



LENTEN DEVOTIONS 2017



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“A Christian Holy People”

Lenten Devotions

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*For the Evangelical Lutheran Church
wherever she may be found*

And for the Glory of God

A special thanks to...

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*Lutheran Press for their translation of the Luther piece
“On the Councils and the Church” which we get our title from*

Ash Wednesday

Jesus said, “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” — Matthew 6:16-21

Christians confess in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, “I believe in...the holy Christian Church,” and “I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church,” for the Church is an article of faith. Does this mean that the Church cannot be seen? Or is one able to find the Church on earth?

Thanks be to God, yes, we can find the one holy Christian and apostolic church on earth! But in order to do so, we must know what we are looking for: certain marks that identify the Lord’s Church and distinguish her from all other associations and bodies.

Over the course of this season of Lent, we will look at the seven Scriptural marks of the Church, as explained by Martin Luther in his great work *On the Councils and the Church**: the Office of the Keys, the Word of God, Baptism, the Call and Ordination of Pastors, Prayer and Praise to God, the Holy Cross, and the Lord’s Supper. These institutions mark the presence of the holy Christian Church on earth: not the quality of the facility or the music, not youth and outreach programs, and not the average age of the congregation. But where you find Absolution, God’s Word, Baptism, the Ministry, Worship, the Cross, and Holy Communion, there you find the Church, for there God is at work, giving you the treasures of heaven: forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Heavenly Father, grant that my confidence would be in what You have established for my salvation. Amen.

*For a copy of Dr. Luther’s “On the Councils and the Church” in a new translation, go to www.lutheranpress.com and look for a copy of their translation titled “A Christian, Holy People”



Thursday after Ash Wednesday

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people. The LORD answered and said to his people, “Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations. — Joel 2:12-14, 18-19

The first mark of the Church that will be considered this Lent is the Office of the Keys. As we learn in the Small Catechism, “The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent.”

Forgiveness and withholding forgiveness is indeed a mark of the true Christian Church on earth, and therefore it is not just a private act; it is public as well. This may make some people uncomfortable. After all, who likes to be acknowledged publicly as a sinner?

Yet, each week, we gather in the Divine Service and begin by confessing our sinfulness publicly, for every ear to hear. For the Word of the Lord from Joel remains true to this day: the Lord our God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. As we confess our sins in the presence of God and one another, God, for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ and His suffering and death, publicly absolves us from our sins through the mouth of the pastor. Therefore where you see that sin is confessed and forgiven—both publicly and privately—you may know that God’s holy people is there.

Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner. Forgive me for the sake of Jesus, and bring me to life everlasting. Amen.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. — Psalm 51:1-4, 10-13

Psalm 51 is introduced, “A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” Nathan went to David armed with nothing other than the Word of God. Yet by this Word—the stinging condemnation of God’s Law—the great King David was brought to repentance for his sins against the Lord. Nathan then spoke the comforting words of the Gospel: “The Lord has also put away your sin; you shall not die.” (2 Samuel 12:13b)

This Biblical account is instructive for us. For even the most faithful of Christians falls into sin and needs to hear the rebuke of the Law, lest we fall into hardened unrepentance like David. But when the sinner is repentant and wants to do better, then there is no word of Law, but only the pure Gospel: “I forgive you all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

There is nothing else that can make the unrepentant repentant and the sinner forgiven but the Word of God rightly distinguished between Law and Gospel. For by the Word alone iniquity is washed away, sins are cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and the sinner is declared righteous in God’s sight.

Almighty God, by Your Law bring me to true and godly repentance, that I would believe Your pure Gospel that I am forgiven for Jesus’ sake. Amen.



Saturday after Ash Wednesday

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. — 2 Peter 1:5–11

Following His resurrection on Easter morning, our Lord Jesus gave to His Church the Office of the Keys. He said to the disciples, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” (John 20:22b-23) It is no coincidence that the Keys are given on Easter, for they are bound together with Christ’s death and resurrection. By His blood, Jesus redeemed us from sins, death, and everlasting condemnation, so that the called minister of Christ may proclaim with all certainty, “Your sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake.” Likewise we may believe this Word without doubting, for it is spoken by one who holds the office in the stead and by the command of the crucified and risen Christ.

Moreover, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too may walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). As St. Peter explains in his second letter, faith in Christ’s Word of Absolution will lead the Christian to bear the fruit of good works: virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. Therefore, as the great Lutheran hymn puts it, “Faith alone can justify; works serve our neighbor and supply the proof that faith is living.” (555:8)

Lord God, by Your Word and Holy Spirit grant me faith in Your Absolution and love for my neighbor; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

Sunday of Lent 1

The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times. — Psalm 12:6

In his work, On the Councils and the Church, Luther places the possession of the holy Word of God at the top of his list of marks of the church, and for good reason. The Word proclaimed and in the sacraments are what the Holy Spirit uses to deliver indescribably joyous treasures of the kingdom of heaven to us. The holy Word of the Law is what the Spirit uses to crush the hearts of sinners, and the holy Word of the Gospel is what the Holy Spirit uses to make sinners alive in Christ. The holy Word is what God combines with plain water to make it a Baptism, that is, a life giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit. The holy Word of God in the Sacrament of the Altar, “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,” is what the Lord uses to give His children His Body and His Blood to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of their sins.

Simply put, apart from the holy Word of God there is no faith. Apart from faith, there is no forgiveness, life, or salvation. Apart from faith we are left in our trespasses and sins. Thank God, then, that He has so generously given us His holy Word to us!

Dear Father in heaven, thank You for the gift of Your holy Word. Have mercy on us and take not Your Word from among us! Amen.



Monday of Lent 1

**You, O Lord, will keep them; you will guard us from this generation forever.
— Psalm 12:7**

**Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word Curb those who by deceit or sword
Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son And bring to naught all You have
done. — “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word” (LSB* 655, stanza 1)**

The Lord gives us innumerable blessings through His Word. Therefore, we ought to have a care not only that it be preached and taught in its truth and purity, but also that we remain faithful to it in spite of the temptations of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature, which to not want the Word of God to be proclaimed and believed. This is the real danger Jesus warns against in His parable of the sower in Matthew 13. It's pleasing to God that the Christian pray to be protected from the evil fate of the seed sown on rocky ground, which springs up quickly, but quickly falls away when persecution arises on account of the Word. Likewise, it's pleasing to God that the Christian pray to be kept from the evil fate of the seed sown among the thorns, which grows for a time, but is choked out by the deceitfulness of the cares and riches of this world. As we've learned in our Catechisms, this false belief and despair are truly great shame and vice.

Yet our Lord also promises to keep us in His Word by His Word. There is no secret to this or magic spell. God uses His Word and His Word alone to deal with His children. He is faithful, and He will keep us until the end.

Dear Father in heaven, increase in us the desire to hear Your Word and to treasure it as more precious than silver or gold. Amen.

*LSB = Lutheran Service Book

Tuesday of Lent 1

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever. — Isaiah 40:8

This amazingly comforting passage from Isaiah was the banner cry for the Reformation, and was often used in acronym form: VDMA is Latin for “the Word of the Lord endures forever.” We can imagine how powerful a cry this was amid the real threat of death and war for challenging the false teaching of the Pope and his cohorts. Despite facing this danger and what may have come, the Reformers were comforted by the knowledge that the Word of the Lord would endure forever. The true danger would have been to consider the fleeting things of this world, even life itself, as more important than fervent prayers to remain faithful to God and His Word.

This battle cry is also comforting as Christians journey to the culmination of the Lenten season on Good Friday. There too was great threat of life and limb. There too was bloodshed and even quaking ground and blackened sky. Yet our Lord, purely out of love for sinful man, endured the cross and His Word spoken there endures forever: “It is finished.” As God Himself fulfills His office of Great High Priest and role of perfect Lamb of God, this bold declaration endures for us. He completes His work of satisfying the demands of the Law for us through His shed blood. The Son of God has died to make us at peace with God. It is this Word that He sends to be preached for the consolation of our conscience and it endures forever.

Dear Father in heaven, thank You for sending Your Word to be preached to the ends of the world. Thank You for using Your Word to declare me righteous. Amen.



Wednesday of Lent 1

**So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.
— Romans 10:17**

God desires a specific Word to be preached in His Name: the Word of the Gospel of Christ Jesus. No other word will do. No other word brings with it forgiveness, life, and salvation for all who believe. No other word, no matter how pleasant, marks the hearers as Christians. It's also the preaching of this Word that let's the world, including all sinners, know that the Church is there. The Word is not hiding in the hearts of men or up on a high mountain in the mind of a guru. Martin Luther says the following in *On the Councils and the Church*:

And even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there, for God's word cannot be without God's people, and conversely, God's people cannot be without God's word. Otherwise, who would preach or hear it preached, if there were no people of God? And what could or would God's people believe, if there were no word of God?

See how great is the Word! Through it and it alone God's children are made and marked. There need be no wondering where God is to be found or what He's about. He has made Himself known to us in the preaching of His Son.

Dear Father in heaven, Your mercy is shown in Your love for sinners. Please grant that the preaching of Your Word of mercy not be taken from us. Amen.

Thursday of Lent 1

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. — Matthew 13:23

Possession of the Word of God by His faithful children necessarily brings with it a thankful joy in the hearts of those who have been rescued from the death of sin. Because of this great mercy shown by the Father, Christians happily, in turn, spread the Word of Christ when and where the Lord has placed them. This happens first and most often in families. Husbands, as heads of the house, happily fulfill their God given duty to make the Word of Christ the center of their marriage. Likewise, fathers instruct their children in the Lord, teaching them to rightly distinguish the Law and the Gospel in their lives together. Wives, mothers, sons, and daughters also have God given roles within the family to exhort and forgive with the Word. These are part and parcel of the Christian family. All pray that they would be granted the grace to hold the Word sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

How is this done? No one, in themselves, wants to do these things. The Word creates the desire to love what God loves and hate what God hates. God hates sin. God loves forgiveness and peace. To this end, He has ordered our lives together in Christian families. Not only does the Word mark Christians gatherings as congregations, it also marks Christian families.

Dear Father in heaven, thank you for the gift of marriage and the blessing of children. Grant that Your Word be the center of our lives together at home. Amen.



Friday of Lent 1

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,
— John 6:68

O Comforter of priceless worth, Send peace and unity on earth; Support us in our final strife And lead us out of death of life. — “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word” (LSB 655, stanza 3)

The holy Word of God is life. Apart from it the Christian dies. The final stanza of Luther’s hymn, “Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word” serves as a somber remind of this. It forces the Christian to acknowledge that this life ultimately leads to death. It reminds us that only God can bring us through that death to true life. And finally, it teaches that the way He does this is through His Word and faithfulness to it. He has promised, and He will do it. He and He alone. It is God who promises, and He cannot lie and will not fail.

Luther remarks on this power of the Word in *On the Councils and the Church*: *It is enough for us to know how this chief holy possession purges, sustains, nourishes, strengthens, and protects the church, as St. Augustine also says, “The church is begotten, cared for, nourished, and strengthened by the word of God.”*

God grant that we cherish the Word for what it is — the power of God for salvation to all who believe!

Dear Father in heaven, Your wonders never cease and Your mercies are new every day. Thank you, above all, for the continued preaching of Your Word. Take it not from us. Keep us in the one true faith until life everlasting. Amen.

Saturday of Lent 1

My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word!
— Psalm 119:25

God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through His spoken Word and the Sacraments. — Smalcald Articles VIII.10

From the beginning, God has dealt with man through His Word. All things were made by the Word including man Himself. Through the Word, God declared that He would be Israel's God and they would be His people. Through His prophets proclaiming His Word, He called His people to repentance and kept them in the true faith. By the Word through Gabriel and the company of angels, He announced that the Messiah had come. Through preaching, the Word made flesh convicted men of their sin and gave them the gift of faith to receive His perfect righteousness and holiness. By His Word He gave His church holy Baptism and the holy Supper, and by His Word He sent His Pastors to administer these according to His institution and to teach and to preach His Word in His Name. As He ascended into heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father, He proclaimed a final Word for His church then and now: "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

God's holy Word is our protection and comfort. God's holy Word is what makes and marks us as His Bride, the Church. God's holy Word is what keeps us in the Church. God's holy Word creates in us love for Him and for our neighbor.

We could be tempted to think that there might be a better, more exciting way for God to deal with us than His holy Word, but see what great things He has done through it and continues to do even for you!

Dear Father in heaven, thank You for Your continued mercy in sending Your holy Word to be preached and administered to us. Increase in us love for Your Word. Without it we would surely die. Amen.

Sunday of Lent 2

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”
— Matthew 3:13-17

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.” This just doesn’t seem right to John, who had been calling sinners to repentance in the wilderness and baptizing them into the forgiveness of sins. It is not that John thought himself better than them; he just knew his office. He rightly knew that he was preparing the way for One greater than he, whose sandals he wasn’t even worthy to carry. And then, when that One came desiring to be baptized by John, John tries to prevent Him saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” Why should the Son of God undergo the sinner’s baptism?

Jesus answers his question. “Thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” He has not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. So, He goes to the Jordan, not confessing His own sins, for He has none. Instead, He goes to become yours. He is baptized into the sinners’ water of the Jordan and made dirty, so that you are made clean in the waters He pours out on you in your Baptism into Christ. What is yours becomes His; what is His becomes yours—His righteousness and life.

Father in heaven, at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, You proclaimed Him Your beloved Son and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized in His name faithful in their calling as Your children and inheritors with Him of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



Monday of Lent 2

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” — Matthew 28:18-20

Baptism is what Jesus says it is. That’s why we first look to His great commissioning of His Church to make disciples by baptizing and teaching. This is where Jesus institutes and commands Baptism. For if Baptism was instituted by the Church for good order or initiation, it may accomplish something, but not what Christ can accomplish. But since Baptism is established by Christ, He works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this. He makes disciples, He washes, and He is present with us always by such means.

All this we have and know by faith. The eye does not see this nor does reason comprehend it, but Christ’s command and promise stand over our reason and senses. He gives what He says He gives. “All that the mortal eye beholds is water as we pour it. Before the eye of faith unfold the power of Jesus’ merit” (LSB 406:7). Faith’s object is Christ’s Word, thus you have everything in Baptism because Jesus said so: His command, His promise, His name, your forgiveness, your life, your salvation.

Merciful Father, through Holy Baptism You called us to be Your own possession. Grant that our lives may evidence the working of Your Holy Spirit in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, according to the image of Your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Tuesday of Lent 2

...for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. — Galatians 3:26-29

Jesus is the only begotten Son of the Father from eternity. He is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The nature of this Trinity is love. The Father loves the Son and is well-pleased with Him and the Son does His Father's will. At Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan, the voice of the Father declared Jesus His beloved Son. Jesus is well-pleasing to His Father, for He does the Father's will in saving sinners by His death.

And what the Father says about His Son He says about you. That is the significance of being called sons. It is not a matter of gender, race, or social status. Being "sons of God through faith" is all about being heirs with Jesus. It is about inheriting what God has promised to you, just as He had promised to Abraham before you. By water and the Word, you have put on Christ and you are blessed.

Faith clings to what is delivered. Through faith in Christ, all—Jew and Gentile, male and female—have what Christ has. You are not without hope or held under the bondage of the Law. You are a son; you are free to live as a son—to live in faith and love.

Lord Jesus Christ, You came in humility and weakness to defeat the powers of sin, death, and the devil. Clothe our weakness with Your righteousness by Your baptismal grace that we might withstand the power of every adversary; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Wednesday of Lent 2

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. — Titus 3:4-7

When God formed Adam from the dust of the ground, the Holy Spirit breathed life into him and he became a living being. But with the Fall into sin, death came to man. Because of sin, man has a corrupt nature and can do nothing that could save him. Because man is now imperfect, no man can come to Jesus or believe in Him. But God's work is perfect and He is merciful. And so, He gives to us this washing of the Holy Spirit, who calls, gathers, and enlightens us by the Gospel. In Baptism, the Holy Spirit breathes life into us once again and we have our life renewed and regenerated in Him. We are justified, declared righteous before God for Christ's sake. We are also declared heirs having the hope of eternal life. What you could accomplish is incomplete; but what God accomplishes for you is complete. This water in Baptism can do such great things because it is combined with God's word of promise. Faith grasps this promise in the water as God works and accomplishes His will in bringing life to sinners in this holy bath.

O Lord, you once breathed Your Holy Spirit into Adam, giving him life. Through Holy Baptism Your Spirit was poured out upon us, regenerating and renewing us. Grant us grace to live lives as Your baptized children, trusting in Your perfect work for us, that we may proclaim Your mercy and goodness as justified heirs of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thursday of Lent 2

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. — Romans 6:3-5

The funeral service in the *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)* begins with Baptism. That is, there's a remembrance that the person in the casket was baptized into Christ and was clothed with Christ's righteousness which covered all his sin. The funeral pall serves as a visible reminder, even in the midst of death, of the garments of Baptism. Also, today's reading of Romans 6:3-5 is read. We hear these words concerning Baptism after a death because Baptism was that person's life. Luther wrote in the Large Catechism that "a truly Christian life is nothing other than a daily Baptism, once begun and ever to be continued" (Concordia: LC IV:65). Baptism is not just a once and done thing, but it is that person's entire life. We abandon our Baptism when we fall into sin and every kind of evil. But as God works repentance and faith in our hearts, we return to those waters by remembering our baptism, dying to sin, drowning the old Adam, and the new man arising to walk before God in newness of life. Through this all, God is at work and He is staying true to His promise to you. You are baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ, united with Him, so that even in death you have that hope of the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting.

O God, for our redemption You gave Your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross and by His glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of the enemy. Grant that all our sin may be drowned through daily repentance and that day by day we may arise to live before You in righteousness and purity forever; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



Friday of Lent 2

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. — Galatians 2:20

Because we are united with Christ in Holy Baptism and buried with Him and raised with Him, what is His is ours. Our Christian life is one of baptism and the focus of our Christian life is Christ. The Christian's faith—his fear, love, and trust—are in Christ. This life is lived in the flesh, with all the temptations and assaults of the flesh. So we are tempted by the devil, scorned by the world, and subjected to the weakness of our mortal flesh. But for the Christian, even that life in the flesh is a life of faith in Christ. Our whole life comes from Christ just as the entirety and certainty of our salvation are found in Him. What He has worked for us upon the cross is a sure and certain thing. The life and salvation He won for us by shedding His blood to cover our sins is the object of our faith. Faith looks to Christ and the promise He gives in the Word and Sacraments. Christ lives in us for we have been baptized into Christ and in Him we live and have our life. This life is the cruciform life, but it is our eternal life given to us as a gift through the merits of the Crucified One, Christ Jesus our Lord.

O almighty God, merciful Father, who in love has joined us to the precious body of Your Son, Jesus Christ, in the water of Holy Baptism, grant that we may find peace and comfort in being incorruptible, even as He is incorruptible; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Saturday of Lent 2

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. — Mark 10:13-16

This passage is included in the baptismal rite not because it is a proof text for infant baptism, but because it teaches us the true nature of faith. And it all begins with Jesus. Why were those Judean parents bringing their children to Jesus? So that He might *touch them*. To touch means to give what Jesus gives: life and salvation. He had touched many before—the sick and suffering—and granted such a gift to them. What parent would not want this for their child? In contrast to the disciples’ rebuke of the parents and children, Jesus holds the children up as a model of faith. This is not because children have a special nature or disposition; they are sinners just like us. Yet children are wholly dependent upon others for life. Faith in Christ is the work of God. It is a gift, given and worked. Just as children received life from God through their parents, so do they also receive new life from God through the new birth of water and the Word. And even to this day, faithful Christian parents bring their children to be touched by Jesus and to receive that blessing of life and salvation that He gives through His means and which He works in His Baptism.

O Lord Jesus, as You once received the children who were brought to You, laying Your hands upon them and blessing them, so grant us Your blessing even now, that with child-like faith we may cling to You, confess Your holy name, and trust in Your promises to us, for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Sunday of Lent 3

As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!” But he said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” — Luke 11:27–28

Today we start a new mark of the Church, the mark of calling and ordaining pastors. Christ has made sure that the Church will have the Word preached and taught to them. He instituted the Office of the Ministry and puts men into that office to preach, teach, baptize, absolve, and commune (the Office that administers many of the other “marks” of the Church). That mark of setting these men apart He has given to His Church, which in most of our cases means the congregation.

So much energy is spent on comparing clergy and laity, or Office of Ministry vs. Priesthood of the Baptized (or believers if you wish), but in reality we need to see how the Lord works here. Has He instituted the Office of the Ministry to be set against the laity? No. Never. Our Lord expresses that here in our Luke text. The Office given to preach the Word is one that is a blessing to God’s people. Jesus says it is a great blessing to have God’s Word taught and preached to you so that you know it, believe it, and hold onto it. As Romans 10 reminds us, how can they hear if there is no man to preach to them?

This week, as you reflect through these devotions, ponder anew what Christ does through the blessing of the Office of the Ministry for your good.

Dear Jesus, thank You for blessing us with pastors to preach Your Word that we may hear it and keep it faithfully. Help us to treasure them as gifts from You for the Church. Amen.



Monday of Lent 3

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” — Matthew 28:18–20

We often hear this passage in relation to the “Great Commission.” It is important to note that this passage is more properly related (by grammar, theology, and historical usage) to Christ instituting two other marks of the Church—Holy Baptism and also the Office of the Ministry. In this passage our Risen Lord Jesus sets up the Office which God uses to make disciples by baptizing and teaching. The distinction of vocation within the Church is also set up, as Luther will call it “Preachers” and “Hearers.”

Jesus said that all authority has been given to Him. He determines how the Church shall be created, sustained, and ultimately delivered. He is the Church’s head. His authority is why Baptism is what it is and why the Ministry is what it is. Our Lord has created this office within the Church to do what He would have them do. In this passage it means making disciples by baptizing them in the name of the Triune God and also teaching them all things. He promises His presence to the pastors as they do these things (I am with you always).

Jesus commands pastors here to do some things. They are to baptize in the way Christ commanded. They are to teach all things that Christ has commanded to be taught. This is summarized in the phrase “the whole counsel of God”. It is no small task, and there are many passages of Scripture that speak of the seriousness of their work. This passage is meant to be a great blessing to you—for Christ saw fit to set up this Office within His Church to make sure that the blessings of Baptism and teaching make it to you in an orderly, recognizable way. For the pastor, this passage is “Law” or instruction on what he should be doing. For the disciple, this passage is “Gospel” telling them what Christ has done for them. He makes sure that His completed work on the cross is delivered to you where you are by a man who has been publicly recognized and tasked with doing it.

Dear Jesus, thank You for instituting both baptism and the office of the ministry. Help us to see Your gracious work through them. Amen.

Tuesday of Lent 3

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”
— John 20:21–23

Here in this passage we see again our Lord Jesus Christ commanding the Office of the Ministry to do something. We also see how the whole Triune God is working through the Office of the Ministry. Certainly elsewhere in Scripture we are taught to forgive others their sins on a personal level, but here Jesus speaks of what we know in the Catechism as the “Office of the Keys.” That, too, is a mark of the Church. The ordaining of pastors to serve publicly in the Church is wrapped up in almost all of these “marks” of the Church in this devotion.

What does Jesus command here for pastors to do? Two things: forgive sins and to withhold forgiveness. Pastors are placed by Jesus into the Church, set apart for public work in that Church, of which the forgiveness of sins is most important. Why would the Church need to withhold forgiveness? It is a matter of using God’s Law to let someone know just how serious their sins are. The goal is to gain repentance unto the forgiveness of sins. Note here especially that these verses are the basis for confession and absolution by the pastor.

If you would like to know more about private confession and absolution, please ask your pastor. This is a great gift with Jesus’ promise attached to it. It is what Jesus has put your pastor there to do for your sake.

Dear Jesus, thank You for earning the forgiveness of our sins at the cross. Thank You for delivering that forgiveness through the word of absolution. Help us both to confess our sins, but also to believe Your word of absolution spoken by our pastor. Amen.



Wednesday of Lent 3

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone — Galatians 1:15–16

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands — 2 Timothy 1:6

Both of these verses speak about men called to serve God in the Office of the Ministry. The first is the Apostle Paul's recounting of his own Divine Call to serve. Paul's call was an immediate call, that is to say, a call issued directly from Christ Himself. The Apostles had these kind of calls. They were confirmed by signs and miracles. The second verse is about Timothy's Divine Call to serve as a pastor. Timothy's call was a mediate call, that is to say, a call that the Triune God issued through means of the Church. This is then confirmed by the public act of laying on of hands (ordination). This is a public recognition that the man being ordained is qualified, taught, examined, and called of God (through means) to serve His Church as a pastor.

This mediate call is the way that the Church continues to fill the Office of the Ministry which Christ instituted. It selects men qualified by examination of both their beliefs and life to be called to serve in the Church. While God could still use immediate calls, they are nowhere promised to continue in the New Testament. We would then expect signs and miracles to confirm an immediate call. The point of either way in which a man is called to be a pastor, it is God at work behind it all.

And this brings courage and faithfulness to your pastor, knowing that God is behind his call to be a pastor. This should also stir you up to true reverence and even obedience toward the pastor which God has placed in your life. This is how the Triune God chooses to care for you through His Church and her ministers.

Dear Jesus, thank You for calling pastors through Your Church to serve us. Help us to revere their office and work among us for our good. Protect them from all things that would harm their teaching or their lives. Let their work among us be a joy for everyone. Amen.

Thursday of Lent 3

Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ — Ephesians 4:8–13

The Office of the Ministry is a gift of Christ to the Church. Those “shepherds and teachers” spoken of in this verse are who you know as “pastor.” Pastors shepherd and teach. Their task is given in the next verse. Christ sends pastors to equip the saints. How does he do this? By the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God to build the unity of the Faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. That means unity around what we believe and know of Christ Jesus.

Pastors also do the work of the ministry. This is the preaching, teaching, baptizing, absolving, communing that Christ commands pastors to do. These things are commanded by Christ to be done for your good. By them you know and believe that God regards you as righteous for Christ’s sake.

Pastors also work in building up the body of Christ, the Church. This goes on wherever the work of the ministry is going on. For where the Word is, there the Spirit is at work doing what He wishes among the people of God. There Christians are being raised into maturity, by the grace of God believing God’s Holy Word and leading godly lives according to it.

Dear Jesus, thank You for giving gifts to Your Church. Help us to receive our pastor as such a gift so that we would believe Your Word and lead godly lives according to it. Amen.



Friday of Lent 3

[Jesus said] Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them. — Matthew 18:18–20

We have been learning from God's Word about pastors. Pastors are a part of the Church, meant to serve it from within. Here in Matthew chapter 18 we hear similar words to those spoken in John 20 about the Office of the Keys. But here we find they are given to the Church. This is one of the key reasons why the Church retains the right from Christ Himself to call and ordain men into the Office of the Ministry.

Each congregation, no matter the size, gathered in a place by the Holy Spirit around the Word and Sacraments is a place where God gives the authority to call and ordain men to serve publicly as His shepherds and teachers. This is not an authority to be used blindly, for the rest of Scripture speaks of the qualifications for such men to serve (i.e. 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1).

Ordinations and installations are great blessings for congregations, for they affirm the authority of Christians gathered together which is exercised by the Office in the Church. Pastor and people, together in Christ, work together so that people would believe in the forgiveness of sins that is delivered when a person believes in Christ Jesus. Christ behind both pastor and people, works to bestow what He earned to those never deserved it but instead receive it by grace.

Dear Jesus, thank You that You have not given the keys of the kingdom to any one individual but to Your whole Church. Help us to see Your Church in our congregation, where pastor and people work together for Your glory. Amen.

Saturday of Lent 3

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. — Acts 14:23

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. — 1 Timothy 4:14–15

Every summer is a time of great joy in the life of American Lutheran congregations. New graduates of seminaries—qualified men who have been taught, examined, and called—are ordained into the Office of the Ministry. During the ordination service, there is a moment where other pastors will lay their hands on the new pastor as St. Paul describes to Timothy in the verse above. These services are some of the greatest occasional services that Christians get to attend in their lives. They are testaments to Christ's continued faithfulness to shepherd His people.

God commands Christians to have a pastor. It is also His gift to them. It provides order to His people to have a publicly recognized preacher and teacher among them. Ordination is a public act that helps both congregation and pastor trust that the Lord Jesus is helping them. The Divine Call and public confirmation of that Call will serve both pastor and people for years to come as a comfort and assurance against all sorts of temptations.

Congregations may be tempted to go without a pastor or come up with some “churchly” looking substitute. This is not according to Christ's command or promise concerning the Office of the Ministry. Instead God wants congregations publicly served by qualified men who have been called by Him and then publicly commended to Him by the laying on of hands (ordination). This is Christ's plan for His Church, therefore it is the best plan.

Dear Jesus, thank You for sending men to serve among us and helping us to publicly recognize this. Help us always to cherish the gift that these men are. May we never despise Your gifts. Amen.

Sunday of Lent 4

The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord accepts my prayer — Psalm 6:9

Do you see with what tender care our Lord teaches us to pray?

For our specific comfort, Jesus teaches us to pray to our Father in heaven, *to call Him Father*. “With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.”

“The LORD has heard the sound of my weeping. The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD accepts my prayer” (Psalm 6:8-9). And in Christ, “all the promises of God find their Yes” (2 Corinthians 1:20).

So, the Church prays.

That is, a Christian, holy people, is recognized by public prayer, praise, and thanksgiving to God. Wherever the Lord’s Prayer is learned and prayed, wherever Psalms and hymns are prayed and sung according to God’s Word and the true faith, and wherever the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Small Catechism are publicly promoted—you can be sure that the Church is there.

Gracious heavenly Father, thank You for teaching us to pray and promising to hear us. By Your Word and Spirit, create in us clean hearts that are willing to receive from You whatever You give and speak back to You the words that You have given us to hear and believe. Amen!

“Our Father, who from heav’n above
Bids all of us to live in love
As members of one family
And pray to You in unity,
Teach us no thoughtless words to say
But from our inmost hearts to pray.”
LSB 766:1



Monday of Lent 4

**Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love
— Jonah 2:8**

From the belly of the great fish, Jonah prayed: “I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me” (Jonah 2:1).

God is holy. And His holiness would terrify us if He did not also reveal Himself to be merciful.

“You brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God” (Jonah 2:6).

When we pray, we confess against our flesh which does not think it needs help. Prayer cries out for help and puts into words our trust for God to be merciful—to seek and save and heal and forgive. When we pray, we flee for refuge to God’s infinite mercy. And He hears. And He answers, in Christ, with the forgiveness of our sins, eternal life, and even daily bread.

For the steadfast love of God endures forever. He always hears His children’s prayers. And, for Christ’s sake, He gives us all that we need for this body and life—and the life to come.

“With the voice of thanksgiving I will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!” (Jonah 2:9).

Holy and Most Merciful God, You have revealed Yourself to be merciful. You know our needs, and we trust you to provide for what is best. Give us faith that trusts You, receives all that You give with patience and joy, and lives as You command. Amen!

“Your name be hallowed. Help us, Lord,
In purity to keep Your Word,
That to the glory of Your name
We walk before You free from blame.
Let no false teaching us pervert;
All poor deluded souls convert.”
LSB 766:2

Tuesday of Lent 4

Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. — 1 Corinthians 14:13-19

Paul spoke in tongues more than us, yet, for the sake of our understanding, he would rather not. When we desire to believe by seeing marvelous things (like Namaan or the Pharisees or the Corinthians or—so often—the Disciples) instead of by hearing the Word proclaimed, we should pray and confess with simple words the will of God:

“God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die.”

Gracious God, thank You for the gift of pastors and teachers. Use them as Your instruments to speak and teach Your Word with simple clarity. For if we are left to ourselves, we will certainly bring it all to destruction. Amen!

“Your gracious will on earth be done
As it is done before Your throne,
That patiently we may obey
Throughout our lives all that You say.
Curb flesh and blood and ev’ry ill
That sets itself against Your will.”
LSB 766:4



Wednesday of Lent 4

Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. In the Law it is written, 'By the people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.' Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongue, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. — 1 Corinthians 14:20-25

Ordered prayer, that is, ordered worship, teaches the faith simply and clearly. We are tempted to embellish what God has simply said and the what Church has simply taught. But, "God is not a God of confusion but of peace" (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Paul writes, "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:13). So, our prayers and teaching—our every word—should speak as Scripture speaks.

Blessed Lord, grant us to hear Your Word, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it, that we may ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life. Amen!

"Lead not into temptation, Lord,
Where our grim foe and all his horde
Would vex our souls on ev'ry hand.
Help us resist, help us to stand
Firm in the faith, a mighty host,
Through comfort of the Holy Ghost."
LSB 766:8

Thursday of Lent 4

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” And he said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.’” — Luke 11:1-4

It should not be lost on us that when Jesus teaches us to pray He does so by telling us to speak out loud. Silent prayer is a strange thing!

Faith comes by hearing, and we hear because someone preaches (cf. Romans 10:17). It follows that our prayers—our recitation of the Word of God that we have heard—would be spoken out loud.

It should also not be lost on us that the devil would have us be and remain silent forever. For our comfort, that we may hear and believe, Jesus speaks the Word of God in its truth and purity, even when we are tempted by the devil. And for our comfort, that we may hear and believe, Jesus proclaims His work for our salvation completed when He says, “It is finished!” (John 19:30).

He did not need to speak this word. But for our comfort, that we would hear and believe, He declared—out loud—His victory over sin, death, and the devil.

Heavenly Father, give us Your Holy Spirit that, by Your grace, we believe Your Holy Word and lead godly lives here on earth. Amen!

“Your kingdom come. Guard Your domain
And Your eternal righteous reign.
The Holy Ghost enrich our day
With gifts attendant on our way.
Break Satan’s pow’r, defeat his rage;
Preserve Your Church from age to age.”
LSB 766:3



Friday of Lent 4

And [Jesus] said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mind has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything?’ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.” — Luke 11:5-8

Jesus does not teach us to badger God with prayer until He relents to our ways, as though we could make God blink. Rather, Jesus would have us know that God desires to help us, unlike the impudent friend.

More than that, He does provide. God knows all your earthly needs, and through the vocation of others, He provides for you and all people.

Gracious heavenly Father, You give daily bread to everyone, even to all evil people. Lead us by Your Holy Spirit to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving. Amen!

“Give us this day our daily bread,
And let us all be clothed and fed.
Save us from hardship, war, and strife;
In plague and famine, spare our life,
That we in honest peace may live,
To care and greed no entrance give.”
LSB 766:5

Saturday of Lent 4

Jesus said, “And I tell you, ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; for if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” — Luke 11:9-13).

This is so obvious and yet so difficult. We (who are evil) know how to give good gifts. We believe in God (who is righteous). And yet we do not always trust Him to provide our daily bread or grant forgiveness.

Hear, then, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the confession of the Church and her prayer: all sin is forgiven in Christ who died and now lives!

You are justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when you believe that you are received into favor and that your sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for your sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight.

Dear Father in heaven, look not upon our sins but upon Your Son who died for us. Teach us to forgive as we have been forgiven, trusting You to give us good and gracious gifts, as You are our God. Amen!

“Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore,
That they may trouble us no more;
We, too, will gladly those forgive
Who hurt us by the way they live.
Help us in our community
To serve each other willingly.”
LSB 766:6

Sunday of Lent 5

Jesus said, “Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.” — John 8:43-46

Luther wrote, “The seventh way the Christian holy people is recognized externally is by the relic of the holy cross. What is that? The fact that the church must suffer misfortune, persecution, tribulation and evil from the devil, the world and the flesh.” (*A Christian Holy People*, 38)

Why do God’s people suffer? As Jesus said, it is because the persecutors are not of God. And because they are not of God, they wish to harm God’s people.

So this week we will contemplate the cross, looking at six different things we learn from the Holy Cross. Today, let us meditate upon what Dr. Francis Pieper says regarding the cross and what it means for you:

We learn from Scripture, on the one hand, that Christians by their faith in Christ enjoy the full favor of God—God is not against them but for them (Romans 8:31), they are God’s children and heirs of eternal life (John 1:12–13; Galatians 3:26; Romans 8:17), the angels serve them (Hebrews 1:14), etc.—on the other hand, that God has ordained that the high dignity of Christians should not become manifest in this life, but rather that the same lowliness which characterized the earthly life of Christ should characterize their earthly life (1 Peter 4:1). And this lowly form of the life of Christians, by which they are conformed to the image of Christ, is called the cross of Christians. (*Christian Dogmatics* 3.68)

Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Monday of Lent 5

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.
— 1 Peter 2:21-25

Today we will consider what constitutes a “cross.”

Pieper writes, “The wicked have many sorrows as well, but only the sufferings of Christians can be called a cross. What Christians suffer as Christians, as they live their Christian faith in this world, that properly constitutes the cross. If you follow Christ, particularly if you confess the Gospel of Christ Crucified, who is a stumbling block to the Jews and an offense to the Greeks, you will receive the same treatment from the world as Christ received – just as Jesus Himself promised you.

“It is true, Christians are still sinners after the flesh and in so far they deserve not only their temporal suffering, but also eternal damnation. But since they repent of their sins and by faith in Christ daily appropriate the forgiveness of sins, their suffering is no longer a punishment of sin in the proper sense, because the true punishment of sin is not this or that temporal misfortune, but eternal damnation.” (Pieper 1.69-70)

The only way for Christians to avoid suffering the cross is for them to reject Christ and His teaching. However, it is only in His wounds that we are healed from sin and death. While we may suffer here in this life, in Christ, we have conquered sin, death, and anything else the enemies of the Gospel may use to persecute us.

Merciful Father, grant me steadfastness so that I do not reject the cross, but instead continue to cling to my Lord who suffered for me; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

Tuesday of Lent 5

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” — Matthew 5:11-12

Today we contemplate the inseparable connection between Christianity and the cross.

Pieper writes, “Bearing the cross is inseparably bound up with Christianity, so inseparably that he who refuses to bear the cross can no longer claim to be a Christian; he has renounced the right to share the glory of Christ. Luther: ‘For he who is not a “Cross-tian,” so to speak, is not a Christian; for he is not like Christ, his Teacher’ (AE 5:274).

“This does not mean, however, that the Christian may impose a cross upon himself or upon others. He must leave that to God (1 Peter 3:17; 1:6), for God alone knows which cross is beneficial and only God gives the strength needed to bear the cross (1 Corinthians 10:13). Luther calls those who purposely seek a cross “work saints” and “the devil’s martyrs” (Pieper 3.70-71).

To be a Christian is to bear the cross. Jesus tells us that this is a blessing! Contrary to what the world sees and even how it may seem to the Christian, Jesus says this suffering is a blessing for you. So much so that He says we can even rejoice and be glad when we suffer for His name’s sake.

Gracious Father, help me to see the cross I bear as a blessing that I may rejoice even in the midst of persecution and suffering; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.



Wednesday of Lent 5

“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. — Hebrews 12:6-11

Today we meditate upon the right view of the cross.

Pieper writes, “The flesh of Christians considers cross-bearing a heavy burden. By their flesh they are led to think that when the world mistreats them they are not receiving what they ought as children of God and members of Christ’s body. They may even think at times that God has forgotten them and become cruel to them (Lam. 5:20; Psalms 13:1; Job 30:21). And unless these thoughts are checked, these tempted Christians will lose their faith; ‘which for a while believe and in time of temptation fall away’ (Luke 8:13)”.

“Scripture therefore instructs us, first of all, that the cross, even though by it our sins are judged, does not manifest God’s wrath against us, but rather reveals God’s love toward us. It marks us as God’s children. Scripture assures us that ‘For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives’ (Heb 12:6), and that ‘when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world’ (1 Corinthians 11:32). Scripture further instructs us that when we suffer because of our confession of Christ by word and deed, the cross is for us a testimony of the Holy Spirit that we are not of the world, but belong to Christ, for we then experience the same treatment which Christ and all witnesses of Christ experienced” (Pieper 3.71-72).

Merciful and everlasting God, grant that my eyes may ever behold my Savior and His cross, that I may not fear the power of any adversaries but rather rejoice in His victory for me; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

Thursday of Lent 5

**In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
— 1 Peter 1:6-7**

Today we consider the purpose and profit of the cross.

Pieper writes, “The cross belongs to the ways and means by which God leads Christians through this world into eternal life. ‘We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God’ (Acts 14:22); ‘Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory’ (2 Corinthians 4:17). The cross renders us humble before God; ‘Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure’ (2 Corinthians 12:7). It warns us to place our sole reliance in the grace of God (2 Corinthians 12:8–9). It thus exercises and strengthens our faith (1 Peter 1:6–7), moves us to prayer (Psalms 18:6; Is. 26:16), destroys the body of sin (Romans 6:6; 1 Peter 4:1), and in general turns our gaze from the things that are seen and must perish to the things which are not seen and are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16–18)” (Pieper 3.73-74).

Christians should also bear their cross patiently for the purpose of setting a good example in patience to the brethren, and to encourage them.

It is through these afflictions that our faith is tested and refined as we are driven again and again back to the mercy of God, found only in Christ Jesus our Lord.

O God, help me rightly to treasure in my heart all that our Lord has of His goodness borne for my sake, that following His blessed example I may bear with all patience all that is adverse to me; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.



Friday of Lent 5

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. — Romans 8:35-39

Today we examine the strength to bear the cross.

Pieper writes, “Scripture teaches that the strength to bear the cross is derived from the assurance of the forgiveness of sins and salvation. Only he can glory in tribulation, only he will not perish in it, in whose heart the love of God is shed abroad by the Holy Spirit, in whose heart the confidence dwells that “while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:5, 8). Only he will disregard the sufferings of this present time who is assured of the glory awaiting him (Romans 8:18). Only he will mortify his members which are upon the earth who knows by faith that his life is hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3–5). Amid the hatred and persecution of the world only he will refrain from sorrowing and complaining and, instead, rejoice and praise the Lord who is certain that his reward is great in heaven (Matthew 5:12; Luke 6:22). Whoever, therefore, destroys the assurance of grace and salvation by making grace and salvation depend on human works or moral efforts in any form deprives himself of the strength needed to bear the cross” (Pieper 3.74).

The strength we need to bear our cross is only found in all that Christ won for us upon His cross.

Heavenly Father, grant me the strength to bear the cross through the assurance of the forgiveness of my sins on account of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

Saturday of Lent 5

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. — Romans 7:21-25

Today we will look at the cross and the sin of Christians

Pieper writes, “The question has been debated whether the sin which still cleaves to a Christian forms a part of the cross of Christians. It must be answered, yes. Christians as Christians renounce the sin in their members; they are filled with hatred of it (Romans 7:15); they deplore the fact that they are ‘sold under sin’ (Romans 7:14), ‘into captivity to the law of sin’ (Romans 7:23), as an exasperating captivity, as a calamity which is inflicted upon them and from which they want to be delivered. Groaning under this captivity, they cry out with the Apostle: ‘O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?’ (Romans 7:24.)” (Pieper 3.76).

Luther sums it up well: “Paul, the dear saint, connects the cross with all creation, saying that heaven, earth, and all they contain suffer with us.... With great sighing and longing we pray the Lord’s Prayer: ‘Thy kingdom come,’ that is: Help, dear Lord, that the blessed day of Thy glorious return may soon come, so that we may be delivered out of this wicked world, the devil’s kingdom, and be freed from that horrible plague, which we must endure without and within, both from wicked people and our own conscience. Keep on strangling the old sack, that we may soon get a different body which is not full of sin and no longer inclined to all evil and disobedience, as at present, which no more is subject to sickness, persecution, and death but, delivered from all misery in body and soul, will be like unto Thy glorified body, dear Lord Jesus Christ, and we thus may finally come to our glorious deliverance! Amen.” (qtd in Pieper 3.76)

O Lord, I am wretched, but You have delivered me from this body of death. Help me never to lose sight of that; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

Palm Sunday

**For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you.
— 1 Corinthians 11:23**

The Sacrament of the Altar is not a man-made rite. The Lord's Supper was not an ancient pot-luck which happened to survive the wreckage of time, like so much flotsam and jetsam. The Sacrament of the Altar is the Lord's Supper. It belongs to Him. It is His last will and testament to His church. It is His body and blood and His forgiveness which His church eagerly receives.

This is why St. Paul makes it very clear that the words of institution were given to him by the Lord. If Paul had received those words from a human authority, we would then have cause to doubt that the Sacrament is truly a mark of the church. But if the Sacrament of the Altar was given to the church by the Lord, then we have a certain and sure certainty that, wherever the Sacrament of the Altar is rightly received, the church, the communion of saints, is truly present.

Like Paul, we receive this divine institution from the Lord. We receive it through Christ's ambassador, the pastor. Just as Paul was commissioned by Christ to rightly hand this heavenly testament down to others, pastors too hand these words down to their parishioners. May the Lord preserve and deliver the Sacrament from age to age, so that His church might be recognized!

Dear Jesus, You handed down the words of institution down to St. Paul, Your preacher and Apostle. Send us true and orthodox preachers like Paul so that we might receive from You what the Corinthian congregation received. Amen.



Monday of Holy Week

For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. — 1 Corinthians 11:29

The Sacrament of the Altar must be rightly given so that it might be rightly believed. Not every Christian ought to receive the Sacrament. There are some, like children, who have faith because of their baptism. But they do not discern the Lord's body. Such people, while Christian, are unworthy and unprepared to receive this mark of the Church.

The Sacrament, like every mark of the church, is holy. But holy things are like medicine. When used rightly, the medicine is beneficial. When used wrongly, medicine becomes dangerous, even deadly. In a similar way, the Sacrament of the Altar is spiritually wholesome to those who receive it rightly, that is, by faith in these words. But the Sacrament is also deadly to those who do not believe these words. These folks eat and drink judgment to themselves, as St. Paul says.

It is necessary that the Sacrament be rightly believed. And it can only be rightly believed when we read, study and inwardly digest the words we have been given: the words of institution.

Lord Jesus, You have given Your body and blood so that it might be salubrious for our souls. Send Your Holy Spirit, so that by Your grace we might believe Your Words of Institution and worthily partake of Your blessed Sacrament. Amen.

Tuesday of Holy Week

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. — Matthew 26:26-27

When the words of institution are rightly given and the Christian rightly believes, then one rightly receives this Mark of the Church. How does one rightly receive the Sacrament? One receives rightly when one receives the sacrament per Jesus’ words. Christ tenderly invites us to eat His body under the bread and to drink His blood under the wine.

We do not rightly receive Christ’s Sacrament when we only eat Christ’s body, as some Roman Catholics do. We do not rightly receive Christ’s Sacrament when we replace the means which Christ ordained, bread and wine, with some other substance, like grape juice or potato chips.

It is necessary for us to rightly receive Christ’s Sacrament. Otherwise, we have no certainty that we truly receive Christ’s body and blood as He instituted. And if we don’t have that certainty, can we be certain that the church is present in this place? So, let us receive Christ’s Sacrament as He invites us, “Take, eat; Take, drink.”

Lord Jesus, You tenderly invite us to eat Your body and drink Your blood under the bread and wine. Let the Words of Your blessed institution ring in our ears so that we might rightly receive Your Sacrament. Amen.



Wednesday of Holy Week

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. — 1 Corinthians 11:26

The Sacrament of the Altar is not private time between you and Jesus. On the contrary, you make a public confession when you commune. You proclaim, before God and the whole world, that you believe that Jesus is Your Savior, that this bread and this wine are His body and blood, and that you are rightly receiving them for your forgiveness.

How do we know that there are believers in our congregations? As these devotions attest, there are certain, infallible marks that reveal to us where Christ's church is on earth. The Sacrament is a public sign and a precious gift by which Christ's people are made holy.

So, what does this mean for us? It means that we do not join congregations because they are numerically large or for other mundane reasons. No, the visible reasons which should impel us to join a congregation are the marks discussed in this devotion. The Lord's Supper is one of those marks. Does the pastor preach the Words of Institution? Does the congregation rightly believe what this Sacrament is and its benefits? Does a congregation rightly receive Christ's body and blood under bread and wine? If so, the church is truly there, even if she is small and sorely oppressed.

Dear Jesus, Your death is proclaimed when we partake of Your blessed Sacrament. Enlighten our minds so that we might make a clear, bold confession about You and Your work. Amen.

Holy (Maundy) Thursday

“He loved them to the end.” — John 13:1

It is strange that Maundy Thursday doesn't appoint Matthew, Mark, or Luke for the Gospel. They record the institution of the Sacrament; John doesn't. And yet, we ought to see that the foot washing and the following discourses are given after the Sacrament's institution.

After He gives Himself in the Sacrament to His disciples, Christ stoops down and washes their feet. In doing so, Christ gave them an example of how they ought to love one another. Christ doesn't command foot washing; He does command, however, that we love one another.

Love is the fruit of the Sacrament of the Altar. First, we are served by Christ. He makes us holy through the forgiveness of sins. And then, we love and serve our neighbors, as Christ commands.

But we must be careful, lest we make love a mark of the church. Our love, though commanded by Christ, cannot be the mark of the church. We are inconstant in love and burdened with sin. Therefore, Christ must continue to serve us through His Sacrament. He loves us, so that we might love one another.

Lord Jesus, You loved Your disciples to the end and You love us even now. Graciously give us the sign and token of Your love, Your body and blood, so that we might begin to fulfill Your new commandment to love one another. Amen.



Good Friday

**“For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.”
— Hebrews 10:14**

The Sacrament of the Altar is not a sacrifice, as the Roman Catholics believe. Hebrews 10:14 makes it clear that there was ONE sacrifice which endures forever. That sacrifice was Christ’s crucifixion. He, the Victim and Priest, made a perfect offering to atone for original sin and for every actual sin.

If the Sacrament of the Altar is not a sacrifice, why does Jesus give it to us? Our redemption occurred two thousand years ago. But we cannot jump the historical ditch. The places where Jesus walked and the presumed pieces of the cross hold no power for us and for our salvation.

But we have a sure and certain hope that the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice, the forgiveness of sins, are distributed to us through the Lord’s Supper. Many may run off to be baptized in the Jordan or to walk where Jesus walked, in order to be certain that they are a member of Christ’s body, the church. However, there is no certainty in those things. But we have a better comfort and blessing. The body which was crucified thousands of years ago is the same body which we eat on Sunday. Christ has given us a solemn guarantee; He cannot deny Himself.

Lord Jesus, we commemorate Your once for all sacrifice upon the tree for our salvation. We thank You for the gift of Your body and blood, which comforts our anxious consciences and gives us the benefits of Your sacrifice: the forgiveness of sins. Amen.

Holy Saturday

“What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?” — 1 Corinthians 11:22

One of the temptations which plague the Christian church is that we focus on the things we shouldn't. There once was a good tradition of wearing your best clothes to church, in order to show reverence toward God. Unfortunately, this pious practice became legalism in a few cases. There is one instance in my parish where a father and son were scandalized when someone made a snide remark about his worn, ugly suit.

Holiness does not consist in clothes. The Sacrament of the Altar can be done without an altar. Baptisms can be done apart from the font. While these externals are wonderful teaching tools and are used reverently, we cannot allow them to overshadow the true marks of the church. If we care more about how a person dresses to receive the Sacrament rather than their confession concerning the Sacrament, we despise the church of God. We may even shame those destitute people for whom Christ also died.

Now, just because something isn't necessary it doesn't mean that it isn't important. While we ought not shame those who cannot dress up, we ought not to despise those who can and do dress up in order to show respect to God and reverence toward our Lord's gifts, like the Sacrament.

Lord Jesus, You called both the rich and the poor to repentance. Sharpen our minds so that we might rightly distinguish between the marks of Your church and external piety. Give us grace not to despise the church and shame those who have nothing. Amen.



The Resurrection of our Lord – Easter Day

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”

— Mark 16:1-7

Where is the Church? This question is not a relic of the past, but it remains important to this day. Throughout the season of Lent, we have studied the Scriptural answer to that question. The Church is found where her marks are: the Office of the Keys, the Word of God, Baptism, the Call and Ordination of Pastors, Prayer and Praise to God, the Holy Cross, and the Lord’s Supper.

To put it differently: the Church is found where Christ is. For where these marks are, the crucified and risen Christ is present and active, forgiving sins and bestowing life and salvation, just as He promises: “For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them” (Matthew 18:20).

If you want to find the Church, find Jesus, and if you want to find Jesus, find His Word and Sacraments. For it is only in these—the Gospel purely taught and the Sacraments correctly administered—that Jesus Christ is present to save you.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Lord Jesus Christ, as we celebrate Your glorious resurrection from the dead, grant that we seek You only where You promise to be found: in Your Word and Sacraments. Amen.



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