

This is how and where God the Son “receives sinners and eats with them”—He pours out God the Holy Spirit in the ministry of His holy Christian Church to forgive them, and make them holy.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF CONCORD
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
LARGE CATECHISM
PART 2: APOSTLES’ CREED ARTICLE III

54] We further believe that in this Christian Church we have forgiveness of sin, which is wrought through the holy Sacraments and Absolution, moreover, through all manner of consolatory promises of the entire Gospel. Therefore, whatever is to be preached concerning the Sacraments belongs here, and, in short, the whole Gospel and all the offices of Christianity, which also must be preached and taught without ceasing. For although the grace of God is secured through Christ, and sanctification is wrought by the Holy Ghost through the Word of God in the unity of the Christian Church, yet on account of our flesh which we bear about with us we are never without sin.

55] Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered to the end that we shall daily obtain there nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. Thus, although we have sins, the [grace of the] Holy Ghost does not allow them to injure us, because we are in the Christian Church, where there is nothing but [continuous, uninterrupted] forgiveness of sin, both in that God forgives us, and in that we forgive, bear with, and help each other.

56] But outside of this Christian Church, where the Gospel is not, there is no forgiveness, as also there can be no holiness [sanctification]. . . .

57] Meanwhile, however, while sanctification has begun and is growing daily, we expect that our flesh will be destroyed and buried with all its uncleanness, and will come forth gloriously, and arise to entire and perfect holiness in a new eternal life. 58] For now we are only half pure and holy, so that the Holy Ghost has ever [some reason why] to continue His work in us through the Word, and daily to dispense forgiveness, until we attain to that life where there will be no more forgiveness, but only perfectly pure and holy people, full of godliness and righteousness, removed and free from sin, death, and all evil, in a new, immortal, and glorified body.

59] Behold, all this is to be the office and work of the Holy Ghost, that He begin and daily increase holiness upon earth by means of these two things, the Christian Church and the forgiveness of sin. But in our dissolution He will accomplish it altogether in an instant, and will forever preserve us therein by the last two parts.

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The Shepherd and His Lost Sheep,
At the Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome
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