

SATURDAY, APRIL 29: 2 TIMOTHY 1-2

“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”

We live in times in which, whether in school or in other contexts, we are encouraged to express things “in your own words.” While that may be helpful for teachers to determine which concepts we grasp and which not, “our own words” are often not the best for communicating the Holy Faith in a timeless way. Rather, we are admonished to “hold fast the pattern of sound words.”

How do we do this? We have sound words first and foremost in the Scriptures. But we also have the words of Scripture woven together in time tested ways in the words of the liturgy, in the words that we say in church every Sunday and in the prayer services. We also have a pattern of sound words in the text of the Catechisms.

Why should we care to make sure we get those words right? It is not out of contempt for congregations that are less liturgical or doctrinally shallow, but “in faith and love.” It is faithful to say back to God the words He has given us to say. And it is loving to hand those words on to others “in their truth and purity,” free of the misunderstandings that may come if we reconstruct them in terms of “what this means to me.” God grant us grace to “hold fast the pattern of sound words.”

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank You for every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Grant us in all humility to hold to them in faith and love, for Your own sake. Amen.

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The Calendar

April 2	Lent 5
April 9	Lent 6
April 13	Maundy Thursday
April 14	Good Friday
April 16	Easter
April 23	Easter 1
April 25 (Tu)	St. Mark, Evangelist
April 30	Easter 2

2017 Colloquium and 12th Annual Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America

The Colloquium (Free Conference) and the Diocesan Synod will take place at Salem Lutheran Church in Malone, Texas from Tuesday, May 30th through Thursday, June 1st. The theme for the Colloquium will be this year's 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. As is our custom, all pastors and deacons of the diocese are expected to be in attendance; laymen of congregations served by the pastors and deacons of the diocese are welcome to attend the Colloquium and open sessions during the Synod, as are other visitors; however, visitors should be in contact with the bishop prior to attendance. For further information, please contact Bishop Heiser either by email (bishopheiser@mac.com) or by calling Salem Lutheran Church (254-533-2330).

FRIDAY, APRIL 28: 1 TIMOTHY 4-6

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

St. Paul writes his letter to Timothy, advising and encouraging him in the conduct of the Holy Ministry. Some of what he writes is specific to ordained ministers, but much of it is simply encouragement to be exemplary as a Christian to his congregation; in other words, to be a role model of the way all Christians should live.

The Apostle encourages him, and thus all of us, to “fight the good fight of faith.” Being faithful is sometimes a great struggle. Engage that struggle, whether that’s resisting temptation, or holding to the Word of God against erroneous ideas and doctrines. In the admonition to “lay hold on eternal life,” everything else falls into line: repentance for the sin that separates us from God, trust in the death and resurrection of Christ which puts us back in communion with God, and living out this life “in perspective,” knowing that the goal is the attainment of eternal life.

Thus believing and thus living, God grant us also grace to confess our hope in the presence of others, that through repentant faith in Christ they too may be made heirs of eternal life.

We pray: Heavenly Father, grant me Your Holy Spirit that I may fight the good fight of faith, and so lay hold of eternal life, for the sake of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”

Was St. Paul recording these words so that for all time all Christians would know that St. Paul was the worst of all sinners? Of course not. No, rather, the faithful saying worthy of all acceptance is for each of us to think this way! Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom each and every one of us is chief!

First, we have the Law recognition: each of us is utterly and entirely condemned as sinners. Before men, some sins disrupt the social fabric worse than others. But before God, if you violate any part of the Law, you are guilty of the whole. Before God we are all “chief of sinners.” And so the entire life of the believer is to be one of repentance.

But then we have the Gospel recognition: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners like us! Do not fear that your sins cut you off from salvation. That’s the whole reason Jesus came into our world in the first place: to suffer, die, and rise again so that you could have forgiveness and eternal life.

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, I thank You that, though my sins are great, Your salvation is even greater. Keep me in this one true faith all the days of my life, for Your own sake. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Judica Sunday

Chapter VI. Of the Third Use of the Law.

1. We believe, teach and confess that although men rightly believing and truly converted to God have been freed and exempted from the curse and coercion of the Law, they nevertheless are not on this account without Law, but have been redeemed by the Son of God, in order that they should exercise themselves in it day and night, (Ps. 119). For even our first parents before the fall did not live without Law, which Law of God was also written upon their hearts, because they were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26sq.; 2:16 sqq.; 3:3).

2. We believe, teach and confess that the preaching of the Law is to be urged with diligence, not only upon the unbelieving and impenitent, but also upon the rightly believing, truly converted, regenerate, and justified by faith.

3. For although they are regenerate and renewed in the spirit of their mind, yet, in the present life, this regeneration and renewal are not complete, but are only begun, and believers are, in the spirit of their mind, in a constant struggle against the flesh, i.e. against the corrupt nature and disposition which cleaves to us unto death. On account of this old Adam, which still inheres in the understanding, will and all the powers of man, it is needful that the Law of the Lord always shine upon the way before him, in order that he may do nothing from self-imposed human devotion; likewise, that the old Adam also may not employ his own will, but may be subdued against his will, not only by the admonition and threatening of the Law, but also by punishments and blows, so that he may follow and surrender himself captive to the Spirit (1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 6:12; Gal. 6:14; Ps. 119:1 sqq.; Heb. 13:21).

4. Then as to the distinction between the works of the Law and the fruits of the Spirit, we believe, teach and confess that the works which are done according to the Law, as long as they are and are called works of the Law, are only extorted from man by the force of punishment and the threatening of God’s wrath.

5. But the fruits of the Spirit are the works which the Spirit of God who dwells in believers works through the regenerate, and are done by believers so far as they are regenerate [spontaneously and freely], as though they knew of no command, threat or reward; for in this manner the children of God live in the Law and walk according to the Law of God, a manner which St. Paul, in his Epistles, calls the Law of Christ and the Law of the mind (Rom. 7:25; 8:7).

6. Thus the Law is and remains both to the penitent and impenitent, both to regenerate and unregenerate men, one and the same Law, namely, the immutable will of God; and the distinction, so far as it concerns obedience, is alone in the men, inasmuch as one who is not yet regenerate does what is required him by the Law out of constraint and unwillingly (as also the regenerate do according to the flesh); but the believer, so far as he is regenerate, without constraint and with a willing spirit, does that which no threatening of the Law could ever extort from him.

MONDAY, APRIL 3: ROMANS 7-9

St. Paul explains how the death of a spouse brings the authority of the contracted marriage to its close. “She is released from the law of marriage.” There are limits to authority. The United States ambassador is authorized to conduct business on behalf of the president. If the ambassador is dismissed by the president, he ceases to have any authority, and is released from his duties. Our Savior was authorized by the heavenly Father to be born under the law. He not only kept it perfectly, but He also suffered and died to fulfill the law’s demands. The active requirements of the law were obediently kept. The punishments of the law were passively endured.

When we came to faith in Jesus Christ, we were united with Him in His death and His resurrection (Romans 6). The death that comes through the law has no authority over those who are in Christ Jesus. Should the law falsely demand our allegiance and threaten to condemn, we shall joyously declare the limits of the law’s authority. Through faith in Christ “the righteous requirements of the law” have been fully met in us. The Church has a new husband! Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, never to die again. His authority endures forever. We serve Him in thankfulness and praise for our liberation from the curse of the law.

We pray: O heavenly Father, who freed us from sin and death through Jesus Christ, send us Your Holy Spirit so that we rise to live in Your Son’s forgiveness. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26: 2 THESSALONIANS 1-3

“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first...”

In many ways we see the world around us going darker. Gross iniquity is advanced as merely “an alternative lifestyle.” The biblical teaching concerning creation is dismissed as “mythology.” The promise of eternal life is brushed off as “pie in the sky, by and by.” And Christians understandably fret about this “falling away.” But should we? Did the Apostle not warn us that it would be so?

In fact, this is nothing new. The text goes on to warn that the son of perdition must first be revealed, who exalts himself above God and sits in the temple of God. In A.D. 1302, *Unam Sanctam* decreed “it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.” The Lutheran Reformation pointed at this, and thus the papacy was revealed as that force which sits within visible Christendom demanding that the Pope be submitted to as if he were God!

Dear ones in Christ, the way of simply trusting in the death and resurrection of Christ has always been a narrow way. God grant us His grace to remain steadfast in His Word against all that would undermine our faith in that Word.

We pray: Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

TUESDAY, APRIL 25: 1 THESSALONIANS 4-5

“Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God.”

The church is “urged and exhorted in the Lord Jesus” to “abound more and more,” that is, to be more and more abundant. St. Paul goes on to speak particularly of sanctification, specifically in terms of sexual immorality and “not defrauding our brother.” There was a day and an age (remember the song, “Wake Up My Little Susie”?) when people sincerely feared that their reputations would be ruined if people even thought they had been sexually immoral. But now, just a few decades later, all manner of sexual immorality is not only tolerated, but celebrated!

So it goes with our society. Be not like unto them. Let go of the longing to be thought of as “normal.” The Scriptures speak of us as a “peculiar people,” and just in this one matter, it is easy to see why. Authentic faithfulness to the Lord entails cutting against the grain of what society considers “normal.”

It begins with repentance and the forgiveness of sins we receive in Christ Jesus. Then, clothed with Christ’s righteousness, we endeavor to “abound more and more” in living up to who we already are: holy ones, “saints,” by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

We pray: Heavenly Father, I give You thanks for the salvation You have given me in Christ Jesus, and for clothing me in Christ’s righteousness in the waters of Holy Baptism. Help me by Your Spirit to live out Christ’s righteousness this day. Amen.

TUESDAY, APRIL 4: ROMANS 10-13

Maybe you have heard the nursery song that sings, “There’s a hole in the bucket.” Dear Henry tries to get some water, but his bucket has a hole in it. Dear Liza tries to advise him how to fix the bucket, which in the end requires some water which he cannot get because of his leaky bucket.

In Romans 10 St. Paul concludes his point with the words, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Christ’s righteousness, which the Israelites rejected, is received by faith. Our God was working to create “the righteousness which is by faith” through the Word. Unlike the children’s song, the salvation which God provided was not a partial answer. He did not require our “fixing” of any part of it. Nothing was left undone—not even one part for us to complete.

Our Triune God provided the atonement of the world by the suffering and death of His Son. He called prophets, apostles, and pastors. He sent them to preach and teach the people. He gave them the message of the Law to reveal sins, and the Gospel to forgive sins. He connected His Holy Spirit’s working to the preached Word. He created faith through the promise of the Gospel so that “anyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.” We have not been given a leaky bucket, but a sound and completed ark of salvation. “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36).

We pray: Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5: ROMANS 14-16

In Galatians St. Paul was speaking to those who were requiring that obedience to the Law's demands be added to faith in Christ for salvation. Concerning these Judaizers who were teaching works-righteousness he says, "...to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (2:5). When it comes to the teaching of the Word and the truth of our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone, there is to be no variance or compromise. We do not yield. There can be no agreement of the truth with falsehood.

However, the situation is quite different in Romans 14-15. St. Paul says, "Receive one who is weak in the faith... We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (14:1, 15:1). When it comes to the weakness of the lives of Christ's believers concerning external matters of indifference, we are to show love in all things, even restraining our own freedom in the gospel. Provided that we are agreed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and all its articles, we should not condemn another for external differences. Our weak brother is not to be judged, but gently taught the freedom which he has received.

"For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). We need to uphold the difference between the pure doctrine of the Word and external matters of indifference.

We pray: O Lord, having declared us righteous through faith in Jesus Christ, give us love to carry the burden of our weak brothers. Amen.

MONDAY, APRIL 24: 1 THESSALONIANS 1-3

"...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

St. Paul observes that the Thessalonians had "turned to God from idols . . . to wait for His Son from heaven." Do you await the return of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do you look forward to it? Do you even think about it? The Scriptures admonish us to set our minds on things above, and not on earthly things.

Faith lives in the joyous hope of our Lord's return in glory and His kingdom that has no end. If our lives aren't oriented toward that, they almost inevitably end up being focused on the pursuit of the things of this world. That's idolatry! We may not have the temples and the ceremonies anymore, but people worship the acquisition of power or pleasure just as sure as if there were temples to Mars and Venus right around the corner!

Dear ones in Christ, be not like unto them. As we continue to celebrate the glorious resurrection of our Lord, rejoice: His resurrection assures believers that Jesus "delivers us from the wrath to come." Use of the things of the world you may (without sin), but live focused on the eternal deliverance that is yours in Christ Jesus.

We pray: Lord, guard my heart, that I would be preserved from the idolatry of the things of this world, and kept in the joyous anticipation of Your second coming. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Quasimodogeniti Sunday

Article V.

That we may obtain this faith, the Office of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who worketh faith where and when it pleaseth God in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justified those who believe that they are received into favor for Christ's sake.

They condemn the Anabaptists and others, who think that the Holy Ghost cometh to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

Article XXV.

Confession in our churches is not abolished; for it is not usual to give the Body of the Lord, except to them that have been previously examined and absolved. And the people are most carefully taught concerning the faith and assurance of absolution, about which, before this time, there was profound silence. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, and pronounced by His command. The power of the Keys is commended, and we show what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences; that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from Heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins.

Aforetime, satisfactions were immoderately extolled; of faith and the merit of Christ, and the righteousness of faith, no mention was made; wherefore, on this point, our churches are by no means to be blamed. For this even our adversaries must needs concede to us, that the doctrine concerning repentance has been most diligently treated and laid open by our teachers.

But of Confession, they teach, that an enumeration of sins is not necessary, and that consciences be not burdened with anxiety to enumerate all sins, for it is impossible to recount all sins, as the Psalm testifies [19:13]: "Who can understand his errors?" Also Jeremiah [17:9]: "The heart is deceitful, who can know it?" But if no sins were forgiven, except those that are recounted, consciences could never find peace; for very many sins they neither see, nor can remember.

—The Augsburg Confession

THURSDAY, APRIL 6: 1 CORINTHIANS 1-3

St. Paul deals with some aberrant practices in the church at Corinth. As he begins his letter to them he assures them in 1:6-7, "...even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." Their problems were not the result of a lack on God's part, as if He didn't provide them with all the spiritual gifts which the congregation needed. According to Ephesians 4:11-13, when Jesus Christ ascended, He gave four gifts with three duties to His church: "And He Himself gave (1) some to be apostles, (2) some prophets, (3) some evangelists, and (4) some pastors and teachers, (A) for the equipping of the saints, (B) for the work of ministry, (C) for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

The workers within the one pastoral ministry were given by God to create unity in mind and thought, not to create divisions. The "foolish" message of the cross was to unite believers in a way in which no one may boast, except in Jesus Christ. The Corinthians were misusing God's gifts. St. Paul desires that their "faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:5).

We pray: Heavenly Father, You have showered Your gifts upon us that we might receive spiritual truths in spiritual words. Give us unity in Christ's forgiveness. Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 7: 1 CORINTHIANS 4-6

Through divine calls issued by Christian congregations pastors become “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1). They have been entrusted with the duties of the Pastoral Office, including the pure preaching of the Word, the right administration of the Sacraments, and, when necessary, the excommunication of the unrepentant (Romans 5).

No faithful pastor seeks to build up Christ’s Church upon his own abilities and skills. Every tool which can accomplish that purpose has been given to him (1 Corinthians 4:7). The “man of God” referred to in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 is the pastor, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Our Triune God equips the pastor for every good work which his vocation requires. A pastor who is faithful in his entrusted duties is one who has learned “not to think beyond what is written” (1 Corinthians 4:6).

One of my members came back from our Diocesan Summer camp and told me, “Every one of the pastors who led Bible study was different from the others, but they all talk about the Bible just like you do!” That is Christian fellowship, which is Scriptural agreement in the doctrine of Christ and all its articles.

We pray: O Lord, “keep us in the pure apostolic doctrine of the holy Gospel, and accompany the preaching of the Word with the effectual working of Thy Spirit, that we may be built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Cornerstone.” Amen. (from The Lutheran Liturgy)

SATURDAY, APRIL 22: COLOSSIANS 1-2

In these chapters St. Paul reminds us that Christ Jesus gives meaning to all that is good in creation, and all things are made to serve His holy will and work.

When God the Father made all things in the beginning through the Word, Who is Christ, He did so for our blessing. This very good creation was made as a loving gift for mankind to enjoy as a testimony of God’s benevolence. But our sin corrupted it. We gave ourselves into sin and incurred its wages, which is death. And even though God rightly had to manifest His condemnation and justice concerning our destructive debt, He did not stop being loving and benevolent toward us!

Christ Jesus crushed Satan’s head by His death on the cross, and with His holy blood He paid the debt of our sin and redeemed us back to God in holiness! Through all these things God exhibited His will, and His will is good and loving, exalting the work of His beloved Son and making those events work together for our good in connection with our faith in Him. So whether we suffer as Paul did, or are blessed, God’s Holy Spirit comes and creates faith in us so that we may be truly content that all things culminate in Jesus Christ and the abundant life that we have only in Him!

We pray: Lord God, grant us Your Holy Spirit so that we may faithfully see and do all things in service to the Gospel of our redemption in Jesus Christ crucified. Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 21: PHILIPPIANS 3-4

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

In faithfulness we do not seek or boast of our own righteousness. That which comes from ourself is corrupted by sin and the antithesis of the things St. Paul commends to our meditations. He even mentions his own past achievements not to boast, but to point out that they are rubbish compared to the glories given to us in Jesus Christ.

We are called up and conformed to the glory of our Lord Jesus. This is the free gift of His righteousness which is bestowed on us! Apart from His righteousness we remain enemies of God.

But being made His holy heirs and children on account of Christ crucified, then we are able to rightly think on the holy things that are from God as Paul encourages us to do. The result is that, on the one hand, we are not focusing on the low things that come from ourself and our flesh, and on the other, we are seeing and giving thanks to God for the many blessings that flow from Him to us because of Jesus Christ!

We pray: Lord, make us to set our hearts and minds on the holy things that come from Your kingdom of Heaven, especially and chiefly the salvation that we have in Christ Jesus Who came down to save us and raise us up in everlasting life. Amen.

SATURDAY, APRIL 8: 1 CORINTHIANS 7-9

The Triune God instituted the estate of marriage—the lifelong union of one man and woman for the procreation of children and for mutual benefit. Before the fall into sin God declared that marriage should be the natural state, saying, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Genesis 2:18). After the fall into sin, St Paul teaches us to use the estate of marriage to avoid sin, saying, “Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband... For it is better to marry than to burn with passion (1 Corinthians 7:2, 9).

When St. Paul begins chapter 7 with the words, “It is good for a man not to marry,” he was speaking of the added duties and concerns that go with pleasing a spouse, providing a household, and raising children. When Christ was asked if it were better not to marry, “He said to them, ‘All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given’” (Matthew 9:11). St. Paul knew that only those who have been given the special gift of living in celibacy can remain chaste apart from marriage. That’s why he said, “For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that” (1 Corinthians 7:7).

We pray: O Creator, give us strength to live according to the gifts You have given us, that we may please You in both body and soul. Amen.

MONDAY, APRIL 10: 1 CORINTHIANS 12-14

Everything that is done is to be done in love, which “does no harm to neighbor” (Rom. 13:10). If the Christian acts from any other motivation then his work cannot be truly good in God’s sight. Or, as Paul says in today’s reading, without love “I am nothing” and “it profits me nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2-3). Love, which St. Paul describes at length, is something to which each of us strives. Not a single one of us loves as St. Paul describes love. Since we are still sinners, our love for our neighbor will always be imperfect and incomplete at best.

The only one who truly loves in this manner, and does so at all times, is our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ prophesied not for His own pride but to teach the gospel to all with ears to hear. Christ understands all mysteries and has all knowledge. He can remove mountains with a word. But He is gentle and humble of heart toward those who seek Him, not lording his divine knowledge over sinners. He did not submit His body to flames to be burned, but “He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). Christ is long-suffering toward sinners, giving them opportunity to repent. He is kind to those who come to Him in humility, seeking the gifts He promises. He is not envious, puffed up, selfish, rude, or evil, for He takes no pleasure in wickedness. Where our love so often fails, Christ’s love for sinners never fails.

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who amid so many adversities do fail through our own infirmities, may be restored through the Passion and intercession of Thine Only-Begotten Son. Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 20: PHILIPPIANS 1-2

St. Paul speaks about, and according to, the affection of Christ. He speaks according to it because he says much that shows how much he loves and appreciates the brethren in the faith at the Church in Philippi. And he speaks about it because the occasion of his writing allows him to continue to teach and build up these faithful saints. The instruction that comes from God’s Word and His Ministers is not always admonishment and chastisement. Sometimes it is encouragement and confirmation. But in either case, it is truly important that we value the help that God shows us through His faithful servants.

In contrast, there are those that St. Paul mentions who preach Christ out of envy and strife, with selfish ambition and insincerity. While we can rejoice with Paul that, if these preachers are at least proclaiming the truth about Christ, His love for the world, and salvation through faith in Him, then it is good that Christ is being preached even in spite of their poor motives.

However, the best scenario is that we strive for and focus on the same love in Jesus Christ, being of one accord and one mind. Such good blessings that God works by His Holy Spirit are the joys that we should set our minds on!

We pray: Heavenly Father, open our lips and let our mouths declare Your praise with all truth, all faithfulness to the whole counsel of Your Word, and with all love and sincerity so that Your mercy may be made manifest to others and we truly glorify You for our life and salvation in Jesus Christ. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19: EPHESIANS 4-6

St. Paul reminds us that we all have callings from the Lord. We are called as His children to believe in Christ, remember we are Baptized into Him, and do the works of love He has prepared for us. And part of doing those works includes faithfully doing the work of our other callings as well.

In Christ we are made one Body, but we are still many parts, which serve different functions. God would have us grow up into Christ, our Head. So He knits us together to love and be loved according to our stations in life and our callings. We are not to walk in sin, focused on ourselves above others, fostering brokenness. We are to be built up in the fellowship of God's light in Christ Jesus. That is why He gives some to serve in the calling, the vocation, of the Apostolic Ministry. He gives others to serve as those who hear, learn, and share, and serve in other ways. Some serve in the vocation of wives, husbands, children, parents, servants, leaders or masters. These callings sometimes blend and intertwine, and as St Paul emphasizes with his teaching on each, they form a beautiful, loving harmony that reflects God's love and grace to the benefit of many!

We pray: Lord God, grant us faithfulness and wisdom according to Your Word and Spirit so that we may know and do the loving works of our various callings, and in all things serve and glorify You in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Head. Amen.

TUESDAY, APRIL 11: 1 CORINTHIANS 15-16

Many today want to deny the resurrection of Christ. This time every year several cable channels will probably run programming presenting blasphemous statements explaining how Christ did not rise, did not actually die, or may not have even existed in the way the Gospels describe. The world wants to keep Jesus in the grave. But there is more. There are even Christian churches in which Christ's resurrection is not taught as a bodily resurrection, but a spiritual resurrection, which is no resurrection at all. All such opinions destroy the Gospel and faith. "If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. 15:14).

Why can Paul write this? Couldn't the death of Jesus atone for sins without His resurrection? He writes in Romans 4:25 that Christ "was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification." A dead Redeemer is no good to us. If Christ remained dead He would be unable to dispense the wonderful treasure He earned on the cross. If Christ remained dead He could not be our Advocate with the Father. If Christ remained dead He would not have conquered death, the final enemy. Christ rises from the grave to demonstrate that His death truly atoned for sin. He rises so that all who believe the Gospel possess the treasures won at the cross. We have the forgiveness of all of our sins. We have the promise of our own resurrection on the Last Day since He lives.

We pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, grant us grace so to pass through this holy time of our Lord's Passion that we may obtain the pardon of our sins; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12: 2 CORINTHIANS 1-4

“We are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death, and to the other the aroma of life to life” (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

During His passion Christ smelled of sweat and blood. He was a sorry sight to the eyes of flesh. Being beaten and crucified, He was an assault on the senses. He smelled like death. The fragrance of Jesus was only the aroma of death to those who did not have eyes to see what was really happening. The eyes of flesh could not see that Christ’s terrible suffering of body and soul was actually the sinless Son of God making atonement for every sin ever sinned by mankind. He reeked of death, but to those who believe the Gospel His passion smells like the sweetest fragrance of them all: forgiveness of sins, a clean conscience, and everlasting life.

Christians smell like Christ. They smell like death to the unbelieving world. They trust that the God-Man Jesus died to atone for their sins. They believe that He rose from the dead. The world sees all this as foolishness and despises it. The world sees Christ as one teacher among many. The world is scandalized by the cross because it means everyone is a sinner. The world rejects the resurrection so that they can deprive Jesus of life and authority. Faith in Christ makes us smell terribly to the world. But to God, by faith, we smell like life.

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds are continually afflicted, may mercifully be relieved by the Passion of Thine Only-Begotten Son. Amen.

TUESDAY, APRIL 18: EPHESIANS 1-3

It is always important for us to remember to pray as our Lord taught us, especially the petition where we ask of God “Thy will be done.” His will desires grace and mercy for us. He gives us His Word and Spirit so that we may hallow His Name in the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified for our redemption. His will is to strengthen and preserve us in that true faith by His holy teachings, His gracious absolution, and the sacred gifts of Baptism and the Supper. These are the things that manifest His kingdom, power, and glory through the Gospel of our Lord Jesus.

It is by His will that He establishes His Church in the world and builds us up as members of this edifice which is the very Body of Christ. Satan, as usual, comes to sow destruction, trying to divide and break us who are members of the Body. He tempts us with lust and other desires of the flesh that turn us in on ourselves, enticing us to see ourselves separated from God’s gracious will. But that is why we are to be built up, made alive by God, and established on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. We are to see, remember, and confess that we are not alone with our own will and flesh, but we are blessed with God’s gracious Word and workings throughout time and creation as He would have His will be done, which is salvation for whoever believes in His Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

We pray: Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word, and let Your will always be done among us; in Jesus Christ’s Name. Amen.

MONDAY, APRIL 17: GALATIANS 4-6

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

We are made heirs of Heaven in Christ Jesus. With that identity comes liberty. And Satan despises both of these realities.

One of the Enemy’s most frequent methods of attack is to keep us enslaved to the Law and bound to focusing on works that serve ourselves more than God’s kingdom. As we are made true children of the Father through His Son Jesus, we are also given His Spirit Who works faith and love in us. He makes us free from the death that comes through the Law, but He also makes us to do those things that serve the Kingdom of Heaven, doing the works of love.

Being a Christian isn’t just about “me and Jesus.” Nor is it about empty customs or phony gestures of being happy and pious. As we are made true children of God we are made to truly love our neighbors, and especially those of the household of faith. This shows the true work of God’s kingdom among us, “faith working through love.” This is the true liberty that comes with being a child of God’s kingdom.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, keep us faithful as Your dear children and empower us according to Your Holy Spirit to walk in those works of love that You prepare for us, all to the glory of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 13: 2 CORINTHIANS 5-7

When we contemplate the bitter passion of our Lord Jesus Christ we ought to be moved to repent of our sins of thought, word, and deed. When considering the depth of suffering Christ endured as the one who “was made sin for us” we ought to take stock of whether or not we have willfully sinned and chosen to do what is contrary to God’s will. Looking at the cross of Christ should always move us to repentance and the desire to be rid of our sins.

But we must not look at the sufferings Christ endured for our sake and solely lament our sins. The cross of Christ is more than just a preaching of condemnation. It is the sweetest Gospel. God the Father made Christ “who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God” by faith (2 Cor. 5:21). The cross should make our hearts rejoice because there we see the full extent of the love of God for sinners. He does not desire the death of the sinner. He would rather see the death of His own Son so that sinners repent, believe the Gospel, and live by mercy alone.

If our repentance doesn’t come from faith in God’s mercy given in Christ Jesus, then it becomes worldly sorrow which produces despair and death. God does not want sinners to despair and think they are beyond His mercy. He desires repentance in faith, which leads to joy in our forgiveness.

We pray: O Lord God, who hast left unto us in a wonderful Sacrament a memorial of Thy Passion, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so use this Sacrament of Thy Body and Blood that the fruits of Thy redemption may continually be manifest in us. Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 14: 2 CORINTHIANS 8-10

“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (2 Cor. 9:15). St. Paul encourages us to give liberally to those who are in need as we have opportunity. He promises sufficiency in all things to us, so that we are not to doubt His gracious provision in this life. The Christian’s charity is not done to earn righteousness before God. Christ earned that for us in His perfect life under the Law and His sinless death. Nor is the Christian’s charity a way to get something we want from God. God has promised to provide every good thing to us. We are to cheerfully give to others in need as God graciously provides for us.

The Christian’s charity, in whatever form it takes, is a reflection of the magnificent charity and indescribable gift God the Father has given us. God has cheerfully handed over His Only-Begotten Son to the hands of sinners to be crucified for us, to endure the full wrath of God against sinners, so that all who believe in Him have everlasting life. God manifests His grace in Christ, “though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we, through His poverty, might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). The entire incarnation of the Son of God is how God cheerfully provides for our more dire need: the forgiveness of all our sins.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who hast not spared Thine only Son, but delivered Him up for us all that He might bear our sins upon the cross, grant that our hearts may be so fixed with steadfast faith in Him that we may not fear the power of any adversaries; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

SATURDAY, APRIL 15: 2 CORINTHIANS 11-13

Christ was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. The eternal Son of God died according to the flesh upon the cross. The second person of the Holy Trinity had suffered the wrath of God the Father in His body and soul. Christ gave Himself completely and fully to atone for the sins of the world. Jesus willfully and lovingly “poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). The greatest and fullest demonstration of God’s love for sinners culminated with His words, “It is finished.” With those words Christ fulfilled the Scriptures and fulfilled the will of the One who sent Him. Christ spent and was spent for the sake of sinners, so that all who believe the Gospel find exactly what He earned on the cross: full remission of all their sins.

St. Paul writes, “I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved” (2 Cor. 12:15). Let us not treat Christ as the Corinthians treated Paul, who gave freely of himself and suffered much in imitation of Christ. Let us rather love Christ all the more as we consider not only His suffering and death, but the reason for all of it: our salvation.

We pray: Grant, O Lord, that as we are baptized into the death of Thy Blessed Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, so by continually mortifying our corrupt affections we may be buried with Him; and that through the grave, the gate of death, we may pass to our joyful resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.