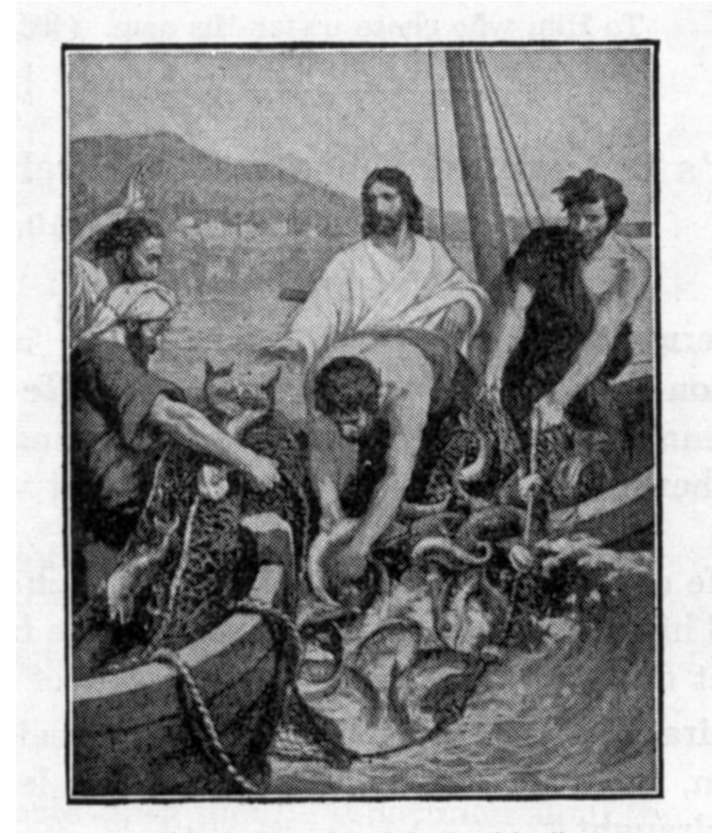


Our Mother—the Holy Christian Church, the Bride of Christ—is very wise, even wiser than King Solomon, as She relies solely on the wisdom of Her holy, perfect Groom.

So often hypocrisy and false doctrine are practiced in prayer. If you could have anything from God that you asked, what would you ask for? Before you answer that, pause and consider carefully. Beyond the false humility of denying what you really want, and attempting to seek that which is pleasing in God's eyes, consider Solomon. Solomon who asked for wisdom and received it, cautioned in Ecclesiastes not to be overly wise. (7:16) "For in much wisdom is much grief," he wrote. (1:18)

When we sit in the lap of our Mother, the Holy Christian Church, she teaches us what to ask of God. Over and over again, she counsels us to ask, "Lord, have mercy." We may find it necessary to ask many other things from God according to our vocations and circumstances, but we do well to couple each petition with a request for mercy. To ask for mercy is to ask God to handle things according to His wisdom. Solomon in all his wisdom fell away from God. Despite his wisdom he disobeyed the command of God not to marry an unbeliever. How would Solomon's life have been different if he had said, "Lord, your people are great and you have made me king over them, have mercy"? Such speculation is foolish of course; we cannot know what has not been. Still, to ask for mercy is to leave things in God's hands, since He remains wiser even than King Solomon.

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THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. Luke 6:36-42 (NKJV)**

Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

And He spoke a parable to them: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye."

The COLLECT

Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Look at how many times Saint David points us to the necessity of God's grace in the good things we do, how the good that is worked is really His. Reading this passage causes the explanation to the Third Article of the Creed to ring in our ears: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord...but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts," etc.

Perhaps the greatest hypocrisy is the claim to be a Christian based on an act of one's will. Most popular preachers are guilty of this subtle and dangerous false doctrine. After what starts out as a good sermon, they us to our own will instead of to Christ. They say, "If you want to be saved..." The words that follow vary, but it doesn't matter: they place a condition on salvation that is centered in the will of Man, a doing or a choice one makes for himself, which is a horrible and damning idolatry! Listening to such preachers allows the devil to whisper in your ears.

Faithful preachers rarely preach about faith, but rather preach faith into you. They tell what God has done for you in Christ and point you to where forgiveness is found: the preaching of the Gospel, Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper. They condemn you for your sin and bring you to repentance by forgiving you in Christ. When you doubt, they point out the reality of the resurrection and God's promise of forgiveness. What a joy always to be led beside the still waters of Baptism!

Saint David said to Solomon, “Know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and a willing mind.” If we are so blessed that we have Christian parents, and they teach us the faith, we do well to obey them. Many children grow up always holding on to a deep admiration of their parents, desiring to be like them, yet feeling like they never quite measure up. To slander someone’s mother or father is to give the greatest of insults. But there can be no greater honor given to a Christian father or mother than to know and serve the God they have known and served.

The command to honor parents bridges the gap between the first and second table of the Law. It comes with the promise that it will be well with us and we will live long on the earth. When we honor Christian parents, we learn about the only true God and Savior. We understand what is true and what is false teaching and hypocrisy in regard to the things of God. We acquire from them the habit of seeking God in the Service of Word and Sacrament. There, in the Service of Word and Sacrament, we obtain the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in the new heaven and earth. (cf. Revelation 21:2) From that, we receive an inheritance to pass on to our own children. From this naturally flows the keeping of the second table of the Law. God grant that we all honor our fathers and mothers in Christ, knowing the true God “and serv[ing] Him with a loyal heart and willing mind!”

The Prophet Samuel is referred to in this chapter (and refers to himself) as a “seer.” For as the writer of the book of Samuel states, “For he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer.” This is more than just a change in nomenclature. There was a reason why they were referred to as *see-ers*; it was because they were men who saw the coming of the Messiah—our Lord Jesus Christ. These men saw the things that our Lord would accomplish for the salvation of all mankind.

The question then needs to be asked: “What does Saul have to do with the Messiah?” In spite of his later failings, Saul at this point is the image of our Lord, for he comes from the lowest, that is, the smallest of tribes—Benjamin. In choosing Benjamin, the lowest tribe, we see our Lord’s grace. For, remember why Benjamin was the smallest tribe? It was because of their debauchery and committing abominable acts of homosexuality that the other eleven tribes banded together and killed off all but 600 men of the tribe of Benjamin.

But now, after this evil had been scourged from the Kingdom of Israel, the Lord God chooses a man from this lowly tribe to be king over all Israel. This is the way of the Lord: He chooses the lowly and humble things of this world to hand out to His people the gifts of His Kingdom. The Messiah would be born to a lowly and humble virgin, and live a lowly and humble life, so that by His humility, suffering and death, He would redeem all mankind from their sins.

“God gave him another heart.” So says the writer of the First Book of Samuel regarding Saul after the Prophet Samuel had anointed him with oil and sent him on his way. Because of this, when Saul meets the other prophets he begins to prophesy just as the Prophet Samuel said he would. What we see in this is the out-pouring of the Holy Ghost upon Saul. It is this gift of the Holy Ghost that changes Saul’s heart. This out-pouring happened through means, as it always does: the Lord worked through the oil (joined to God’s Word) that was poured upon Saul’s head to change his heart.

But, we are also given an *example* of how his heart was changed. Even though Samuel told him all that was going to happen, when the time came that Saul was chosen as king, where was he? He was hiding among some equipment. Saul realized at this point his unworthiness to fulfill the calling to which the Lord God had chosen him to carry out. The Lord, by the out-pouring of the Holy Ghost, caused Saul’s heart to become humble, to realize that this task is not able to be done without the help of the Lord God.

Here we see the Lord’s grace: He has not left Saul alone, but has given Him his Holy Spirit to guide him, has sent to him His holy Prophet to preach to him the way in which he must walk, and has caused His people to receive him as their king. Through all this the Lord God shows that He is with him to accomplish His will.

It is terrible hypocrisy to claim love for a child but refuse to teach him the faith, saying, “I want him to choose for himself.” Do you let your children choose what they will eat? Do you let them choose if they will take a bath or change their underwear? Do you let them choose if they will brush their teeth, go to school, or go to bed? Such things are meaningless in the context of eternity, yet parents actively teach the right choices in all these areas.

Who our children date and marry—even who their friends are—has an impact on their eternal salvation. More than that, whether or not they attend church, and *where* they attend church is crucial to their salvation. How they dress to go to church, and how they act there are also very important in that the outward act both reveals an inward attitude, and teaches it to others. God have mercy on all parents for the many times they fail to teach their children the right choices with regard to the things of God!

In our passage today, Saint David is an excellent example for parents. He recognized his son’s weaknesses and surrounded him with people who would help him. He spoke formally to his son and told him his responsibility in life, blessed him, and told him what would give him success in the eyes of the Lord. David went on to encourage Solomon. God grant you grace to show love to your children the way David showed love to Solomon.

King David sinned often. He was an adulterer, a murderer, ignored the command of God in regard to his rebellious son, and today we see that he put his faith in the strength of his army, instead of in God. Because David was king of Israel and, therefore, a father to the people, his example served to lead the Children of Israel into his sin. David was a false teacher by his example to others.

There are many fathers today both in the home and in the churches who teach falsely by their actions. Many claim sound doctrine, but practice a faith that is in the strength of man rather than in God.

Look at the contrast between David on the one hand, and Joab and Ornan on the other. Joab was sickened by David's false faith. He should not have obeyed the king at all in this case, but his faith in God, weak as it was, at least kept him from completing what the king commanded. And, while David feared to go before the Lord because of the angel's sword, Ornan saw the angel of the Lord and kept right on working. Every indication was that the angel was about to kill Ornan, but that changed nothing for him. There is nothing to fear for those who trust in the Lord, who are resigned to His will.

Today we again see that Saint David was a man after God's own heart in this: he repented of his sin. Each of us is guilty of teaching falsely at times whether by word or by act, but there is forgiveness those who repent.

In today's reading, the Prophet Samuel defends his faithfulness to the Word of God, while at the same time pointing out the sin of the people of Israel in their desire to have an earthly king in place of their current ruler—the Lord God.

Samuel's faithfulness not only included faithfulness to the Word itself, but also a holy life in accord with it. Thus, he calls the people of Israel to bear witness against him if he had cheated them in any way: "Witness against me before the Lord and before His anointed: Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received any bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore it to you."

The Prophet Samuel was found blameless before the Lord and before the people of Israel. He was not a "belly-servant"—that is, one who is only concerned about his own physical needs, while neglecting the spiritual needs of the people under his care.

While this passage is especially important for the Ministers of the Lord, it also applies to all men in whatever vocation they have been placed. For our Lord has placed us into our various callings for the benefit of our neighbors whom He has placed in our life; that is, our lives are not given to care for only ourselves but also those whom our Lord has given us. For, it is out of the Lord's grace and mercy that He has placed them into our lives, so that they might enrich our lives (and glorify Him) as well.

Here we see the beginning of the downfall of King Saul. He had attacked the Philistines, which is why he was made king, as we learned in a previous chapter, that he would rescue the people from the Philistines. Yet, as he waited for the Prophet Samuel to come and offer burnt offerings, the Philistine army began to grow to the point that King Saul began to worry and fear. Therefore, he took it upon himself, after the Prophet Samuel was delayed in his coming, to offer up the sacrifices himself.

This was clearly beyond his calling as king. We are told that the offering that he offered would not be accepted by the Lord. Instead of his kingdom enduring forever, he would be cut off and another would take his place. This is the first time we hear of David who would be king. The Lord God would establish his throne forever; that is, through him the Messiah would come and reign for all eternity.

The writer of the First Book of Samuel states, “The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart.” What this means is that David would become the image of the Messiah that King Saul at first was, but had since abandoned. David would be repentant in his sins, unlike King Saul who would remain impenitent and further call God’s wrath against himself. Moreover, David would be merciful as the Lord is merciful. David would be persecuted as the Lord Jesus was persecuted. Finally, David would be the replacement of the sinful King Saul, even as our Lord Jesus Christ is the Substitute for us sinners.

Jesus warned His disciples that their enemies would be the members of their own household. He also warned them that if they loved father, mother, son, or daughter more than Him, they were not worthy of Him. That truth is presented in our passage for today.

Absalom presented himself to people as a nice guy who was on their side. He stole the hearts of the people away from David. Indeed, David himself had misplaced loyalties because of his relationship to Absalom. David should have despised Absalom and thanked God for doing what he had failed to do. God had commanded the Children of Israel to kill rebellious sons, but David was caught up in such love for his son that he did not carry out the command of God. How often we excuse, protect, and even defend our relatives when they are hypocrites and rebels. Whether it is an “alternative lifestyle” or false doctrine in the church, blood interferes with good judgment.

Joab set David straight: it isn’t the blood relationship that matters, but the spiritual. Hypocrisy and rebellion are always sad—and more so when the rebel is related to us—but our loyalty must always be to God and His people. To defend a rebel, especially a false teacher, is to despise God and His people. Joab was bold enough to rebuke David, and, by grace, David was wise enough to repent. Sadly, Absalom never repented.

It is not too late for us and the people around us. If we have defended hypocrisy and rebellion, we need to repent. God forgives all who are brought to Christ in repentance, trusting in His atonement.

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 thornbushes 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.

King Saul is told by the Lord God through the Prophet Samuel utterly to destroy the Amalekites, because they had ambushed the Israelites during their 40 year sojourn in the wilderness. King Saul was to destroy “both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” Perhaps this seems a bit harsh to our ears: after all, the offence happened generations ago. Yett, this fact only serves to show us our Lord’s long-suffering nature. He bore with the Amalekites for many centuries, in the hope that through the presence of His people Israel they might repent of their ways. Instead, we learn from the Prophet Samuel’s words to King Agag that the same spirit dwelt among the Amalekites as had been at the time of the Exodus. Therefore, their punishment is just.

However, King Saul and his army break the command of the Lord and keep the choice animals of the Amalekites. King Saul confesses to the Prophet Samuel that this is because they were retained for sacrificial purposes. Now, this seems like a good thing: they intended this for a good purpose. The Lord God, who sees the true intent of the heart, though, isn’t buying it. Their words to the contrary notwithstanding, these animals were kept purely because of the greed of the people.

The point of this pericope is that impenitent sin is to be punished. Neither do the people of Israel, King Saul, nor those in the Church who desire to call good “evil” and evil “good,” have the right to abandon their calling to use the keys to bind what the Lord commands to be bound.

The Holy Ghost is placed upon David, and is removed from King Saul, so that he is vexed by a distressing spirit. Therefore, David is brought to King Saul to drive away the distressing spirit.

Pastors, too, by their preaching of the holy Word of God and the administration of the Sacraments, drive away the distressing spirit of guilt and shame brought on by our sinfulness as, through them, the Holy Ghost puts before our eyes and hearts and into our ears and mouths the forgiveness won by our Lord Jesus Christ on the tree of the holy Cross. Through the preaching of the Word of God, and the administration of the Sacraments, we receive the Holy Spirit Himself, who creates and sustains in our hearts true faith toward God and love for our neighbor.

Moreover, David is often referred to as “the Psalmist,” for he is the one who crafted most of the psalms. It is in these psalms of David where the joys, sorrows, fears, and angers of the Christian are expressed and sung. Therefore, the Psalter is also a valuable tool to drive away the distressing spirits of guilt and shame, for our Lord Jesus Christ is at the center of the psalms, and His work of salvation is preached through them for our benefit.

When we chant the psalms, we our voices are joined to all the saints and patriarchs who have come before us, sharing their sorrows and joys and proclaiming our thanks to our Lord God for the wonderful work of redemption which He has placed upon us through His Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

See what a tender, loving heart David has for Absalom even after all that worthless son had done to him and to his nation. What earthly king acts this way toward a traitor, even when the traitor is his own child? The crime of treason is punishable by death, period! Yet David desired to forgive and restore his son. He did not desire this for Absalom’s sake, because Absalom was worthy of it or deserved it. But for his own sake David desired reconciliation, purely out of love for his lost son.

So we see God’s heart toward us sinners. Everything the Lord God has done since the fall has been for the sake of forgiving rebellious, traitorous sinners. He promised a Savior. He was longsuffering with sinners as He waited through many centuries to fulfill the promise. And finally He sent His Son into our flesh to receive the just wages of sin—death—that sinners might be forgiven of their treachery and live unto eternal life. As we sing:

But God beheld my wretched state
Before the world’s foundation,
And mindful of His mercies great,
He planned my soul’s salvation.
A father’s heart He turned to me,
Sought my redemption fervently:
He gave His dearest Treasure. (TLH 387:4)

All of this He has done “purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all of which I am in duty bound to thanks and praise, to serve and obey Him.” (Apostles’ Creed—1st Article)

Shimei was a liar who cursed David unjustly. David was not responsible for the deaths of Saul and his sons. Yet, David was responsible for the innocent death of Uriah the Hittite. Thus David recognized that in some sense he was being justly cursed, for he had greatly offended the Lord God by his sin. The Lord used evil Shimei and his unjust cursing for David's good, for in this way He further trained David. He taught him humility and patience and kept him ever dependent on His merciful hand.

How very much like Christ was David. In silence Christ endured the cruel treatment of His enemies and did not repay evil for evil. As they nailed Him to the accursed tree Jesus prayed: "Father, forgive them." On the one hand, unlike David, Christ truly suffered mistreatment unjustly, for He was completely innocent of any sin whatsoever. On the other hand, since He bore in His own Body the sin of the world, He truly suffered as *the* guilty sinner all of the just curse and judgment of God.

When we suffer unjust mistreatment, let us learn from David patience and humility. It may indeed be unjust. On the other hand, "we daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment." (Lord's Prayer—5th Petition) Let us leave personal retribution to the One Who has promised: "Vengeance is Mine. I will repay, says the Lord." Let us look upon our suffering as a loving chastening from our Lord and let us flee for refuge to Him Who endured all suffering and condemnation that we might have the way of escape.

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.

Goliath struts onto the battlefield to claim his prize. If he gains victory over the warrior of Israel ,then the Israelites will serve the Philistines. Goliath is prepared for combat, coated with armor and brandishing a spear. Saul and the Israelites hear Goliath's accusations and despair their fate as slaves of their enemy.

Standing between a lifetime of servitude and harassment stands David. David, from a worldly point of view, is unprepared for battle. He is puny, despised by his own brothers, and without worldly armor. Yet David is the stronger combatant because He comes with full confidence in the Lord's salvation. David conquers Goliath and sets the people of Israel free from the fear and despair Goliath inspired in them.

We are pursued by our Goliath. Satan daily stands before us to accuse us of our sins, to enslave us to guilt over past transgressions, and to shackle us to our shame. Like the Israelites we are hopeless against our Goliath's weapons and armor. Yet we have our David, King David's greater Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He does not look like much in the eyes of the world. He appears puny, despised by his brothers, and without worldly power. But He is the stronger man who conquers the devilish Goliath upon the battlefield of Calvary. Christ frees us from the Devils' accusations, slavery, and despair. Like His ancestor David, He comes in the name of the Lord to slay our Goliath and snatch us from his grasp. By faith in Christ's victory over Satan, we are free from his servitude and freed to live under Christ in His kingdom.

David's life was a mess—the consequences of his willful transgression against the Lord. The Lord had indeed forgiven David's sin. He would not die, but live. Still, the child he conceived with Bathsheba would die, and there would be constant trouble in his household. Thus he would always be reminded that the “wages of sin is death.” The Lord would actively keep David in a state of humility and dependence upon His mercy and favor.

The trouble came to a head in David's son, Absalom. Absalom's sister had been raped by one of their half-brothers. In revenge, Absalom murdered the perpetrator and then had to flee from David's wrath. In time, David forgave Absalom and restored him to the family. Unlike the Prodigal Son, however, when Absalom was received back into his father's love, he took his father's love and went out again and squandered it.

Absalom's vanity got the better of him. Unlike Jesus, the true and meek Son of David, Who sought to do His Father's will, Absalom instigated rebellion and stole the hearts of his father's people from him, even as Satan stole the hearts of the Jews so that they sought to kill Jesus. David was exiled, but he would come back in victory. In the same way, Christ would defeat Satan and fulfill His Father's will by suffering the Father's wrath against sin. Then He would rise victorious from the grave and ascend into heaven to be given the eternal throne. In this way then, for David, and for all those who believe, truly “the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

“You are the man!” What haunting, awful words. David had worked so hard to get away with his crimes, to the point where he had even convinced himself that he was really innocent. Thus, when Nathan told his parable David lashed out in unrighteous anger: “As the Lord lives the man who has done this shall surely die!” David spoke the truth...against himself. “You are the man!” God’s servant responded. For there is One Who is not fooled, but sees behind the facade.

What else could David say but, “I have sinned against the Lord.” God’s Law had done its killing work, bringing David to repentance. All that remained was to raise him back to life: “The Lord has also put away your sin; you shall not die.”

“You are the man!” Those are hard words. It’s not someone else. No one made you do it, or speak it, or think it. The devil didn’t make you do it, either. Oh, he tempts you to think, say and do all sorts of things. But he doesn’t *make* you do anything. Repent! And when you repent, then hear the Lord’s Word of pardon: “I forgive you all your sins.” That’s the only way to deal with sin—to confess it and be forgiven. Only Christ, the sacrificial Lamb can cover sin. Every other way is fig leaves.

Oh, you may still have to suffer the consequences for your foolishness. David had to. Just because our sin is forgiven doesn’t mean that we will suffer no reminders. But the eternal consequence is gone, wiped away in the forgiving blood of Jesus.

The Lord had departed from Saul due to his unbelief. Because of his obstinate sin, an evil spirit had taken the Holy Spirit’s place. For Saul there was now only despair. Jealousy, anger, and hatred filled his heart. These never remain in the heart, either: they eventually bubble up and erupt from the hands and out of the tongue. Saul tries twice to run David through with his spear. He attempts to murder David by regularly placing him in danger of the Philistines. This is the nature of unbelief, inwardly and outwardly.

Yet, the Lord is with David and David possesses full confidence that the Lord favors him. With the Lord on his side, David can conquer any foe, scale any wall, and be delivered from all evil. This is the opposite of unbelief: faith trusts God’s promises and takes God at His Word. David trusts God’s mercy in spite of a king who wants to kill him, Philistines that want revenge, and evil plots to entrap him.

The Lord is with you as well. You are beloved of the Lord. He has given you His Holy Spirit when He bathed you in water combined with His Word. He has caused His Holy Spirit to dwell in your hearts. The Holy Spirit causes faith to spring up in your heart which casts aside jealousy, anger, and hatred. Faith trusts nothing but Christ. Faith is confidence that because of Christ, the Lord favors you, is with you to forgive your sins, and is for you in this life and in the life to come. This was the faith of David which the Holy Spirit now gives to you each day.

“Is Saul also among the prophets?” Saul persecuted David, whom the Lord had anointed to be king after Saul. Saul was touched by the Holy Spirit even though the Lord had departed from him earlier—but this is not the *cleansing* touch of the Spirit. St. Augustine comments that Saul’s prophesying is similar to Caiaphas the high priest’s prophesying in John 11:50. Both Saul and Caiaphas’ prophesying was true prophesying, though they remained in unbelief.

Prophecy doesn’t do any good if there isn’t love. Paul reminds us of this in 1 Corinthians 13:2: “Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” It is possible for these men to possess great gifts of the Spirit, though these gifts are not to their benefit, but rather their condemnation. Both use the gift of prophecy while pursuing wickedness: Saul seeks to murder David, Caiaphas seeks to murder the greater David, our Lord Jesus Christ. Instead, prophecy is meant for the “edification and exhortation and comfort to men.” (1 Corinthians 14:3)

The Holy Spirit gives many gifts to Christ’s Church and to Christ’s pastors. Yet, having all the gifts in the world doesn’t mean anything if we do not possess faith towards God (which gives love for one another), just as the gift of prophecy didn’t benefit Saul, Caiaphas, or their hearers. God grant to us true charity toward our neighbor that we may use our gifts to serve them, to edify and exhort the church, and to the comfort of men.

David’s desire to build a magnificent house for the worship of the Lord God was a good desire, for he wished to return thanks to the Lord for bestowing a kingdom on him and for the rest the Lord had given him from his enemies all around.

Therefore, the faithful desires of your heart are good and pleasing to the Lord—your offerings and works of love, given to God’s glory and for the benefit of your neighbors. For these are motivated by the Holy Spirit who works in you faithfulness and gratitude for all that the Lord has done for you.

Still, we must always remember that the highest act of worship is not to give to God, but to receive God’s good gifts, namely, the forgiveness of sins. Thus, the Lord turns things around and uses David’s good desire toward Him as an opportunity to promise more good to come for him. He says “no” to David’s plan. Instead, He—the Lord—will build David a house. God will set one on His throne that will be established forever. God will be a Father to Him and He shall be God’s Son.

He has raised up from the seed of David the Messiah, Jesus Christ, God’s only Son. God has laid on Christ the iniquity of all and has “chastened Him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men.” In and through Him God has built a house, which is His Church. In this house, day by day, the Lord God does abundant good for you, for “Here forgiveness and salvation daily come through Jesus’ merit.”

Note the correct pattern of worship described in today's reading: David offered the burnt offerings and peace offering—the bloody sacrifices through which the Lord God provided atonement for sin. David gave God's blessing to the people. He appointed musicians to commemorate and give thanks to the Lord and to praise the Lord for all the marvelous works He had done for His people.

The first half of David's Psalm, which he delivered to the tabernacle musicians to sing during public worship, extols God's gracious work of choosing Israel for his own, giving them the land of Canaan and the covenant of salvation, and delivering them from their enemies. On the basis of God's mercies toward us first, His people offer back to Him the honor and glory which are His due.

The chief way to honor and glorify God is to further speak of what He has done for us, to rejoice in it, and above all to believe it! As the Apology says: "Thus the worship and divine service of the Gospel is to receive from God gifts; on the contrary, the worship of the Law, is to offer and present our gifts to God. We can, however, offer nothing to God, unless first we have been reconciled and born again. This passage, too, brings the greatest consolation; as the chief worship of the Gospel is to wish to receive remission of sins, grace and righteousness." So we sing:

Dear Christians, one and all rejoice, With exultation springing,
And with united heart and voice And holy rapture singing,
Proclaim the wonders God hath done,
How His right arm the vict'ry won;
Right dearly it hath cost Him.

Saul understood full well what Jonathan had done. "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?" Saul understood that his own son had chosen the side of David and forsaken his own birthright. Saul could have asked, "Why don't you honor me as the fourth commandment demands?" Jonathan could have responded with Peter's words from Acts 5:29, "We ought to obey God rather than men."

Jonathan had to forsake his family for the pure confession. Jonathan loved and honored his father. At the beginning of this chapter Jonathan puts the best construction on his father by insisting that Saul wasn't trying to kill David. Jonathan's decision to befriend David was not a manner of honor. It was a matter of truth. Christ our Lord reminds us in Matthew 10:36-37, "A man's enemies will be those of his *own* household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." Jonathan understood that sometimes family would have us pay closer attention to family ties than truth.

For those of you who have been separated from family members because of your bold confession, the Lord offers you these words of comfort: "Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life." (Matthew 19:29) We ought always seek our family's honor. Even more so, we ought always seek the honor and glory of heavenly Father in our confession.

In Saul's pursuit of David he adopts a 'scorched earth' policy: anyone who has offered aid or comfort to David is guilty of treason in Saul's mind and deserves death. Not even the Priests of the Lord's Tabernacle are spared from Saul's satanic rage against David. Saul intends to send a message to David and his supporters by spilling priestly blood. But, Saul's action has a far worse consequence: by killing the priests of the Lord's house, Saul has taken away the Word of God from Israel, since the priests were to teach the people. He has also taken away their sacrifices, for the priesthood was instituted for that purpose. Even worse, by attacking God's called and ordained servants, Saul attacks the Lord himself. Yet, Abiathar remains. David, being faithful, takes in Abiathar and protects him from Saul's wrath.

Many today seek to slay the Lord's called and ordained servants who keep watch over the Lord's House and Doctrine. They do not flay pastors with sword and spear; their weapons are more sophisticated: slashing salaries, taunts and temper tantrums, lies and gossip, among other tyrannies. Yet these people are not only attacking the Lord's servants: they attack the Lord himself.

Pastors who are under attack today, though, are not left without their David to protect them. Christ Jesus, the greater David, through His Spirit working through His faithful people, will rise up to protect God's servants against wickedness and to be a strong refuge for all who are mistreated at the hands of the false church. God grant us resources to care for pastors attacked for the true confession in our day!

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.

In Hebrews 4:12 we read, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

In our reading for today, David was clearly afraid of God because of the death of Uzzah. If God was going to be that fussy about who touched the ark, how could David be sure to do the right things with it in Jerusalem? Clearly, the Lord’s instructions about who handled the ark and how it was to be handled got David’s attention. It was apparent that God’s wrath followed when His Law was disregarded!

However, there is also Gospel in our reading and David saw that too. He said, “The Lord has blessed the house of Obed-Edom...because of the ark of God.” Good things came from God because of the ark. God had promised that His presence would dwell with the ark when it was placed in the tabernacle. By faith David saw the blessing coming from God.

In Ephesians 2, St. Paul tells us that we were dead in our trespasses and sins, and by nature we were children of wrath. God’s wrath is nothing to disregard. But in verse 4 he says, “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love...even when we were dead...made us alive together with Christ.” With David and St. Paul, we thank God that by His Law and Gospel He has brought us into His kingdom and blessed us to be His own workmanship to do His good works.

David is given the opportunity to remove Saul, his thorn. David could have been rid of his persecutor. As Saul relieves himself in the cave with David near enough for a killing stroke, David’s men interpret this to be a sign from the Lord, saying, “This is the day of which the LORD said to you, ‘Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you.’” The situation seems like divine providence.

Yet, David will not take matters into his own hands. This isn’t just any enemy: Saul is still the Lord’s Anointed. David reckons that since the Lord put Saul in that position it should be the Lord who removes Saul from his office. David’s love for the Lord means that he will not strike down what the Lord has established, even if one occupying that office causes David hardship and grief.

As you are afflicted with different trials and vexations, the temptation will arise to find an end to the suffering. As it was with David, so it is with you. Your Lord lays your cross upon you so that you may share in the sufferings of Christ. Your cross is God’s demonstration that you are His son by Baptism: “If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?” (Heb 12.7) Moreover, the Lord’s chastening will not last forever, just as Saul was not allowed to pursue and torment David forever. As the hymn says: “He who knows/all my woes/knows how best to end them.”

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.

Are you wanting answers from the Lord? King David did! He inquired of the Lord, “Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver them into my hand?” He needed answers. The Lord replied, “Go up...for I will...deliver the Philistines into your hand.” So David went up against them and defeated them. When the Philistines redeployed themselves against Israel, David again inquired of the Lord. He continued to look to the Lord for answers. And the answer was, “Listen for the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees.” Aren’t you glad we don’t have to wait for answers like that to be sure the Lord is with us!

Rather the Lord gives us certainty in His answers. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” And “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.” “Take eat; this *is* My Body...this *is* My Blood given and shed for *you* for the forgiveness of sins.” The Lord doesn’t leave us uncertain or in doubt. He states the facts for us.

We who were dead in trespasses and sins, God made alive. “For by grace [we] have been saved through faith, and that not of [our]selves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:8-10)

Thank God that we don’t have to listen for wind in the trees—we have the sure Word of God. Amen.

Guidance for God's persecuted people often comes in strange forms. David's response to Saul's death is not what we expect. After all, Saul tried to kill David several times. Saul was an unstable man who was persecuting David. Our natural response to the death of such a hateful enemy would more than likely be joy and relief. But not so for David. He showed respect and sorrow at the death of his enemies.

David's attitude was very much like Christ's attitude. During His earthly life Christ taught the people to respect their leaders—the very people who would crucify Him. He taught that “the Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.” These were the same men who after Jesus' death and burial would go to Pilate to have him put a guard on Jesus' tomb to make sure He stayed dead; the same men for whom Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

Many of us may also have suffered various types of persecution for the Word of God in our former fellowship. Many of us may have felt and still feel the sting of unkind words and unkind actions on the part of our former associates. Many of us may have enemies who would rejoice to see our defeat. Our old sinful nature might wish to see their downfall and defeat. However, both David and Jesus teach us that our goal and prayer for them should be that they come to believe the truth and repent of their sin. Like David and Jesus, may our prayer be, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.” Amen.

Today's text is a classic example of good versus evil. The evil—King Saul and his army, go out to capture or kill the good—David, the young man anointed to be the next king. Saul goes with great power and glitz—David goes with respect and great humility. Saul arrayed his army strategically and David, so to speak, walked into the mouth of the lion.

It's not a great leap to make the comparison to Satan and Jesus. Satan arrayed his army, made up of the Jewish religious leaders and the civil government of Pontius Pilate. Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the mouth of the lion, in humility on a lowly donkey. Jesus stood alone against the powers that be and they crucified Him. It looked as if evil had won. The “Anointed One” was dead!

However, we know the rest of the story. On Easter morning Jesus arose from the tomb victorious over sin, death, and Satan. He won eternal life for us and He gives it to us as His free gift through Word and Baptism.

In the words of the hymn (TLH 187):

Christ is arisen From the grave's dark prison.
 We now rejoice with gladness; Christ will end all sadness.
 Lord, have mercy.
 All our hopes were ended Had Jesus not ascended
 From the grave triumphantly.
 For this, Lord Jesus, we worship Thee.
 Lord, have mercy.
 Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
 We now rejoice with gladness; Christ will end all sadness.
 Lord, have mercy. Amen.

As you and I read the Book of First Samuel, we soon realize that King Saul was a great one for doing his “own thing.” Most of the decisions he made were made to benefit himself and his wants. He pretty much disregarded the Lord’s prophet and his word. But when his enemies gathered against him, Saul was “afraid and his heart trembled greatly...and the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets.” It shouldn’t surprise us that he seeks advice from an ungodly source, a witch, to try to find out God’s will. God had already revealed His will to Saul—and Saul ignored God’s Word. Saul did his “own thing.” He refused to repent. He hardened his heart to the Word of the Lord.

What a lesson there is in these verses for God’s Church and His people. What reason for you and I to daily go to the Lord in confession and to receive absolution. Our old sinful nature is always with us. Too often we look out only for “old number one”—me! But through His Word and Sacrament the Lord keeps us in His care. He keeps us as His people. He keeps us from hardening our hearts. He keeps us to the end.

The Collect for Trinity 6 was, “Lord of all power and might, the Author and Giver of all good, graft into our hearts the love of Your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Your great mercy keep us in the same.”

Indeed, this is God’s will for our lives and He will do it. Amen.

King Saul’s death at his own hand is indeed a sad commentary on this life. Fearful of what his enemies would do to him, he asked his armorbearer to kill him. When he refused, King Saul fell on his own sword. Saul had fallen so far from the Lord and His Word that he no longer trusted God’s promises, so he took matters into his own hands.

Even for the most “faithful” Christian the cares of this world sometimes come crashing down on us and we wonder how we are going to cope. You and I worry about more things than we can even approach in this devotion. Like Saul, we are burdened with fear, but the Psalmist tells us, “Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be shaken.”

We who have God’s Word and promises, can be assured that our heavenly Father cares for us. By Water and Word He made us His children. By Word and Sacrament He keeps us as His children. He assures us that His promises of care are reliable.

As we read and study His Word, let our prayer be: “Blessed Lord, Who hast caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of Thy holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ, Who livest and reignest with Thee and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.”