

In today's reading Jesus uses the parable of the judge and the widow as an example of God's faithfulness to His people. He says "shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?" We can be assured that God will answer the prayers of His people, in His time and in His way.

In 2 Peter 3:8ff Peter interprets these verses for us. He says, "beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promises...., but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

In the Third Petition of the Lord's prayer we pray, "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Luther's explanation says, "The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.... 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. This is His good and gracious will." God's will is indeed good and will be done.

We pray: O God, who sees that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

# THE LUTHERAN HERALD



**FEBRUARY 5—MARCH 3, 2018**

**A PUBLICATION OF  
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF  
NORTH AMERICA**

## *The Calendar*

February 4	Sexagesima
February 11	Quinquagesima
February 14	Ash Wednesday
February 18	Invocavit
February 25	Reminiscere

### ***2018 Synod and Summer Camp***

This year's Diocesan Synod will take place at Salem Lutheran Church (Malone, Texas) during the week of June 25–29 so that it will coincide with the annual Summer Camp, which will also be at Salem. (The 2018 Colloquium was held in January in Fort Wayne, Indiana.)

Although the Colloquium and Synod usually occur during the same week, they were divided this week to accommodate the Seminary schedule, so that the clergy of the diocese would gather after the seminarian's conclusion of his studies to conduct his theological colloquy. Josiah Scheck's colloquy is presently scheduled to take place on Tuesday, June 26. The seminary graduation is scheduled for Wednesday evening, June 27.

This year's Summer Camp will build on the theme of last year, continuing our exploration of the history of the Lutheran Church through the settlement of the Americas, beginning with the Church in New Sweden (Delaware) in the 1630s.

Further details concerning both the Synod and Camp will be available in future issues of *The Lutheran Herald* and from the pastors of the diocese.

## **FRIDAY, MARCH 2: LUKE 17:1-10**

## **LENT 2**

In verses 1-4 the apostles must have thought Jesus had laid a great weight of responsibility on them as He sent them about their work. First, He warned them to be very careful to not bring offense to anyone, and second, He laid the weight of being forgiving on them. He said to always forgive a repentant brother! How hard these commands seem! Is it any wonder the apostles said, "Increase our faith?"

Then Jesus goes on to tell them that they don't need an increase of faith, because it isn't the size of one's faith, but what and who is the foundation of faith. In the verse just before our text, Jesus said, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead."

All the faith we need is given to us through the Word of God. Peter later points out that "we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "we have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place" (2 Pet 1:16ff).

Today this word still goes out through faithful pastors, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, it still works forgiveness of sins, new life, and salvation. Just as with the apostles, today through the Word and Sacrament He still calls, gathers, and enlightens His Church to do His work in the world.

We pray: O God, who sees that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In verses 10-13 Jesus speaks about faithful and just stewards; about unfaithful and unjust stewards; and about serving only one master. He says we cannot serve both God and the things of this world. If we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we usually serve the wrong master—we serve ourselves and our desires. In fact, the first tenet of Christianity is that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). Of ourselves we do not have it in us to be faithful to God, of ourselves we want to be our own master.

However, as baptized Christians we also know that God Himself stepped in and did something about our lost state. In other words, we have been given a new master—the Holy Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! By His grace we now serve Him.

Our loving God gave us the Sacrament of Baptism through which He washes us from our sins and makes us His disciples. In Luther’s explanation he asks the question, “What does such baptizing with water indicate?” He answers: “It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” Thank God that He indeed brought us into His Kingdom, given us a new master, and keeps us into eternity.

We pray: O God, who sees that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## Lesson from the Book of Concord Sexagesima Sunday

### Article VII.

Also, they [the Lutherans] teach, that One holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church, it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: “One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,” etc. [Eph. 4:5, 6]

### Article VIII.

Although the Church properly is the Congregation of Saints and true believers, nevertheless, since, in this life, many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled therewith, it is lawful to use the Sacraments, which are administered by evil men; according to the saying of Christ: “The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat,” etc. [Matt. 23:2]. Both the Sacraments and Word are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, notwithstanding they be administered by evil men.

They condemn the Donatists, and such like, who denied it to be lawful to use the ministry of evil men in the Church, and who thought the ministry of evil men to be unprofitable and of none effect.

—The Augsburg Confession

### XII.

#### Of the Church.

We do not acknowledge them [the Roman Catholics] as the Church, and they are not; we also will not listen to those things which, under the name of Church, they either enjoin or forbid. For, thank God, today a child seven years old knows what the Church is, viz. saints, believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. For the children repeat: “I believe in one holy Christian Church.” This holiness does not consist in an alb, a tonsure, a long gown and other of their ceremonies devised by them beyond Holy Scripture, but consists in the Word of God and true faith.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article XII  
The Book of Concord

“With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.”

This is one of those phrases from Holy Scripture that is often taken out of context. Usually when we hear someone quoting this passage it is meant to imply what great things that individual can do if he just has God working for him. However, if we read this verse in context it is not talking about God making possible what mankind does, it is about salvation.

Only God can save! Mankind cannot do anything that will bring him salvation. Obeying the Commandments cannot do it. Not even selling all you have and giving it to the poor can do it. With mankind, salvation is impossible. But with God, salvation is possible.

Our Lord Jesus Christ humbled Himself and became man so that the impossible task of fulfilling the Commandments might be accomplished for mankind. He even humbled Himself further by selling all that He had, even His very life, to suffer our punishment on the tree of the holy cross to atone for the breaking of the Commandments by all mankind. On account of the merits and work of Christ we now have treasure in Heaven, an eternal life with our Redeemer and all the saints.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In Luke 15 Jesus told three parables to the tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees and scribes. In the first one the point is that when the sheep that was lost is found there is great rejoicing in heaven. In the second one, the same is true when the lost coin is found. There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

In the third one, the parable of the loving father, again there is great rejoicing. In the parable of the two sons, Jesus pictures the grace of God in a wonderful manner, as being ever ready to pardon the repentant sinner. It is as if He were constantly watching the road for the return of the repentant one.

Jesus pictures the pardoning grace of God so strongly because the oppressed conscience must not doubt that God really intends to forgive. He sends out His pastors, His Word, His Sacraments to call and win us lost sinners back to Himself. Nothing in God should make us hesitate to come to Him. It is only our own blindness which does that. In Christ we have been called into His Kingdom, the Church. In this Kingdom He cleanses and nourishes us with the milk of the Word. He feeds us with His Body and Blood. And He keeps us unto eternal life. We certainly do have a loving Father.

We pray: O God, who sees that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The reading for today can only be understood through the eyes of faith. As Christians we know that we are to honor our parents; love our spouse and children; and our neighbors. What does Jesus mean about hating my family; or counting the cost of building something; or whether we can fight a war? In faith we know that nothing should be allowed to keep us from following Him. If He and the truth of His Word is not the highest priority in our life, do we really have faith? Is that faith able to stand up to the devil, the world, and our flesh, boldly confessing and trusting Him, whatever may come into our life?

Dr. Luther's explanation of the Apostle's Creed reminds us just what God has done for us, and what He continues to do for us:

"I believe that God has made me... that He has given me my body and soul... and still takes care of them... He defend me against all danger... out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy.... He [Jesus Christ] has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person... with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death... that I may... live under Him in His kingdom... the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts sanctified and kept me in the true faith... On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true."

We pray: O God, who sees that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

After our Lord Jesus instructs His disciples in what was about to happen to Him, we are presented with two contrasting scenes. In the first scene, St. James and St. John request that they be given the highest seats of authority in the kingdom, to sit on the Lord's left and right. They seek power and authority. They do not understand what they ask. To sit with the Lord Jesus means to endure His suffering and pain, His mocking and scourging. They will indeed drink this cup of our Lord, even though it is not what they expect to happen at this time.

The second scene involves a blind man, Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. What is his request of the Lord? It is not for glory or fame, but for mercy. He cries out with a loud voice until his prayer is answered, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." His blindness is a result of sin in this world. Bartimaeus suffers blindness because this world is trapped in the darkness of sin. But unlike St. James and St. John, who in their spiritual darkness ask for something that cannot be given to them, Bartimaeus sees the Lord Jesus as the source of light. Not only is He the source of light which cures Bartimaeus' blindness, but He shines in this dark world to drive back sin and enlighten all those who believe on Him. For this reason Bartimaeus' request is granted. He is shown the mercy that his faith hoped for and he is given his sight.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Our Lord is hungry and sees a fig tree with no figs on it. And even though it is not the season for figs, He curses the tree. This seems odd to us at first. However, the curse spoken against the fig tree, “Let no one eat fruit from you ever again,” is really a curse against the temple in Jerusalem, for that is what bookends the cursing of the fig tree. Our Lord Jesus is visiting the temple before and after the scene with the fig tree.

When the Lord Jesus returns to the temple he drives out the money changers, the ones who were using the sins of mankind as a means to make a profit. They were profiting off of man’s misery, even though most people just considered them to be providing a service.

What our Lord is doing is preparing the way for the true Temple, the Temple of His Body, which will provide the one and only sacrifice needed for the atonement of all sins. There is salvation found only in His sacrifice for us on the cross. There is no need for those who buy and sell forgiveness. It is a free gift, given through Holy Baptism and the other means of grace, to all those who cling to God’s promises through faith.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In verses 1,6, and 11, Jesus deals with the question “What about sin in the world?” What about the murdered Galileans, or the Galileans on whom the tower fell? Why didn’t the fig tree bear fruit? Why did the women suffer an infirmity for eighteen years? Did these things happen because they were worse sinners than others? Jesus says, “No!” He says that when we see the effects of sin in the world, we need to look at the sin in our own lives, and we need to repent.

Contrary to popular practice, the season of Lent is a season of repentance not of penance. We don’t give up something during Lent to please God. We do it to remind ourselves of how sinful we are.

In Psalm 51, written by David after the prophet Nathan confronted him about his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, her husband, David cries out “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.” When David was confronted by the Word of God, it brought repentance! When we are confronted by the Word of God, Christ is calling us to repentance. In the words of absolution we too hear, “God be merciful to you and strengthen your faith. Amen.”

We pray: O God, who sees that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The sad fact is that we worry. Though we are Christians, and have been told numerous times not to worry, WE WORRY! Try as we might to keep from worrying, we find ourselves worrying. There is just so much that goes on in our lives that we find it impossible not to worry. We find it all too easy to slide into the ditch of despair.

There is one word in today's reading that should bring us comfort. That word is "little". Our Lord understands our condition better than we. He so understands us, that He both warns and chastises those whom He loves about the fact they worry, as well as comforting us by telling us that we still have faith, "little" though it be.

What we need to remember is that faith is God's work in us. Though we find we are oft times unfaithful and of "little faith", He remains faithful and keeps us in faith. Thus, we have the importance of daily repentance. Through it the Holy Spirit drowns the old Adam so the new man can serve Christ. Why daily repentance? Well, as someone once said, "The old Adam is a good swimmer." Every day our old Adam struggles to throw off faith through worry. But Christ continues to hold onto us. More than that, He strengthens our "little faith" through His Word of forgiveness, the forgiveness of the very sin of worry.

Naught, naught, can now condemn me/ Nor set my hope aside;  
Now hell no more can claim me./ Its fury I deride.  
No sentence e'er reproves me,/ No ill destroys my peace;  
For Christ, my Savior, loves me/ And shields me with His  
grace. (TLH - 528, st. 6)

Prayer - Gracious Heavenly Father, keep me steadfast in the true faith. Amen.

The Pharisees question Jesus about paying taxes to Caesar. This was a ploy to get the Lord to admit to paying the tax so they could say He was not really the Messiah, because the Messiah would not hold allegiance with Caesar. The irony in this comes later when, in order to get the Lord Jesus crucified, they themselves claim they have no king but Caesar.

The Sadducees try a similar ploy. They question Jesus about the resurrection, something they do not even believe in any way. They also only read the Torah, the five books of Moses, and disregarded the rest of the Word of God. Our Lord Jesus refutes them with the proper use of the Word, just as He did the devil in the wilderness when he was tempting the Lord. God is God of the living. Even after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were many years in the grave, they were still living in Heaven when the Lord spoke to Moses.

This is also why the Son of David can be the Lord of David, because David was still living in Heaven. The Lord Jesus was Lord over David, though, because He was both God and man. He was the Son who was the Lord. And by His sacrifice on the tree of the holy cross He made sin, death, and the devil—His enemies—to serve as His footstool and give us freedom from their power over us.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Having been tempted by the devil after forty days of fasting, our Lord Jesus returns to Galilee, and to Nazareth where He grew up. We are told by Luke that He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read, and this was His custom. Before His baptism, the last we had heard of our Lord was His questioning the teachers of the Law when He was twelve years old.

And what is the first thing that our Lord reads after His baptism and temptation? He reads the passage from Isaiah which was quoted to the disciples of John the Baptist when they were sent to ascertain whether He was the One sent from God, or if they were to look for another. On this Sabbath the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in the midst of those in Nazareth. And what do they do? They reject Him. He think He cannot be the Messiah, for He is only Joseph's son. Their reaction was a testament to the lowly upbringing of our Lord, who is not only born in a humble way, but lived a humble life with parents who were not people of high standing.

What does our Lord do after His rejection? He continues to do the things that Isaiah said He would do, cast out demons and heal the sick, in short, destroy the kingdom and stronghold of the devil. He completed the defeat of the devil's kingdom with His death on the cross.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Many years ago, there was a TV program called Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom. As a child, I was fascinated by the program. The program went around the world filming animals in the wild. One of the episodes was filmed on the African savannah. They showed a pride of lions with one of the lions stalking its prey. It crouched down and waited for the moment to pounce.

Interestingly, today's reading speaks of the scribes and pharisees "lying in wait for Him, and seeking to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accuse Him." They were looking for the opportune moment to pounce. They so hated Jesus they couldn't wait to strike. But as we also know, the people who followed Jesus were numerous. As much as the scribes and pharisees wanted immediately to pounce, they also knew they had to wait for the right time and place to do so.

And strike they did, on the night in which our Lord was betrayed they arrested Jesus under the cloak of darkness when the multitudes were at home asleep. This gave the scribes and pharisees time to hatch their plan so that by the time the sun arose and the "cock crowed three times" even His own followers would deny Him.

Peter warns us: Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8 NKJV). Indeed, the devil and his henchmen are out to get you. How to remain "sober" and "vigilant" is the question. The answer is as clear as the Word. Though you can and do fail, He who is faithful will never fail you.

Prayer - Gracious Heavenly Father, protect me from the evil one and bring me safely to your heavenly kingdom. Amen.



Light and darkness... The contrast between belief and unbelief could not be more vividly portrayed than the image of light and darkness.

If you have ever had the opportunity to visit a cave, it is an experience you won't soon forget. You are taken into the depth of the cave and then told the lights are going to be turned off. You literally cannot see your hand in front of your face. No matter how long you wait for your eyes to adjust, without the presence of light nothing can be seen. You know you are there, but cannot see where there is.

Because of sin, we sit in darkness. We know we are "there," that is, we know we exist and because the law is written on our hearts we know something is wrong. But until God's Word shines upon us, we are unable to comprehend the full width, breadth, and depth of our sin. Belief takes God at His Word. The Word tells us that the very nature of our being is sinful. It is not so much what we have done against God's Law that condemns us, but rather who we are, sinners, that separates us from God.

The very Word of the God became flesh. Jesus not only exposes our sinful condition, He shows the way to eternal life by He being the very Way. He not only leads us to believe the full extent of our lost and condemned condition, He also give faith which trusts in what He has done on the Cross as payment for sin.

Prayer - Gracious Heavenly Father, You have shined Your Light of Your Law upon us and exposed our sinful condition. Out of Your mercy, show us salvation through Your beloved Son Jesus Christ. Amen

In some ways there is no difference between lepers and tax collectors. They both need a physician. One needs a physician of the body, the other needs a physician for the soul. The leper in a certain city was healed of his leprosy. Levi, who we know as the Evangelist St. Matthew, was healed of sin.

In between these events we are presented with an individual who needs a physician for both his body and soul. A paralytic's friends let him down through the roof because they could not get through the crowds. Our Lord, being the Good Physician, heals his greatest need first, the need of his soul. His sins are forgiven. But, it is believed that only God can forgive sins. Since the Son of Man has power to forgive sins, He then heals the paralytic's body.

One thing that is not explicitly mentioned in these narratives is the faith that clings to the promise of healing. The leper, in faith that the Lord would heal him, falls on his face and implores the Lord to make him clean. The faith of the paralytic and his friends led them to go up on the roof and let him down in order that he might be healed. Levi's faith is shown in his offering a great feast for the Lord in thanksgiving for His forgiveness. Levi's faith is so great that it draws other tax collectors and sinners to come and receive that same forgiveness that was offered to Levi. Let us in faith cling to our Lord and the forgiveness that He offers.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

# Lesson from the Book of Concord Quinquagesima Sunday

## Chapter II, Article IV.

[B. What is Justifying Faith?]

The adversaries [Roman Catholics] feign that faith is only a knowledge of history, and, therefore, [they] teach that it can coexist with mortal sin. Hence, they say nothing concerning faith, by which Paul so frequently says that men are justified, because those who are accounted righteous before God do not live in mortal sin. But that faith which justifies, is not merely a knowledge of history, but it is to assent to the promise of God, in which, for Christ's sake, the remission of sins and justification are freely offered. [It is certainty or the certain trust in the heart, when, with my whole heart, I regard the promises of God as certain and true, through which there are offered me, without my merit, the forgiveness of sins, grace and all salvation, through Christ the Mediator.] And, that no one may suppose that it is mere knowledge, we will add further: it is to wish and to receive the offered promise of the remission of sins and of justification. And the distinction between this faith and the righteousness of the Law, can be easily discerned. Faith is the divine service, which receives the benefits offered by God; the righteousness of the Law is the divine service which offers to God our merits. By faith, God wishes Himself so to be honored, that we may receive from Him those things which He promises and offers.

But that faith signifies, not only a knowledge of history, but the faith which assents to the promise, Paul openly testifies, when he says (Rom. 4:16): "Therefore it is of faith, to the end the promise might be sure." For he judges, that the promise cannot be received, unless by faith. Wherefore, he compares them correlatively, and connects promise and faith. Although it will be easy to decide what faith is, if we consider the Creed, where this article certainly stands: "The forgiveness of sins." Therefore, it is not enough to believe that Christ was born, suffered, was raised again, unless we add also this article, which is the final cause of the history: "The forgiveness of sins." To this article, the rest must be referred, viz. that, for Christ's sake, and not for the sake of our merits, forgiveness of sins is given us. For what need would there be, that Christ be given for our sins, if for our sins our merits can give satisfaction?

—Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §48–52

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21: LUKE 10:38-11:13

LENT 1

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13).

It wasn't that long ago we celebrated Christmas. We remember the joy we experienced in giving gifts to children, whether they be our own or the children of others. Jesus points out that even evil people can show a certain degree of care for others. The point Jesus makes is quite simple. "If you then, being evil... how much more will your heavenly Father."

Thus, when we pray, "Our Father in heaven," we should have no doubts as to what He will do. He always does, and always will do, what is best for us. And the ultimate, the very best gift, is the gift of the Holy Spirit. And what a gift it is for "the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." (Third Article of the Apostles' Creed - Small Catechism).

The everyday gifts that God provides, "clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have" (Explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed - Luther's Small Catechism), important as they are for life in this world, pale in comparison to the faith God has given us, for through faith we have been granted life eternal.

Martha was caught up in the everyday. Mary was caught up by the forever day. Martha wanted to "give good gifts" to her guests. Mary was content to receive from her Heavenly Father the gift Christ and ears to His Word.

Prayer - Gracious heavenly Father, keep us in Your Word. Amen.

When Jesus sent out the 70, their job description was simple. They were to preach the Gospel of forgiveness of sins for Jesus's sake. Accompanying the preaching of the Gospel was power to heal the sick as it was given them by Christ.

It must have been quite something to experience such power as noted by their statement upon their return: "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." How quickly they forgot that "signs and wonders" are not the Gospel nor are they a manifestation of the presence of the Gospel in a Christian's life. The modern Charismatic movement has fallen into the same snare by leading people to believe that there must be manifestations of "signs and wonders" in their lives if they are really Christians.

One need only refer to Jesus when asked for a sign: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mt. 12:40). The Christian need only look to Christ and Him crucified to know the "sign" that bears eternal significance. Clinging to Christ and Him crucified, one has what Jesus has so graciously granted through faith. There, in Christ, one has all that one needs for this life and the life to come for only in Him, not in the "signs and wonders", does one find forgiveness of sins. And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life, salvation, and the very knowledge that one's name has been "written in heaven."

Prayer - Gracious Heavenly Father, before the foundation of the world You wrote my name in the Book of Life. Keep me ever in your grace through faith in Christ. Amen.

While walking through a grainfield on a Sabbath, Jesus' disciples plucked and ate grain. When the false teachers pointed out this supposed infraction of the Law, against the requirement that no work be done on the Sabbath, He pointed to David who took and ate and gave showbread on a Sabbath. Jesus pointed to David, who in his action had pointed to Jesus and the blessed taking and eating of the body of Christ in Holy Communion on holy days yet to come.

Jesus replied to the Pharisees' charge by asserting that He, Jesus, is the Lord of the Sabbath. If this was His only negative interaction with the Pharisees one might be generous toward them, thinking maybe they didn't know who Jesus is. But then comes another Sabbath, and Jesus miraculously heals a man's withered hand, and the Pharisees who witnessed Jesus' divine power became furious. Already they were plotting His death.

Out of kindness, not just for the crippled man, but also toward the unthankful and evil Pharisees, Jesus demonstrated that He is also Lord of the eternal Sabbath where, by the grace of God through faith in Jesus, those who suffer from hunger, poverty, pain, and oppression will be blessed forevermore.

We pray: Heavenly Father, grant us patience, even joy, in the face of those things which bring pain and weariness, and in Your mercy turn the hearts of those who envy and assault us for our faith in Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

We have the blessed opportunity in this text once again to consider the relationship between faith and works. None should ever suffer terror on his or her deathbed wondering, as the fateful hour draws near, “Have I done enough? Am I good enough?” We all have fallen short of the glory of God. But Jesus has fulfilled the Law for us. The Holy Spirit creates in us faith that by Jesus’ death and resurrection our sins have been removed from us as far as the East is from the West. God will regard the faithful on the Last Day and judge them not according to their merits, but according to Jesus’ merits.

We rejoice in this Word of truth. Too often, though, we pay no heed to other words of truth when asked, “Why don’t you do the things His Word says?” These are things like forgiving others, and being generous in all ways toward people in need. Instead, we find fault with others and forget that we ourselves are sinners. No, works do not save us, but faith without good works is dead.

We pray: Lord of heaven and earth, stir our hearts to express our thankfulness toward You for Your patience and mercy. Help us to do Your selfless acts of goodness toward the people around us in unfeigned love and joy, in the imitation of Christ, in whose holy name we pray. Amen.

Today’ reading takes us from reality to reality. It extends from the reality of Jesus’s divinity, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!”, to the reality of His humility, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” We can hear about this many, many times but such a dichotomy is still hard for us to grasp. Our sinful nature will always lead us only to look for the glory while shunning the cross.

One way we can do this is by looking at what Christ did for our salvation and begin to think about it on the wrong terms. We turn the focus on us by thinking we must really be worth a great deal to God that He would send His son to die for us. What we fail to see is that our salvation was not due to our worth in God’s eyes because all we are worthy of is eternal punishment and death.

When we look at the cross, what we need to see is the depth of our transgressions and to see just how much it took to pay for ours sins and the sins of the whole world. It took the death of the Only-begotten Son of God, the Perfect Lamb of God.

Prayer - Gracious heavenly Father, look not upon our sins when you gaze upon us. Instead, see Your crucified Son into Whom you have placed me through Holy Baptism and grant me peace through faith in Him Who saved me. Amen.

I was frightfully shy as a boy. I think I owned more pencils than anyone else because the pencil sharpener was in the front of the room and there was no way I was going to walk up there to use it in front of the whole class, so I had plenty of spares. We grow out of those kinds of fear, for the most part. Still, even bashful folks will discourse at length about a car, a movie they saw on television, a summer vacation, or a fishing trip. But to talk about Jesus? To say something about the Christian verity? Most people would rather not, it seems.

For some, it's a matter of uncertainty. They rightly consider talking about Jesus to be important, but wrongly think they won't say it right, regardless how many times they've confessed the Apostles' Creed. There are times when it may be best to be silent. Even Jesus sometimes encouraged people to be quiet about what they had seen Him do, but that was in accord with God's arrangement of the timing of events so that Jesus' death and resurrection would come about exactly as He, in His wisdom, had ordained it.

Now the end times indeed are coming. We must take heed to listen to Jesus. He warns us that whoever is ashamed of Him and His words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in his own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.

We pray: Lord, make us to speak Your testimonies even before kings and not be ashamed. Amen.

We have in this text something at which to marvel—a man who might well be considered a hero of the faith, actually telling Jesus not to bother to come to his house! As much as we are rightly exhorted to do our good works discreetly and not try to draw attention to ourselves, this centurion's good works were quite well known among the people of Capernaum. He had even built a synagogue for them. This seems to be a far cry from the Pharisees who raged at Jesus because He exercised His authority by healing a withered hand on the Sabbath. Here we have a Gentile who simply says, "I understand authority. Leadership and command have been my life. But my influence is nothing compared to yours. You can stay right where You are and still bring wholeness to my servant by the power of Your divine will."

In addition to his obvious faith, he didn't try to bargain with Jesus. Instead of laying claim on Jesus' heavenly favors because of his works, he humbly proclaims his unworthiness. The centurion has demonstrated for us a good, right, and salutary relationship between works and faith.

We pray: Lord of heaven and earth, grant that we grow in our willingness and ability to imitate this centurion both in faith and in works. And may we still be bold to claim that which You in Your mercy have promised for Jesus' sake, even the salvation of our souls. Amen.

Jesus reassured John the Baptist by sending a message through his disciples that He was indeed the Coming One. As He had proclaimed, after having read the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth, He now had clearly demonstrated this blessed reality. He did so through such miraculous signs as healing a man's withered hand, preaching good news to the poor in the Sermon on the Mount, and healing a Gentile centurion's servant.

These mighty deeds had either been ignored, or denied by the Pharisees, who Jesus described as those who were so spiritually dead that they would respond to neither flute nor dirge. One of the Pharisees, possibly to get a closer look at Jesus as part of their plot against Him, invited Him to dinner. And, sure enough, while at the man's house Jesus allowed Himself to be approached by a woman who the Pharisee knew to be a sinner and, therefore, in his eyes, unqualified for mercy. We are not told what her ailment or sins might have been, but she expressed her gratitude and love for Jesus by washing His feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, and applying fragrant oil to His feet. It was her faith, and not merely her love, that saved her. It was Christ's mercy in forgiving her that stirred such strong tides of love in her heart, and the Holy Ghost created such saving faith.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In this text we witness two things that have recurred in this week's readings: we are saved by the grace of God through faith, and we are not just to be hearers of the Word, but also doers of the Word. And yet, although the wind and the waves obey Him, frequently we do not. The disciples' were frightening when the storm raged against them, and their fear of death at sea was greater than their fear of God. "Where is your faith?" Jesus asked them.

We know few particulars about the unnamed naked man who lived in the tombs, but after having been freed from a legion of demons his faith and his thankfulness were so great that he became a powerful witness in his hometown, and perhaps even had a part in spreading the news about Jesus throughout the Decapolis.

Jesus told His disciples to share the light. As the Holy Spirit worked through them after that great Day of Pentecost, we now enjoy the blessings of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, the evidence that they did just that; they shared the light. Neither should we hide a light under a bed. For it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

We pray: Grant us courage, opportunity, and discernment, Lord, to know when to speak and when to act, to the end that we too might have part in letting Jesus' light shine in this darkened world. In Jesus' name, Amen.