

not assume myself? Am I kind to him, and just to him, and to the Lord, in asking him to a participation as thus offered?

Our Saviour said nothing of the Sacrament as the mark of union between Christians. He said it is the forgiveness of my sins in His blood given for, and to us, and is the commemoration of Himself. The Apostle Paul declares we are one body in the communion, but—in *the* “communion of the blood of Christ,” and in *the* “communion of the body of Christ.” That is the communion which we Lutherans celebrate in the sacrament; and will those who believe that this is not the essence of the sacrament, desire to partake of it with us? Or, shall we desire to partake of it with them?

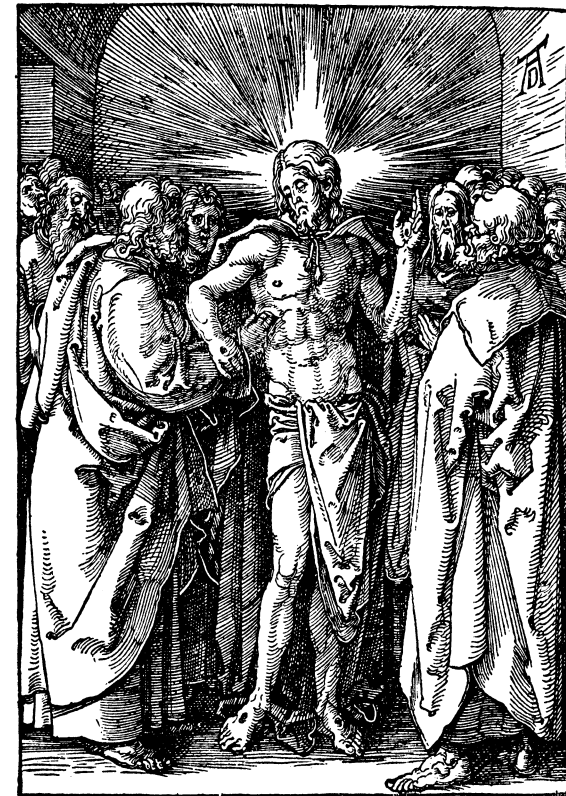
If they should, they are giving up nothing except respect for our convictions; and they are willing that we should be placed in the position of seeming to give up all that is most precious to us. If we should desire to participate with them in their sacrament, we are willing—in order to celebrate the mystery with them—to seem to be robbing it of the chief significance with which, in our conviction, it has been invested by our Lord.

Let us show our belief in the character of our friend and our participation in such brotherhood as can exist in Christ, in a more practical way. Let us trust his word. Let us praise his faith where we can. Let us demonstrate our entire absence of jealousy of him. Let us not only tolerate his church in our midst, but encourage him to worship in accordance with his convictions. Let us convince him that we believe he values his convictions; and that, though we are not in unison with him in our principles, yet we do not thereby set up ourselves as better Christians than he is. Let us be humble in his presence and in the sphere of love show him the respect and depth of an everlasting love. If we are faithful to our unity with our Lord, and our brethren in blood are faithful to their unity in the Lord, the Lord will take care of the proper adjustment of our unity to each other.

[TO BE CONTINUED IN THE JUNE ISSUE]

—from *The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of The Lutheran Church as Embodying the Evangelical Confession of the Christian Church*, by Theodore E. Schmauk and C. Theodore Benze, (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911), p. 904–907.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



MAY 2011

(EASTER I—EASTER 5)

The Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America

News from Around the Diocese: Visitation of the Kenai-Homer Parish

Bishop Heiser recently conducted his visitation of the churches in Kenai and Homer, Alaska which are served by Pastor Tim Tolar. The bishop was present for a Vespers service and two classes (one on Deuteronomy and another on the Book of Concord), traveled with the Tolars to Homer to visit with parishioners, and accompanied Pr. Tolar on a home visit. Bp. Heiser and Pr. Tolar also discussed prospects for a new mission start.

Visitation of the pastors of the diocese—and the congregations which the Lord



has entrusted to their care—is one of the bishop's responsibilities toward the diocese. The bishop offers encouragement and support to the pastors and their families and the congregations affiliated

with the ELDONA. The visitation of the Alaska parish is a reminder that great distances may come between the saints, and yet all share a firm commitment to God's Word and the Book of Concord.



in truth, not a mark of fellowship at all, except in its unity. The only fellowship it expresses is between Christ and my soul, and not even that primarily. Primarily the Sacrament is the gift to me of my Saviour's body and blood for the forgiveness of my sin. It is the most sacred mystery and most holy reality of my faith. It is of the nature of miracle. It is the mystery of Sacrament. It is the "holy of holies" in my religion and worship, and means to me the eating unto life or the eating unto death.

My friends cannot claim to share all the most holy and most solemn acts of my soul. Marriage is not so holy as a sacrament, yet marriage separates me with another in its mystery for all the World; and my friends to not take it amiss if I fail to ask them to share in that holy communion. My membership in an ancestral society, in a guild peculiar to my vocation, in a discipline for the restoration of my bodily health, separates me from all except such as I am,—those who feel the need of what I need, those who wish to receive what I wish to receive. Do others think hard of me because I excuse myself from their fellowship, and go my way toward what I know I need?

If my convictions are with the historic democratic political party, but my sons and brothers and all my relatives are of the stalwart republican type, do they think any the less of me because on election day I separate myself from them, and vote in accordance with my convictions? Is the matter of family fellowship and manifestation to others that our family is in a unity, regarded as of more import than the exercise of my convictions at the polls? Do I insult and fail to show toleration and respect to the position of my relatives because I go my own way to vote?

Is *the Lord's Supper* the place to display *my* toleration, my Christian sympathy, or my fellowship with another Christian, when that is the very point in which most of all we differ; and in which the difference means for me everything—means for me, the reception of my Saviour's atonement? Is this the point to be selected for the display of Christian union, when in fact it is the very point in which Christian union does not exist?

If I will not take the sacrament myself without having been absolved at the special service held for that purpose, in the fear of being unworthy and held guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, am I kind to my neighbor, and kind to my Lord, in asking the former to come to the sacrament without such worthiness as I feel to be necessary, for safety's sake, in my own case? Am I willing to place him in the way of risk which I am not willing and dare

“THE CONFSSIONAL PRINCIPLE OF THE BOOK OF CONCORD AND CHRISTIAN COOPERATION.”

THE PRINCIPLE OF FELLOWSHIP.

Fellowship is a far more intimate thing than cooperation. Cooperation is a combined support in prosecution of a business plan; but fellowship is a life together. Cooperation is a limited association for definite ends; but fellowship is an unlimited association in spiritual life. Fellowship throws open all the doors, unlocks all the strong boxes, and bids the other one abide in our soul and heart.

Modern Christianity greatly abuses the principle of fellowship; and, in so far, destroys both its value and its sacredness. On the grounds of a broad humanity, it would admit to the heart of the Church even those who despise the precious merits of the Head of the Church. On the ground of a Christian brotherhood, it will admit to its fellowship those with whom it will not cooperate. The less one prizes the realities of love, the more publicly can fellowship be offered. True fellowship is with those with whom we are one in the life of the truth or fact on the basis of which the fellowship is enjoyed.

We believe that the feeling against Lutherans who do not participate in the Sacrament with all Christians, rests upon a misconception. Properly understood, we do not see how anyone who respects our believe would have us do otherwise. The Sacrament to us, it need scarcely be said, is not a sacred rite, but a solemn reality, in which we receive the body and blood of Christ. Therein, and in nothing else, lies its value to us. God's substantial pledge to us of salvation, a *divine* act, must not suffer evaluation with our acquiescence and consent.

It is not, to us, a mere mark of fellowship between Christians. It is,



From the Propers for the First Sunday after Easter (Quasimodogeniti)

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 20:19–31 (NKJV)

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side.

Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send 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 retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”

And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

The COLLECT

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection may by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

In today's text, St. John recounts "the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead." For the disciples, this must have brought back all kinds of memories, both fond and not so fond. First, there was the time when Peter told the Lord that they had been fishing all night and caught nothing (Luke 5). Jesus simply tells Peter to let down the nets and Peter does. BINGO! The nets are filled with fish to the point of breaking. Then there is this breakfast that Jesus had prepared for His disciples... bread and fish. How could they not remember the times Jesus fed multitudes of people with bread and fish, but this time Jesus is personalizes the meal by preparing it just for them? These must have been fond memories, indeed.

But the memories take a turn to those that were not so fond. On the night our Lord Jesus was betrayed, He told Peter that Peter would deny Him three times. Peter was quite emphatic, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" The disciples said the same thing. Well, we know how all of them faired that evening. Peter denied his Lord three times and the others became conspicuously absent. Now Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love Me?" One can only imagine the guilt felt by Peter and the other disciples.

As God's people, we have many fond memories of what our Lord has done in our lives. And as God's people, we have many not so fond memories of the sins we have committed against our Lord. Our Lord let's those memories remain as a reminder of our frailty, but thanks to our Lord Jesus our Father in heaven has no memory of our sin.

"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." Jesus is not a mere doorkeeper (Jn 10:3), a man in charge of maintaining the entrance to a particular space; He is the door itself – and the only door -- through which access into a most blessed space is made. This God-Man is man's access to God, having reconciled sinful man back to God through His death upon a cross for man's sin. This Jesus is the very entrance through which the sheep enter in to the sheepfold for protection from predators; any lamb who enters into His protection by trusting in Him is rescued from the threatening perils of our sins, from death, and from the power of the devil. Entering into this Christ is entrance into a most blessed place, for all who are baptized into Christ exit out of Him into Heaven itself, finding there the ever-green pastures of Paradise. He may seem to be a narrow gate (Mt 7:13-14), for this door is precisely the width of the Man Jesus, and yet that is wide enough for any man to enter through it and find life – even life everlasting!

Let me not doubt, but trust in Thee,
Thy Word cannot be broken;
Thy call rings out, "Come unto Me!"
No falsehood hast Thou spoken.
Baptized into Thy precious name,
My faith cannot be put to shame,
And I shall never perish.
(Paul Speratus, 1523)

“The sheep hear his voice. . . . The sheep follow him, for they know his voice. . . . They do not know the voice of strangers.” During this liturgical week, we are being prepared for the Risen Lord’s ascension back into Heaven. The forty-day period following His resurrection from the dead will be completed on Thursday, and He will be seen no more. Yet, the Ascended Lord will continue to abide on earth, promising an abiding presence in His Church: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Mt 28:20).

How will Christ’s people find that Church in which the Lord abides? “Thank God, a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd.” (SA III.XII.2). His lambs remain steadfast in His Word, so that they recognize His voice in that Word. Christ’s lambs listen to the voice of the pastor in a particular church, and then judge whether they hear the voice of a stranger – an unfaithful proclaimer of Christ’s Word and therefore a stranger to Christ -- from whom the lambs must flee to avoid being robbed of their spiritual lives by this thief. Christ be praised indeed when the sheep hear the voice of a faithful pastor – the true Voice of the Good Shepherd, who proclaims the complete forgiveness of all sins, showered upon the world by God’s grace alone, solely on account of Christ’s atonement of all sins, and apprehended by faith alone!

Scripture tells us that the Jews did not understand the meaning of Jesus’ words. They thought His words were utter nonsense. In their minds it was a matter of simple reasoning. “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” Though it was true that God could be found at the Temple, this Temple, built out of stone, was only a temporary residence. God had taken up permanent residence in the One who is True God and True man, Jesus.

Yesterday, we heard the account of Jesus appearing to His disciples a third time after His resurrection. There were many things for them to remember about Jesus. But the clincher for the disciples is the fact that Jesus said He would die and rise again, AND HE DID!! “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” the words the Jews did not understand would later be remembered by the disciples after His resurrection.

By virtue of your Baptism into Christ, you also are God’s temple. “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16). But because of your “Old Adam,” you continue to sin and desecrate the Temple, as had the moneychangers. Now through this same Baptism by which you were baptized into Christ, the Holy Spirit works every day to drive out the “Old Adam” through repentance so that the “New Man” may serve God. This cycle of repentance will continue until sin finally destroys “this temple,” the temple of your body in which God has been pleased to reside since claiming you through Holy Baptism. And as it was your Lord, sin’s destruction of your body is of no avail. God “will raise it up” for you belong Christ who has conquered death.

“After these things...” is the earlier account of Jesus meeting with Nicodemus. Jesus had told Nicodemus of the need to be “born of water and the Spirit,” the need for Holy Baptism. Now we find Jesus and His disciples in the land of Judea where “He remained with them and... AND... BAPTIZED!” And nearby was John the Baptist living up to his name. John was also BAPTIZING!

Sometimes we can be left with the impression that going, baptizing, and making disciples were something the disciples did after Christ’s Ascension. But as we read in our text, they were working hand-in-hand with Jesus to accomplish what is known to us as “The Great Commission.” At this time they were learning while Jesus still walked with them. Later, they would continue the work Christ had given them with the assurance of His presence though they could no longer see Him.

But Satan can never leave the good things of God go untouched by his conniving hands. He tries to drive a wedge between John and Jesus by creating a dispute over all the baptizing that was going on. Satan tries to make John jealous of Jesus. But John knows that all he is accomplishing is really Christ working through him. John could do no more than what God gives to him. If John baptizes many, it is because God has drawn the many to John. If John baptizes only a few, it is because God has drawn only a few to John.

So it is with the congregations within our diocese. Some congregations are large in comparison to others, while some congregations are still being formed as our missionaries continue their work. What all of us need to remember is that every soul served by our pastors and deacons is a soul redeemed by Christ and precious in His sight.

From the Propers for the Fifth Sunday after Easter (Rogate)

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 16:23–30 (NKJV)

“Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.”

His disciples said to Him, “See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God.”

The COLLECT

O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The Evangelist St. John in his First Epistle writes, *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* The Pharisees in today’s pericope refuse to admit their sin and blindness, therefore, they are deceiving themselves into thinking that they are *“sons of Abraham”* and have *“never been slaves to anyone.”* Sadly, they do not realize they are slaves to sin and unrighteousness, because they have made the doing of good works their religion. Therefore, their sin remains because the truth is not in them.

The blind man, on account of his having been born blind, would have always been reminded of his sinfulness by others, for the Jews believed that sin and blindness were connected. Therefore, when the *“Son of God”* comes to him and heals him of his blindness, that is, removes the stain of sin from him, he cannot respond to our Lord’s question with anything other than, *“Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?”* Therefore our Lord relieves him of the suffering he endured by constantly being told that he is a sinner, by saying, *“You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.”*

Our Lord opens the blind man’s eyes to see Him and Who is speaking to him. Therefore, the blind man can now speak the words of faith, *“Lord, I believe!”* When we acknowledge our sin, our Lord also relieves our anguish over sin by reminding us that we have both seen and heard Him in the waters of Holy Baptism, which washed away the blindness from our eyes and made us righteous in His sight.

The story of Jesus ministry continues with the Pharisees watching his every move. It was bad enough for the Pharisees that crowds had flocked to John the Baptist to hear his preaching and to be baptized by him. Now the guy who had driven the moneychangers out of the Temple had the people swarming to Him. Business as usual was over and their influence was waning. This is clearly seen in the next turn of events.

The Jews had nothing to do with the Samaritans. Though the Samaritans had Jacob as their “father,” they were not pure blooded and thus resided outside of Judaism. But as evidenced by Jesus’ travels through Samaria, they were not outside His love. He had come to redeem all people, even Samaritans. Little did the Samaritan woman know that though she had come to draw water from Jacob’s well, God was drawing her to Jesus? He asks her for a drink in order to speak to her about the Waters of Eternal Life. She is curious. Jesus confronts the woman at the well with her immoral life and she realizes that Jesus is “a prophet.” She cannot escape the Law of God and confesses the man she is living with is not her husband. Jesus will not withhold the Gospel from her.

Such is Jesus’ ministry in our lives. “I who speak to you am He.” By virtue of your baptism, the Spirit of the Living Christ brings you to daily repentance as He tells you “all things.” Every time you hear God’s Law, Christ is speaking to you. And every time you hear these words, “You are forgiven,” Christ assures you that you are His beloved.

Our reading for today continues the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. The story draws your attention to two matters. First, the “living water” Jesus had given the women is already beginning to spring up as she returns to the city in order to tell the men what had just taken place. The Word of God creates faith and the faith that the Word of God creates now moves the person to tell others.

The second matter is the discussion that ensues between Jesus and His disciples. The disciples know Jesus is physically hungry. But Jesus hungers for righteousness. He can only be satiated by doing the will of His Father. Nothing of this world can substitute for that. As was often the case with the disciples, they did not understand Jesus’ Words. He is looking heavenward and they are still earthly minded.

Jesus had been and is still preparing them the time when He departs this world in order to fill all things. Then His promised Spirit would lead the Apostles to reap the harvest. They would go as His messengers and continue the work of bringing the Word of God to His people. The prophets had gone before them with God’s Word and now they would tell of the Word becoming flesh and redeeming mankind.

On Good Friday our Lord said, “It is finished!” However, that didn’t mean that Jesus had nothing more to do. He paid the price to redeem fallen mankind, now He works to cash in on what He accomplished on the Cross. Christ Himself has laid the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets for us. Christ continues to labor through the Office of the Holy Ministry to bring people the benefits of the Cross. Christ preaches, Christ baptizes, Christ absolves, and Christ serves His Supper through His called and ordained servants. And He will not stop working until His Father sends Him to wrap things up and bring the harvest, you and me, to our eternal home.

The hatred and unbelief of the Pharisees is shown to us clearly in that the only fault they could find with our Lord healing the blind man was that He did it on the Sabbath.

The rule regarding work on the Sabbath that the Pharisees were referring to was “*Ye shall do not servile work.*” The Septuagint uses for the word “servile”: “latreuton.” The Hebrew uses the word “abowdah.” Both words mean the “service of a servant.” In short, our Lord is telling the Israelites to not do the same labor that they did in the land of Egypt; the labor they did in slavery.

This again goes back to what our Lord was saying in St. John 8 about the sons of Abraham being slaves, and not free, because they have forsaken the word of God, and have made up their own religion that fits the whims of their own heart; they have chosen the religion of the works; the religion of the Law.

The blind man now sees not only physically, but spiritually, for he sees that the Lord Jesus is “*from God.*” This blind man is now spiritually free from sin, and is now a son of God. His eyes have been fully enlightened by the “Light of the world” Who has come into the world to destroy the powers of darkness. As long as our Lord is in the world by His word, the Light remains in the world. Therefore, let us rejoice that we have the holy Gospel, which enlightens our spiritually blind eyes to see that our Lord has called us out of slavery into sonship.

“Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.” This blind man, in a spiritual sense, represents all mankind, for we are all born spiritually blind on account of sin. The Apostles, as they were taught by the Jews, recognize the fact that blindness and sin are connected and therefore ask our Lord, *“Who sinned, this man or his parents?”*

One question that often is asked: “If God truly is a loving God, why did He allow sin to enter into the world in the first place, couldn’t He have just prevented it?” This question is similar to the question of the Apostles, “Who caused this man to be born blind?” The answer to both questions is the same from our Lord, *“That the works of God should be revealed in him.”*

It must be remembered that God planned our salvation *“before the foundation of the world.”* Sin in the world wasn’t a mistake that He wasn’t anticipating, and then after we messed it up, He had to come up with a plan to save us. No, He anticipated man’s rebellion, and had a plan of salvation in place before creation that involved His incarnation; the *“Light of the world,”* coming into the darkness of this world to enlighten its blind eyes.

In this the works of God are revealed, for sinners are saved by our Lord’s enlightening us with His holy Gospel. The works of God are revealed in the blind man, in that He received his sight. The physical darkness that enveloped him was removed. Both can now see the works of salvation that God does for them.

Our reading for today concludes the story of the Woman at the Well. The story brings us back to the woman and the men she had told about the Christ. Here we see how it often works in Christ’s Church. The work of bringing the Gospel to others is a work shared by laity and pastor alike. This laywoman told the men what she had heard. She did not usurp the Office of the Holy Ministry in doing so. She simply went to those she knew and spoke to them. As the result of her words, the people she had spoken to are drawn to Christ. Christ shows the Samaritans that they, too, have admittance into God’s family through His gracious invitation.

As laity, you have the opportunity to tell countless friends and family about the goodness of God in Christ. As God works through that word, He creates the desire for more. As Philip told Nathaniel, you can tell them, “Come and see!” and bring them to Church. Here they come into the presence of the same Jesus who stayed with the people of that Samaritan village for two days. Here they hear the voice of Jesus through His called and ordained servant.

Sadly, the people of His own country did not honor Jesus. “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” John 1:11. After His many miracles, which attested to His divinity as the Christ of God, He was rejected. But after two days of teaching in the Samaritan village, “many more believed because of His own word.” You have His Word... the Word that has caused you to believe and has given you life.

From the Propers for the Second Sunday after Easter
(Misericordias Domini)

THE HOLY GOSPEL St. John 10:11–16 (NKJV)

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”

THE COLLECT

God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son did raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou has delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 25: ST. JOHN 8:30-45

EASTER 4

“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” We are told at the beginning of this pericope that “*many believed in Him,*” because of the words that He spoke concerning His crucifixion and death; His being “lifted up.” It is one thing to believe the words of our Lord Jesus, it is another thing to “abide” in His word.

To abide in our Lord’s words, means to remain, or continue in them; to remain faithful to what He had said. Therefore, our Lord, seeing that those who believed in Him on account of words, would be the same Jews who would “*seek to kill*” Him, tells them plainly that they need to “*abide,*” that is, remain faithful, to His word.

This tells us that abiding in our Lord’s word is not as easy a task as it would seem, for there are many outward influences upon us and the word that seek to either pull us away from the truth of the word, or seek to destroy the word itself. The religious leaders would lead the Jews to cry for the release of Barabbas, and the crucifixion of our Lord. The religious leaders did not “abide” in the word; they were unfaithful to the word of God. Therefore they led the sons of Abraham out of their inheritance into the slavery of their father the devil.

Our Lord has given us His word, in order that we might remain in it, and proclaim it in all of its truth and purity for it saves us from Satan’s lies.

“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM.” Here is our Lord’s proof that He is the *“Light of the world.”* He Who is the creator of Light, and the *“Light of the world,”* shows that He is the One, True God by being lifted up on the holy Cross.

This, our Lord says, is the proof of His witness of Himself to the Pharisees; it is His proof that He is *“from above”* and *“not of this world.”* He goes away to death and hell, so that we might have life and salvation. He comes down *“from above”* to become a part of *“this world”* by taking on our flesh, so that He might *“always do those things that please Him,”* that is, His heavenly Father.

In obeying the Law perfectly, our Lord *“always does those things that please”* His heavenly Father. He does this for us, since we are unable to *“do those things that please Him.”* Therefore, on our behalf, our Lord goes where we cannot go. He goes to take on our punishment on the holy Cross, bearing our sin in His innocence, so that He may show that He is the great *“I AM”* Who rescues the whole world from the power of darkness, and the sting of death.

On the holy Cross, our Lord had *“many things to say and to judge concerning you.”* That is to say, He interceded for us on the holy Cross to our heavenly Father, pleading with Him to accept His sacrifice for us, and to accept His righteousness acts in place of our sinful acts.

“Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches.” It was to that pool that a poor, lame sheep had hobbled that day. He had come to that pool like many others that day, hoping to find relief from his misery. For it was known that an angel stirred that pool from time to time, and that the first man to enter into those waters following that stirring would be healed of all afflictions. How wonderful it would have been for that lamb, who had suffered for so many years, to enter into such a healing bath on that Sabbath day – and He did!

Indeed, how wonderful . . . for you! This episode of Jesus’ encounter with the crippled man at Bethesda is a picture of Jesus’ own encounter with you on the day of your baptism. On that day, the Good Shepherd came to Bethesda – the House of Mercy – to have mercy on His poor little lamb. Christ is the Angel of the Lord Who came to the pool on that day to impart the healing power to that water by stirring His Word and faith into that water. Jesus is the Man Who came to put you into the pool of grace on that day so that you could obtain relief from the dreadful disease of sin. In those baptismal waters He spoke to you, “You sins are forgiven you! Rise; take up your death bed – for you shall not die, but live! Walk in the grace of your baptism all the days of your life in this world, until you enter by the Sheep Gate into the Heavenly Jerusalem, and dwell in the House of the Lord forever!”

“Like father, like son.” We use this expression when we make the observation that a child’s words and deeds are just like those of his Dad. In such a case, the young son is doing precisely what children ought to do: to look upon the parent as an example of how to act and how to speak, and to mimic the parent’s actions and speech. Yet, all of this mimicking says as much about the parent as it does about the child. Indeed, what the son says and does is not only evidence of the character of the son, but also is a testimony to the character of the father who has raised up such a son.

This is most certainly true with regard to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son. As Jesus proclaims, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.” Jesus Christ is the full revelation of God the Father in this world, for we see the Father’s gracious and merciful character in the words and deeds of His Son, so that Jesus testifies in truth: “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” Yet the Son is gracious and merciful Himself, and does what His Father has taught Him from eternity to do: “For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.” That is what the Son has come into the world to do for you: to raise you up to new and even everlasting life through His Word of forgiveness! “Like Father, like Son. Amen, Amen!”

Our Lord says today: “*I AM the Light of the world.*” In the words of the Nicene Creed we confess that our Lord Jesus is “Light of Light.” That is to say, that He Who made the Light is the “*Light of the world.*” The Apostles saw His Light glorified on the Mount of Transfiguration; He revealed that He was the “Light of Light”; the creator of Light, Who was Himself the Light.

This “Light of Light” came down from Heaven and hid the “Light of Light” under the cloud of the flesh. He veiled His Light so that He might save mankind. He hid His true nature, so that the powers of darkness—sin, death, and the devil—might be defeated, once and for all.

The Pharisees only see the veil; they only see the cloud that covers the Light. Therefore, they do not believe our Lord’s witness of Himself: “*I AM the Light of the world.*” The same is true of people today; they only see the man named Jesus. They refuse to believe that He is the Light come into the world to save mankind from the powers of darkness. At best they say He was a great teacher, and at worst they deny His existence all together.

But the “*Light of the world*” has come, veiled in human flesh, to redeem the world, from sin, death and the devil. He has redeemed you by filling you with His Light; He has “enlightened you with His gifts” in the waters of Holy Baptism. Therefore, by His Holy Ghost, the darkness that was in you has been replaced with His eternal Light.

From the Propers for the Fourth Sunday after Easter
(Cantate)

THE HOLY GOSPEL St. John 16:5–15 (NKJV)

“But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.”

The COLLECT

O God, who makes the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 11: JOHN 5:31-47

EASTER 2

“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” In our day, we sometimes hear people refer to the word “Bible” as an acronym for “Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.” While this phrase helpfully points out the truth about another life that is yet to come after we leave this world, it does not spell out clearly the way in which this Holy Book is to be used to reach that life. That can leave a person in the same situation as the Jews whom Jesus is addressing; they search the Scriptures, and think that they have found the instructions for eternal life, but are misinterpreting them entirely.

Here, Jesus provides simple instruction on how to read the Scriptures and attain everlasting life by them. “These testify of Me; come to Me.” The words of Holy Scripture, authored by the Holy Spirit Himself, testify of the person and work of God’s Christ for the sinner’s deliverance from everlasting death. We who are completely incapable of following perfectly God’s instructions for our lives are led by His Word of Gospel to Jesus, Who has accomplished our salvation from sin and death. The words of life in the Bible bring us to the Living Word, Who died and yet is risen to raise up our hope for everlasting life through faith in Him. Let the words of God in the Scriptures lead you to the Word of God in the flesh, Who is The Way, The Truth, and The Life!

“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” So much of our daily life is devoted to our labors for our daily bread. We work several hours at a job in order to earn money with which to buy groceries and the other basic necessities of life. We work at washing, peeling, chopping, cutting, and cooking our meals. We work at cleaning up the kitchen and dining area after dinner, so that we can begin the planning and preparation for the next meal that we will eat within the next few hours. It is all necessary labor, of course, but it is not the most important work that we might do. After all, all of this labor serves a body that will one day reach the end of its life and perish from this world.

Jesus calls us here to the far more important work, one which has eternal consequences for us. It is the laboring for a food that brings endurance to an ever-living soul. It is the work to obtain the very Bread of Life, Christ Jesus Himself, Who gives eternal life by His grace. This is truly a labor of value, for it brings a food that never perishes -- and a life that never ends! It is a work worthy of all effort, and yet it requires such little effort – for God Himself works it in and through us! It is a work that requires no time at all, and yet His people do it all the time. This is that work of God: believe in Him whom He sent—His Son, Jesus Christ!

Christ’s forgiveness is tremendous. However, His forgiveness must not be confused with permissiveness. Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery in today’s reading, but He also told her to “go, and sin no more.” Jesus saved this woman from death (in more ways than one!), but people sometimes confuse His merciful pardon with the idea that sin should be ignored. Jesus teaches us mercy, but He also would have us understand justice as well!

Many who claim to have faith in Christ mistakenly reduce the Gospel to a generic sort of love that ignores sins. But even secular wisdom understands that love can be “tough” and that discipline is a form of compassion. It is a twisted logic that believes love permits a friend to damage himself.

These twisted ideas of permissiveness are the work of Satan, not the wisdom of a merciful Lord. There is a difference between being saved from our sins and being saved from the consequences of our sins. Christ not only saves us from the death that results from our sins, but He also would save us from the damage of continuing in those sins!

Jesus Christ died for the mistakes we have made. And He continues to forgive us for those mistakes. But it is a tragic and wicked thing for us to mock His death by dismissing the seriousness of those sins. We have received an immeasurable gift from His sacrifice on the cross! May He keep us mindful of the life He has given us and make us truly thankful for His blessed pardon!

Faith can be contagious. That's why the life of Christians is so valuable in this world. Christ sends out His people so that His Gospel can be proclaimed to all nations. His Spirit compels us to practice His righteousness and to reflect His mercy and forgiveness. As we are made alive by His Spirit the living water of His Word is shown to the world by our witness.

Faithlessness can also be dangerously contagious. People can be compelled by fear and ignorance, and those who are hard-hearted realize that they can intimidate others into unfaithfulness. The truth can set us free, but ignorance can also enslave us.

The truth must always be proclaimed about Christ. Mankind will naturally speculate about God, but people will come to the wrong conclusions without His Spirit and Truth. Faithfulness grows from the wellspring of God's Word. This is part of our identity in Baptism as well. We do not grow if we simply believe, become baptized, and then try to exist on occasional exposure to His Word. Satan constantly tests our faithfulness, and if it becomes weak he is clever to question us at those points.

We have received tremendous gifts in Christ's Words and His Spirit. They create faith and life in us, and they also bear witness to others. The value and importance of Christ's truth and blessings are already diminished by the secular world, so it is all the more important that our witness be true. Let us always remember that our life flows from God alone, according to the Truth of His Son and the faith that His Spirit brings us! Amen!

"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." There it is. Yes, it really is that simple. This is the singular answer to one of the most perplexing questions that a Christian asks himself, a question that a Christian confronts often – even daily -- and struggles mightily to answer: How can I respond to this situation in a way that conforms with God's will for me? What is God's will for me in this situation?

The proper response by the Christian facing such challenge is formed by God's own response to the Christian's prayer in that situation, "Thy will be done." God accomplishes His will in that person's life at that time "[w]hen God breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow the name of God nor let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh, but strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in faith unto our end." Note how the Small Catechism's explanation of this petition of the Lord's Prayer speaks just like Jesus speaks here of the will of His Father: it is God's will to keep His faithful one steadfast in God's Word and in the Christian faith unto our end in Heaven. The appropriate response to the situation always will be a faithful one, arising out of God's own faithfulness toward His people and conforming with His Word – and leading directly to the Christian's abiding with God forevermore. Indeed, this is His gracious and good will – for you!

“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.” This is the chief reason why the Evangelical Lutheran churches “do not abolish the Mass, but religiously maintain and defend it” and why among us “masses are celebrated every Lord’s Day and on the other festivals, in which the Sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved.” (Apol XXIV.1). It is not for the mere sake of tradition, but on account of the tradition in which Christians, by means of the Sacrament of the Altar, have engaged in this most Holy Communion with Christ Jesus since the time of His institution of this Sacrament.

“For this reason we go to the Sacrament, because there we receive such a treasure by and in which we obtain forgiveness of sins. Why so? Because the words stand here and give us this; for on this account He bids me eat and drink, that it may be my own and may benefit me, as a sure pledge and token, yea, the very same treasure that is appointed for me against my sins, death, and every calamity. On this account it is indeed called a food of souls, which nourishes and strengthens the new man. For by Baptism we are first born anew; but (as we said before) there still remains, besides, the old vicious nature of flesh and blood in man, and there are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and of the world that we often become weary and faint, and sometimes also stumble. Therefore it is given for a daily pasture and sustenance, that faith may refresh and strengthen itself so as not to fall back in such a battle, but become ever stronger and stronger.” (LC VI.22-24).

The Jews who persecuted Jesus and sought to kill Him believed they were doing God’s will. Modern wisdom might look at their efforts and say, “That’s nice that they are dedicated in their service to their god, but that’s kind of nasty business about killing someone over it. . . .” Then there is the third perspective, the Christian point of view, which says that the Pharisees and chief priests were serving their false assumptions about God and they were trying to kill the very Messiah in which they claim to believe.

John’s Gospel often emphasizes the difference between knowledge of the spirit and knowledge of the flesh. People thought they knew from where Jesus came, but they only saw according to the flesh. They also speculated on where He would go, according to the same wisdom. However, the truth about Jesus can only be known according to His Spirit.

The idea that Jesus was God, from God (like the Nicene Creed confesses), makes no sense to worldly wisdom. It sees Him as a flesh-and-blood man from Nazareth. But Jesus’ statement that He was “from the Father” had serious implications, more than claiming to be a simple messenger!

It is no good to say that Jesus was just a teacher, or simply an enlightened person. There is no room for “agreeing to disagree” on the things Jesus said in these verses. He was truly either a rebellious blasphemer or the Christ from God. That is why the Gospel is so very precious. It is a matter of life and death for all mankind. If we know the truth about our Savior by His Spirit, then we are most truly blessed!

“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” Worldly wisdom runs contrary to this. Man’s wisdom emphasizes appearances more than real righteousness. This difference between God’s wisdom and man’s wisdom relates back to Jesus’ comment about glory. “He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.” People seek to glorify themselves, and when they do this they are inevitably faced with the fact that they have sins that compromise their personal glory. When this happens they must shift the focus on appearances rather than have their unrighteousness exposed.

But the doctrine that Jesus brings us is focused on the glory and righteousness of God. If the focus is on God’s glory and His righteousness, then our sins can be judged for what they are. We no longer have to hide behind a false appearance of glory. Our unrighteousness is forgiven and the glory of the Son is placed on us by the will of the Father, and according to His Spirit!

Let us pray that God give us His wisdom and righteous judgment, so that we appreciate the reality of God exposing the sins of our flesh and cutting them away. Let us also rejoice in the fact that He truly does make us whole, as well, by His death and forgiveness from the cross, which is God’s greatest glory! Amen!

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 16:16–23 (NKJV)

“A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.”

Then some of His disciples said among themselves, “What is this that He says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father’?” They said therefore, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is saying.”

Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, “Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’? ‘Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. And in that day you will ask Me nothing.

The Collect

Almighty God, who shows to them that are in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Today's reading is another example of the "hard sayings" that cause people to dismiss or resent faith in Christ. The preceding verses have Jesus telling us that His body and blood are truly bread and drink, which give eternal life. These ideas alone have caused offence among people throughout the centuries! Then Jesus says that no one comes to Him unless it is granted

by the Father. People find this kind of talk intolerable. Human nature compels us to want things on our own terms, and if things conflict with how we want or expect that they should go, our hearts become rebellious.

Jesus' words are spirit because they speak to our spirit, and are only truly understood according to His Holy Spirit. They are life because they teach us about the redemption and everlasting life that only the one true God gives to us. The spirit and life offered by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are on very specific terms. They are not impossible, nor unreasonable terms, but they are narrow terms, and many people cannot tolerate them.

Christ desires to show mercy and forgiveness to everyone, but if we insist on ignoring sins or explaining them away, then we also reject His words of forgiveness and life. It does seem hard for us to understand how faith and eternal life can be as simple as God giving us His Spirit to understand the Gospel, but it can also be so difficult for us to be truly honest about our sins. Thanks be to God that He does choose us, and He continues to reflect His Gospel through us that He may call others to faith as well!

Shrewdness is a virtue. Everything has a proper time and place, and our Lord illustrates that in today's reading. Unfortunately, shrewdness is frequently confused with deception or cowardice. A cheat will be shrewd in his dealings so that he may benefit his own desires. And a coward will claim he is being shrewd by avoiding a difficult situation to which integrity would insist he be a part. Jesus is neither a coward nor a cheat. His shrewdness was focused on a much bigger picture than the trembling of human flesh. Christ had more to teach, and more to suffer, before His enemies were given the chance to kill Him.

In the world there is still much confusion about the difference between shrewd wisdom and the vices of cowardice and deception. People call out for "peace and unity!" when there ought to be discipline and instruction. Cowards fear the sting of discipline, and cheats despise the light of the truth. Just as Christ was no coward or liar in the face of His persecutors, neither should we be ignoble in the face of this current world.

We are not called to run headlong into foolish fights or quest after martyrdom. God has determined times for love and mercy, and He has established other times for boldness and struggle. The Truth of God's Word must be defended clearly, but it also must be practiced zealously! That is the shrewdness that comes from the Spirit of God!