whom alone belongs all glory; yea, the riches of glory. He pours out his blessings abundantly and above measure; he is the source of all blessings in heaven and on earth. Even his most inferior creatures — water, air, the earth and its products — are so generously bestowed that we can appropriate only an infinitesimal part of them. Yet in our blindness and stupidity we do not see, yea, we utterly ignore the fact that God is the giver of these. Now, how much more generous is God in spiritual blessings! He has freely given himself — poured out himself — for us, and also gifts and blessings of the highest order. He has illumined us with a light bright enough to reveal to us the real character of the world, the devil and the angels. Yes, to show to us God's purposes, present, past and future. Thus we have all wisdom and all

power over sin, the devil and death, being lords of all creatures. In a word, our riches are inexpressibly great.

[32] Paul employs forcible words to record his prayer here. He has firm confidence in God that the petition must be efficacious, must penetrate the clouds and open heaven. He does not say that God looks upon our merit and worthiness and for the sake of these grants our requests; but for the sake of the riches of his glory. We are not worthy his favors, but his glory is worthy of our recognition, and we are to honor him because he gratuitously lavishes his blessings upon us, that his name alone may be hallowed. Only with a recognition of these facts may prayer be offered if it is to avail before God. If God were to consider our merit, very small would be the portion due us. But if we are to be richly blessed, it must come about through our recognition of pure grace as the source of our gifts, and our praise of God's exceeding glory.

[33] But what are the blessings for which Paul's prayer entreats? Something more than continuance of the Word with his followers, though it is a great and good gift even to have the Word thoroughly taught: he prays that the heart may taste the Word and that it may be effectual in the life. Thus the apostle contrasts a knowledge of the Word with the power of the Word. Many have the knowledge, but few the impelling and productive power that the results may be as we teach. Hence they are criticized and not without reason. But our enemies cannot censure and reproach us to greater extent than to say that we preach and accept much good doctrine to no purpose; that no one practices it and profits thereby; that in fact we are morally worse than before we heard the doctrines, and consequently it would have been better had things remained as they were.

We Should Pray for the Power of the Word

[34] What answer shall we make? This: In the first place, considering our unsatisfactory condition and the lack of power with the Word, we have great reason to pray with the earnestness Paul's example teaches. And secondly, though our enemies see little improvement and few fruits of the Gospel, it is not theirs to judge. They think we ought to do nothing but work miracles — raising the dead and bordering the Christian's walk with roses, until naught but holiness obtains everywhere. This being the case, where

would be the need to pray? We cannot, nor dare we, pray for what we already have, but must thank God for it. But, since Paul and other Scripture authorities command us to pray, a defect somewhere in our strength is indicated. Otherwise why say they so much about it? Thus Paul himself acknowledges the Ephesians were weak. He complains of the same weakness in other Epistles and especially in those to the Corinthians. Everywhere he urges them to do and live as they had been taught. The only reason Paul advocates this is that he saw, as we now see, that everywhere they fail, and things are not as they should be. In spite of the fact that not everyone's conduct is satisfactory, some do mend their ways; and the happy condition obtains that many consciences are assured and many former evils are now avoided. If the two sides of the question were carefully compared, we would see much advantage with us not now noticed. Again, even though we are somewhat weak, is that any reason for saying all is lost? Further, there is naught else but filth and corruption in the ranks of our enemies, which they would gladly adorn with our weakness even. But they must look upon their way as excellent and ours as odious.

[35] Let them go on with their judging. We admit we are not all strong, but it is also true that were there no weakness in our ranks, we would have no need of prayer, perseverance, exhortation and daily preaching. In condemning the Gospel because of our admitted weakness, something we ourselves confess, our enemies are themselves judged before God by their judging us. It is possible for me to be truly in the kingdom of grace and at the same time outwardly weak enough to be regarded of men as a knave. My faith is not apparent to men, but God sees it and I am myself sensible of it. You meantime erroneously judge me by my outward conduct, thus bringing judgment upon yourself. We are aware of, and also lament, our weakness and imperfection. Hence we cry and groan, and pray to God to grant us strength and power.

World Sees Not Inner Marks of Christians

[36] A third answer to our enemies is: We are certain that wherever the Word of God is proclaimed, the fruits of the same must exist. We have the Word of God, and therefore the Spirit of God must be with us. And where the Spirit is, faith must obtain, however weak it may be. Though visible evidence may be lacking, yet inevitably there must be some among us who

daily pray, while we may not be aware of it. It is reasonable to be expected that our enemies should judge erroneously, because they look for outward evidences of Christianity, which are not forthcoming. The Word is too sublime to pass under our judgment; it is the province of the Word to judge us. The world, however, while unwilling to be judged and convicted by us, essays to judge and convict the Word of God. Here God steps in. It would be a pity for the worldly to see a godly Christian, so God blinds them and they miss his kingdom. As Isaiah says (Isaiah 26:10): “In the land of uprightness will he deal wrongfully and will not behold the majesty of Jehovah.” For this reason, few real Christians come under the observation of cavilers; the latter, in general, observe fools and fanatics, at whom they maliciously stumble and take offense. They are unworthy to behold God’s honor in a godly Christian upon whom the Lord has poured out himself in fullness of blessing.

[37] Let the real Christian come into the presence of [the caviler, stand before his very eyes, and the caviler will not see him. Let the fault-finder hear that one leads an irreproachable life and he will say: “Heretics have behaved similarly, but under a good appearance concealed poison.” Let one be refractory and reckless, and he must be a knave. Whatever we do, they are not satisfied. If we pipe, they will not dance; if we mourn, they will not lament. Neither sweet nor sour appeals to them. Wisdom must permit herself to be schooled and governed by these cavilers, as Christ says in Matthew 11:19. Thus God confounds and shames the world; while all the time tolerating its judgment of himself, he is ever careful to have the Gospel inculcated, even though the worldly burst with rage. I say these things to teach us to be careful not to join the caviler in judging presumptuously the work and Word of God. Notwithstanding our weakness, we are yet certain the kingdom of God is in our midst so long as we have his Word and daily pray for its efficacy and for an increase of our faith, as the following words recommend: “That ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man.”

The Spirit Imparts Real Strength

[38] The apostle here speaks with varied expression. He leaves little honor and glory, as it were, for free will, but desires for his followers the heavenly power imparted through the Holy Spirit. There is also a power of the world,

and a spirit — the devil, the prince of the world, who blinds and hardens men's hearts. He boasts of himself and imparts to men a spirit of daring in his purpose to suppress and exterminate Christian doctrine. But while worldings are courageous and daring, so are Christians, and the latter are greater and far more powerful through the Holy Spirit, and are undaunted by the world, the devil, death and all kinds of misfortune. This is real spiritual strength. The Hebrew word "spirit" might well be rendered "bold, undaunted courage." Spiritual strength is not the strength of muscle and bone; it is true courage — boldness of heart. Weakness, on the contrary, is faint-heartedness, timidity, lack of courage.

[39] Paul's meaning, then, is: "I desire for you, and pray God to grant you, that bold, dauntless courage and that strong, cheerful spirit which will not be terrified by poverty, shame, sin, the devil or death, but is confident that nothing can harm us and we will never be in need." The courage of the world — the spirit of the world — holds out only until exhaustion of the stores whereon it relies. As the saying is, "Wealth gives temporal boldness, but the soul must rely on God alone." The boldness resulting from riches and worldly power is haughty and makes its boast in earthly things. But the soul has no hoarded treasure. In God alone it braves every evil; it has a courage and heart very different from that of the world. This is the strength for which Paul prays on behalf of his converts, a strength not inherent in flesh and blood. The possessor thereof does not rely and build on his own powers and riches, nor upon any human help and support. This strength dwells in the inner man. It is the trust of the dauntless, cheerful heart in God's grace and assistance, and in these alone. The heart which so trusts has no fear. It possesses by faith abundance of riches and pleasures — God himself with all his blessings. At the same time, to human sight only want, weakness and terror may be apparent. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

[40] The Holy Spirit brings Christ into the heart and teaches it to know him. He imparts warmth and courage through faith in Christ. Paul everywhere intimates that no man should presume to approach God otherwise than through Christ, the one Mediator. Now, if Christ dwells in my heart and regulates my entire life, it matters not though my faith be weak. Christ is not mere bone but also flesh. Yes, he has blisters and boils and sins of which he is not ashamed, notwithstanding the eminent saints

may hold their noses thereat. And where he dwells all fullness is, let the individual be weak or strong as God permits.

Christ Embraced Only by the Heart

[41] For Christ to dwell in the heart is simply for the heart to know him; in other words, to understand who he is and what we are to expect from him — that he is our Savior, through whom we may call God our Father and may receive the Spirit who imparts courage to brave all trials. It is thus that Christ dwells with us, in our hearts. Only so can he be embraced; for he is not an inanimate thing, but the living God. How does man lay hold of the Savior in the heart? Not by embracing him intellectually. It is accomplished only by living faith. Christ will not permit himself to be received by works, nor to be apprehended with mental vision; he will consent only to be embraced by the heart. If your faith be true and on a firm foundation, you have and feel Christ in your heart and are aware of all he thinks and does in heaven and on earth — how he rules through his Word and his Spirit, and the attitude of those who have Christ and those who have him not.

[42] Paul desires Christ to be efficacious in the hearts of his followers unto the full realization of the promises of the Word — liberation from sin and death, and assurance of grace and eternal life. It is impossible for the heart having such experience to be other than firm and courageous to oppose the terrors of the devil and the world. But the heart which has not yet arrived at this point is here advised what course to take, namely, to pray God for such faith and strength, and to avail himself of the prayers of others to the same end. So much in regard to faith; now follows the mention of love. “That ye, being rooted and grounded in love.”

Love, The Expression of Faith

[43] This is an unusual way of speaking. Is it not in faith that we are to be rooted, engrafted and grounded? Why, then, does Paul here substitute “love?” I reply: Faith, it is true, is the essential thing, but love shows whether or no faith is real and the heart confident and courageous in God. Where one has an unquestioning confidence that God is his Father, necessarily, be his faith never so weak, that faith must find expression in word and deed. He will serve his neighbor in teaching and in extending to

him a helping hand. This is what Paul calls being rooted and grounded in love — having the conscious experience of possessing true faith. Love is the test that determines the reality of faith. Peter says (2 Peter 1:10), “Give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure.” That is, proceed to good works that others may see and you experience that you have true faith. Until you do, you will always be uncertain, vacillating, superficial in heart, not rooted and grounded. So by these two clauses Paul teaches, first, that we should have in our hearts genuine faith toward God; and second, that faith should find expression in loving service to one’s neighbor. “May be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth.”

True Christians Find Christ Everywhere

[44] These words represent another feature of the apostle’s desire for his Christians to be established and comforted in God through faith, and rooted and grounded in love toward their neighbors. “When you are thus strengthened,” he would say, “and are perseveringly pressing forward, you will be able to grasp with all saints the four parts, to increase therein and to appreciate them more and more.” Faith alone effects this apprehension. Love is not the moving force here, but it contributes by making faith manifest.

[45] Some teachers would make these words reflect and measure the holy cross. But Paul does not say a word about the cross. He simply says, in effect: “That you may apprehend all things; may see the length and breadth, the height and depth, of Christ’s kingdom.” This condition obtains when my heart has reached the point where Christ cannot make the spiritual life too long or too wide for me to follow, nor high enough or deep enough to cause my fall from him or his Word; the point where I may be satisfied that wherever I go he is, and that he rules in all places, however long or broad, deep or high, the situation from either a temporal or eternal point of view. No matter how long or wide I measure, I find him everywhere. David says (Psalm 139:7-8): “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there.” Christ rules eternally. His length and breadth, his depth and height, are unlimited. If I descend into hell, my heart and my faith tell me he is there.

[46] The sum of the matter is this: Depressed or exalted, circumscribed in whatsoever way, dragged hither or thither, I still find Christ. For he holds in his hands everything in heaven or on earth, and all are subject to him — angels, the devil, the world, sin, death and hell. Therefore, so long as he dwells in my heart, I have courage, wherever I go, I cannot be lost. I dwell where Christ my Lord dwells. This, however, is a situation impossible to reason. Should reason ascend a yard above the earth or descend a yard below, or be deprived of the tangible things of the present, it would have to despair. We Christians are, through Christ, better fortified. We are assured that he dwells everywhere, be it in honor or dishonor, hunger, sorrow, illness, imprisonment, death or life, blessing or affliction. It is Paul's desire for the Ephesians that God give them grace and strength to have such heart apprehension of his kingdom. He concludes the details of his prayer in these words: "And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God."

[47] He means: "I desire you, in addition to having faith and apprehending the four proportions of Christ's kingdom, to know the love of Christ we should have — the love Christ bears toward us, and the love we owe our neighbor. This knowledge transcends all other, even familiarity with the Gospel; for, know as much as you may, your knowledge will avail little or nothing without love.

[48] Paul's desire, briefly summed up, is that the faith of Christians may be strengthened unto efficacy, and that love may be warm and fervent, and the heart filled with the fullness of God. "Filled unto all the fullness of God" means, if we follow the Hebrew, filled with everything God's bounty supplies, full of God, adorned with his grace and the gifts of his Spirit — the Spirit who gives us steadfastness, illuminates us with his light, lives within us his life, saves us with his salvation, and with his love enkindles love in us; in short, it means having God himself and all his blessings dwelling in us in fullness and being effective to make us wholly divine — not so that we possess merely something of God, but all his fullness.

Christian Perfection

[49] Much has been written about the way we are to become godlike. Some have constructed ladders whereby we are to ascend to heaven, and others

similar things. But this is all patchwork. In this passage is designated the truest way to attain godlikeness. It is to become filled to the utmost with God, lacking in no particular; to be completely permeated with him until every word, thought and deed, the whole life in fact, be utterly godly.

[50] But let none imagine such fullness can be attained in this life. We may indeed desire it and pray for it, like Paul here, but we will not find a man thus perfect. We stand, however, upon the fact that we desire such perfection and groan after it. So long as we live in the flesh, we are filled with the fullness of Adam. Hence it is necessary for us continually to pray God to replace our weakness with courage, and to put into our hearts his Spirit to fill us with grace and strength and rule and work in us absolutely. We ought all to desire this state for one another. To this end may God grant us grace. Amen.

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity. Ephesians 4:1-6. Exhortation to Live According to the Christian Calling, and in the Unity of the Spirit.

Text: Ephesians 4:1-6.

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,
2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;
3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. Ephesians 4:1-6

The Christian Calling and Unity

[1] This, too, is a beautiful sermon, delivered by Paul to the Ephesians, concerning the good works of Christians, who believe and are obedient to the doctrine of the Gospel. In the knowledge of good works Paul desires Christians to grow and increase, as we learned in the epistle for last Sunday. The ground of all doctrine, of all right living, the supreme and eternal treasure of him who is a Christian in the sight of God, is faith in Christ. It

alone secures forgiveness of sins and makes us children of God. Now, where this faith is, fruits should follow as evidence that Christians in their lives honor and obey God. They are necessary for God's glory and for the Christian's own honor and eternal reward before him.

[2] Paul, remembering the imprisonment and tribulations he suffered because of the Gospel and for the advantage, as he before said, of the Ephesians, gives the admonition here. He would have them, in return for his sufferings, honor the Gospel in their lives. First he names a general rule of life for Christians. "To walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called."

The Christian Calling

[3] The chief thing that should influence a Christian's outward walk is the remembrance of his calling and appointment by God. He should be mindful of why he is called a Christian and live consistently. He must shine before the world; that is, through his life and God's work, the Word and the name of Christ the Lord must be exalted. Christ exhorts his disciples: "Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:16.

[4] Similarly, Paul would say: "You have received God's grace and his Word and are a blessed people. In Christ all your needs are blessedly supplied. Be mindful of this and remember you are called to a far different and vastly higher life than others know. Show by your manner of living that you seek a higher good than the world seeks — indeed, that you have received far greater blessings. Let your lives honor and glorify the Lord who has given you such blessings. Give no occasion for dishonoring your treasured faith, or for scorning his Word. Rather, influence men by your godly walk and good works to believe in Christ and to glorify him."

[5] Let the Christian know his earthly life is not unto himself, nor for his own sake; his life and work here belong to Christ, his Lord. Hence must his walk be such as shall contribute to the honor and glory of his Master, whom he should so serve that he may be able to say with Paul, not only with respect to the spiritual life — the life of faith and of righteousness by grace — but also with respect to its fruits — the outward conduct: "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." Galatians 2:20. The Christian's manner

of life may be styled “walking in Christ”; yes, as Paul elsewhere has it (Romans 13:14), “putting on” the Lord Jesus Christ, like a garment or an ornament. The world is to recognize Christ by his shining in us.

[6] But the so-called Christian life that does not honor Christ makes its sin the more heinous for the name it bears. Every sin the people of God commit is a provocation of Jehovah; not only in the act of disobedience itself, but also in the transgression of the second commandment. The enormity of the sin is magnified by the conditions that make it a blasphemy of God’s name and an occasion of offense to others. Paul says in Romans 2:24: “For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” So a Christian should, in his life, by all means guard the honor of God — of Christ. He must take heed that he be not guilty of blaspheming that name and of doing wickedness. The devil, aided by the world, construes every act, when possible, to reflect upon God’s honor and glory. His purpose is to manifest his bitter hatred against Christ and the Word; also to injure the Church by charging offenses, thus deterring unbelievers from embracing the Gospel and causing the weak to fall away.

[7] To guard against such disaster, Christians should be particularly careful to give, in their conduct, no occasion for offense, and to value the name and honor of their God too highly to permit blasphemy of them. They should prefer to lose their own honor, their wealth, their physical wellbeing, even their lives, rather than that these, their most precious possessions and greatest blessings, should suffer disgrace. Let them remember that upon keeping sacred the name and honor of God depends their own standing before God and men. God promises (1 Samuel 2:30), “Them that honor me! will honor.” But pursuing the opposite course, Christians bring upon themselves God’s sternest wrath and effect their own rejection and shame. For he says further: “They that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” And in the second commandment God threatens certain and terrible punishment to abusers of his name; that is, to them who do not employ it to his honor and praise.

[8] Well may every Christian examine his own life to see if he is careful to guard against offense to the Gospel and to regulate his words and conduct by God’s first commandment, making them contribute to the honor and praise of the divine name and the holy Gospel. Weighty indeed and well calculated to cause complaint are the sins to which every Christian is liable

in this respect; well may he avoid them lest he heap to himself the wrath of God. Especially need we be careful in these last and evil times when the Gospel is everywhere suppressed by great offenses. Man was created to be the image of God, that through this his image God might himself be expressed. God's image, then, should be reflected in the lives of men as a likeness in a glass, and a Christian can have no higher concern than to live without dishonor to the name of God.

Admonition to Special Christian Virtues

[9] Such is the first part of Paul's admonition concerning the general life of Christians. He goes on to make special mention of several good works which Christians should diligently observe: humility, meekness, longsuffering, preservation of the unity of the Spirit, and so on. These have been specially treated before, in other epistle lessons, particularly those from Peter. Humility, for instance — mentioned in today's lesson — is taken up the third Sunday after Trinity; patience and meekness, the second Sunday after Easter, and the fifth Sunday after Trinity.

[10] The text here presents good works sufficient to occupy all Christians in every station of life; we need not seek other nor better ones. Paul would not impose upon Christians peculiar works, something unrelated to the ordinary walks of life, as certain false saints taught and practiced. These teachers commanded separation from society, isolation in the wilderness, the establishment of monkeries and the performance of self-appointed works. Such works they exalted as superior to ordinary Christian virtues. Indeed, their practice amounted to rejection of the latter, and they actually regarded them as dangerous. The Papacy has in the past shamelessly styled the observance of Christian good works as worldly living, and men were compelled to believe they would find it hard to reach heaven unless they became ecclesiasts — for they regarded only the monks and priests worthy — or at least made themselves partakers of the works of ecclesiasts by purchasing their merits. But Paul — in fact, the entire Scriptures — teaches no other good works than God enjoins upon all men in the Ten Commandments, and which pertain to the common conditions of life. True, these make not such brilliant show in the eyes of the world as do the self-appointed ceremonials constituting the divine service of hypocrites; nevertheless, they are true, worthy, good and profitable works in the sight of

God and man. What can be more acceptable to God and advantageous to man than a life lived, in its own calling, in the way that contributes to the honor of God, and that by its example influences others to love God's Word and to praise his name? Moreover, what virtues, of all man possesses, serve him better than humility, meekness, patience and harmony of mind?

[11] Now, where is a better opportunity for the exercise of these virtues than amidst the conditions in which God destined us to live — in society, where we mingle with one another? Upon these conditions, self-appointed, unusual lives and monastic holiness have no bearing. For what other person is profited by your entering a cloister, making yourself peculiar, refusing to live as your fellows do? Who is benefited by your cowl, your austere countenance, your hard bed? Who comes to know God or to have a peaceful conscience by such practices on your part, or who is thereby influenced to love his neighbor? Indeed, how can you serve your neighbor by such a life? How manifest your love, humility, patience and meekness if you are unwilling to live among men? if you so strenuously adhere to your self-appointed orders as to allow your neighbor to suffer want before you would dishonor your rules?

[12] Astonishing fact, that the world is merged in darkness so great it utterly disregards the Word of God and the conditions he designed for our daily living. If we preach to the world faith in God's Word, the world receives it as heresy. If we speak of works instituted of God himself and conditions of his own appointing, the world regards it as idle talk; it knows better. To live a simple Christian life in one's own family, to faithfully perform the duties of a manservant or maidservant — "Oh, that," it says, "is merely the following of worldly pursuits. To do good works you must set about it in a different way. You must creep into a corner, don a cap, make pilgrimages to some saint; then you may be able to help yourself and others to gain heaven." If the question be asked, "Why do so? where has God commanded it?" there is, according to their theory, really no answer to make but this: Our Lord God knows nothing about the matter; he does not understand what good works are. How can he teach us? He must himself be tutored by these remarkably enlightened saints.

Fruits of Original Sin

[13] But all this error results from that miserable inherent plague, that evil termed “original sin.” It is a blind wickedness, refusing to recognize the Word of God and his will and work, but introducing instead things of its own heathenish imagination. It draws such a thick covering over eyes, ears and hearts that it renders men unable to perceive how the simple life of a Christian, of husband or wife, of the lower or the higher walks of life, can be beautified by honoring the Word of God. Original sin will not be persuaded to the faithful performance of the works that God testifies are well pleasing to him when wrought by believers in Christ. In a word, universal experience proves that to perform really good works is a special and remarkable grace to which few attain; while the great mass of souls aspiring after holiness vainly busy themselves with worthless works, being deceived into thinking them great, and thus make themselves, as Paul says, “unto every good work reprobate.” Titus 1:16. This fruitless effort is one evil result of the error of human ideas of holiness and the practice of self-chosen works.

[14] Another error is the hindrance — yes, the suppression and destruction — of the beautiful virtues of humility, meekness, patience and spiritual harmony here commended of Paul. At the same time the devil is given occasion to encourage fiendish blasphemy. In every instance where the Word of God is set aside for humanly-appointed works, differing views and theories must obtain. One introduces this and another that, each striving for first recognition; then a third endeavors to improve upon their doctrine. Consequently, divisions and factions ensue as numerous as the teachers and their creeds; as exemplified in the countless sects to this time prevalent in Popedom, and in the factious spirits of all time. Under such circumstances, none of the virtues like humility, meekness, patience, love, can have place. Opposite conditions must prevail, since harmony of hearts and minds is lacking. One teacher haughtily rejects another, and if his own opinions fail to receive recognition and approval, he displays anger, envy and hatred. He will neither affiliate with nor tolerate him whose practices accord not with his own.

[15] On the other hand, the Christian life, the life of faith with its fruits, controlled as it is by the Word of God, is in every way conducive to the preservation of love and harmony, and to the promotion of all virtues. It interferes not with the God-ordained relations of life and their attendant

obligations upon men — the requirements of social order, the duties of father and mother, of son and daughter, master and mistress, servant and maid. All life's relations are confirmed by it as valid and its duties as vital. The Christian faith bids each person in his life, and all in common, to be diligent in the works of love, humility, patience. It teaches that one be not intolerant of another, but rather render him his due, remembering that he whose condition in life is the most insignificant can be equally upright and blessed before God with the occupant of the most significant position. Again, it teaches that man must have patience with the weakness of his fellow, being mindful of how others must bear with his own imperfections. In short, it says one must manifest to another the love and kindness he would have that other extend to him.

[16] To this Christian attainment, contributes very largely the single fact that a Christian is conscious he has, through Christ, the grace of God, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. And these not for his own merits or peculiar life and works, but because he is, no matter how insignificant in condition before the world, a child of God and blessed; a partaker, if he but believes, in all the blessings of Christ, sharing equally with the most eminent saint. So, then, he need not look about for works not enjoined upon him. He need not covet those wrought in prominence and by the aid of great gifts of God — of unusual attainments. Let him confine himself to his own sphere; let him serve God in his vocation, remembering that God makes him, too, his instrument in his own place. Again, the occupant of a higher sphere, the possessor of higher gifts and accomplishments, who likewise serves in his vocation received from God, should learn and exhibit harmony of mind. So shall he continue humble and be tolerant of others. He should remember that he is not worthier in the eyes of God because of his greater gifts, but rather is under deeper obligation to serve his fellows, and that God can use the possessor of lesser gifts for even greater accomplishments than himself can boast. Having so learned, he will be able to manifest patience, meekness and love toward his weak and imperfect neighbors, considering them members of Christ with him, and partakers of the same grace and salvation.

The Unity of the Spirit

[17] Now you have the reason why the apostles Paul and Peter everywhere so faithfully enforce this virtue, the unity of the Spirit. It is the most necessary and beautiful grace that Christians possess. It holds together the Christian community, preventing factions and schisms, as before explained. So Paul here admonishes men to be careful for harmony, making every endeavor to preserve it. The term “unity of the Spirit” is used to make plain the apostle’s meaning. He would thus emphasize oneness of doctrine — the one true faith. Since the Holy Spirit is present only where there is knowledge of and faith in the Gospel of Christ, “unity of the Spirit” implies a unity of faith. Above all things, then, the effort must be to preserve, in the Church, the doctrine of the Scriptures, pure and in its unity.

[18] One of the wickedest offenses possible to commit against the Church is the stirring up of doctrinal discord and division, a thing the devil encourages to the utmost. This sin usually has its rise with certain haughty, conceited, self-seeking leaders who desire peculiar distinction for themselves and strive for personal honor and glory. They harmonize with none and would think themselves disgraced were they not honored as superior and more learned individuals than their fellows, a distinction they do not merit. They will give honor to no one, even when they have to recognize the superiority of his gifts over their own. In their envy, anger, hatred and vengefulness, they seek occasion to create factions and to draw people to themselves. Therefore, Paul exhorts first to the necessary virtue of love, having which men will be enabled to exercise humility, patience and forbearance toward one another.

[19] The character of the evils resulting to the Church from divisions and discords in doctrine is evident from the facts. Many are deceived; the masses immediately respond to new doctrine brilliantly presented in specious words by presumptuous individuals thirsting for fame. More than that, many weak but well-meaning ones fall to doubting, uncertain where to stand or with whom to hold. Consequently, men reject and blaspheme the Christian doctrine and seek occasion to dispute it. Many become reckless pleasure-lovers, disregarding all religion and ignoring the Word of God. Further, even they who are called Christians come to have hard feelings against one another, and, figuratively, bite and devour in their hate and envy. Consequently, their love grows cold and faith is extinguished.

[20] Of so much disturbance in the Church, and of the resulting injuries to souls, are guilty those conceited, factious leaders who do not adhere to the true doctrine, preserving the unity of the Spirit, but seek to institute something new for the sake of advancing their own ideas and their own honor, or gratifying their revenge. They thus bring upon themselves damnation infinitely more intolerable than others suffer. Christians, then, should be careful to give no occasion for division or discord, but to be diligent, as Paul here admonishes, to preserve unity. And this is not an easy thing to do, for among Christians occasions frequently arise provoking self-will, anger and hatred. The devil is always at hand to stir and blow the flame of discord. Let Christians take heed they do not give place to the promptings of the devil and of the flesh. They must strive against them, submitting to all suffering, and performing all demands, whether honor, property, physical welfare or life itself be involved, in the effort to prevent, so far as in them lies, any disturbance of the unity of doctrine, of faith and of Spirit. “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.”

[21] Christians should feel bound to maintain the unity of the Spirit, since they are all members of one body and partakers of the same spiritual blessings. They have the same priceless treasures — one God and Father in heaven, one Lord and Savior, one Word, baptism and faith; in short, one and the same salvation, a blessing common to all whereof one has as much as another, and cannot obtain more. What occasion, then, for divisions or for further seeking?

[22] Here Paul teaches what the true Christian Church is and how it may be identified. There is not more than one Church, or people of God, one earth. This one Church has one faith, one baptism, one confession of God the Father and of Jesus Christ. Its members faithfully hold, and abide by, these common truths. Everyone desiring to be saved and to come to God must be incorporated into this Church, outside of which no one will be saved.

[23] Unity of the Church does not consist in similarity of outward form of government, likeness of Law, tradition and ecclesiastical customs, as the Pope and his followers claim. They would exclude from the Church all not obedient to them in these outward things, though members of the one faith,

one baptism, and so on. The Church is termed “one holy, catholic or Christian Church,” because it represents one plain, pure Gospel doctrine, and an outward confession thereof, always and everywhere, regardless of dissimilarity of physical life, or of outward ordinances, customs and ceremonies.

[24] But they are not members of the true Church of Christ who, instead of preserving unity of doctrine and oneness of Christian faith, cause divisions and offenses — as Paul says (Romans 16:17) — by the human doctrines and self-appointed works for which they contend, imposing them upon all Christians as necessary. They are perverters and destroyers of the Church, as we have elsewhere frequently shown. The consolation of the true doctrine is ours, and we hold it in opposition to Popedom, which accuses us of having withdrawn from them, and so condemns us as apostates from the Church. They are, however, themselves the real apostates, persecuting the truth and destroying the unity of the Spirit under the name and title of the Church and of Christ. Therefore, according to the command of God, all men are under obligation to shun them and withdraw from them.

Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity. The Treasure Christians Have in the Preaching of the Gospel. The Call to Fellowship.

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:4-9.

1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of

man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.

4 For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

6 And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.

7 For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

8 Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.

9 For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. 1 Corinthians 4:1-9

Treasure Christians Have in the Gospel

[1] We have before us the opening words of the Epistle to the Corinthians, which Paul was moved to write because of unpleasant conditions in the Church at Corinth after his departure. Divisions had arisen, and sad confusion prevailed in doctrine and life. Hence the apostle was constrained to rebuke their wickedness and correct their infirmities. Because of these wholesome admonitions, the reading and heeding of this epistle is not only profitable but essential to this day; for the devil takes no respite, but whenever the Gospel is preached in its purity he mixes with the children of God and sows his seed.

[2] Paul intends to be rather severe — yet caustic — but he begins very leniently, showing them what they have received through the Gospel. His purpose is to arouse their gratitude to God, and to induce them, for his honor and glory, to be harmonious in doctrine and life, avoiding divisions

and other offenses. “I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,” etc.

[3] In other words, Paul would say: Dear brethren, consider, I pray you, what abundant grace and gifts have been given you of God. They are bestowed not because of the Law, or because of your righteousness, your merits and works; you are given no reason to exalt yourselves above others, or to originate sects or schisms. Nay, all these blessings have been freely given you in Christ and for his sake, through the preaching of the Gospel. The Gospel is a grace which brings to you all manner of gifts, by him enriching you in everything. You lack nothing from God, but you await this one thing, that blessed day when Christ will reveal himself to you with all those heavenly gifts which you now possess in faith.

[4] In this wise he extols to them the preaching of the Gospel (as indeed he does on different occasions); his purpose is to induce them to regard it most appreciatively. He gives them an example of his own gratitude, thanking God on their behalf, for the purpose of calling forth their especial gratitude when they should consider what they formerly were and what they now had received through the Gospel. And again, he would have them beware lest, forgetful of their former misery and present grace, they relapse into their old blindness. A sad beginning in such backsliding had been made by factions in their midst, who, satiated with the Gospel and indifferent to the abundant grace they enjoyed, began to cast about for something else.

[5] Now observe: If the exalted apostle and venerable teacher of the Gentiles in his day had to witness in his own parish such factions and sects as those which, in sinful security and ingratitude toward the Gospel, arose during his life, what wonder is it that today, when we do not have the excellent preachers and pious Christians of those times, there are similar sects? We are aware of the great benefits bestowed upon us, but at the same time we see and realize that the devil instigates divisions and scandals. And the cause of these evils may be traced to our ingratitude; we have quickly forgotten the ills we endured under the blindness of popery, and how miserably we were deluded and tormented. Necessarily, where God’s mercies are lightly dismissed from the mind and disregarded, gratitude and regard for God’s Word cannot be the result; satiated, listless Christians go their way fancying that spiritual conditions always were and always will be as now.

[6] The people, therefore, must be awakened to consider their former destitution, the very wretchedness they were in. The apostle later on vividly pictures such condition to his Corinthians, while here, in the opening chapter, he intimates to them, in kind and courteous words, to consider, in the light of the Gospel benefits they now enjoy, what they lacked before and might be deprived of again.

[7] Therefore he says, You now have received the grace whereby in everything ye are enriched. Formerly you had not this grace and would not have it today had not the Gospel been preached to you. You are enriched in everything pertaining to yonder life, for it is not the purpose of the Gospel to give earthly riches. But in spiritual blessings ye come behind in no gift and have need of naught except this one thing, that the Lord himself should come. This blessing you are yet to have, and biding its advent you here live by the gifts and grace with which you were enriched, until you are finally redeemed from the sinful, wicked life of the world and from all its oppressions. You must know, and must thank God for it, that you need not seek after any higher calling or better gifts, thinking you have not all that is essential, as the factious spirits would have you believe.

[8] For in your own judgment, what better thing could you have than is the Christian's in his Gospel and his faith? He has assurance of sins forgiven and washed away in holy baptism, of justification and holiness before God, and of the fact that he is God's child and heir to eternal life. Furthermore, although the Christian is conscious of remaining weakness and sin, yea, although he be overcome by a fault, he may avail himself of absolution, comfort and strength through his fellow Christians and by the aid of the sacraments; and he has daily guidance for his conduct and faith in all the walks of life. Again, he can call upon God in prayer in the day of trouble, and the firm assurance is his that God will hear and help him. What further can one desire, or what more does he need, than the knowledge that he is God's child through baptism and has God's Word at hand for comfort and strength in weakness and sin? Do you consider it slight enrichment to have assurance of the fact that God himself is speaking to you and, by means of the office of the ministry, is effective in you, teaching, admonishing, comforting, sustaining you, yea, granting you victory over the devil, death and all evil influences on earth?

[9] Formerly what would we not gladly have given and done for but a single Gospel truth in our distress and trials of conscience! True, when one was discouraged or perplexed he was advised to seek and follow the counsel of some intelligent and judicious mind; but such judicious one who might assist with his counsel was nowhere to be found. For a wise man's counsel does not answer in such case. The Word of God alone suffices, and you are to rely on it as if God himself revealed his counsel to you from heaven.

[10] As Paul says, it is great riches, a precious treasure, to possess in very fact the Word of God and not to doubt that it is the Word of God. It is this that will answer; this can comfort your heart and support it. Of spiritual benefits you know we had none under the tyranny and darkness of the Pope. At that time we suffered ourselves to be led and driven by his commandments, vain human baubles, by bulls, lies, invocation of saints, indulgences, masses, monkery. And we did whatever was enjoined in the name of the Church, solely to gain comfort and help, that we might not despair of God's grace. But instead of comforting us, these things led us to the devil and thrust us into greater anguish and terror; for there was nothing in the doctrine of the papists that could give us certainty. Indeed, they themselves had to confess that by its teachings no man could or should be certain of his state of grace.

[11] Yea, they forced poor, timid, tempted hearts to dread and fear Christ more than the devil even, as I myself experienced full well. I resorted to the dead — St. Barbara, St. Ann and other departed saints — regarding them as mediators between me and Christ's wrath. But this availed me nothing, nor did it free me from a fearful and fugitive conscience. There was not one among us all — and we were called very learned doctors of Holy Writ — who could have given true comfort from God's Word, saying: This is God's Word; this one thing God asks of you, that you honor him by accepting comfort; believe and know that he forgives your transgressions and has no wrath against you. If someone could have told me this, I would have given all I possessed for the knowledge; yea, for such word of comfort I would not have taken in exchange the glory and the crowns of all kings, for it would have restored my soul, it would have refreshed and sustained my body and life.

[12] All this we should bear in mind, by no means should we forget it; that we may return thanks to God, recounting the superior and wonderful gifts which have enriched us in all things. We have besides the Word, free prayer and the Lord's Prayer, knowing what to pray for and how to pray — knowledge common to the very children today, thank God. In former times, all men, especially we monks, tormented themselves with lengthy repetitions in reading and singing; yet our prayers were but chattering, as the noise of geese over their food, or of monks repeating a psalm.

[13] I, too, wanted to be a pious and godly monk and I prepared with earnest devotion for mass and for prayers. But when most devout I went to the altar a doubter and left the altar a doubter. When I had rendered my confession I still doubted, and I doubted when I did not render it. For we were wholly wrapped up in the erroneous idea that we could not pray and would not be heard unless we were absolutely clean and without sin, like the saints in heaven. It would have been much better not to pray at all and to have done something else, than thus to take God's name in vain. Still, we monks — in fact all the ecclesiastics — eluded the people, promising them our prayers for their money and possessions, actually selling our prayers, though we did not even know that we prayed in a manner acceptable to God. But today, thank God, we do know and understand, not only what to pray for and how to approach God "nothing doubting," but we can also add a hearty Amen, believing that according to his promise he will certainly hear us.

The Christian's Treasure

[14] The Christian has indeed inestimable treasure. In the first place he has the testimony of the Word of God, which is the word of eternal grace and comfort, that he has a right and true conception of baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Ten Commandments and the Creed. In addition, he has the sure refuge of God's promise to deliver us from every trouble in which we shall call upon him, and to give us, as he promised by the prophet Zechariah 12:10, the Spirit of grace and of prayer. And the Christian, by virtue of his enlightened understanding, can wisely discern what are good works and what callings are pleasing to God; on the other hand, his judgment is equally true as to unprofitable and vain works and false services. Before, we had not this wholesome knowledge. We knew not what we believed, or

how we prayed and lived. We sought comfort and salvation in self-devised trivialities, in penances, confessions and satisfactions, in self-righteous works of monkery and in obedience to the commands of the Pope. We believed such works to be fully satisfactory and, indeed, the only things that were holy; the pursuits of common Christians we considered worldly and dangerous.

[15] In illustration of this idea, a picture was exhibited — with the sanction of the Pope — representing a great ship in the wild, wide sea, containing only the holy monks and the super-holy popes, cardinals, bishops, etc., who were throwing their merits to those in peril struggling in the water, or extending a hand, or by means of ropes and their stoles drawing the drowning to safety in the boat.

[16] In contrast to this darkness, consider the priceless and to-be-cherished blessing of knowing with certainty wherein the heart is to take comfort, how to seek help in distress and how to conduct one's self in one's own station. If, though provided with spiritual riches on all sides, you are not sufficient of yourself at all times to grasp them, you can, nevertheless, always reach and appropriate them by means of the ordinary ministry and office of the Church, yes, by the aid of your fellow-Christians. Again, it is productive of the greatest happiness to know that when living aright in the ordinary walks of life established by God, you are more acceptable and pleasing to him than you would be to purchase the works and merits of all the monks and hermits.

[17] What Paul terms being “enriched,” first, “in all utterance,” or knowledge — which, in the exalted spiritual meaning of the words, bears on life everlasting — is having the comfort of faith in Christ and of invocation and prayer. And enriched in “all knowledge,” means having true conception and right judgment in all things of our physical life and in all our earthly relations. All things that a Christian should know and should possess are comprehended in these two terms. These blessings are gifts and treasures indescribably great. He who will contrast them with the destitution of our former condition cannot but be joyful and thankful. I remember the time when I, engaged in earnest study of Holy Writ, would have given a great deal for the right exposition of a psalm; and when had I but begun to understand a verse aright, I would have been as rejoiced as if born to life anew.

[18] Truly, then, we should now render to God heartfelt thanks for the great favor and blessing of restored light and understanding in Scripture, and the right conception of doctrinal matters. But, alas! It is likely to be with us as with the Corinthians, who had received most abundantly from Paul but by way of return had made ill use of it and proved shamefully unthankful. And they met with retribution, the worst of it being false doctrine and seductions, until at last that grand congregation was wholly ruined and destroyed. A similar retribution threatens us, yes, is before the door with appalling knock, in the instance of the Turks and in other distress and calamity. For this reason we should, with a thankful heart and serious mind, pray, as Paul here does for his Corinthians, that God would keep us steadfast in the possession of his gifts and blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[19] Paul admonishes us to continue in this knowledge and appreciation of the grace and gifts of God. Since by these blessings we have received riches and happiness to the satisfying of all our need, the apostle further admonishes us to look only for the Lord to reveal to us publicly by his coming that which he has promised and through faith already granted us.

[20] In the past, much has been written and ingeniously devised on the topic of preparing for death and the final judgment. But it has only served to further confuse timid consciences. For these comforters were not able to show anything of the comfort to be found in the riches of grace and bliss in Christ. They directed the people to oppose with their own works and good life, death and God's judgment. In place of this delusion is now evident the precious truth; he who knows the Gospel doctrines, goes on and performs his own work and duty in his respective calling. He takes comfort in the fact that through baptism he is engrafted into Christ; he receives absolution and partakes of the holy supper for the strengthening of his faith, commending his soul and body to Christ. Why should such a one fear death? Though it come at any time, in form of pestilence or accident, it will always find the Christian ready and well prepared, be he awake or asleep; for he is in Christ Jesus.

[21] For all these things the Christian may well thank and bless God, realizing that he has no further need, nor can he gain anything better than he already has in the remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the faithful prosecution of his calling; however, he should remain in, and daily

grow in, faith and supplication. But he cannot hope to attain to another and better doctrine, faith, Spirit, prayer, sacrament, reward, etc., than had all the saints, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, or in fact than has now every Christian that is baptized. Therefore I need not idly spend time in trying to prepare people for death and inspire them with courage by such commonplaces as recalling and relating the innumerable daily accidents, ills and dangers of this life. This method will not answer; death will not thereby be frightened away, nor will the fear of death be removed. The Gospel teaching is: Believe in Christ, pray and live in accordance with God's Word, and then, when death overtakes and attacks you, you will know that you are Christ the Lord's. Paul says (Romans 14:8): "Whether we live... or die, we are the Lord's." Indeed, we Christians live upon this earth to the very end that we may have assured comfort, salvation and victory over death and hell.

[22] Of this Paul here reminds us, and dwells on it more fully later in this Epistle; he would have us duly thankful for this great grace and living among ourselves in a Christian and brotherly manner, in doctrine and practice, ignoring and avoiding that wild, disorderly conduct of the contentious and disorderly. He who recognizes such grace and blessing cannot but love and thank God and conduct himself aright toward his neighbor; and when he finds himself falling short in this he will, by admonition and the Word of God, make amends.

[23] Here you might put the question: Why does Paul speak in such a commendatory way of the Corinthians, saying that they were enriched in everything and came behind in no gift, when he himself confesses later on that they had contentions and schisms — in regard to baptism, to the sacrament, to the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and in regard to abuse of liberty, and some lived as they pleased. Would you not call these things faults and shortcomings? How, then, is he in a position to say that they were abundantly supplied with all things spiritual, lacking not one thing?

[24] Well, you should recall what I have repeatedly stated: Christendom is never so spotless that there are not some spurious and wicked admixed, just as you will always find weeds, darnel, tares, or wild mustard together with pure grain. And he who will examine the Church with only a view of finding faults and frailties among those called Christians, will miss the Church, yes, the Gospel and Christ, and never discover a Church at all.

[25] But we have the consolation of knowing that if we have the Gospel pure, we have the treasure God gives his Church and we cannot go astray nor want. But as yet we have not reached that degree of perfection where all hearers of the Gospel will grasp it fully and wholly or are faultless in faith and life; at all times there will be some who do not believe and some who are weak and imperfect. However, that great treasure and rich blessing of doctrine and knowledge is present. There is no defect in this, and it is effective and fruitful. The fact that some do not believe, does not weaken baptism or the Gospel or the Church; they only harm themselves. To sum up, where the Word remains, there most assuredly is also the Church. For wherever the doctrine is pure, there you can also keep purity in baptism, the sacrament, absolution, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, good works and all callings; and wherever you find a defect or an irregularity, you can admonish, amend and rectify by means of the Word.

[26] Some there must be who have the Word and sacraments pure and unadulterated, who have faith, pray aright, keep God's commandments and do other things, as, thank God, we have with us. Then we may firmly conclude: If the true Church were not here, these characteristics would be lacking; therefore, we must have among ourselves true members of the Church and true saints. Now even though children of the world intermingle (as will be the case always and in all places), who show neither faith nor a godly life, it would corrupt neither faith, nor baptism, nor doctrine, nor would the Church perish on that account — the treasure remains in its integrity and efficacy, and God may graciously cause some to turn from their unbelief and wicked life and be added to the faithful and to mend their ways.

[27] Again, they with whom this treasure — the Word or doctrine and its knowledge — is not found, cannot be the Christian Church nor members of it, and for that reason they cannot pray or believe aright or do good works pleasing to God. It follows that their whole lives are in God's sight lost and condemned, though they may assiduously extol God and the Church and before the world may have the appearance and reputation of leading particularly holy lives and excelling even the upright Christians in virtues and honor. It is a settled fact that outside the Church of Christ there is no God, no grace, no bliss; as Paul says (Ephesians 4:5): "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all," etc. And Acts 4:12 says: "And in

none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved.”

[28] And so Paul, when here extolling the Corinthians, has not an eye to the contentious, the Epicureans, or to those who give public offense, as the man that “had his father’s wife;” but the apostle looks to the fact that a few remain who have the pure Word of God, faith, baptism and the sacrament, though some hypocrites be among them. Because of these few — and few indeed there may be — we recognize the presence of that inestimable treasure of which the apostle speaks. It is found as well where two or three are gathered together as with thousands. Neither the Gospel nor the ministers nor the Church is to be blamed that the multitude miss this treasure; the multitude have but themselves to blame, for they close their ears and eyes.

[29] Now behold how loftily Paul has extolled and how beautifully portrayed the Christian Church — where she is to be found on earth and what inestimable blessings and gifts she has received of Christ, for which she is in duty bound to thank and praise him in her confession and in her life. This subject the apostle concludes with the words: “God is faithful, through whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”

[30] The good work which Christ has begun in you and already assured to you, he will without fail establish in you until the end and forever, if you but do not fall away through unbelief, or cast grace from you. For his Word or promise given to you, and his work begun in you, are not changeable as is man’s word and work, but are firm, certain, divine, immovable truth. Since you are in possession of this your divine calling, draw comfort therefrom and rely on it without wavering. Amen.

Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity. Putting on the New Man and Laying Off the Old Man.

Text: Ephesians 4:22-28.

22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

27 Neither give place to the devil.

28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Ephesians 4:22-28

Duty to New and Old Man

[1] Here again is an admonition for Christians to follow up their faith by good works and a new life, for though they have forgiveness of sins through baptism, the old Adam still adheres to their flesh and makes himself felt in tendencies and desires to vices physical and mental. The result is that unless Christians offer resistance, they will lose their faith and the remission of sins and will in the end be worse than they were at first; for they will begin to despise and persecute the Word of God when corrected by it. Yea, even those who gladly hear the Word of God, who highly prize it and aim to follow it, have daily need of admonition and encouragement, so strong and tough is that old hide of our sinful flesh. And so powerful and wily is our old evil foe that wherever he can gain enough of an opening to insert one of his claws, he thrusts in his whole self and will not desist until he has again sunk man into his former condemnable unbelief and his old way of despising and disobeying God.

[2] Therefore, the Gospel ministry is necessary in the Church, not only for instruction of the ignorant — such as the simple, unlettered people and the children — but also for the purpose of awakening those who know very well what they are to believe and how they are to live, and admonishing them to be on their guard daily and not to become indolent, disheartened or tired in the war they must wage on this earth with the devil, with their own flesh and with all manner of evil.

[3] For this reason, Paul is so persistent in his admonitions that he actually seems to be overdoing it. He proceeds as if the Christians were either too dull to comprehend or so inattentive and forgetful that they must be reminded and driven. The apostle well knows that though they have made a beginning in faith and are in that state which should show the fruits of faith, such result is not so easily forthcoming. It will not do to think and say: Well, it is sufficient to have the doctrine, and if we have the Spirit and faith, then fruits and good works will follow of their own accord. For although the Spirit truly is present and, as Christ says, willing and effective in those that believe, on the other hand the flesh is weak and sluggish. Besides, the devil is not idle, but seeks to seduce our weak nature by temptations and allurements.

[4] So we must not permit the people to go on in their way, neglecting to urge and admonish them, through God's Word, to lead a godly life. Indeed, you dare not be negligent and backward in this duty; for, as it is, our flesh is all too sluggish to heed the Spirit and all too able to resist it. Paul says (Galatians 5:17): "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh ... that ye may not do the things that ye would." Therefore, God is constrained to do as a good and diligent householder or ruler, who, having a slothful manservant or maidservant, or careless officers, who otherwise are neither wicked nor faithless, will not consider it sufficient once or twice to direct, but will constantly be supervising and directing.

[5] Nor have we as yet arrived at the point where our flesh and blood will joyfully and gladly abound in good works and obedience to God as the spirit is inclined and faith directs. Even with the utmost efforts the Spirit scarce can compel our old man. What would be the result if we were no more urged and admonished but could go our way thinking, as many self-satisfied persons do: I am well acquainted with my duties, having learned them many years ago and having heard frequent explanations of them; yea,

I have taught others? It might be that one year's intermission of preaching and admonition would place us below the level of the heathen.

[6] Now, this exhortation in itself is simple and easy of comprehension. The apostle is but repeating his exhortations of other places — on the fruits of faith, or a godly walk — merely in different terms. Here he speaks of putting away the old man and putting on the new man, of being “renewed in the spirit of your mind.” “The Old Man”

[7] What he calls “the old man” is well known to us; namely, the whole nature of man as descended from Adam after his fall in paradise, being blinded by the devil, depraved in soul, not keeping God before his eyes nor trusting him, yes, utterly regardless of God and the judgment day. Though with his mouth he may honor God's Word and the Gospel, yet in reality he is unchanged; if he does have a little additional knowledge, he has just as little fear, love and trust in God as heretofore.

[8] Such a life and such conduct should not be found among you, says the apostle; you are not to continue with “the old man.” He must be put off and laid aside. Your former manner of life, inherited of Adam, consisted in disobeying God, in neither fearing, trusting nor calling upon him. Again, in your body you obeyed not God's commandments, being given to lust, pride, insatiable greed, envy, hatred, etc. A life and walk of this nature is not becoming a Christian who is regarded as, and truly is, a different order of being from his former self, as we shall hear. Necessarily he should walk differently.

[9] In this respect a Christian must take heed that he does not deceive himself; the true Christian differs from the hypocrite. True Christians so live that it is apparent from their lives that they keep God before their eyes and truly believe the Gospel, while hypocrites likewise show by their walk that their pretensions of faith and forgiveness of sin are hollow. No proof is seen in their lives and works showing that they have in any wise mended their former ways; they merely deck themselves with a pretense, with the name of Gospel, of faith, of Christ.

[10] Now, the apostle has two things to say of the old man: that he corrupts himself in error as to the soul and in lusts as to the body. Paul portrays the old man — meaning every man without true faith though he bear the name of a Christian — as in the first place given to error: coming

short of the truth, knowing naught of the true knowledge of Christ and faith in him, indifferent alike to God's wrath and God's grace, deceiving himself with his own conceit that darkness is light. The old man believes that God will not be moved to vengeance though he do as he pleases, even to decorating vices with the names of virtues. Haughtiness, greed, oppressing and tormenting the poor, wrath, envy — all this he would call preserving his dignity, exercising strict discipline, honestly and economically conducting his domestic affairs, caring for his wife and children, displaying Christian zeal and love of justice, etc. In short, he proceeds in the perfectly empty delusion and self-conceit that he is a Christian.

[11] Out of this error proceeds the other corruption, the lusts of the body, which are fruits of unbelief. Unbelief causes men to walk in sinful security and yield to all the appetites of their flesh. Such have no inclination toward what is good, nor do they aim to promote orderliness, honor or virtue. They take desperate chances on their lives, wanting to live according to the lusts of their flesh, and yet not be reprimanded.

[12] This, says the apostle, is the old man's course and nature. He will do naught but ruin himself. The longer continued, the greater his debasement. He draws down upon himself his own condemnation and penalty for body and soul; for in proportion as he becomes unbelieving and hardhearted, does he become haughty, hateful and faithless, and eventually a perfect scoundrel and villain. This was your former manner of life, when as yet you were heathen and non-Christians. Therefore you must by all means put off the old man and cast him far from you; otherwise you cannot remain a Christian. For glorying in the grace of God and the forgiveness of sin is inconsistent with following sin — remaining in the former old un-Christian life and walking in error and deceitful lusts. The Growth of "The New Man" "And that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth."

[13] Having put away the old man, the apostle exhorts us further to put on the new man, that day by day we may grow as new creatures. This is effected by first being delivered from error — from the erroneous thoughts and ideas incident to our corrupt nature with its false conceptions of God, wherein we do not fear nor believe him — and then from God's Word receiving the right understanding of him. When we rightly understand, we

shall fear his wrath against sin and rely on his grace in true faith, believing that he will forgive our sins for Christ's sake and will hear our prayer for strength and assistance to withstand and conquer, and to continually grow in faith.

[14] This change Paul calls being “renewed in the spirit of your mind”; that is, constantly growing and becoming established in that true conception and clear knowledge of Christ begun in us, in opposition to error and idle vaporings. He who is thus received, says the apostle, is a man “that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.” In the old man there is naught but error, by means of which the devil leads to destruction. But the new man has the Spirit and the truth, by which the heart is illumined unto righteousness and holiness, wherein man follows the guidance of God's Word and feels a desire for a godly walk and good life; just as, on the other hand, the desire and love for sin and wickedness is the product of error. This new man is created after God, as an image of God, and must of necessity differ from such as live in error and in lusts, without the knowledge of God and disobedient to him. For if God's image is in man, man must consequently have the right knowledge of God and right conceptions and ideas, and lead a godly life consistent with holiness and righteousness as found in God himself.

[15] Such an image of God Adam was when first created. He was, as to the soul, truthful, free from error, and possessed of true faith and knowledge of God; and as to the body, holy and pure, that is, without the impure, unclean desires of avarice, lasciviousness, envy, hatred, etc. And all his children — all men — would have so remained from their birth if he had not suffered himself to be led astray by the devil and to be thus ruined. But since Christians, by the grace and Spirit of God, now have been renewed to this image of God, they are so to live that soul and spirit are righteous and pleasing to God through faith in Christ; and that also the body — meaning the whole external life — be pure and holy, which is genuine holiness.

[16] Some there are who pretend to great holiness and purity, but it is mere pretense, deceiving the people in general. Such are the factious spirits and monastic saints, who base their holiness and uprightness solely on an external, peculiar life and on self-elected works. Theirs may be apparently a commendable, holy and pure way of praying and fasting, of denying self, etc., and the people may call it so; but inwardly they are and remain

haughty, venomous, hateful, filled with the filth of human lust and evil thoughts, as Christ says of such. Matthew 15:19; Luke 16:15. Likewise their righteousness on which they pride themselves before God has a certain gloss, on the strength of which they presume to merit the grace of God for themselves and others; but inwardly they have no true conception of God, being in rank unbelief, that is, false and vain suppositions, or doubts. Such righteousness, or holiness, is not true nor honest. It is made up wholly of hypocrisy and deceit. It is built, not of God nor after God, but after that lying spirit, the devil.

[17] The true Christian, Paul asserts, has been molded through faith in Christ into a new man, like unto God, truly justified and holy in his sight; even as Adam originally was in perfect harmony of heart with God, showing true, straightforward confidence, love and willingness. And his body was holy and pure, knowing naught of evil, impure or improper desire. Thus, the whole life of the man was a beautiful portrait of God, a mirror wherein God himself was reflected; even as the lives and natures of the holy spirits the angels are wrapped up in God and represent true knowledge of him, assurance, and joy in him and utterly pure and holy thoughts and works according to the will of God.

[18] But since man is now so grievously fallen from this cheerful confidence, this certainty and joy, into doubts or into presumption toward God, and from unspotted, noble obedience into the lusts of iniquity and ungodliness, it follows that not from mankind can come help or relief. Nor can anyone hope for remedy except the Christians, who through faith in Christ begin again to have a joyful and confident heart toward God. They thus enter again into their former relation and into the true paradise of perfect harmony with God and of justification; they are comforted by his grace. Accordingly, they are disposed to lead a godly life in harmony with God's commandments and to resist ungodly lusts and ways. These begin to taste God's goodness and loving kindness, as Paul says, and realize what they lost in paradise. He, therefore, that would be a Christian should strive to be found in this new man created after God; not in blind error and vain conceit, but in the very essence of righteousness and holiness before God. Two Classes of Sins "Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbor: for we are members one of another."

[19] Lest there might be one who failed to understand the meaning of the old and the new man, or of true and false righteousness and holiness, the apostle now proceeds to give an example or two, making it easier for us to grasp the idea. All sin comes under one of two classes: First, that of the devil's own making, such as murder and deceit; for by lies he establishes all idolatry, error, false faith and holiness, and among men he creates faithlessness, deceit, malice, etc. Secondly, those sins which he instigates man to commit against man; deeds of wrath, hatred, vengeance and murder. Paul combines these two classes.

[20] Now, when a man does not deal fairly with his neighbor, but practices dishonesty and deceit, be it in matters spiritual or temporal (and the world is ever deceitful in all transactions), then certainly the old man holds sway and not righteousness nor holiness, however much the man may effect a good appearance and evade the courts. For such conduct does not reflect God's image, but the devil's. For the heart does not rely on God and his truth, otherwise it would war with fraud and deception; but its object is to clothe itself with a misleading garb, even assuming the name of God, and thus to deceive, belie, betray and forsake its neighbor at the bidding of every fiendish whim, and all for the satisfaction of its avarice, selfishness and pride.

[21] In contrast thereto you can recognize the new man. He speaks the truth and hates lies, not only those momentous lies against the first table of the Ten Commandments, but also those against the second table; for he deals faithfully and in a brotherly way with others, doing as he would be done by himself. Thus should Christians live with each other, as members of one body, according to the apostle, and as having in Christ all things common and alike. "Be ye angry and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath."

[22] Half the sins which the world has learned of its lord and master, the devil, consist in lying and deceiving, and that in the name and appearance of truth. No one wants to be called a liar, and even the devil covers his lies with the name of truth. The other half, which is easier to recognize, consists in wrath and its fruits. And this class is usually the result of the other. The world, for its own advantage, lies and deceives; and when it sees mankind acting in opposition to its wishes, or beholds its lies exposed and its schemes thwarted, it begins to rage in wrath against God, endeavoring to

avenge itself and inflict harm, but fraudulently disguising its wicked motive under the plea of having good and abundant reasons for its action.

[23] Therefore Paul admonishes the Christians as new creatures, to guard against this vice of wrath, adducing the fourth verse of the fourth Psalm: "Stand in awe and sin not." The repetition of this passage sounds, in Paul's rendering, as if permission to be angry were given; he says: "Be ye angry, and sin not." But Paul is taking into consideration the way of the world. Men are tempted and moved to anger. There are no clean records. Under sudden provocation the heart swells with ire, while the devil busily fans the flame; for he is ever alert to stamp upon us his seal and image and make us like unto him, either through error and false doctrine, or through wrath and murder in conflict with love and patience. These two forms of evil you will encounter, especially if you make an effort to be a godly Christian, to defend the truth and to live uprightly in the sight of all. You will meet with all manner of malice aforethought and deceit, and with faithlessness and malignity on the part of those you have benefited; again, with unmasked violence and injustice on the part of those who should protect you and see to your interests. This will hurt and move you to wrath. Yea, in your own house and among your dear Christian brethren you will often meet with that which vexes you; again, a word of yours may hurt their feelings. And it will not be otherwise. This life of ours is so constituted that such conditions must be. Flesh and blood cannot but be stirred at times by wrath and impatience, especially when it receives evil for good; and the devil is ever at hand kindling your anger and endeavoring to fan into a blaze the wrath and ill humor between yourself and your neighbor.

[24] But right here, says the apostle, you should beware and not sin; not give rein, nor yield to the impulse and promptings of wrath. That you may indeed be moved, the apostle would say, I well know, and you may fancy to have the best of reasons for exhibiting anger and vengeance; but beware of doing what your wrath would have you do: and if overcome by wrath and led to rashness, do not continue in it, do not harbor it, but subdue and restrain it, the sooner the better; do not suffer it to take root or to remain with you overnight.

[25] If followed, wrath will not suffer you to do a single right thing, as James affirms (James 1:20). It causes man to fall and sin against God and his neighbor. Even the heathen has seen that wrath gets the better of reason

and is never the source of good counsel. In line with this, we read that St. Ambrose reproved the emperor Theodosius for having, while in a rage, caused the execution of many persons in Thessalonica; and that he succeeded in having the emperor issue a rescript to the effect that no one should be executed, even on his imperial order and command, until a full month had passed by, thus affording an opportunity to rescind the order if given in haste and wrath.

[26] Therefore the Psalm says: When wrath attacks and moves you, do not at once give it leave to do its will. Therein you would certainly commit sin. But go into your chamber, commune and take counsel with yourself, pray the Lord's Prayer, repeat some good passages from God's Word, curb yourself and confide in God; he will uphold your rights.

[27] It is this the apostle has in mind when saying: "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." A Christian must not entertain wrath; he should instantly quench and stifle it. It is the part of the new man to control anger, that the devil may not move him from his new-found faith and make him lose what he has received. If he yields to these instigations of his flesh, he thereby returns to the error and condemnation in the old man and loses control of himself, following his own desires. Then he adorns a lie with the appearance of truth, claiming the right to be angry and take revenge; just as the world does when it asserts: This fellow has done me infinite violence and injustice; am I to suffer it? I have a just cause and shall not recline my head in ease until he is repaid! By such talk it loses its case before both God and men; as the saying goes: He that strikes back has the most unjust cause.

[28] Both divine and human justice forbids that a man be judge in his own case. For this very reason God has established governmental and judicial authority, in his stead to punish transgressions, which — when properly administered — is not man's but God's judgment. He therefore that invades such judgment, invades the authority of God himself; he commits a double wrong and merits double condemnation. If you desire to seek and obtain redress in the courts, you are at liberty to do so, provided you proceed in the proper way, at the proper place and with those to whom God has entrusted authority. To these authorities you may appeal for redress. If you obtain it according to law, well and good; if not, you must suffer wrong and commit your case to God, as we have explained more fully elsewhere.

[29] In short, we find in this unique passage a statement to the effect that he who curbs not his wrath but retains it longer than a day, or overnight, cannot be a Christian. Where then do they stand who entertain wrath and hatred indefinitely, for one, two, three, seven, ten years? Such is no longer human wrath but fiendish wrath from hell; it will not be satisfied nor extinguished, but when it once takes possession of a man he would, if able, destroy everything in a moment with his hellish fire. Even so the archfiend is not satisfied with having cast the whole human race into sin and death, but will not rest content unless he can drag all human beings into eternal damnation.

[30] A Christian therefore has ample cause to carefully guard against this vice. God may have patience with you when wrath wells up in your heart — although that, too, is sinful — but take heed that wrath does not overcome you and cause you to fall. Rather take serious counsel with yourself and extinguish and expel your anger by applying passages of Holy Writ and calling upon your faith. When alone or about to retire, repeat the Lord's Prayer, ask for forgiveness and confess that God daily forgives you much oftener than your neighbor sins against you. "Neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need."

[31] This thought is brought out also in the next Epistle, namely, that a Christian should guard against giving offense to anybody by his life, lest God's name be blasphemed. It is a grand thing to be a Christian, who, as has been stated, is a new man created after God and a true image of God, wherein God himself desires to be reflected. Therefore, whatever of good a Christian does, or whatever of evil he does, under the name of a Christian, either honors or disgraces God's name. Now, says Paul, whenever you follow your lusts, in obedience to your old Adam, you do naught but give occasion to the slanderers — the devil and his troop — to blaspheme the name of God. For the devil, even without your assistance, at all times seeks opportunity — nor can he desist — to befoul our dear Gospel and the name of God with his slanderous tales, composed, if need be, entirely of lies. But where he finds the semblance of occasion he knows how to profit by it. He will then open his mouth wide and cry: Behold, these are your Gospel

people! Here you have the fruits of this new doctrine! Is their Christ such a one as they honor by their lives?

[32] So then a Christian should be exceedingly careful and cautious for this reason, if for no other: to protect the name and honor of his dear God and Savior and not to do the devil the favor of letting him whet his slanderous tongue on Christ's name. How shall we stand and answer in his sight when we cannot deny the fact that our life gives just cause for complaint and offense? By such a life we intentionally bring disgrace and shame upon God's name and Word, which things should be our highest treasures and most valuable possessions.

[33] When the apostle says, "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need," he indicates the true fruit of repentance, which consists in abandoning and utterly abstaining from evil and in doing good. He at the same time attacks and reproves the sin of theft so common in all walks of life. And them who idle away their time and neglect their duty of serving and helping their fellow-beings, he calls — and rightfully — thieves in God's sight.

[34] For the right interpretation of the commandment, Thou shalt not steal, is this: Thou shalt live of thine own work, that thou mayest have to give to the needy. This is your bounden duty, and if you do not so God will pronounce you not a Christian but a thief and robber. In the first place, because you are an idler and do not support yourself, but live by the sweat and toil of others; in the second place, because you withhold from your neighbor what you plainly owe him. Where now shall we find those who keep this commandment? Indeed, where should we dare look for them except where no people live? But such a class of people should Christians be. Therefore, let each of us beware lest he deceive himself; for God will not be mocked nor deceived. Galatians 6:7.

Twentieth Sunday after Trinity. The Careful Walk of the Christian and Redeeming the Time

Text: Ephesians 5:15-21.

15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Ephesians 5:15-21

The Careful Walk of the Christian

[1] Paul's admonition here is designed for those who, having heard the Gospel and made a fine start in believing, immediately imagine themselves secure and think they have accomplished all. Forgetful that they are still flesh and blood, and in the world and in contact with the devil's kingdom, they live in unconcern, as if delivered from all danger, and the devil far fled. By the very reason of their security they are overcome of the devil and their own flesh, and fall unawares from the Gospel. They have just enough

connection with it to be able to prate of it, boasting themselves Christians but giving no indication of the fact in their conduct.

[2] Paul would tell them how, in view of these things, vigilance is essential to the Christian life. To regulate the life by keeping God's will ever before the eyes, always conforming the conduct to it — this he calls walking circumspectly and being wise. If you for a moment lose sight of God's will, the devil immediately possesses you and works pernicious results, transforming a Christian into an indolent, self-secure hypocrite; a hypocrite into a heretic and factionist; and a heretic into an open enemy. So the apostle here teaches that in all seriousness if we would secure ourselves against the craft and power of the devil we must be vigilant; we must be careful how we walk. In Satan we have an enemy bent on hindering us; on undermining our very foundation.

[3] Consequently, they who fail to keep earnest watch over their Christian life — that is, to have a care for soundness of belief and to gladly hear and obey the Word of God — are unwise, even foolish, and have no knowledge of God's will. They have removed the light from before their eyes to behold instead a thing of their own imagination. They see as through a painted glass, presuming they do well in following such phantoms of their reason, until they are misled and defeated of the devil.

The Word, The Guide of the Christian

[4] Therefore, not without reason does Paul warn Christians to be always wise and circumspect — to keep the Word of God before them. Upon so doing depends their wisdom and understanding. Let each one make it a matter of personal concern, and especially should it be the general interest of the congregation. Where care is not observed to retain the Word in the Church, but there are admitted to the pulpit brawlers who set forth their own fraudulent doctrines, the Church is injured; the congregation will soon be as the preacher. Again, if the individual fails to regulate his daily life — the affairs of his calling — by the Word of God; if he forgets the Word and absorbs himself in accumulating wealth; if he is tangled with secular interests, he soon becomes a cold and indolent Christian, then an erring soul, and finally utterly disregards God's will and his Word. It is for these reasons God so frequently commands us in the Scriptures continually to

explain and apply his Word, to hear it willingly and practice it faithfully, and to meditate upon it day and night. He would have our lives emanate from the Word in honor to God and gratitude to him — from the Word wherein we daily look as in a mirror. But care and diligence are necessary to bring it to pass, and we should faithfully assist each other by instruction, advice, and in other ways.

[5] In my admonitions I have often enough urged those who have influence, to use all diligence in drawing the young to school, where they may receive proper instruction to become pastors and preachers; and I have earnestly advised that in cases of necessity ample financial provision be made for students. But, alas, few communities, few states, are interested in the matter. In all Germany, look at the bishops, princes, noblemen, the inhabitants of town and country — how confidently they go on sleeping and snoring in their indifference to the question. They presume to think there is no need for action; the matter will adjust itself; there will always be pastors and preachers. But assuredly they deceive themselves if they think they are consulting their best interests in this affair; for they will, as the text says, become foolish and fail to recognize the will of God. Therefore they will someday have to experience what they do not now believe: in a few years after our day they will seek preachers and find none; they will have to hear rude, illiterate dolts who, lacking understanding of the Word of God, will, like all stupid Papists, preach the vile, offensive things of the Pope, about consecrated water and salt, about gray gowns, new monasteries and the like.

[6] Cry, preach and admonish as we will, no one will hear; foreseeing which, Paul prophesies that they who observe not God's will, become unwise, foolish, and consequently waste the day of grace and neglect their salvation. Now, it is God's will we should sanctify his name, love and advance his Word, and so aid in building up his kingdom. When we fulfill his will in these things, he will regard our desires, providing us with daily bread and granting peace and happiness.

[7] Now, it should be our chief concern to preserve to ourselves the Word and will of God. That would truly be wisdom and redeeming the time. But failing therein, it must be with us as with the unwise and fools; we will have to hear the declaration: "Since you refuse to sanctify my name, to advance my kingdom and to do my will, neither will I provide you daily bread, nor forgive your sins, nor keep from temptation and deliver from

evil.” God will then permit us to deplore the great calamities of the world — its turmoil and wickedness, the cause whereof the world attributes to the Gospel. But the punishment just mentioned must be visited upon them who will not recognize the will of God and submit to it. These, however, desire to justify themselves and are unwilling to receive censure for having conducted themselves unwisely, even foolishly.

[8] So much for a general observation upon the expression “walking wisely and circumspectly”; so much upon unwise conduct in regard to matters of vital importance to the Church, which have to do with the office of the ministry and with God’s Word. Where the ministry and the Word of God are preserved, there will always be some among the masses to attend upon the preaching of the Word and to conform their lives to it. But when the Bible leaves the pulpit, little good will be accomplished, even though one here and there be able to read the Scriptures for themselves and imagine they have no need of the preached Word. Where will the untaught masses stand? Note how it has been with the poor people in our time who were misled by Munzer and Munster, and their prophets and factionists. Public Preaching of the Word Enjoined Then let everyone lend earnest effort to promote public preaching of the Word everywhere, and public attendance upon that preaching; and thus rightly to found and build up the Church. Let him also put on the wedding garment himself (mentioned in the Gospel for today); let him take care to be found an earnest advocate of the Word of God, uninfluenced by thoughts common to the secure spirit: “Oh, there are pastors and preachers enough for me. I can hear or read the Word when I please; have access to it any day. I must give first attention to bread-winning and like things. Let others look out for themselves.” Take care, my dear sir; you can easily fail by carelessness here and be found without the wedding garment, perhaps may die without it, unaware how you are being deceived. Whose fault will it be but your own since you would not hear Paul’s admonition to walk wisely and circumspectly?

[9] We should make provision while the opportunity is at our doors, for, judging from the present course of the world, it will not long retain what it has. Everywhere men are diligently helping to hunt down ministers, or at least to so bring to bear upon them hunger and poverty, to so oppose them with secret fraud, as to drive them from the land. And little trouble and labor will be required to accomplish it. We shall only too soon be rid of our

ministers and have their places amply supplied by deceivers. I would much rather suffer in hell with Judas the Betrayer than to bear the guilt of accomplishing one minister's death or of being instrumental in offering place to one deceiver. For it would not be so intolerable to suffer the anguish of the betrayer of Christ as to endure that of one who, by his sin in this respect, is responsible for the loss of countless souls.

Necessity of Improving the Time

[10] Paul goes on to elaborate his admonition by explaining what it is to walk circumspectly and wisely — to “redeem the time, because the days are evil.” In other words: Think not happy days are in store for you and you may defer duty till better times; better times will never be. The devil is always in the world to hinder your every effort to do good, and his opposition increases with time. The longer you tarry, the less your power to accomplish good; wasted time only makes matters worse. Then redeem the time; grasp your opportunities as best you can. Let no interest be so dear to you as the promotion of God's kingdom and the serving of the public in every good and useful way possible, whatever befall yourself.

[11] Christ in like manner says to the Jews: “While ye have the light, believe on the light, that ye may become sons of light.” John 12:36. And Paul, after quoting from Isaiah 49:8, adds: “Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” 2 Corinthians 6:2. So his counsel in our text means: Take heed you receive not the grace of God in vain. Or, neglect not the matter of your salvation; enjoy while you may the opportunity of furthering the kingdom of God, for the sake of your own and others' salvation. Defer not the thing to another time, lest the opportunity escape you. Elsewhere (Galatians 6:10) the apostle says, “As we have opportunity, let us work that which is good.” In other words: Act now, while you may. Your time passes with astonishing rapidity. Be not deceived, then, by the thought, “Oh, I can attend to the matter a year from now — two years — three.” That is simply foolish. It is an unwise conclusion of the thoughtless. Before they are aware, they have lost the salvation extended them. They defer to consider God's will, putting it off for a season, until they shall have accomplished their own aims; then they have deferred too long.

[12] The Lord comes to your door. You do not have to seek him. If you are grateful he tarries to speak with you. But if you let him pass by you will have to complain as did the bride in Song of Solomon 5:6: "I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone ... I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer." Think not you will find the Lord when he has once gone, though you traverse the world. But while he is near you may seek and find; as Isaiah says (Isaiah 55:6), "Seek ye Jehovah while he may be found." If through your neglect he pass by, all seeking then will be vain. For more than twenty years in my cloister I experienced the meaning of such disappointment. I sought God with great toil and with severe mortification of the body, fasting, watching, singing and praying. In this way I shamefully wasted my time and found not the Lord. The more I sought and the nearer I thought I was to him, the farther away I got. No, God does not permit us to find him so. He must first come and seek us where we are. We may not pursue and overtake him. That is not his will.

[13] Then be careful to avail yourself of the present opportunity. Embrace it while he is near, and faithfully consider what he requires of you. To ascertain this, go to the Creed and the Ten Commandments. They will tell you. Regulate your life by them. Be helped by the Lord's Prayer. Begin with yourself; then pray for the Church. Let it be your desire that God's name be everywhere sanctified and that your life conform to his will. If you are faithful in these things, assuredly you will walk wisely; you will avoid sin and do good. For the study and practice of these precepts will leave you no opportunity to do evil. God's Word will soon teach you to sanctify his name, to extend his kingdom, to do your neighbor no injury in mind, body or estate.

[14] Observe this is "redeeming the time." This is employing it well, while the golden days last in which we have remission from pain and sin. Not such remission as the Pope grants in his jubilees, wherein he deceives the world. Right here let us be careful not to cheat ourselves with the false idea that salvation cannot escape us. Let it not be with us as befell the children of Israel, of whom it is said in Psalms 95:11 and Hebrews 4:3 that because of their unbelief they entered not into the rest of God. They would not accept their opportunity in the forty years wherein he gave them his Word and showed them his wonders, daily admonishing them and calling to

repentance and faith. They but tempted and provoked him the more. Hence another admonition was given the people of God and a certain day appointed: “Today if ye shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” Hebrews 4:7. Every day with us is “today” and we are permitted to hear God’s voice still imploring us not to waste the time.

[15] Surely we ought supremely to thank God, as the latter part of our text enjoins, for the great blessing of his nearness to us. We have his presence in our homes. He is with us at our board, by our couch — anywhere we desire him. He offers us all assistance and grants all we may ask. So gracious a guest should indeed receive our high esteem. We ought to honor him while he is with us.

[16] Well may we pray, as I have said. There is too much slumbering everywhere in Germany. We cannot perceive how it is possible to preserve the Gospel and fill the pulpits for ten years longer. To such extent does wickedness rage in the world that blindness and error must sweep it as before. And no one will be to blame but the stupid bishops and princes, and those of us who esteem not the Word of God. Ingratitude Will Be Punished Alas, that I am compelled against my will to be a prophet of ill to Germany. Yet it is not I, but the prayer of my Lord and your Lord; for according to its teachings he will say: “You neglected my Word. Unwilling to tolerate it, you persecuted and starved out its messengers. Therefore I will withhold your daily bread and give instead famine and war and murder, unto utter desolation; for you wish to have it so. Then when you cry for forgiveness of sins and deliverance from the evils come upon you, I will hear you as you heard my Word, my entreaties. I will leave you in your misfortunes as you left me and my Word.”

[17] In fact, no one for a moment thinks of how God has signally, richly and graciously blessed us; how we are in possession of actual paradise — yes, the entire kingdom of heaven — if we only recognized the fact: and yet we shamefully, ungratefully and unreasonably reject the kingdom; as if it were not enough for us to overstep the Ten Commandments in our disobedience, but must even trample underfoot the mercy God offers in the Gospel. Then why should we be surprised if he send down wrath upon us? What else is he to do but fulfill our Gospel passage for today, which threatens every individual rejecter and persecutor of God’s Son and his servants, by whom we are invited to the marriage — what else is God to do

but send out a divine army of servants to arrest the career of such murderers and to terminate their existence? We are given a special illustration — an example to the world — in the instance of the fate of Jerusalem, and in fact of the entire Jewish nation. They sinned unceasingly against all God's commandments, and when he proclaimed grace and offered forgiveness of sins, they trampled upon his mercy. Should Christ not revenge himself when they shamed and mocked his precious blood?

[18] Unto all the abominable sins mentioned, we must heap blasphemies; for when wrath and punishment come upon us we make outcry, complaining that the Gospel — or the new doctrine, as it is now called — is responsible. The Jews blame us Christians alone for the fact that they are scattered throughout the world. Their prayers day and night are directed against us, in blasphemies and reproaches inexpressible. Nevertheless, it was not the Christians who harassed and scattered them, but the heathenish Roman emperor. But whom other than themselves have the Jews to blame for their condition? for they would not tolerate Christ, when he brought them only help and boundless grace. Refusing to accept him whom God gave and in whom he promised all blessings, they necessarily lost their daily bread from God, except as they rebelliously extort it by usury and wickedness. They had also to suffer the loss of their national life, their priesthood and public worship, forgiveness of sins and redemption, and so remain eternally captive under the wrath and condemnation of God. Such is the just and inevitable punishment of the unwise — the foolish — who refused to recognize their opportunity when Christ was with them.

[19] With this terrible example before our eyes, we are still unrepentant, pursuing the same course the Jews followed, not only in disobedience to the will of God, but in rejecting his grace. For that grace we should earnestly long and pray, striving to secure to our children after us baptism, the ministry and the sacrament, in their purity. In return for our perversity, it will eventually be with us as with the Jews and other ungrateful persecutors and rejecters.

[20] Then let him who will receive advice and help, faithfully heed Paul's counsel and redeem the time, not sleeping away the blessed golden hour of grace; as Christ earnestly admonishes in the parable of the five foolish virgins. Matthew 25:13. The foolish virgins might have made their purchases in season, before the bridegroom's arrival; but failing to attend to

the matter until time to meet the bridegroom, they missed both the market and the wedding.

[21] The ancient poets and sages make use of a similar illustration at the expense of the cricket or grasshopper. As the fable runs, when winter came the grasshoppers, having nothing to eat, went to the ants and asked them to divide their gathered store. “What did you in the summer time that you gathered nothing?” asked the ants. “We sang,” the grasshoppers replied. “If you sang in the summer, you must dance for it in the winter,” was the response. Similarly, should fools unwilling to learn the will of God be answered. Terrible and alarming is the wrath of God when with scorn and mockery he turns away a soul. In Proverbs 1:24 and 26 he threatens: “Because I have called, and ye have refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man hath regarded I also will laugh in the day of your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh.”

[22] Some may ask what Paul means by adding to the phrase, “Redeeming the time,” the modifier, “because the days are evil”; if we are to regard the present opportunity golden, why are the days evil?

Evil Doctrines Ever Oppose the Christian

[23] I answer: The time is unquestionably good so long as the Gospel is sounded — is faithfully preached and received. At the same time, even today the world is filled with evils, factions, false theories and bad examples of every sort; much of this wickedness is inherent in ourselves. With these things the Christian must always contend; the devil pursues, and our own flesh discourages us and allures from recognition and observance of the divine will. If we strive not against it, we shall soon lose sight of God’s will, to our own injury, even while listening to the Gospel. For the devil’s strongest fury is exerted to befoul the world with fanaticism, and to draw from the pure doctrine of faith into that evil even them who possess the Gospel. Moreover, being still flesh and blood we are always self-secure, unwilling to be led by the Spirit, and indolent and unresponsive in relation to the Word of God and to prayer. Again, in the outward walks of life, in temporal conditions, only obstacles and evils meet us everywhere, impeding our spiritual progress and impelling us to suppress the Gospel and to rend the Church.

[24] Let no one, then, expect to enjoy an era of peace and pleasure here on earth. Although the present time is in itself good, and God bestows upon us the golden year of his Word and his grace, yet the devil is here with his factions and followers, and our own flesh supports him. He corrupts the blessed days of grace at every possible opportunity, and so oppresses Christians that they must contend against him with their utmost strength and vigilance if they would not, through the influence of evils and obstacles, be wrested from the Gospel they have received, and if they would persevere therein unto the end. Wherefore, we have the best reasons to adapt ourselves to the present time in the best possible way; to walk wisely and circumspectly, showing all faithfulness to the will of God; obeying it while we have opportunity — while still in possession of God’s Word, his grace and his Spirit. Being opposed and obstructed by the devil and our own flesh, we must, as Paul implies, be wise and careful; we must guard against following them. If we fail in this respect, it will not avail us to pretend we did not know our duty, or had not time to perform it, and consequently could not cope with them. So, then, we are to understand by “evil days” the allurements that lead us away from God’s Word and his will. “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.”

[25] The apostle touches upon several evils strongly tending to waste of time and neglect of the golden opportunity. Especially is drunkenness one, for drink makes men particularly self-secure, reckless and disorderly. The evil was formerly common in Greece, and in Germany today are men who delight in being riotously drunk night and day. Such individuals are utterly lacking in the faithfulness and interest essential to following the will of God. They are unable, even in temporal affairs, to persistently apply themselves, much less to be opportune. Indeed, so beastly and swinish do they become, they lose all sense of either shame or honor; they have no modesty nor any human feeling. Alas, examples are before our eyes plainer and more numerous than we can depict.

[26] Paul’s words of admonition, “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,” are treated in the epistle passage for the fifth Sunday after Epiphany, where the text is similar.

Twenty First Sunday after Trinity. The Christian Armor and Weapons.

Text: Ephesians 6:10-17.

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Ephesians 6:10-17

The Christian Armor and Weapons

This epistle text is fully expounded in “The Explanations and Sermons on Paul’s Epistles” — in the sermon on Ephesians 6:10-17, entitled “The Christian Armor and Weapons,” preached in the year 1533.

Twenty Second Sunday after Trinity. Paul's Thanks and Prayers for His Churches.

Text: Philippians 1:3-11.

3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,
4 Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,
5 For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;
6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work
in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:
7 Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my
heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation
of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.
8 For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of
Jesus Christ.
9 And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in
knowledge and in all judgment;
10 That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere
and without offence till the day of Christ;
11 Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ,
unto the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:3-11

Paul's Thanks and Prayers for Churches

[1] First, the apostle Paul thanks God, as his custom is in the beginning of his epistles, for the grace whereby the Philippians came into the fellowship of the Gospel and were made partakers of it. Secondly, his desire and prayer to God is for their increase in the knowledge of the Gospel, and their more abundant fruits. His intent in extolling the Gospel is to admonish them to remain steadfast in their faith, continuing as they have begun and as they

now stand. Apparently this is a simple passage, especially to learned and apt students of the Scriptures. They may not think it holds any great truth to be discovered. Yet we must explain this and like discourses for the benefit of some who do not fully understand it, and who desire to learn.

[2] These words give us an exact delineation of the Christian heart that sincerely believes in the holy Gospel. Such hearts are rare in the world. It is especially difficult to find one so beautiful as we observe here unless it be among the beloved apostles or those who approached them in Christlikeness. For in the matter of faith we today are entirely too indolent and indifferent.

[3] But the Christian heart is such as inspired Paul's words; here its characteristics are shown. He rejoices in the Gospel with his inmost soul. He thanks God that others have come into its fellowship. His confidence is firm regarding certain beginners in the faith, and he is so interested in their salvation he rejoices in it as much as in his own, seeming unable to thank God sufficiently for it. He unceasingly prays that he may live to see many come with him into such fellowship and be preserved therein until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall perfect and complete all the defects of this earthly life. He prays these beginners may go forth faultlessly in faith and hope until that joyful day. Thus the godly apostle expresses himself, pouring out the depths of his heart — a heart filled with the real fruits of the Spirit and of faith. It burns with love and joy whenever he sees the Gospel recognized, accepted and honored, and the Church flourishing. Paul can conceive for the converts no loftier desire — can offer no greater petition for them than to implore God they may increase and persevere in the Gospel faith. Such is the inestimable value he places upon possessing and holding fast God's Word. And Christ in Luke 11:28 pronounces blessed those who keep the Word of God.

I. The Duty of Gratitude.

[5] Now, the first thing in which Paul is here an example to us is his gratitude. It behooves the Christian who recognizes the grace and goodness of God expressed in the Gospel, first of all to manifest his thankfulness therefore; toward God — his highest duty — and toward men. As Christians who have abandoned the false services and sacrifices that in our

past heathenish blindness we zealously practiced, let us remember our obligation henceforth to be the more fervent in offering true service and right sacrifices to God. We can render him no better — in fact, none other — service, or outward work, than the thank offering, as the Scriptures term it. That is, receiving and honoring the grace of God and the preaching and hearing of his Word, and furthering their operation, not only in word, but sincerely in our hearts and with all our physical and spiritual powers. This is the truest gratitude.

[6] God calls that a “pure offering” which is rendered to him “among the gentiles” (Malachi 1:11), where his name is not preached and praised from avariciousness, not from pride and presumption in the priesthood and in the holiness of human works. These motives actuated the boasting Jews, who, as God charges in this reference, presumptuously thought to receive honor from him for every trivial service like closing a door or opening a window. But the offering of the gentiles is joyfully rendered from a sincere, willing heart. This kind of thanksgiving and sacrifices are acceptable to God, for he says in Psalm 110:3, “Thy people shall be willing”; and in 2 Corinthians 9:7, “God loveth a cheerful giver.” The knowledge of the Gospel should inspire us with gratitude of this order. Let us not be found unthankful, and forgetful of God’s infinite goodness.

Ingratitude Denounced by the Heathen

[7] The heathen everywhere, despite their ignorance of God and his grace, condemned to the utmost the evil of ingratitude. They regarded it the mother of evils, than which was none more malevolent and shameful. Among many examples in this respect is one left us by a people in Arabia called Nabathians, who had an excellent form of government. So strict were they in regard to this evil that anyone found guilty of ingratitude to his fellows was looked upon as a murderer and punished with death.

[8] No sin is more abominable to human nature, and of none is human nature less tolerant. It is easier to forgive and to forget the act of an enemy who commits a bodily injury, or even murders one’s parents, than it is to forget the sin of him who repays simple kindness and fidelity with ingratitude and faithlessness; who for love and friendship returns hatred. In the sentiment of the Latin proverb, to be so rewarded is like rearing a

serpent in one's bosom. God likewise regards this sin with extreme enmity and punishes it. The Scriptures say: "Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house." Proverbs 17:13.

[9] Thus we have the teaching of nature and of reason regarding the sin of men's ingratitude toward one another. How much greater the evil, how much more shameful and accursed, when manifested toward God who, in his infinite and ineffable goodness, conferred upon us while yet enemies to him and deserving of the fires of hell — conferred upon us, I say, not ten dollars, not a hundred thousand dollars even, but redemption from divine wrath and eternal death, and abundantly comforted us, granting us safety, a good conscience, peace and salvation! These are inexpressible blessings, incomprehensible in this life. And they will continue to occupy our minds in yonder eternal life. How much more awful the sin of ingratitude for these blessings, as exemplified in the servant mentioned in the Gospel passage for today, to whom was forgiven the debt of ten thousand talents and who yet would not forgive the debt of his fellow servant who owed him a hundred pence!

[10] Is it not incredible that there are to be found on earth individuals wicked enough to manifest for the highest and eternal blessings such unspeakable ingratitude? But alas, we have the evidence of our own eyes. We know them in their very dwelling places. We see how the world abounds with them. Not only are the ingrates to be found among deliberate rejecters of the acknowledged truth of the Gospel, concerning God's grace, an assured conscience and the promise of eternal life, terrible as such malice of the devil is, but they are present also in our midst, accepting the Gospel and boasting of it. Such shameful ingratitude prevails among the masses it would not be strange were God to send upon them the thunders and lightnings of his wrath, yes, all the Turks and the devils of hell. There is a generally prevalent ingratitude like that of the wicked servant who readily forgot the straits he experienced when, being called to account for what he could not pay, the wrathful sentence was pronounced against him that he and all he possessed must be sold, and he be indefinitely imprisoned. Nor have we less readily forgotten how we were tortured under the Papacy; how we were overwhelmed, drowned as in a flood, with numberless strange doctrines, when our anxious consciences longed for salvation. Now that we are, through the grace of God, liberated from these distresses, our gratitude

is of a character to increasingly heap to ourselves the wrath of God. So have others before us done, and consequently have endured terrible chastisement.

[11] Only calculate the enormity of our wickedness when, God having infinitely blessed us in forgiving all our sins and making us lords over heaven and earth, we so little respect him as to be unmindful of his blessings; to be unwilling for the sake of them sincerely to forgive our neighbor a single slighting word, not to mention rendering him service. We conduct ourselves as if God might be expected to connive at our ingratitude and permit us to continue in it, at the same time conferring upon us as godly and obedient children, success and happiness. More than this, we think we have the privilege and power to live and do as we please. Indeed, the more learning and power we have and the more exalted our rank, the greater knaves we are; perpetrating every wicked deed, stirring up strife, discord, war and murder for the sake of executing our own arbitrary designs, where the question is the surrender of a penny in recognition of the hundreds of thousands of dollars daily received from God notwithstanding our ingratitude.

[12] Two mighty lords clash with each other like powerful battering rams, and for what? Perhaps for undisputed possession of a city or two, a matter they must be ashamed of did they but call to mind what they have received from God. They would be constrained to exclaim: "What are we doing that we injure one another — we who are all baptized in one name, the name of Christ, and pledged to one Lord?" But no, it will not do for them to consider this matter; not even to think of it. They must turn their eyes away from it and put it far from their hearts. Wholly forgetting God's benefits, they must wage war against each other, involving nations, and subjecting people to the Turk. And all for sake of the insignificant farthing each refused to yield to the other.

[13] The world permits the very devil to saddle and ride it as he pleases. It seems to be characteristic of every phase of life that one will not yield to another — will not submit to any demand. Everyone is disposed to force his arrogant authority. The presumption is that supreme honor and final success depend upon an unyielding, unforgiving disposition, and that to seek to retain our possessions by peaceable means will prove our ruin. Even the two remaining cows in the stall must be brought into requisition, and war waged to the last stick, until when the mutineer comes and we have neither

cow nor stall, nor house nor stick, we are obliged to cease. Retribution Follows Ingratitude Oh, had we but grace enough to reflect on how it would be with us did God require us, as he has a perfect right to do, to pay our whole indebtedness, none being forgiven! grace enough to think whether we would not this very moment be in the abyss of hell! But so must it finally be with those who disregard the question and continually heap to themselves the wrath of God, being at the same time unwilling for him to deal otherwise with them than he did with the servant he forgave. But against that servant was finally passed the irrevocable sentence which, without mercy, delivered him to the tormentor till he should pay the debt, something he could never do.

[14] Nor is there any wrong or injustice in this ruling. For, as St. Bernhard says, ingratitude is an evil damnable and pernicious enough to quench all the springs of grace and blessing known to God and men; it is like a poison-laden, burning, destructive wind. Human nature will not tolerate it. Nor can God permit you, upon whom he has bestowed all grace and goodness, all spiritual and temporal blessing, to go on continually in wickedness, defiantly abusing his benevolence and dishonoring him; you thus recklessly bring upon yourself his wrath. For God cannot bless you if you are ungrateful, if you reject his goodness and give it no place in your heart. In such case the fountain of grace and mercy that continually springs for all who sincerely desire it, must be quenched for you. You cannot enjoy it. It would afford you an abundant and unceasing supply of water did you not yourself dry it up by the deadly wind of your ingratitude; by shamefully forgetting the ineffable goodness God bestows upon you; and by failing to honor the blood of Christ the Lord, wherewith he purchased us and reconciled us to God — failing to honor it enough to forgive your neighbor, for Christ's sake, a single wrong word.

[15] What heavy burden is there for the individual who, in submission and gratitude to his God, and in honor to Christ, would conduct himself something like a Christian? It will cost him no great effort nor trouble. It will not break any bones nor injure him in property or honor. Even were it to affect him to some trifling extent, to incur for him some slight injustice, he should remember what God has given him, and will still give, of his grace and goodness. Yes, why complain even were you, in some measure, to endanger body and life? What did not the Son of God incur for you? It

was not pleasure for him to take upon himself the wrath of God, to bear the curse for you. It cost him bloody sweat and unspeakable anguish of heart, as well as the sacrifice of his body, the shedding of his blood, when he bore for you the wrath and curse of God, which would have rested upon you forever. Yet he did it cheerfully and with fervent love. Should you not, then, be ashamed in your own heart, and humiliated before all creatures, to be so slow and dull, so stock-and-stone-hardened, about enduring and forgiving an occasional unkind word — something to be suffered in token of honor and gratitude to him? What more noble than, for the sake of Christ, to incur danger, to suffer injury, to aid the poor and needy? in particular to further the Word of God and to support the ministry, the pulpit and the schools?

[16] It would be no marvel had Germany long ago sunk to ruin, or had it been razed to its very foundations by Turks and Tartars, because of its diabolical forgetfulness, its damnable rejection, of God's unspeakable grace. Indeed, it is a wonder the earth continues to support us and the sun still gives us light. Because of our ingratitude, well might the heavens become dark and the earth be perverted — as the Scriptures teach (Psalm 106) — and suffer the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, no longer yielding a leaf nor a blade of grass, but completely turned from its course — well might it be so did not God, for the sake of the few godly Christians known and acknowledged of him, forbear and still delay.

Examples of Ingratitude for the Gospel

[17] Wherever we turn our eyes we see, in all conditions of life, a deluge of terrible examples of ingratitude for the precious Gospel. We see how kings, princes and lords scratch and bite; how they envy and hate one another, oppressing their own people and destroying their own countries; how they tax themselves with not so much as a single Christian thought about ameliorating the wretchedness of Germany and securing for the oppressed Church somewhere a shelter of defense against the murderous attacks of devil, Pope and Turks. The noblemen rake and rend, robbing whomever they can, prince or otherwise, and especially the poor Church; like actual devils, they trample under foot pastors and preachers. Townsmen and farmers, too, are extremely avaricious, extortionate and treacherous; they fearlessly perpetrate every sort of insolence and wickedness, and without

shame and unpunished. The earth cries to heaven, unable longer to tolerate its oppression.

[18] But why multiply words? It is in vain so far as the world is concerned; no admonition will avail. The world remains the devil's own. We must remember we shall not by any means find with the world that Christian heart pictured by the apostle; on the contrary we shall find what might be represented by a picture of the very opposite type — the most shameless ingratitude. But let the still existing God-fearing Christians be careful to imitate in their gratitude the spirit of the apostle's beautiful picture. Let them give evidence of their willingness to hear the Word of God, of pleasure and delight in it and grief where it is rejected. Let them show by their lives a consciousness of the great blessing conferred by those from whom they received the Gospel. As recipients of such goodness, let their hearts and lips ever be ready with the happy declaration: "God be praised!" For thereunto are we called. As before said, praise should be the constant service and daily sacrifice of Christians; and according to Paul's teaching here, the Christian's works, his fruits of righteousness, should shine before men. Such manifestation of gratitude assuredly must result when we comprehend what God has given us.

[19] Notwithstanding the world's refusal to be influenced by the recognition of God's goodness, and in spite of the fact that we are obliged daily to see, hear and suffer the world's increasing ungratefulness the longer it stands, we must not allow ourselves to be led into error; for we will be unable to change it. We must preach against the evil of ingratitude wherever possible, severely censuring it, and faithfully admonish all men to guard against it. At the same time we have to remember the world will not submit. Although compelled to live among the ungrateful, we are not for that reason to fall into error nor to cease from doing good. Let our springs be dispersed abroad, as Solomon says in Proverbs 5:16. Let us continually do good, not faltering when others receive our good as evil. Just as God causes his sun to rise on the thankful and the unthankful. Matthew 5:45.

[20] But if your good works are wrought with the object of securing the thanks and applause of the world, you will meet with a reception quite the reverse. Your reward will justly be that of him who crushes with his teeth the hollow nut only to defile his mouth. Now, if when ingratitude is met with, you angrily wish to pull down mountains, and resolve to give up

doing good, you are no longer a Christian. You injure yourself and accomplish nothing. Can you not be mindful of your environment — that you are still in the world where vice and ingratitude hold sway? that you are, as the phrase goes, with “those who return evil for good”? He who would escape this fact must flee the boundaries of the world. It requires no great wisdom to live only among the godly and do good, but the keenest judgment is necessary to live with the wicked and not do evil.

[21] Christianity should be begun in youth, to give practice in the endurance that will enable one to do good to all men while expecting evil in return. Not that the Christian is to commend and approve evil conduct; he is to censure and restrain wickedness to the limit of the authority his position in life affords. It is the best testimony to the real merit of a work when its beneficiaries are not only ungrateful but return evil. For its results tend to restrain the doer from a too high opinion of himself, and the character of the work is too precious in God’s sight for the world to be worthy of rewarding it.

II. The Duty of Prayer.

[22] The other Christian duty named by Paul in this passage is that of prayer. The two obligations — gratitude for benefits received, and prayer for the preservation and growth of God’s work begun in us — are properly related. Prayer is of supreme importance, for the devil and the world assail us and delight in turning us aside; we have continually to resist wickedness. So the conflict is a sore one for our feeble flesh and blood, and we cannot stand unvanquished unless there be constant, earnest invocation of divine aid. Gratitude and prayer are essential and must accompany each other, according to the requirements of the daily sacrifice of the Old Testament: the offering of praise, or thank offering, thanks to God for blessings received; and the sacrifice of prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer — the petition against the wickedness and evil from which we would be released.

[23] Our life has not yet reached the heights it is destined to attain. We know here only its incipient first-fruits. Desire is not satisfied; we have but a foretaste. As yet we only realize by faith what is bestowed upon us; full and tangible occupancy is to come. Therefore, we need to pray because of the limitations that bind our earthly life, until we go yonder where prayer is

unnecessary, and all is happiness, purity of life and one eternal song of thanks and praise to God. But heavenly praise and joy is to have its inception and a measure of growth here on earth through the encouragement of prayer — prayer for ourselves and the Church as a whole; that is, for them who have accepted and believe the Gospel and are thus mutually helpful. For the Gospel will receive greater exaltation and will inspire more joy with the individual because of its acceptance by the many. So Paul says he thanks God for the fellowship of the Philippians in the Gospel, and offers prayer in their behalf.

Prayer for Others

[24] Yes, it should be the joy of a Christian heart to see multitudes accept the offer of mercy, and praise and thank God with him. This desire for the participation of others in the Gospel promotes the spirit of prayer. The Christian cannot be a misanthrope, wholly unconcerned whether his fellows believe or not. He should be interested in all men and unceasingly long and pray for their salvation; for the sanctification of God's name, the coming of his kingdom, the fulfilment of his will; and for the exposure everywhere of the devil's deceptions, the suppression of his murderous power over poor souls and the restraint of his authority.

[25] This prayer should be the sincere, earnest outflow of the true Christian's heart. Note, Paul's words here indicate that his praise and prayer were inspired by a fervent spirit. It is impossible that the words "I thank my God upon all my remembrance of you, always in every supplication" be the expression of any but a heart full of such sentiments. Truly, Paul speaks in a way worthy of an apostle — saying he renders praise and prayer with keenest pleasure. He rejoices in his heart that he has somewhere a little band of Christians who love the Gospel and with whom he may rejoice; that he may thank God for them and pray in their behalf. Was there not much more reason that all they who had heard the Gospel should rejoice, and thank Paul in heart and in expression for it, praying God in his behalf? should rejoice that they became worthy of the apostle's favor, were delivered from their blindness and had now received from him the light transferring from sin and death into the grace of God and eternal life?

[26] But Paul does not wait for them to take the initiative, as they ought to have done to declare their joy and their gratitude to him. In his first utterance he pours out the joy of his heart, fervently thanking God for them, etc. Well might they have blushed, and reproached themselves, when they received the epistle beginning with these words. Well might they have said, “We should not have permitted him to speak in this way; it was our place first to show him gratitude and joy.”

Few Believers No Reason for Discouragement

[27] We shall not soon be able to boast the attainment of that beautiful, perfect Christian spirit the apostle’s words portray. Seeing how the apostle rejoices over finding a few believers in the Gospel, why should we complain because of the smaller number who accord us a hearing and seriously accept the Word of God? We have no great reason to complain nor to be discouraged since Christ and the prophets and apostles, meeting with the same backwardness on the part of the people, still were gratified over the occasional few who accepted the faith. We note how Christ rejoiced when now and then he found one who had true faith, and on the other hand was depressed when his own people refused to hear him, and reluctantly censured them. And Paul did not meet with more encouragement. In all the Roman Empire — and through the greater part of it he had traveled with the Gospel — he only occasionally found a place where was even a small band of earnest Christians; but over them he peculiarly rejoices, finding in them greater consolation than in all the treasures on earth.

[28] But it is a prophecy of good to the world, a portent of ultimate success, that Christ and his apostles and ministers must rejoice over an occasional reception of the beloved Word. Such acceptance will tell in time. One would think all men might eagerly have hastened to the ends of the earth to be afforded an opportunity of hearing an apostle. But Paul had to go through the world himself upon his ministry, enduring great fatigue and encountering privations and grave dangers, being rejected and trampled upon by all men. However, disregarding it all, he rejoiced to be able now and then to see some soul accept the Gospel. In time past it was not necessary for the Pope and his officials to run after anyone. They sat in lordly authority in their kingdom, and all men had to obey their summons, wherever wanted, and that without thanks.

[29] What running on the part of our fathers, even of many of us, as if we were foolish — running from all countries, hundreds of miles, to Jerusalem, to the holy sepulcher, to Compostella, St. James, Rome, to the heads of St. Peter and St. Paul; some barefooted and others in complete armor — all this, to say nothing of innumerable other pilgrimages! We thus expended large sums of money, and thanked God, and rejoiced to be able thereby to purchase the wicked indulgences of the Pope and to be worthy to look upon or to kiss the bones of the dead exhibited as holy relics, but preferably to kiss the feet of His Most Holy Holiness, the Pope. This condition of things the world desires again, and it shall have nothing better.

Twenty Third Sunday after Trinity. The Enemies of the Cross of Christ and the Christian's Citizenship in Heaven

Text: Philippians 3:17-21.

17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.

18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:

19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his

glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. Philippians 3:17-21

Enemies of the Cross of Christ and the Christian's Citizenship in Heaven

[1] Paul immeasurably extols the Philippians for having made a good beginning in the holy Gospel and for having acquitted themselves commendably, like men in earnest, as manifest by their fruits of faith. The reason he shows this sincere and strong concern for them is his desire that they remain steadfast, not being led astray by false teachers among the roaming Jews. For at that time many Jews went about with the intent of perverting Paul's converts, pretending they taught something far better; while they drew the people away from Christ and back to the Law, for the purpose of establishing and extending their Jewish doctrines. Paul, contemplating with special interest and pleasure his Church of the Philippians, is moved by parental care to admonish them lest they sometime be misled by such teachers to hold steadily to what they have received, not seeking anything else and not imagining, like self-secure, besotted souls who allow themselves to be deceived by the devil not imagining themselves perfect and with complete understanding in all things. In the verses just preceding our text he speaks of himself as having not yet attained to full knowledge.

Purity of Doctrine Enjoined

[2] He particularly admonishes them to follow him and to mark those ministers who walk as he does; also to shape their belief and conduct by the pattern they have received from him. Not only of himself does he make an example, but introduces them who similarly walk, several of whom he mentions in this letter to the Philippians. The individuals whom he bids them observe and follow must have been persons of special eminence. But it is particularly the doctrine the apostle would have the Philippians pattern after. Therefore we should be chiefly concerned about preserving the purity of the office of the ministry and the genuineness of faith. When these are kept unsullied, doctrine will be right, and good works spontaneous. Later

on, in chapter 4, verse 8, Paul admonishes, with reference to the same subject: "If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

[3] Apparently Paul is a rash man to dare boast himself a pattern for all. Other ministers might well accuse him of desiring to exalt his individual self above others. "Think you," our wise ones would say to him, "that you alone have the Holy Spirit, or that no one else is as eager for honor as yourself?" Just so did Miriam and Aaron murmur against Moses, their own brother, saying: "Hath Jehovah indeed spoken only with Moses? hath he not spoken also with us?" Numbers 12,2. And it would seem as if Paul had too high an appreciation of his own character did he hold up his individual self as a pattern, intimating that no one was to be noted as worthy unless he walked as he did; though there might be some who apparently gave greater evidence of the Spirit, of holiness, humility and other graces, than himself, and yet walked not in his way.

[4] But he does not say "I, Paul, alone." He says, "as ye have us for an example", that does not exclude other true apostles and teachers. He is admonishing his Church, as he everywhere does, to hold fast to the one true doctrine received from him in the beginning. They are not to be too confident of their own wisdom in the matter, or to presume they have independent authority; but rather to guard against pretenders to a superior doctrine, for so had some been misled.

Righteousness of the Law Is Vain

[5] In what respect he was a pattern or example to them, he has made plain; for instance, in the beginning of this chapter, in the third verse and following, he says: "For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh: though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh: if any other man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews." That is, he commands the highest honor a Jew can boast. "As touching the law," he goes on, "a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the Church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless. Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea

verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”

[6] “Behold, this is the picture or pattern,” he would say, “which we hold up for you to follow, that remembering how you obtained righteousness you may hold to it a righteousness not of the Law.” So far as the righteousness of the Law is concerned, Paul dares to say he regards it as filth and refuse (that proceeds from the human body); notwithstanding in its beautiful and blameless form it may be unsurpassed by anything in the world such righteousness as was manifest in sincere Jews, and in Paul himself before his conversion; for these in their great holiness, regarded Christians as knaves and meriting damnation, and consequently took delight in being party to the persecution and murder of Christians.

[7] “Yet,” Paul would say, “I who am a Jew by birth have counted all this merit as simply loss that I might be found in ‘the righteousness which is from God by faith’.” Only the righteousness of faith teaches us how to apprehend God how to confidently console ourselves with his grace and await a future life, expecting to approach Christ in the resurrection. By “approaching” him we mean to meet him in death and at the judgment day without terror, not fleeing but gladly drawing near and hailing him with joy as one waited for with intense longing. Now, the righteousness of the Law cannot effect such confidence of mind. Hence, for me it avails nothing before God; rather it is a detriment. What does avail is God’s imputation of righteousness for Christ’s sake, through faith. God declares to us in his Word that the believer in his Son shall, for Christ’s own sake, have God’s grace and eternal life. He who knows this is able to wait in hope for the last day, having no fear, no disposition to flee.

[8] But is it not treating the righteousness of the Law with irreverence and contempt to regard it and so teach as something not only useless and even obstructive, but injurious, loathsome and abominable? Who would have been able to make such a bold statement, and to censure a life so faultless and conforming so closely to the Law as Paul’s, without being pronounced by all men a minion of the devil, had not the apostle made that

estimation of it himself? And who is to have any more respect for the righteousness of the Law if we are to preach in that strain?

[9] Had Paul confined his denunciations to the righteousness of the world or of the heathen the righteousness dependent upon reason and controlled by secular government, by laws and regulations his teaching would not have seemed so irreverent. But he distinctly specifies the righteousness of God's Law, or the Ten Commandments, to which we owe an obligation far above what is due temporal powers, for they teach how to live before God something no heathenish court of justice, no temporal authority, knows anything about. Should we not condemn as a heretic this preacher who goes beyond his prerogative and dares find fault with the Law of God? who also warns us to shun such as observe it, such as trust in its righteousness, and exalts to sainthood "enemies of the cross of Christ whose God is the belly" who serve the appetites instead of God?

[10] Paul would say of himself: "I, too, was such a one. In my most perfect righteousness of the Law I was an enemy to and persecutor of the congregation, or Church, of Christ. It was the legitimate fruit of my righteousness that I though I must be party to the most horrible persecution of Christ and his Christians. Thus my holiness made me an actual enemy of Christ and a murderer of his followers. The disposition to injure is a natural result of the righteousness of the Law, as all Scripture history from Cain down testifies, and as we see even in the rest of the world who have not come to the knowledge of Christ. Princes, civil authorities in proportion to their wisdom, their godliness and honor are the bitter and intolerant enemies of the Gospel.

[11] Of the sensual papistical dolts at Rome, cardinals, bishops, priests and the like, it is not necessary to speak here. their works are manifest. All honorable secular authorities must confess they are simply abandoned knaves, living shameless lives of open scandal, avarice, arrogance, unchastity, vanity, robbery and wickedness of every kind. Not only are they guilty of such living, but shamelessly endeavor to defend their conduct. They must, then, be regarded enemies of Christ and of all honesty and virtue. Hence every respectable man is justly antagonistic toward them. But, as before said, Paul is not here referring to this class, but to eminent, godly individuals, whose lives are beyond reproach. These very ones, when Christians are encountered, are hostile and heinous enough to be able to

forget all their own faults in the sight of God, and to magnify to huge beams the motes we Christians have. In fact, they must style the Gospel heresy and satanic doctrine for the purpose of exalting their own holiness and zeal for God.

Righteousness of the Law Opposes the Cross

[12] The thing seems incredible, and I would not have believed it myself, nor have understood Paul's words here, had I not witnessed it with my own eyes and experienced it. Were the apostle to repeat the charge today, who could conceive that our first, noblest, most respectable, godly and holy people, those whom we might expect, above all others, to accept the Word of God that they, I say, should be enemies to the Christian doctrine? But the examples before us testify very plainly that the "enemies" the apostle refers to must be the individuals styled godly and worthy princes and noblemen, honorable citizens, learned, wise, intelligent individuals. Yet if these could devour at one bite the "Evangelicals," as they are now called, they would do it.

[13] If you ask, Whence such a disposition? I answer, it naturally springs from human righteousness. For every individual who professes human righteousness, and knows nothing of Christ, holds that efficacious before God. He relies upon it and gratifies himself with it, presuming thereby to present a flattering appearance in God's sight and to render himself peculiarly acceptable to him. From being proud and arrogant toward God, he comes to reject them who are not righteous according to the Law; as illustrated in the instance of the Pharisee. Luke 18:11-12. But greater is his enmity and more bitter his hatred toward the preaching that dares to censure such righteousness and assert its futility to merit God's grace and eternal life.

[14] I myself, and others with me, were dominated by such feelings when, under popery, we claimed to be holy and pious; we must confess the fact. If thirty years ago, when I was a devout, holy monk, holding mass every day and having no thought but that I was in the road leading directly to heaven. If then anyone had accused me had preached to me the things of this text and pronounced our righteousness which accorded not strictly with the Law of God, but conformed to human doctrine and was manifestly

idolatrous pronounced it without efficacy and said I was an enemy to the cross of Christ, serving my own sensual appetites, I would immediately have at Mass helped to find stones for putting to death such a Stephen, or to gather wood for the burning of this worst of heretics.

[15] So human nature ever does. The world cannot conduct itself in any other way, when the declaration comes from heaven saying: “True you are a holy man, a great and learned jurist, a conscientious regent, a worthy prince, an honorable citizen, and so on, but with all your authority and your upright character you are going to hell; your every act is offensive and condemned in God’s sight. If you would be saved you must become an altogether different man; your mind and heart must be changed.” Let this be announced and the fire rises, the Rhine is all ablaze; for the self-righteous regard it an intolerable idea that lives so beautiful, lives devoted to praiseworthy callings, should be publicly censured and condemned by the objectionable preaching of a few insignificant individuals regarded as even pernicious, and according to Paul, as filthy refuse, actual obstacles to eternal life.

[16] But you may say: “What? Do you forbid good works? Is it not right to lead an honorable, virtuous life? Do you not acknowledge the necessity of political laws, of civil governments? that upon obedience to them depends the maintenance of discipline, peace and honor? Indeed, do you not admit that God himself commands such institutions and wills their observance, punishing where they are disregarded? Much more would he have his own Law and the Ten Commandments honored, not rejected. How dare you then assert that such righteousness is misleading, and obstructive to eternal life? What consistence is there in teaching people to observe the things of the Law, to be righteous in that respect, and at the same time censuring those things as condemned before God? How can the works of the Law be good and precious, and yet repulsive and productive of evil?”

[17] I answer, Paul well knows the world takes its stand on this point of righteousness by the Law, and hence would contradict him. But let him who will, consult the apostle as to why he makes such bold assertions here. For indeed the words of the text are not our words, but his. True, law and government are essential in temporal life, as Paul himself confesses, and God would have everyone honor and obey them. Indeed, he has ordained their observance among Turks and heathen. Yet it is a fact that these people,

even the best and most upright of them, they who lead honorable lives, are naturally in their hearts enemies to Christ, and devote their intellectual powers to exterminating God's people. It must be universally admitted that the Turks, with all the restrictions and austerity of life imposed upon them by the Koran, a life more rigorous even than that of Christians it must be admitted they belong to the devil. In other words, we adjudge them condemned with all their righteousness, but at the same time say they do right in punishing thieves, robbers, murderers, drunkards and other offenders; more, that Christians living within their jurisdiction are under obligation to pay tribute, and to serve them with person and property. Precisely the same thing is true respecting our princes who persecute the Gospel and are open enemies to Christ: we must be obedient to them, paying the tribute and rendering the service imposed; yet they, and all obedient followers willingly consenting to the persecution of the Gospel, must be looked upon as condemned before God.

[18] Similarly does Paul speak concerning the righteousness of all the Jews and pious saints who are not Christians. His utterance is bold and of certain sound. He censures them and, weeping, deprecatingly refers to certain who direct the people to the righteousness of the law with the sole result of making "enemies to the cross of Christ."

[19] Again, all the praise he has for them is to say that their "end is perdition"; they are condemned in spite of strenuous efforts all their lives to teach and enforce the righteousness of work. Here on earth it is truly a price less distinction, an admirable and noble treasure, a praise worthy honor, to have the name of being a godly and up right prince, ruler or citizen; a pious, virtuous wife or virgin. Who would not praise and exalt such virtue? It is indeed a rare and valuable thing in the world. But however beautiful, priceless and admirable an honor it is, Paul tells us, it is ultimately condemned and pertains not to heaven.

Human Righteousness Idolatrous

[20] The apostle makes his accusation yet more galling with the words "whose god is their belly." Thus you hear how human righteousness, even at its best, extends no higher than to service of the sensual appetites. Take all the wisdom, justice, jurisprudence, artifice, even the highest virtues the

world affords, and what are they? They minister only to that god, carnal appetite. They can go no farther than the needs of this life, their whole purpose being to satisfy physical cravings. When the physical appetites of the worldly pass, they pass likewise, and the gifts and virtues we have mentioned can no longer serve them. All perish and go to destruction together righteousness, virtues, laws and physical appetites which they have served as their god. For they are wholly ignorant of the true and eternal God; they know not how to serve him and receive eternal life. So then in its essential features such a life is merely idolatrous, having no greater object than the preservation of this perishable body and its enjoyment of peace and honor.

[21] The fourth accusation is, “whose glory is in their shame.” That is all their glory amounts to. Let wise philosophers, scrupulous heathen, keen jurists, receive the acme of praise and honor it is yet but shame. True, their motto is “Love of Virtue;” they boast strong love of virtue and righteousness and may even think themselves sincere. But judged by final results, their boast is without foundation and ends in shame. For the utmost their righteousness can effect is the applause of the world here on earth. Before God it avails nothing. It cannot touch the life to come. Ultimately it leaves its possessor a captive in shame. Death devours and hell clutches him.

[22] You may again object, “If what you say it true, why observe temporal restrictions? Let us live in indulgent carelessness following our inclinations. Let pass the godly, honorable man; the virtuous, upright wife or virgin.” I answer, By no means; that is not the design. You have heard it is God’s command and will that there be temporal righteousness even among Turks and heathen. And later on (Philippians 4:8) Paul admonishes Christians to “think on these things,” that is, on what is true. He says: “Whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” And continuing, in verse 9, he refers them to his own example, saying, “which ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me.”

Fruits of Faith

[23] With the believers in Christ, them who have their righteousness in him, there should follow in this life on earth the fruits of upright living, in obedience to God. These fruits constitute the good works acceptable to God, which, being works of faith and wrought in Christ, will be rewarded in the life to come. But Paul has in mind the individuals who, rejecting faith in Christ, regard their self-directed lives, their humanly wrought works, which conform to the Law, as righteousness availing in the sight of God. His reference is to them who so trust, though wholly ignorant of Christ, for whose sake, without any merit on our part, righteousness is imputed to us by God. The only condition is we must believe in Christ; for he became man, died for our sins and rose from the dead, for the very purpose of liberating us from our sins and granting us his resurrection and life. Toward the heavenly life we should tend, in our life here walking in harmony with it; as Paul says in conclusion: "Our citizenship is in heaven [not earthly and not confined to this temporal life only]; whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." If we have no knowledge, no consciousness, of this fact, it matters not how beautiful and praiseworthy our human, earthly righteousness may be, it is merely a hindrance and an injury. For flesh and blood cannot help relying on its own righteousness and arrogantly boasting in this strain: "We are better, more honorable, more godly, than others. We Jews are the people of God and keep his Law." Even Christians are not wholly free from the pernicious influence of human holiness. They ever seek to bring their own works and merits before God. I know for myself what pains are inflicted by this godless wisdom, this figment of righteousness, and what effort must be made before the serpent's head is bruised.

[24] Now, this is the situation and there is no alternative: Either suffer hell or regard your human righteousness as loss and filth and endeavor not to be found relying on it at your last hour, in the presence of God and judgment, but rather stand in the righteousness of Christ. In the garment of Christ's righteousness and reared in him you may, in the resurrection from sin and death, meet Christ and exclaim: "Hail, beloved Lord and Savior, thou who hast redeemed me from the wretched body of sin and death, and fashioned me like unto thy holy, pure and glorious body.

God's Patience with Human Righteousness

[25] Meantime, while we walk in the faith of his righteousness, he has patience with the poor, frail righteousness of this earthly life, which otherwise is but filth in his sight. He honors our human holiness by supporting and protecting it during the time we live on earth; just as we honor our corrupt, filthy bodies, adorning them with beautiful, costly garments and golden ornaments, and reposing them on cushions and beds of luxury. Though but stench and filth encased in flesh, they are honored above everything else on earth. For their sake are all things performed the ordering and ruling, building and laboring; and God himself permits sun and moon to shine that they may receive light and heat, and everything to grow on earth for their benefit. What is the human body but a beautiful pyx containing that filthy, repulsive object of reverence, the digestive organs, which the body must always patiently carry about; yes, which we must even nourish and minister to, glad if only they perform their functions properly?

[26] Similarly God deals with us. Because he would confer eternal life upon man, he patiently endures the filthy righteousness of this life wherein we must dwell until the last day, for the sake of his chosen people and until the number is complete. For so long as the final day is deferred, not all to have eternal life are yet born. When the time shall be fulfilled, the number completed, God will suddenly bring to an end the world with its governments, its jurists and authorities, its conditions of life; in short, he will utterly abolish earthly righteousness, destroying physical appetites and all else together. For every form of human holiness is condemned to destruction; yet for the sake of Christians, to whom eternal life is appointed, and for their sake only, all these must be perpetuated until the last saint is born and has attained life everlasting. Were there but one saint yet to be born, for the sake of that one the world must remain. For God regards not the world nor has he need for it, except for the sake of his Christians.

[27] Therefore, when God enjoins upon us obedience to the emperor, and godly, honest lives on earth, it is no war rant that our subjection to temporal authority is to continue forever. Instead, God necessarily will minister to, adorn and honor this wretched body — vile body, as Paul here has it with power and dominion. Yet the apostle terms human righteousness “filth,” and says it is not necessary to God’s kingdom; indeed, that it is condemned in the sight of God with all its honor and glory, and all the world must be ashamed of it in his presence, confessing themselves guilty.

Paul in Romans 3:27 and Romans 4:2 testifies to this fact when he tells how even the exalted, holy fathers Abraham, and others though having glory before the world because of their righteous works, could not make them serve to obtain honor before God. Much less will worldly honor avail with God in the case of individuals who, being called honorable, pious, honest, virtuous lords and princes, wives and husbands boast of such righteousness.

[28] Outwardly, then, though your righteousness may appear dazzlingly beautiful before the world, inwardly you are but filth. Illustrative of this point is the story told of a certain nun regarded holy above all others. She would not fellowship with anyone else, but sat alone in her cell in rapt devotion, praying unceasingly. She boasted special revelations and visions and had no consciousness of anything but that beloved angels hovered about and adorned her with a golden crown. But some outside, ardently desiring to behold such sights, peeped through holes and crevices, and seeing her head but defiled with filth, laughed at her.

[29] Notice, the reason Paul calls the righteousness of the Law filth and pollution, is his desire to denounce the honor and glory claimed for it in God's sight; notwithstanding he honors before the world the observance of the Law by styling it "righteousness." But if you ostentatiously boast of such righteousness to him, he pronounces his sentence of judgment making you an abomination, an enemy of the cross of Christ, and shaming your boasted honor and finally casting you into hell. Concerning the righteousness of faith, however, which in Christ avails before God, he says: "Our citizenship [conversation] is in heaven, from Whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body."

[30] We who are baptized and believe in Christ, Paul's thought is, do not base our works and our hope on the righteousness of this temporal life. Through faith in Christ, we have a righteousness that holds in heaven. It abides in Christ alone; otherwise it would avail naught before God. And our whole concern is to be eternally in Christ; to have our earthly existence culminate in yonder life when Christ shall come and change this life into another, altogether new, pure, holy and like unto his own, with a life and a body having the nature of his.

The Christian a Citizen of Heaven

[31] Therefore we are no longer citizens of earth. The baptized Christian is born a citizen of heaven through baptism. We should be mindful of this fact and walk here as if native there. We are to console ourselves with the fact that God thus accepts us and will transplant us there. Meantime we must await the coming again of the Savior, who is to bring from heaven to us eternal righteousness, life, honor and glory.

[32] We are baptized and made Christians, not to the end that we may have great honor, or renown of righteousness, or earthly dominion, power and possessions. Notwithstanding we do have these because they are requisite to our physical life, yet we are to regard them as mere filth, wherewith we minister to our bodily welfare as best we can for the benefit of posterity. We Christians, however, are expectantly to await the coming of the Savior. His coming will not be to our injury or shame as it may be in the case of others. He comes for the salvation of our unprofitable, impotent bodies. Wretchedly worthless as they are in this life, they are much more unprofitable when lifeless and perishing in the earth.

[33] But, however miserable, powerless and contemptible in life and death, Christ will at his coming render our bodies beautiful, pure, shining and worthy of honor, until they correspond to his own immortal, glorious body. Not like it as it hung on the cross or lay in the grave, blood stained, livid and disgraced; but as it is now, glorified at the Father's right hand. We need not, then, be alarmed at the necessity of laying aside our earthly bodies; at being despoiled of the honor, righteousness and life adhering in them, to deliver it to the devouring power of death and the grave something well calculated to terrify the enemies of Christ: but we may joyfully hope for and await his speedy coming to deliver us from this miserable, filthy pollution. "According to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

The Glorified Body of the Christian

[34] Think of the honor and the glory Christ's righteousness brings even to our bodies! How can this poor, sinful, miserable, filthy, polluted body become like unto that of the Son of God, the Lord of Glory? What are your powers and abilities, or those of all men, to affect this glorious thing? But Paul says human righteousness, merit, glory and power have nothing to

do with it. They are mere filth and pollution and condemned as well. Another force intervenes, the power of Christ the Lord, who is able to bring all things into subjection to himself. Now, if he has power to subject all things unto himself at will, he is also able to glorify the pollution and filth of this wretched body, even when it has become worms and dust. In his hands it is as clay in the hands of the potter, and from the polluted lump of clay he can make a vessel that shall be a beautiful, new, pure, glorious body, surpassing the sun in its brilliance and beauty.

[35] Through baptism Christ has taken us into his hands, actually that he may exchange our sinful, condemned, perishable, physical lives for the new, imperishable righteousness and life he prepares for body and soul. Such is the power and the agency exalting us to marvelous glory something no earthly righteousness of the Law could accomplish. The righteousness of the Law leaves our bodies to shame and destruction; it reaches not beyond physical existence. But the righteousness of Christ inspires with power, making evident that we worship not the body but the true and living God, who does not leave us to shame and destruction, but delivers from sin, death and condemnation, and exalts this perishable body to eternal honor and glory.

Twenty Fourth Sunday after Trinity. Knowledge of God's Will and Its Fruits. Prayer and Spiritual Knowledge

Text: Colossians 1:3-14.

3 We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

4 Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye

have to all the saints,

5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

6 Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:

7 As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;

8 Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

11 Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Colossians 1:3-14

Prayer and Spiritual Knowledge

[1] In this short epistle to the Colossians Paul treats of many things, but particularly of faith, love, patience and gratitude. Upon these topics he is remarkably eloquent, for as God himself declares in Acts 9:15, Paul is a chosen vessel or instrument of God, his best preacher on earth. He is particularly strong in his discussion of the main principle of the Gospel, faith in Christ. And he exalts Christ supremely, in person and kingdom, making him all in all in his Church God, Lord, Master, Head and Example, and everything mentionable in goodness and divinity.

[2] The apostle's first words are praise for the Colossians. He remarks upon the good report he has heard of them, how they have faith in Christ

and love for all saints, and hold fast the hope of eternal life reserved for them in heaven: in other words, that they are true Christians, who have not allowed themselves to be led away from the pure Word of God but who earnestly cling to it, proving their faith by their fruits; for they love the poor Christians, and for Christ's sake have endured much in the hope of the promised salvation. So he exalts them as model Christians, a mirror of the entire Christian life.

[3] "Hearing these things of you," Paul would say, "I heartily rejoice in your good beginning." Apparently, he was not the one who first preached to them. In the first verse of the second chapter he speaks of his care for them and others who have not seen his face, and he also intimates here that the Colossians learned of Christ and the Gospel from Epaphras, Paul's fellow servant.

[4] "And therefore I always pray for you," he writes, "that you may continue in this way; may increase and be steadfast." He is aware of the necessity for such prayer and exhortation in behalf of Christians if they are to abide firm and unchangeable in their newfound faith, against the ceaseless assaults of the devil, the wickedness of the world, and the weakness of the flesh in tribulation and affliction. "That ye may be filled," Paul continues, "with the knowledge of his will."

[5] This is his chief prayer and desire for them and if it is fulfilled there can be no lack. The words are, "be filled"; that is, not only hear and understand God's will, but become rich in the knowledge of it, with ever increasing fullness. "You have begun well; you are promising shoots. But something more than a good beginning is required, and the knowledge of God's will is not to be exhaustively learned immediately on hearing the Word. On the contrary it must be constantly pursued and practiced as long as we live if it is ever to be rounded and perfected in us.

Knowledge of God's Will Imposes Obligations

[6] "Knowing the will of God" means more than simply knowing about God, that he created heaven and earth and gave the Law, and so on, a knowledge even the Jews and Turks possess. For doubtless to them has been revealed that knowledge of God and of his will concerning our conduct, which nature the works of creation can teach. Romans 1:20. But if

we fail to do God's revealed will, the knowledge of it does not benefit us. Such mere mental consciousness is a vain, empty thing; it does not fulfill God's will in us. Indeed, it eventually becomes a condemnatory knowledge of our own eternal destruction. When this point has been reached, further enlightenment is necessary if man is to be saved. He must know the meaning of Christ's words in John 5:40: "This is the will of my Father, that everyone that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life"; and in Matthew 18:14: "It is not the will of your Father, that one of these should perish, which believe on me."

[7] Since we have not done God's will according to the first revelation and must be rejected and condemned by his eternal, unendurable wrath, in his divine wisdom and mercy he has determined, or willed, to permit his only Son to take upon himself our sin and wrath; to give Christ as a sacrifice for our ransom, whereby the unendurable wrath and condemnation might be turned from us; to grant us forgiveness of sins and to send the Holy Spirit into our hearts, thus enabling us to love God's commandments and delight in them. This determination or will he reveals through the Son, and commands him to declare it to the world. And in Matthew 3:17 he directs us to Christ as the source of all these blessings, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him."

Spiritual Knowledge Enjoined

[8] Paul would gladly have a spiritual knowledge of these things increase in us until we are enriched and filled wholly assured of their truth. Sublime and glorious knowledge this, the experience of a human heart which, born in sins, boldly and confidently believes that God, in his unfathomable majesty, in his divine heart, has irrevocably purposed and wills for all men to accept and believe it that he will not impute sin, but will forgive it and be gracious, and grant eternal life, for the sake of his beloved Son.

[9] This spiritual knowledge or confidence, is not so easily learned as are other things. It is not so readily apprehended as the knowledge of the law written in nature, which when duly recognized by the heart overpowers with the conviction of God's wrath. Indeed, that more than anything else hinders Christians and saints from obtaining the knowledge of God's will in Christ, for it compels heart and conscience to plead guilty in every respect

and to confess having merited the wrath of God; therefore, the soul naturally fears and flees from God. Then, too, the devil fans the flame of fear and sends his wicked, fiery arrows of dismay into the heart, presenting only frightful pictures and examples of God's anger, filling the heart with this kind of knowledge to the exclusion of every other thought or perception. Thus, recognition of God's wrath is learned only too well, for it becomes bitterly hard for man to unlearn it, to forget it in the knowledge of Christ. Again, the wicked world eagerly contributes its share of hindrance, its bitter hatred and venomous outcry against Christians as people of the worst type, outcast, condemned enemies of God. Moreover, by its example it causes the weak to stumble. Our flesh and blood also is a drawback, being waywardly inclined, making much of its own wisdom and holiness and seeking thereby to gain honor and glory or to live in security a life of wealth, pleasure and covetousness. Hence on every side a Christian must be in severe conflict, and fight against the world and the devil, and against himself also, if he is to succeed in preserving the knowledge of God's will.

We Must Pray for Spiritual Light

[10] Now, since this knowledge of the Gospel is so difficult to attain and so foreign to nature, it is necessary that we pray for it with all earnestness and labor to be increasingly filled with it, and to learn well the will of God. Our own experience testifies that if it be but superficially and improperly learned, when one is overtaken by a trifling misfortune or alarmed by a slight danger or affliction, his heart is easily overwhelmed with the thunderbolts of God's wrath as he reflects: "Woe to me! God is against me and hates me." Why should this miserable "Woe!" enter the heart of a Christian upon the occasion of a little trouble? If he were filled with the knowledge of God as he should be, and as many secure, self-complacent spirits imagine themselves to be, he would not thus fear and make outcry. His agitation and his complaint, "O Lord God! Why dost thou permit me to suffer this?" are evidence that he as yet knows not God's will, or at least has but a faint conception of it; the woe exceeds the joy. But full knowledge of God's will brings with it a joy that far overbalances all fear and terror, ay, removes and abolishes them altogether.

[11] Therefore let us learn this truth and with Paul pray for what we and all Christians supremely need, full knowledge of God's will, not a mere

beginning; for we are not to imagine a beginning will suffice and to stop there as if we had comprehended it all. Everything is not accomplished in the mere planting; watering and cultivation must follow. In this case the watering and cultivating are the Word of God, and prayer against the devil, who day and night labors to suppress spiritual knowledge, to beat down the tender plants wherever he sees them springing up; and also against the world, which promotes only opposition and directs its wisdom and reason to conflicting ends. Did not God protect us and strengthen the knowledge of his will, we would soon see the devil's power and the extent of our spiritual understanding.

[12] We have a verification of this assertion in that poetical work, the book of Job. Satan appears before God, who asks (Job 1:8): "Hast thou considered my servant Job? for there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God." And Satan answers on this wise: "Yea, thou hast surrounded him with thy protection and kept me at bay; but only withdraw thy hand and I venture I will soon bring him around to curse thee to thy face"; as he afterward did when he afflicted Job with ugly boils and in addition filled him with his fiery arrows terrifying thoughts of God. Further, Christ said to Peter and the other apostles: "Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not." Luke 22:31-32. In short, if God hinders him not, Satan dares to overthrow even the greatest and strongest saints.

[13] Therefore, although we have become Christians and have made a beginning in the knowledge of God's will, we ought nevertheless to walk in fear and humility, and not to be presumptuous like the soon wearied, secure spirits, who imagine they exhausted that knowledge in an instant, and know not the measure and limit of their skill. Such people are particularly pleasing to the devil, for he has them completely in his power and makes use of their teaching and example to harm others and make them likewise secure, and unmindful of his presence and of the fact that God may suffer them to be overwhelmed. Verily, there is need of earnest and diligent use of the Word of God and prayer, that Christians may not only learn to know the will of God, but also to be filled with it. Only so can the individual walk always according to God's will and make constant progress, straining toward the goal of an ever-increasing comfort and strength that shall enable

him to face fears and terrors and not allow the devil, the world, and flesh and blood to hinder him.

Spiritual Knowledge Brings Increasing Joy

[14] Such is the nature of this fullness of knowledge that the possessor never becomes satiated with it or tired of it, but it yields him ever increasing pleasure and joy, and he is ever more eager, more thirsty, for it. As the Scriptures declare, “They that drink me shall yet be thirsty.” Ecclesiastes 24: 21. For even the dear angels in heaven never become sated with fullness of knowledge, but as Peter says, they find an everlasting joy and pleasure in the ability to behold what is revealed and preached to us. Peter 1:12. Therefore, if we have not a constant hunger and thirst after the full and abundant comprehension of God’s will — and certainly we ought to have it in greater degree than the angels — until we, too, shall be able to behold it eternally in the life everlasting, then we have but a taste of that knowledge, a mere empty froth, which can neither refresh nor satisfy us, cannot comfort us nor make us better.

Why Afflictions Are Sent

[15] To create and stimulate this hunger and thirst in us, and to bring us to the attainment of full knowledge, God kindly sends upon his Christians temptation, sorrow and affliction. These preserve them from carnal satiety and teach them to seek comfort and help. So God did also in former ages, in the time of the martyrs, when he daily suffered them to be violently seized in person and put to death by sword, fire, blood and wild beasts. In this way he truly led his people to school, where they were obliged to learn to know his will and to be able defiantly to say: ““ No, O tyrant, O world, devil and flesh, though you may injure me bodily, may beat or torment me, banish me or even take my life, you shall not deprive me of my Lord Jesus Christ — of God’s grace and mercy.” So faith taught them and confirmed to them that such suffering was God’s purpose and immutable will concerning themselves, which, whatever attitude towards them he might assume, he could not alter, even as he could not in the case of Christ himself. This discipline and experience of faith strengthened the martyrs and soon accustomed them to suffering, enabling them to go to their death with pleasure and joy. Whence came, even to young girls thirteen and fourteen

years old, like Agnes and Agatha, the courage and confidence to stand boldly before the Roman judge, and, when led to death, to go as joyfully as to a festivity, whence unless their hearts were filled with a sublime and steadfast faith, a positive assurance that God was not angry with them, but that all was his gracious and merciful will and for their highest salvation and bliss?

[16] Behold, what noble and enlightened, what strong and courageous, people God produced by the discipline of cross and affliction! We, in contrast, because unwilling to experience such suffering, are weak and enervated. If but a little smoke gets into our eyes, our joy and courage are gone, likewise our perception of God's will, and we can only raise a loud lamentation and cry of woe. As I said, this is the inevitable condition of a heart to which the experience of affliction is unknown. Just so Christ's disciples in the ship, when they saw the tempest approach and the waves beat over the vessel, quite forgot, in their trembling and terror, the divine will, although Christ was present with them. They only made anxious lamentation, yet withal cried for help: "Save, Lord; we perish!" Matthew 8:25. So also in the time of the martyrs, many Christians became timid and at first denied Christ from fear of torture or of long confinement in prison.

[17] It is God's will that we, too, should learn to accustom ourselves to these things through temptation and affliction, though these be hard to bear and the heart is prone to become agitated and utter its cry of woe. We can quiet our disturbed hearts, saying: "I know what is God's thought, his counsel and will, in Christ, which he will not alter: he has promised to me through his Son, and confirmed it through my baptism, that he who hears and sees the Son shall be delivered from sin and death, and live eternally."

[18] Now, what Paul calls being filled with the knowledge of the divine will in Christ through the faith of the Gospel, means faith in and the comfort of the forgiveness of sins, since we have not in ourselves the ability to fulfill his will in the ten commandments. This knowledge is not a passive consciousness, but a living, active conviction, which will stand before the judgment of God, contend with the devil and prevail over sin, death and life.

[19] Now, the heart possessing such knowledge or faith is kindled by the Holy Spirit and acquires a love for and delight in God's commandments. It

becomes obedient to them, patient, chaste, modest, gentle, given to brotherly kindness, and honors God in confession and life. Thus it is increasingly filled with the knowledge of God's will; it is armed and fortified on all sides to withstand and defeat the flesh and the world, the devil and hell.

“Spiritual Wisdom” Defined

[20] By way of explanation Paul adds the words, “all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” This is not the wisdom of the world. There is no necessity to strive and to endure persecution for that which concerns itself with other than spiritual matters. Nor is it the wisdom of reason, which indeed presumes to judge of divine things, but yet can never understand them; on the contrary, although it accepts them, it quickly falls away into doubt and despair.

[21] “Wisdom” signifies with Paul, when he places it in apposition with “spiritual understanding,” the sublime and secret doctrine of the Gospel of Christ, which teaches us to know the will of God. And a “wise man” is a Christian, who knows himself and can intelligently interpret God's will toward us and how we perceive his will by faith growing and obediently living in harmony with it. This wisdom is not devised of reason; it has not entered into the heart of man nor is it known to any of the princes of this world, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:8-10. But it is revealed from Heaven by the Holy Spirit to those who believe the Gospel.

[22] But there is necessary to the full completion of wisdom something which the apostle calls “understanding”; that is, a careful retention of what has been received. It is possible for one having the spiritual wisdom to be overtaken by the devil through a momentary intellectual inspiration, or through anger and impatience, or even through greed and similar deceitful allurements. Therefore it is necessary here to be cautious, alert and watchful in an effort to guard against the devil's cunning attacks and always to oppose him with his own spiritual wisdom, that he may not be undeceived. The Pauline and scriptural use of the word “understanding” signifies the ability to make good use of one's wisdom; to make it effective as a test whereby to prove all things, to judge with keen discernment whatever presents itself in the name and appearance of wisdom. Thus armed, the soul

defends itself and does not in any case violate its own discretion. To furnish himself with understanding, the Christian must ever have regard to the Word of God, must put it into practice, lest the devil dazzle his mind with some palaver and error and deceive him before he is aware of it. This Satan is well able to do; indeed, he uses every art to accomplish it if a man be not on his guard and seek not counsel in God's Word. Such is the teaching of David's example, who says in Psalm 119:11: "Thy word have I laid up in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." And again in verse 24: "Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counselors."

[23] A man may be familiar with God's Word, yet if he walks in self security, concerned about other matters, or if perhaps being tempted he loses sight of God's Word, it may easily come to pass that he is seduced and deceived by the secret craft and cunning of the devil; or of himself he may become bewildered, losing his wisdom and being unable to find counsel or help even in the most trivial temptations. For the devil and reason, or human wisdom, can dispute and syllogize with extraordinary subtlety in these things until one imagines to be true wisdom that which is not. A wise man soon becomes a fool; men readily err and make false steps; a Christian likewise is prone to stumble; ay, even a good teacher and prophet can easily be deceived by reason's brilliant logic. Essentially, then, Christians must take warning and study, with careful meditation, the Word of God.

[24] We read of St. Martin how he would not undertake to dispute with heretics for the simple reason that he was unwilling to fall into wrangling, to rationalize with them or to attempt to defeat them by the weapon of reason, the sole means whereby they pointed and adorned all their arguments, as the world always does when opposing the Word of God. The shrewd Papists today pretend, as they think, very acutely to confirm and support all their anti-Christian abominations by the name of the Church, making the idiotic claim that one must not effect nor suffer any change in the religious teaching commonly accepted by Christendom. They say we must believe the Christian Church is always guided by the Holy Spirit and therefore demands our obedience. Notice here the name of the Church, concerning which your spiritual wisdom teaches according to the article: "I believe in a holy Christian Church. But that name is distorted to confirm the lies and idolatry of the Papacy, just as is true of the name of God. So there

is need of understanding, of careful, keen discernment, that wisdom be not perverted and falsified, and man be deceived with its counterfeit.

[25] By close examination and comparison with God's Word, the standard and test, you may clearly prove the Papacy to be not the Church of Christ, but a sect of Satan; it is filled with open idolatry, lies and murder, which its adherents fain would defend. These things the Church of Christ does not endorse, and to tax it with resolving, appointing, ordering and demanding obedience to that which is at variance with the Word of God, is to do the Church wrong and violence.

Church Not to Compromise with Papists

[26] The world at the present time is sagaciously discussing how to quell the controversy and strife over doctrine and faith, and how to effect a compromise between the Church and the Papacy. Let the learned, the wise, it is said, bishops, emperor and princes, arbitrate. Each side can easily yield something, and it is better to concede some things which can be construed according to individual interpretation, than that so much persecution, bloodshed, war, and terrible, endless dissension and destruction be permitted. Here is lack of understanding, for understanding proves by the Word that such patchwork is not according to God's will, but that doctrine, faith and worship must be preserved pure and unadulterated; there must be no mingling with human nonsense, human opinions or wisdom. The Scriptures give us this rule: "We must obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29.

[27] We must not, then, regard nor follow the counsels of human wisdom, but must keep ever before us God's will as revealed by his Word; we are to abide by that for death or life, for evil or good. If war or other calamity results, complain to him who wills and commands us to teach and believe our doctrine. The calamity is not of our effecting; we have not originated it. And we are not required to prove by argument whether or no God's will is right and to be obeyed. If he wills to permit persecution and other evils to arise in consequence of our teaching, for the trial and experience of true Christians and for the punishment of the ungrateful, let them come; and if not, his hand is doubtless strong enough to defend and preserve his cause from destruction, that man may know the events to be of

his ordering. And so, praise his name, he has done in our case. He has supported us against the strong desires of our adversaries. Had we yielded and obeyed them, we would have been drawn into their falsehood and destruction. And God will still support us if we deal uprightly and faithfully in these requirements, if we further and honor the Word of God, and be not unthankful nor seek things that counterfeit God's Word.

[28] So much by way of explaining what Paul means by wisdom and understanding to know the will of God, and by way of teaching the necessity of having both wisdom and understanding. For not only must the doctrine where by wisdom is imparted be inculcated in Christendom, but there is also need for admonition and exhortation concerning that understanding necessary to preserve wisdom, and/or defense in strife and conflict. Were not these principles exercised and inculcated in us, we would be deceived by false wisdom and vain imaginations and would accept their gloss and glitter for pure gold, as many in the Church have ever done.

[29] The Galatians had received from Paul the wisdom of justification before God by faith in Christ alone. Nevertheless, in spite of that knowledge, they were deceived and would have lost their wisdom altogether through the claim of the false prophets that the God-given Law must be observed, had not Paul aroused their understanding at this point and brought them back from error. The Corinthians were taught by their spiritual wisdom the article of Christian liberty; they knew that sacrifices to idols are nothing. But they failed in this respect: they proceeded without understanding, and made carnal use of their liberty, contrary to wisdom and offending others. Therefore, Paul had to remind them of their departure from his doctrine and wisdom.

[30] The Scriptures record many instances of failure in this matter of understanding. A notable one is found in the thirteenth chapter of First Kings. A man of God from the kingdom of Judah, who had in the presence of King Jeroboam openly denounced the idolatry instituted by the king and had confirmed his preaching and prophecy by a miracle, was commanded by God not under any circumstances to abide in the place whither he had gone to prophesy, nor to eat and drink there. He was to go straight home by another way than the route he had come. Yet on the way homeward he allowed himself to be persuaded by another prophet, one who falsely claimed to have a revelation from God, by an angel, commanding him to

take the man of God to his home and give him to eat and drink. While they sat together at the table the Word of the Lord came to the inviting prophet and under its inspiration he told the other that he should not reach home alive. The latter, departing on his journey, was killed on the way by a lion, which remained standing by the body and the ass the man of God had ridden, not touching them further, until the old prophet came and found them. He brought the body home on the ass and buried it, commanding that after his own death he should be laid in the same grave. Such was God's punishment of the prophet who allowed himself to be deceived and obeyed not God's express command. However, his soul suffered not harm, as God testified by the fact the lion did not devour his body but defended it. Now, in what was the prophet lacking? Not in wisdom, for he had the Word of God. He lacked in understanding, allowing himself to be deceived when the other man declared himself a prophet whom the angel of the Lord had instructed. The man of God should have abided by the word given to him, and have said to the other: "You may be a prophet, indeed, but God has commanded me to do this thing. Of that I am certain and I will be governed by it! I will regard no conflicting order, be it in the name of an angel or of God."

Neither Reason nor Feelings a Right Judgment

[31] So it is often with man today, not only in doctrinal controversy but in private affairs and in official capacity. He is prone to stumble and to fail in understanding when not watchful of his purposes and motives, to see how they accord with the wisdom of God's Word. Particularly is his understanding unreliable when the devil moves him to wrath, impatience, dejection, melancholy, or when he is otherwise tempted. Often, they who have been well exercised with trials become bewildered in small temptations and uncertain what course to take. Here must one be watchful and not go by his reason or his feelings but remember God's Word or ascertain if he does not know what it is — and be guided thereby. When tempted man cannot judge aright by the dictates of reason. Therefore, he ought not to follow his own natural intelligence nor to act from hasty conclusions. Let him be suspicious of all his reasoning and beware the cunning of the devil, who seeks either to allure or to intimidate us by his specious arguments. First of all let man call upon the understanding born of

his wisdom in the Gospel, what his faith, love, hope and patience counsel, in fact, what God's will eloquently teaches everywhere and in all circumstances if only one strive, labor and pray to be filled with such knowledge.

[32] Paul uses the expression, "spiritual wisdom and understanding," because it represents that which makes us wise and prudent to oppose the devil and his assaults and temptations, or wiles as Paul calls them in Ephesians 6:11; which governs and guides, shepherds and leads, teaches and keeps us, and enables us to fare well spiritually in faith and a good conscience toward God and also in the temporal affairs of life when reason fails as a counselor or teacher. Paul further says: "To walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work; and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to the might of his glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

[33] What is meant by "walking worthily of the Lord" we have heard in other epistles, namely to believe, and to confess the faith by doctrine and life, as people worthy of the Lord and of whom the Lord can triumphantly say: "These are my people, Christians who live and abide in what they have been taught by the Word, who know my will and obediently do and suffer for it."

[34] Our wisdom and understanding of the knowledge of God should serve to make us characters that are an honor and praise to God, in whom he may be glorified, and who live to God unto all pleasing, that is, please him in every way, according to his Word. And because of such wisdom and knowledge, we should, in our lives, in our stations and appointed work, not be unfruitful nor harmful hypocrites and unbelievers, as false Christians are, but doers of much good, useful characters to the honor of God's kingdom. All the time we are to make constant growth and progress in the knowledge of God, that we may not be seduced or driven from it by the cunning of the devil, who at all times and in all places assails Christians and strenuously seeks to effect their fall from the Word and from God's will, even as in the beginning he did with Adam and Eve in paradise.

Only God's Power Can Overcome the Devil

[35] The apostle continues: “strengthened with all power, according to the might of his glory.” Here is preparation to sustain the conflict against the devil, the world and the flesh, and to overcome. Not our own power, nor the combined power of all mankind, can affect it. Only God’s own divine, glorious power and might can overcome the devil and win honor and praise in the contest with the gates of hell. Christ in himself proved such efficacy of the divine strength when he overcame all the devil’s superlative assaults.

[36] By this power and might of God must we be strengthened in faith. We must strive after such divine agency and by the help of the Word persevere and pray, that there may be not only a beginning, but a continuation and a victorious end. So shall we become ever stronger and stronger in God’s might. Whatever we do, it must not be undertaken in and by our own strength. We must not boast as if we had our selves accomplished it, but must rely upon God, upon his strength and support. Certainly, it is not due to our ability but to his own omnipotent agency if one remains a Christian, steadfast in the knowledge of God and not deceived nor conquered by the devil.

Patience Essential to Endurance

[37] But, the writer tells us, the attainment of strength and victory calls for “all patience.” We must have patience to endure the persistent persecution of the devil, the world and the flesh. Not only patience is required here, but “long suffering.” The apostle makes a distinction between the two words, regarding the latter as something more heroic. It is the devil’s way, when he fails to defeat by affliction and trouble, to try the heart with endurance. He makes the ordeal unbearably hard and long to patience, even apparently without end. His scheme is to accomplish by unceasing persistence what he cannot attain by the severity and multitude of his temptations; he aims to wear out one’s patience and to discourage his hope of conquering. To meet these conditions there is necessary, in addition to patience, long suffering, which holds out firmly and steadfastly in suffering, with the determination: “Indeed, you cannot try me too severely or too long, even though the trial continue to the end of the world.” True, knightly, Christian strength is that which in conflict and suffering is able to endure not only severe and manifold assaults of the devil, but to hold out indefinitely. More than anything else do we need to be strengthened, through prayer, with the

power of God, that we may not succumb in such grievous warfare, but achieve the end.

Christians Should Rejoice and Be Thankful

[38] And your patience and long suffering, Paul says, must be exercised “with joy.” In these severe, multiplied and long temptations you must not allow yourselves to be filled with sad and depressing thoughts. You are to be hopeful and joyous, despising the devil and the troubles and tumults of the world and himself. Rejoice because you have on your side the knowledge of the divine will in Christ, and his power and glorious might, and doubt not that his omnipotence will help you through.

[39] Finally the apostle enjoins us to give thanks, or to be thankful. Forget not, he would say, the unspeakable benefits and gifts God has bestowed upon you above all men on earth. He has richly blessed you, and liberated you from the power and might of sin, death, hell and the devil, wherein you would, for all you could help yourselves, have had to remain eternally captive; he has appointed you for eternal glory, making you co-heirs with the saints elected for his eternal kingdom; and he has made you partakers of all eternal, divine, heavenly blessings. In your sufferings and conflicts, remember these glories ordained for and given to you, and remembering, rejoice the more and willingly fight and suffer to obtain possession, to enjoy the fruition, of what is certainly appropriated to you in the Word and in faith.

[40] The writer of the epistle calls it “the inheritance of the saints in light,” or of the “light” saints, that is, the true saints. Thus, he distinguishes from false saints, intimating that there are two classes of saints. To one class belong the many in the world who have only their own claim to sainthood: the Jews, for instance, with their holiness of the Law; and the world generally, the philosophers, jurists and their kind, with their self-righteousness. These are not saints of light; they are saints of darkness, unclean, even defiled. In Philippians 3:8 Paul counts such righteousness loss and refuse. To this class belong also many false, hypocritical saints in the company of Christians who have the Gospel; they, too, hear the Gospel and attend upon the Holy Supper, but they remain in darkness, without the least experience of the wisdom and understanding that knows the divine

will. But they who exercise themselves in these spiritual graces by faith, love and patience in temptation, and perceive the wonderful grace and blessing God imparts through the Gospel these honorably may be called the saints, destined, even appointed, to eternal light and joy in God's kingdom. "Who delivered us out of the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love; in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins."

[41] Paul now expatiates on the things that call for our gratitude to God the Father. He sums up the whole teaching of the Gospel, showing us what is ours in Christ and giving a glorious and comforting description of his person and the blessing he brings. But first, he says, we ought, above all, to thank God unceasingly for the knowledge of his revealed Gospel. In it we have no small treasure. Rather, it is a possession with which all the gold, silver and other riches of this world, all the earthly joy and comfort of this life, are not to be compared. For it means redemption from eternal, irreparable loss and ruin under God's eternal, unbearable wrath and condemnation. And this wretchedness was the result of our sin. We were committed to sin and without help, without deliverance, ay, we were captive in such blindness and darkness that we did not recognize our misery; much less could we devise and effect our escape. Now, in place of this misery, we have, without any merit on our part, any preparation, any deed or design, ay, without even a thought, assuredly received, through God's unfathomable grace and mercy, redemption, or the forgiveness of sins.

God's Grace Incomprehensible

[42] The measure of such graciousness and blessing no tongue can express; indeed, in this life no man can understand it. In hell the wicked shall become sensible of it by the realization of their condemnation and the never-ending wrath of the eternal, divine Majesty and of all creatures. No created thing shall they be able to behold with joy, because in these ever shall be reflected the condemned one's own unceasing, lamentable sorrow, terror and despair. Nor, on the other hand, can the creature behold the condemned with pleasure, but must abhor them; it must be an object of further terror and condemnation to the damned. However, in this life God in his unspeakable goodness has subjected the creature to vanity, as Paul says in Romans 8:20, and to the service of the wicked. Yet it serves against its

will, travailing as a woman in pain, with the supreme desire to be liberated from this service of the wicked, condemned world. It must, however, have patience in its hope of redemption, for the sake of those children of God yet to come to Christ and finally to be brought to glory; otherwise it is as hostile to sin as God himself.

[43] But because an eternal, unchangeable sentence of condemnation has passed upon sin, for God cannot and will not regard sin with favor, but his wrath abides upon it eternally and irrevocably; redemption was not possible without a ransom of such precious worth as to atone for sin, to assume the guilt, pay the price of wrath and thus abolish sin.

[44] This no creature was able to do. There was no remedy except for God's only Son to step into our distress and himself become man, to take upon himself the load of awful and eternal wrath and make his own body and blood a sacrifice for the sin. And so he did, out of his immeasurably great mercy and love towards us, giving himself up and bearing the sentence of unending wrath and death.

[45] So infinitely precious to God is this sacrifice and atonement of his only beloved Son who is one with him in divinity and majesty, that God is reconciled thereby and receives into grace and forgiveness of sins all who believe in this Son. Only by believing may we enjoy the precious atonement of Christ, the forgiveness obtained for us and given us out of profound, inexpressible love. We have nothing to boast of for ourselves but must ever joyfully thank and praise him who at such priceless cost redeemed us condemned and lost sinners.

[46] The essential feature of redemption forgiveness of sins being once obtained, everything belonging to its completion immediately follows. Eternal death, the wages of sin, is abolished, and eternal righteousness and life are given; as Paul says in Romans 6:23, the grace, or gift, of God is eternal life. And now that we are reconciled to God and washed in the blood of Christ, everything in heaven and earth, as Paul again declares (Ephesians 1:10), is in turn reconciled to us. The creatures are no longer opposed, but at peace with us and friendly; they smile upon us and we have only joy and life in God and his creation.

[47] Such is the doctrine of the Gospel, and so is it to be declared. It shows us sin and forgiveness, wrath and grace, death and life; how we were

in darkness and how we are redeemed from it. It does not, like the Law, make us sinners, nor is its mission to teach us how to merit and earn grace. But it declares how we, condemned and under the power of sin, death and the devil, as we are, receive by faith the freely given redemption and in return show our gratitude.

[48] Paul also explains who it is that has shed his blood for us. He would have us understand the priceless cost of our redemption, namely, the blood of the Son of God, who is the image of the invisible God. The apostle declares that he existed before creation, and by him were all things created, and that therefore he is true, eternal God with the Father. Hence, Paul says, the shed blood truly is God's own blood. And so the writer of this epistle clearly and mightily establishes the article of the divinity of Christ. But this requires a special and separate sermon.

Twenty Fifth Sunday after Trinity. Christ Will Take Both Alike to Himself, the Dead and Living, When He Comes.

Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ

shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Living and Dead When Christ Returns

Paul writes these words to comfort Christians who were troubled about what would take place at the resurrection of the dead. Shall all rise together? Shall those living on the earth at the last day meet Christ before others? These and like thoughts worried them. Here Paul answers them by saying that Christ would take all his believers to himself at the same time, etc. This epistle text you will find richly expounded in “The Explanation of Certain Epistles,” which appeared on special occasions. [The Miscellaneous Sermons of the Year 1532.]

Twenty Sixth Sunday after Trinity. God’s Righteous Judgment in the Future. When Christ Comes.

Text: 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10.

3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

4 So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:

5 Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

6 Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10

God's Judgment When Christ Returns

[1] First, Paul has words of praise for his Church at Thessalonica. In view of its faith and its love, it was one of the first rank. Patiently it stood firm, and even increased, under crosses of affliction. The apostle's intent in commending these people is to incite to perseverance. He would hold them up to others as an example, an illustration of the fruits resulting when the Gospel is preached and received. He also points out in what the edification and success of the true Church of Christ consist. Then he consoles them for their patient sufferings with the mention of the glorious coming of Christ the Lord, which shall mean their final redemption, the recompense of peace and joy for their tribulations, and the bringing of eternal wrath upon their persecutors.

[2] This consolation Paul draws from their sufferings and God's righteous judgment, by which he makes plain why God lets them suffer here on earth, what is his purpose in it. Looking at the Christian community with the eye of human reason and reflection, no more wretched, tormented, persecuted, unhappy people are in evidence on earth than those who confess and glory in Christ the crucified. In the world they are continually persecuted, tormented and assailed by the devil with all manner of wretchedness, misfortune, distress and death. Even to their own

perceptions, it seems as if they surely are forgotten and forsaken by God in the sight of mankind. For he allows them to remain prostrate under the weight of the cross, while others in the world, particularly their persecutors, live in the enjoyment of honor and fortune, of happiness, power and riches, with everything moving to the fulfillment of their desires. The Scriptures frequently deplore this condition of things, especially the Psalms, and Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:19 confesses: "If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable."

Christians' Suffering Lead to Happiness

[3] Now, assuredly this state of affairs cannot continue without end; it cannot be God's intention to permit Christians thus to suffer continually while they live, to die because of it and remain dead. It would be incompatible with his eternal, divine truth and honor manifest in his Word. For there he declares he will be the God of the pious, of them who fear and trust him, and gives them unspeakable promises. Necessarily, then, he has planned a future state for Christians and for non-Christians, in either instance unlike what they know on earth. Possibly one of the chief reasons why God permits Christians to suffer on earth is to make plain the distinction between their reward and that of the ungodly. In the sufferings of believing Christians, and in the wickedness, tyranny, rage, and persecution directed by the unrighteous against the godly, is certain indication of a future life unlike this and a final judgment of God in which all men, godly and wicked, shall be forever recompensed.

[4] Notice, Paul means to say here when he speaks of the tribulations and sufferings of Christians: "These afflictions are the indication of God's righteous judgment, and a sign you are worthy of the kingdom of God for which you suffer." In other words: "O beloved Christians, regard your sufferings as dear and precious. Think not God is angry with you, or has forgotten you, because he allows you to endure these things. They are your great help and comfort, for they show God will be a righteous judge, will richly bless you and avenge you upon your persecutors. Yes, therein you have unfailing assurance. You may rejoice, and console yourselves, believing without the shadow of a doubt that you belong to the kingdom of God, and have been made worthy of it, because you suffer for its sake.

[5] Whatever the Christian suffers here on earth at the hands of the devil and the world, befalls him simply for the sake of the name of God and for his Word, True, as a baptized child of God the Christian should justly enjoy unalloyed goodness, comfort and peace on earth; but since he must still dwell in the kingdom of the devil, who infuses sin and death into human flesh, he must endure the devil. Yet all Satan's inflictions and the world's plagues, persecutions, terrors, tortures, even the taking of the Christian's life, and all its abuse, is wrought in violence and injustice. But to offset this, the Christian has the comforting assurance of God's Word that because he suffers for the sake of the kingdom of Christ and of God he shall surely be eternally partaker of that kingdom. Certain it is, no one will be worthy of it unless he suffers for it.

[6] "If so be that it is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you," continues the apostle. It is impossible it should continue to be, as now, well with the world and evil with you. God's righteousness will not admit of it. Just because he is a righteous judge, things must be eventually different: the godly must have eternal good, and the wicked, on the other hand, must be punished forever. Otherwise God's judgment would not be righteous; in other words, he would not be God. Now, since this is an impossible proposition, since God's righteousness and truth are immutable, in his capacity of judge he must perforce, in due time, come from heaven, when he shall have assembled his Christians, and avenge them of their enemies, recompense the latter according to their merits, and confer eternal rest and peace upon his followers for the temporal sufferings they have endured here.

God Does Not Forget His Children

[7] Christians should certainly expect this and comfort themselves in the confidence that God will not permit the wrongs of his people to continue unpunished and unavenged. We might think he had forgotten were we to judge from the facts that godly Abel was shamefully murdered by his brother, that God's prophets and martyrs - John the Baptist, Jeremiah, Paul and others - suffered death at the hands of bloodhounds like the Herods, Neros and other shameless, sanguinary tyrants of the sort, and this when God had, even in this life, given glorious testimony to their being his beloved children. A judgment must be forthcoming that tyrants may suffer

pains and punishments, and that the godly, delivered from sufferings, may have eternal rest and joy. Let all the world know God does not forget, even after death.

[8] This is the consolation the future judgment at the resurrection of the dead holds, that, as God's righteousness requires, the saints shall receive for their sufferings a supremely rich and glorious recompense. Paul seems to present as the principal reason why God must punish the world with everlasting pain, the fact that the world has inflicted tribulations on Christians. Apparently his words imply that the perpetrations of the devil and the world their supreme contempt and hatred of God's name and Word, their blasphemies of these, their wickedness and disobedience in other respects, whereby they bring upon themselves everlasting pain and damnation — that for these sins against himself God is not so ready to punish as for their persecution and torment of his poor, believing Christians. This truth is indicated where we read that Christ on the last day shall say: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels . . . inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me." Matthew 25:41 and 45.

[9] Paul's further observations, concerning the manner of the judgment to come and the painful punishment of the ungodly, is sufficiently clear as rendered, and is also explained in the sermon on the Gospel text. Further explanation here is unnecessary.

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