

In his introduction to his commentary on Galatians, Luther wrote: “St. Paul, in this epistle, goes about diligently to instruct us, to comfort us, to hold us in the perfect knowledge of this most Christian and excellent righteousness. For if the article of justification is lost, then all true Christian doctrine is lost. He who strays from Christian righteousness falls into the righteousness of the law; that is, when he loses Christ, he falls into the confidence of his own works. Therefore we also earnestly set forth, and so often repeat the doctrine of ‘faith,’ or Christian righteousness, that by this means it may be kept in continual exercise, and may be plainly discerned from the active righteousness of the law.”

The problem facing the people of Galatia was simple. They had forsaken the doctrine of justification. Near the end of 2 Corinthians we heard of St. Paul’s warning concerning false preachers who were preaching “another Jesus.” False preaching robs the hearer of the Gospel’s grace and places the hearer back under the Law. False preachers had followed Paul to Galatia to entice the people away from the Gospel.

Paul hits the Galatians head-on because they are turning “to a different gospel, which is not another.” Paul’s opening volley sets the tone for his letter to the Galatians. He does not seek to please his reader by skirting the issue or by somehow excusing the inexcusable. Paul would not allow the doctrine of justification to be compromised then, nor may we allow it to be compromised today.

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THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. Luke 5:1-11 (NKJV)**

So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat.

When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net."

And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men."

So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.

The COLLECT

O God, who has prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

(Note: We jump to Trinity 5 today, so that this Gospel may precede the Festival Day of SS. Peter and Paul, which is observed this week.)

Yesterday, Paul warned the Corinthians of false preachers who wanted to lead the people away from Christ. In today's reading Paul addresses what he knows they are thinking, "Who does this Paul think he is?" Well, he is one sent by God to speak to them and their condition as sinners and in doing so it is for their "edification." Paul appeals to them to repent of their sins and turn to Christ. He knows what is going on by way of witnesses. He is familiar with the sins of their past and the sin in which they live. Thus, Paul longs for their repentance in order that they may be made right with God.

Paul's message is the message of every faithful preacher: repent and believe the Gospel. Yet all too often the response to sound preaching is: "Who does this pastor think he is?" Then the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins, which comes not "from the pastor," but from God, through the pastor, is rejected. But then, the message of repentance and forgiveness as delivered by Christ Himself was also rejected by many for whom He died.

To those whom God has called to be His own, though, He gives ears to hear what those of this world refuse to hear. His blessed call to turn from sin and to trust in Him is the very power of God unto salvation. The prayer of every faithful pastor is for the sheep entrusted to his care to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd.

As St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is drawing to a close, Paul warns the Corinthians of would-be apostles that speak "another Gospel." He warns them of the deceit of Satan who, as a serpent, deceived Eve by leading her away from the simple Word of God. Now, false preachers have come to rob the Corinthians of the peace that was theirs in Jesus. These charlatans were corrupting the simple message of forgiveness of sins. Though humans deliver this false message, the fount and source of false teaching is Satan, "the father of lies." Such false preaching is in violation of the Second Commandment, for such lying takes God's name in vain.

Satan's corruption of Scripture continues today through the voices of countless preachers who rob the Gospel of its sweetness by taking people back to God's Law in order to find purpose in life. Under the shadow of God's Law, one can only be left with uncertainty of one's salvation which finally leads to the self-righteous idea "I am pleasing God by the life I am living," or to despair of any hope because "I can never please God."

The "simplicity that is in Christ" is knowing that sins are forgiven for His sake and that His life is now counted as your very own. All this comes through the faith that God has so graciously given you to believe in Christ.

"For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."

A grave doctrinal error was unleashed on the church once again a generation ago when false teachers denigrated the rich variety of Christian vocations by proclaiming "every member is a minister." This doctrine led to a neglect of the office of the ministry by those whom the Lord called to that office, and an invasion of that office by those whom the Lord had not called to fill it. Not only did this error lead to a grave misunderstanding of the office of the holy ministry, but it also led Christians to think that they were somehow failing to live a Christian life when they were not usurping the calling of another.

Luther pointed to 1 Corinthians 7:20 as a clear passage demonstrating the calling of all Christians to live out their faith in all the vocations to which the Lord has called them: "Let each one remain in the same calling which he was called. ... Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called." (v. 20, 24) Every Christian has a rich variety of vocations appointed to him by the Triune God: A person may be a husband or wife, father or mother, son, daughter, worker, citizen, ruler, pastor, etc.—and in each and every one of these vocations, all that a Christian does which is not sin, is something done to the glory of God.

Not all members have the same function, but each member of the body has a purpose which is important to the whole body. In each and every task, no matter how humble or glorious it may be in the eyes of men, is done to the glory of God when a Christian is living out His God-given vocation.

“Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”

With these words, St. Paul gives the same counsel which our Lord gave when the Pharisees and Herodians sought to trap Him with a question regarding taxation: “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Mat. 22:21 NKJV) From time to time, radicals who confuse the respective roles allotted to the various kingdoms will urge “tax protests” or “tax resistance”—on at least one occasion, this writer has heard it maintained that “there’s nothing in the Bible saying we have to pay taxes.” But in fact, God’s Word specifically declares that we are obligated to pay taxes, customs, and to offer respect to the civil authorities according to their vocation.

St. Paul’s words also make it clear that the governing authorities will be held accountable for how they fulfill their calling. As they have been “appointed by God” they are therefore answerable to Him. Their calling is to be “not a terror to good works, but to evil”—and if they fail in this regard, they must give an accounting for their poor stewardship to the One who entrusted them with such responsibility. Again, we are told that “he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.” Therefore, if those who have been entrusted with such authority fail to punish evil, or use the sword unjustly, the Lord of heaven and earth will not hold them guiltless.

It is no small thing to be charged with such grave responsibilities in the administration of justice in this fallen world. It is for this reason that the Church always remembers the State in her prayers, and Christians serve faithfully in the vocations to uphold the authority which the Lord has allotted to the State.

St. Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians is nearing its close and Paul’s message shifts subjects. Paul now enters into a defense of his ministry against those who would subvert the Gospel to lead some astray. The fight is not one of flesh warring against flesh, but one of man’s words against the Word of God. No false teaching will be stopped by human might but only by the power of God’s Word.

Luther wrote in 1523: “Heresy can never be stopped by force. A different strategy is called for; and this strife and quarrel are different from those that are dealt with by the sword. In this controversy the Word is to contend. If this does not accomplish the desired end, it will undoubtedly remain unaccomplished by secular power, though it fill the world with blood. Heresy is a spiritual matter, which no iron can strike, no fire can burn, nor water can drown. God’s Word alone avails here.”

As we watch the growth of Islam throughout the world, it is quite easy to look to our government to protect us—which it should. But, at the same time, we, as Christians, need to understand that our government cannot defeat the heresy that is Islam. To fight Islam requires two things: an understanding of its errors and knowledge of the Truth. As Christians, we need to continue to learn and relearn Christian doctrine: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds.”

We are reminded of St. Paul's words to the people of Galatia—"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10)—as he continues his invitation to the saints in Corinth to gather an offering for the saints in Jerusalem. He encourages them not to be cheapskates, but also not to give grudgingly, for either way gives evidence that the heart is held captive by selfishness.

As with yesterday's reading, Paul does what Paul always does: he preaches Law and Gospel. Where sin is brought to light, the Gospel shines all the more brightly: "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." The people of Corinth will never be able to do the good work of gathering an offering for Jerusalem unless God gives it to them to do so. The answer is found in repenting of themselves and turning to Christ. Paul once again assures them that God will bless them and enable them to do His good pleasure.

Today's reading again reminds us that the good works we do are a gift from God as the Thanksgiving Collect that follows Holy Communion states quite clearly: "O God the Father, Fount and Source of all goodness."

THE HOLY GOSPEL St. Matthew 5:20-26 (NKJV)

"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny."

The COLLECT

Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in 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.

“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way.”

Christians are always falling into one extreme or the other when it comes to the matter of taking and giving offense. There are many who claim they are defending their “Christian freedom” when in fact their conduct is offensive—there *are* some who are weak in faith and there will be those who perversely provoke them. However, there are others who wave the banner of their own “weakness” as an excuse for pressing their own preferences on others. Neither extreme is a good testimony for that righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees—that is, the righteousness of Christ Jesus which is graciously credited to all those who believe in Him.

Paul teaches the Church, “But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.” We know that ‘To go against conscience is neither right nor safe’—what is needed is for one’s conscience to be instructed from God’s Word, so that one may rightly discern that which is consistent with the Christian life. For one who is truly ‘strong,’ there can be no better counsel than to listen to the words of St. Paul: “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves”. However, those who are inclined to take offense at that which is not sinful should endeavor to put the best construction on the words or actions of others which they may be unjustly judging. In short, what is needed is for all to view the actions of their fellow Christians in the best light, and seek counsel from the Word as to that which is consistent with the Law of God. For our righteousness before the Lord is not found in ourselves—whether or not we ‘eat’—but in Christ alone.

Today’s reading has been the basis for many so-called “stewardship sermons.” I am not sure who hates “stewardship sermons” the most, the hearers or the pastors who feel the need to preach them. These sermons will speak of “the three ‘T’s of stewardship”—time, talent, and treasure—but, more often than not, the sermon ends up talking little about time and talent and much about treasure—all to the detriment of the Gospel.

One need only go back to the verse one to understand rightly where St. Paul is directing his readers: “we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.” The “stewardship” of the Macedonians did not originate from within them, but was entirely the result of God working in them and through them because of His grace. The “liberality” of which St. Paul wrote in the second verse literally means “single-mindedness.” By the grace of God, the people of Macedonia had a “single-mindedness” toward God with the result of suspending worry about their own wants and needs and focusing on the need of others.

But, sadly, such “single-mindedness” toward God can quickly wane and the Christian will think, “Hey! What about my needs?”

Thankfully, God’s knows both your needs and your one true need: the forgiveness of your sins. That is why “our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” Only He can save you from yourself and your selfishness.

THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. Luke 16:1–9 (NKJV)**

He also said to His disciples: “There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.’

Then the steward said within himself, ‘What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.’

So he called every one of his master’s debtors to him, and said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ So he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ So he said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.

The COLLECT

Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

“And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation, but as it is written: ‘To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.’”

As one of the apostles, it was part of St. Paul’s calling to be a witness to the resurrection, and in his journeys preaching the Gospel, his regular labor was bearing witness to Christ’s atoning sacrifice to those who had not heard the good news of salvation. Throughout the Acts of the Apostles, one may read the account of Paul’s endeavors, and see that a regular pattern emerges: Paul proclaims the Gospel, there are some who hear the Word with joy, then those who oppose the Gospel (whether Jews or Gentiles) rise up to persecute Paul, and he departs to proclaim the same message in yet another place. Far from building on another man’s foundation, Paul’s ministry was regularly confronted with disbelief, hatred and persecution; often only a small remnant believed the Word which they had heard.

It is the character of the prophets and apostles that they serve as the foundation of the Church, with Christ Jesus being the chief cornerstone. As the cornerstone was rejected by men—and yet remains the cornerstone—so the foundation endures as the only foundation of Christ’s Church, and the disbelief, persecution and errors of men cannot overturn that which the Lord has established through the prophets and apostles whom He sent to proclaim His Word of Law and Gospel.

That apostolic doctrine still comes to us today—the measure of a faithful minister is that he proclaimed the Word of God in its truth and purity and administers the Sacraments according to Christ’s institution. This labor is to build on a foundation which has already be laid by Christ—and often to build on the foundation in a given place which the Lord of the Church already established through another called and ordained servant of the Word.

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”

It has almost become a cliché among Lutherans to speak of “marking and avoiding” those who cause divisions through their false doctrine—a cliché not because we should not so mark and avoid false teachers, but because while many people talk about doing so, in the end many excuses are offered for failing to “follow through”; excuses are offered which attempt to explain away the offense of the false teacher and the division which his man-made doctrine bring.

As Christians strive to be faithful to God’s Word they will discern those who serving not the Lord, but their own beliefs—and that awareness will lead to sorrow, and even anger. Understanding what a profound treasure we have received from the Lord it can be devastating to realize how men will pervert the Word to serve their petty desires—it is depressing to realize how easily the weak are seduced by smooth talk and flattery!

The Lord assures us that the gates of Hades will not prevail against His Church (Mat. 16:18), and though the world (and many of the weak within the Church) will think ill of, and even persecute, those who “note those who cause divisions and offenses” through false doctrine, by the grace of God, those who have their hope in Christ will see that refuting error is a vital element of proclaiming truth, and will stand by those who serve Christ’s Church by defending her from the flatterers and hirelings.

“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”

Here St. Paul clearly states why the Church practices closed communion. There are no gray areas in the above examples. Where righteousness exists, lawlessness has no place. Where light exists, darkness cannot exist. So too, wherever belief exists, unbelief cannot exist. A person cannot be both a believer and unbeliever at the same time.

This holds true for those who preach false doctrine and those who remain faithful to the pure teaching of God’s holy Word. False doctrine cannot remain where the pure teaching of God exists. Therefore, those who believe falsely have no place at the Altar of our Lord—the place where the Church enters into a pure and holy communion with our Lord—with those who know what they receive at the Altar and believe that by our Lord’s true and substantial Body and Blood given in bread and wine they receive the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation.

Those who do not believe this, or doubts this, is unworthy and unprepared to receive the Lord’s Supper, for it is required that all hearts believe.

For this reason, the Church practices closed communion, so that the Word of God might remain pure, that darkness may have no place with light, and that the unbeliever may not be seen to have equal footing with the true believer.

“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.”

The knowledge of God is likened by St. Paul to a sweet fragrance. One cannot see or touch a sweet smell; rather it is sensed by one’s nose. When the smell is good, we cannot get enough of it, like the smell of fresh baked cookies. However, when the smell is bad, like a dead skunk in the middle of the road, we cannot get away quick enough; we hold our noses and cringe and try to wind it away with our hands.

The knowledge of God is a sweet fragrance. When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, the nose of faith senses this, and it is a sweet smelling fragrance to the believer. However, when false doctrine is being taught, or worse, being allowed to exist alongside pure doctrine as if there is no real difference, the nose of faith cringes from the wretched smell that is produced by such false teaching.

This is why it is important to keep and maintain our faithfulness to the purity of God’s Word, for we are not “peddlers of the Word of God,” that is, the Church doesn’t exist so that she might feed her own belly, but that she might give spiritual sight to the spiritual blind; that she might proclaim to sinners to take in the sweet smell that their sins are forgiven on account of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

As we were reminded yesterday, smooth words and flattering speech are the sort of thing which brings divisions and offenses within the Church. Now St. Paul instructs us that the Lord of the Church send him “to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words” (v. 17)—which is not to say that Paul was anything less than a master when it came to communications; but the efficacy of the Word of God did not rely on any winsomeness or wisdom of Paul’s own devising, and he knew it.

Smooth words, flattering speech, and a fixation on the cleverness of one’s own “communication skills” are kindred idolatries which demand veneration in the place of the divine Word. What St. Paul desired for the Corinthians—and for all Christians—was that they “speak the same thing”. What matters is not creativity but fidelity. Where there is a common ‘speaking of the same thing’—a phenomena which is manifest in the confession of the faith found in the Creeds and other symbols of the one, true faith—there we find unity. Thus a child (or an adult convert) is baptized in that faith confessed in the Creed, and a catechumen is instructed in the right understanding of God’s Word faithfully confessed in the Small Catechism. So, too, when a pastor is ordained or installed, he does not give an oath to speak words which are ‘smooth’ or ‘flattering’—the oath given before the Lord and the congregation is that he will “speak the same thing”—and that same thing is the apostolic doctrine.

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Natural man does not “get it”—and he’s not going to! The natural man is dead in sin; for him to receive the things of the Spirit of God he must first be made alive, and that is not something which sinful man can accomplish for himself.

Thus St. Paul writes to the Church in Corinth: “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” Those who heard the Word proclaimed, and believed that Word, were those whom the Lord called through that Word, and in whom the Holy Spirit created faith; worldly wisdom—like the righteousness of the Pharisees—is not going to “cut it.” The righteousness of the Pharisees is fouled throughout by sin; and the wisdom of men—and the excellence of their speech—and corrupted by sin. Thus St. Paul declared by inspiration of the Holy Spirit: “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” Through the Word, we are brought from death to life, and through the Word, we are sustained in this new life—all this is accomplished by the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacraments.

St. Paul brought to the Corinthians the one thing which they truly needed: He proclaimed to them Christ crucified, for through the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God, the sacrifice for all the sins of men—from Adam to the end of the world—has been made, and through the proclamation of the Gospel the Spirit of God creates faith which believes this good news.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

St. Paul opens his second Epistle to the church at Corinth with these words of comfort. Trial and tribulation had abounded at Corinth when he wrote his first Epistle. Many of the troubles which he had addressed in that Epistle had been resolved, so that now Corinth was able to comfort other parishes that would experience the same troubles as they had. Indeed, the first Epistle to the church at Corinth has proved to be a comfort to many parishes throughout the centuries of the Church.

There are many examples today where a parish that struggles and has endured serves as a comfort to other parishes. Many of the parishes in our fellowship have endured suffering and persecution in many and various ways, but because they have remained faithful to the pure teaching of the Word of God, and the proper administration of the Sacraments, we are now able to comfort one another *“with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”*

The Church on Earth suffers just as her Lord suffered. She is persecuted, just as He was persecuted. But just as He rose victorious on the third day, because He remained faithful to His Father’s will, so too does the Lord raise His holy Church from tribulation, so that she may be comforted and comfort those who suffer with her.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

St. Paul concludes his first Epistle to the church at Corinth by referring briefly to his work in Ephesus. He states, *“For a great and effective door has opened to me.”* This is meant to serve as encouragement to the church at Corinth as they were dealing with several issues which caused strife within their midst. The encouragement was that just as the Lord had opened *“a great and effective door”* for St. Paul in Ephesus, the same would be granted to the church at Corinth.

But St. Paul goes on to say of Ephesus that *“there are many adversaries.”* This would also serve as encouragement to the church at Corinth, for they indeed were rocked by many adversaries not only from without, but from within their church. Therefore, they were not alone in the attacks from the Evil One.

This is why St. Paul tells the Corinthians to *“be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.”* In other words, remain faithful; do not let the lies and deceptions of the devil persuade you to depart from the one true faith once delivered. This admonition remains true for us today. We are to remain faithful to the pure teaching of the holy Word of God, in the midst of the *“many adversaries,”* so that by the holy Word, the Holy Ghost may open up to all who would hear *“a great and effective door”* to the holy Gospel.

“We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.”

How could it be that St. Paul, the spiritual father of the Corinthian Christians, could become the ‘scum of the earth’? Well, how had our Lord been received? Those who had been begotten by the Gospel which St. Paul preached (4:15) had given in to party spirit and faction—just as the disciples contended among themselves as to which one of them was the greatest. And as Peter once boasted that he would never deny his Lord just a brief while before covering himself with shame—for a time—through his threefold denial, so, too, the Corinthians who boasted in the strength of their faith and became more concerned for the person of their teachers than for the unity of the one true faith. The Corinthians argued over the merits of Apollos and Paul—both of whom proclaimed the same doctrine—even as the scandal of unimaginable immorality found expression in their very midst.

“What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?” The bluntness of Paul’s question no doubt shocked the Corinthians, just as it surprises us. Of course we know what message they (and we) would want to hear! The shock for them came in the clear Word which taught them why it was needful for them to repent and return to their earlier love for the divine Word which had been proclaimed to them.

It was a small thing for St. Paul if he found himself treated as the “filth of the world”; the threats, beatings and imprisonments which he had endured testify to the way in which the Lord sustained his faith throughout such things. What was needful was that the Corinthians reflect on the way in which they had come to conform to the way in which the world responded to God’s servants—and to repent.

THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. Mark 8:1-9 (NKJV)**

In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, “I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar.”

Then His disciples answered Him, “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?”

He asked them, “How many loaves do you have?”

And they said, “Seven.”

So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and they set them before the multitude. They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before them. So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away.

The COLLECT

O God, whose never-failing providence orders all things both in heaven and earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

St. Paul in today’s pericope puts forth two rubrics governing the Liturgy of the Church: “*Let all things be done for edification,*” and “*Let all things be done decently and in order.*” Edification means the building up of something. Therefore, St. Paul’s first rubric means that the first rule of good Liturgy is that it teaches and builds up the Church; it is not done for show. The Liturgy is meant to reinforce the simple truths which we confess, so that we may be sustained in the one true faith from the trials and tribulations of this sinful life which seek to destroy our faith.

St. Paul’s second rubric, “*Let all things be done decently and in order*” gives us the second rule of good Liturgy: it is reverent. Liturgy that changes from Sunday to Sunday, or that is chaotic and hectic is not good Liturgy, for it is not done decently and in order.

Therefore, so-called contemporary worship is a violation of Holy Scripture, for it breaks these two rules. It doesn’t edify because the words are changed from week to week, so that the worshipper cannot depend on the truth of the Word, and is therefore left in doubt and not edified. It also does not promote order in the Church, because everything changes. God who is immutable deserves worship that is immutable, that is, unchanging.

It is for this reason that the Church has established the Ordinaries—the unchanging parts of the Liturgy. These along with the Proper—the parts which cycle Christians yearly through the life of Christ—serve to proclaim our Lord’s salvation through Him alone.

The Church is One Body, but many members. Just like in our body, not all the members of our body have the same tasks. The eyes see; the ears hear; the nose smells; our arms and hands do activities; our legs and feet carry us to where we want to go; and our head controls them all. The hair on our head doesn't do a particular activity. However, if we receive a bad haircut from our barber, we become frustrated, because it affects the nature of our whole body.

“But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” Whatever happens to the Body of Christ, good or bad, effects the whole Body of Christ. Therefore, when false doctrine is tolerated, or invades the Church, the Body suffers, because members of the Body are drawn away from their source of life and being.

However, when the Church is united in a common confession and fellowship; when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and the sacraments are rightly used according to Christ's institution, and there is agreement in doctrine and practice among the parishes of the Body of Christ, the Body remains healthy and is able to accomplish its task of proclaiming the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ without hindrance.

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? . . . and such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

What does this mean . . . for me? You might well borrow the following words from the Large Catechism concerning the summary of all the commandments, for these amply summarize the intention for every Word that God speaks to His children:

“Now, there is comprehended in these words (as said before) both an angry word of threatening and a friendly promise to terrify and warn us, and, moreover, to induce and encourage us to receive and highly esteem His Word as a matter of divine earnestness, because He Himself declares how much He is concerned about it, and how rigidly He will enforce it, namely, that He will horribly and terribly punish all who despise and transgress His commandments; and again, how richly He will reward, bless, and do all good to those who hold them in high esteem, and gladly do and live according to them. Thus He demands that all our works proceed from a heart which fears and regards God alone, and from such fear avoids everything that is contrary to His will, lest it should move Him to wrath; and, on the other hand, also trusts in Him alone and from love to Him does all He wishes, because he speaks to us as friendly as a father, and offers us all grace and every good.” (LC I.322)

“But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk.”

What does this mean . . . for me? You might well borrow the following words from the Large Catechism concerning the first article of the Creed, for these amply summarize the intention for every creature and object of creation that the God our Creator has made:

“I am a creature of God; that is, that He has given and constantly preserves to me my body, soul, and life, members great and small, all my senses, reason, and understanding, and so on, food and drink, clothing and support, wife and children, domestics, house and home, etc. Besides, He causes all creatures to serve for the uses and necessities of life, sun, moon, and stars in the firmament, day and night, air, fire, water, earth, and whatever it bears and produces, birds and fishes, beasts, grain, and all kinds of produce, and whatever else there is of bodily and temporal goods, good government, peace, security. Thus we learn from this article that none of us has of himself, nor can preserve, his life nor anything that is here enumerated or can be enumerated, however small and unimportant a thing it might be, for all is comprehended in the word Creator. . . . Now, since all that we possess, and, moreover, whatever, in addition, is in heaven and upon the earth, is daily given, preserved, and kept for us by God, it is readily inferred and concluded that it is our duty to love, praise, and thank Him for it without ceasing, and, in short, to serve Him with all these things, as He demands and has enjoined in the Ten Commandments.” (LC II. 13-16, 19)

THE HOLY GOSPEL **St. Matthew 7:15-23 (NKJV)**

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn-bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.’ Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

The COLLECT

Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee; may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”

1. Do you believe that you are a sinner?
2. How do you know this?
3. Are you sorry for your sins?
4. What have you deserved from God because of your sins?
5. Do you hope to be saved?
6. In whom then do you trust?
7. Who is Christ?
8. How many Gods are there?
9. What has Christ done for you that you trust in Him?
10. Did the Father also die for you?
11. How do you know this?
12. What are the Words of Institution?
13. Do you believe, then, that the true body and blood of Christ are in the Sacrament?
14. What convinces you to believe this?
15. What should we do when we eat His body and drink His blood, and in this way receive His pledge?
16. Why should we remember and proclaim His death?
17. What motivated Christ to die and make full payment for your sins?
18. Finally, why do you wish to go to the Sacrament?
19. What should admonish and encourage a Christian to receive the Sacrament frequently?
20. But what should you do if you are not aware of this need and have no hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?

“These questions and their answers are no child’s play, but are drawn up with great earnestness of purpose by the venerable and devout Dr. Luther for both young and old. Let each one pay attention and consider it a serious matter; for St. Paul writes to the Galatians in chapter six: ‘Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked.’” (SC, “Christian Questions and Their Answers”)

“Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

What does this mean . . . for me? You might well borrow the following words from the Large Catechism concerning the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, for these words instruct us on the attitude of humility that a Christian holds toward a brother, whether he takes offense at you or gives offense to you:

“But there is here attached a necessary, yet consolatory addition: As we forgive. He has promised that we shall be sure that everything is forgiven and pardoned, yet in the manner that we also forgive our neighbor. For just as we daily sin much against God, and yet He forgives everything through grace, so we, too, must ever forgive our neighbor who does us injury, violence, and wrong, shows malice toward us, etc. If, therefore, you do not forgive, then do not think that God forgives you; but if you forgive, you have this consolation and assurance, that you are forgiven in heaven, not on account of your forgiving, for God forgives freely and without condition, out of pure grace, because He has so promised, as the Gospel teaches, but in order that He may set this up for our confirmation and assurance for a sign alongside of the promise which accords with this prayer, Luke 6:37: Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven. Therefore Christ also repeats it soon after the Lord’s Prayer, and says, Matt. 6:14: For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, etc.” (LC III.93-96)

“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

What does this mean . . . for me? You might well borrow the following words from the Large Catechism concerning Holy Baptism, for these words instruct us on the use of the gifts given in the pouring of that holy water upon the body to bring our sinful flesh under control:

“Thus we must regard Baptism and make it profitable to ourselves, that when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say: Nevertheless I am baptized; but if I am baptized, it is promised me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body. For that is the reason why these two things are done in Baptism, namely, that the body, which can apprehend nothing but the water, is sprinkled, and, in addition, the word is spoken for the soul to apprehend. Now, since both, the water and the Word, are one Baptism, therefore body and soul must be saved and live forever: the soul through the Word which it believes, but the body because it is united with the soul and also apprehends Baptism as it is able to apprehend it. We have, therefore, no greater jewel in body and soul, for by it we are made holy and are saved, which no other kind of life, no work upon earth, can attain.” (LC IV.44-46)

“Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?”

What does this mean . . . for me? You might well borrow the following words from the Large Catechism concerning Holy Communion, for these words instruct us on how to maintain our place as creatures who are subject to our Creator—particularly when it comes to using in a God-pleasing manner the Supper that He has provided for the justification of the sinner and sanctification of the saint:

“We must, therefore, make a distinction here among men. For those who are wanton and dissolute must be told to stay away [from the Lord’s Supper]; for they are not prepared to receive forgiveness of sin, since they do not desire it and do not wish to be godly. But the others, who are not such callous and wicked people, and desire to be godly, must not absent themselves, even though otherwise they be feeble and full of infirmities, as St. Hilary also has said: If any one have not committed sin for which he can rightly be put out of the congregation and esteemed as no Christian, he ought not stay away from the Sacrament, lest he may deprive himself of life. . . .

Therefore such people must learn that it is the highest art to know that our Sacrament does not depend upon our worthiness. For we are not baptized because we are worthy and holy, nor do we go to confession because we are pure and without sin, but the contrary, because we are poor miserable men, and just because we are unworthy; unless it be some one who desires no grace and absolution nor intends to reform.” (LC V.58-59).