

Clergy of the ELDoNA, affiliated congregations and missions, and sister churches

Rt. Rev. James Heiser

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX
(Vacancy) Faith L. C., Beaverton, OR

Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church,
Tony, WI; Alpha & Omega Lutheran
Mission, Winter, WI; Apologia Lu-
theran Mission, Deer Park, WI; Peace
Lutheran Church, Ironwood, MI

Rev. Ernest Bernet

Discipleship L. C., Mineral Wells, TX

Rev. David Carver

St. Paul's L. C., Taylorsville, NC

Rev. Jerald Dulas

Sts. Peter & Paul L. C., Simpsonville,
SC; All Saints Lutheran Mission, Myr-
tle Beach, SC; St. Michael & All Angels
Lutheran Mission, Martinez, GA

Rev. Douglas Handrich

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Kent Heimbigner

Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

Rev. Michael Henson

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin,
IL; Port Charlotte Lutheran Mission,
Port Charlotte, FL; Memphis Luther-
an Mission, Lakeland, TN

Rev. Daniel Mensing

Good Shepherd L. C., Tucson, AZ

Rev. Mark Mueller

Redeemer L. C., Cambridge, MN

Rev. John Rutowicz

St. Boniface Lutheran Church, Niles, MI

Rev. Paul Rydecki

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Las Cru-
ces, NM; Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran
Mission, Silver City, NM

Rev. Josiah Scheck

Christ Lutheran Church, Richmond, MO

Rev. Eric Stefanski

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Har-
rison, AR; Emmanuel Lutheran Mis-
sion, Conway, AR; Lamb of God Lu-
theran Mission, Rogers, AR

Rev. Joshua Sullivan

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Ker-
rville, TX; Faith Lutheran Mission,
Leander, TX

Rev. Timothy Tolar

St. Luke Lutheran Church, Kenai, AK
Homer Lutheran Mission, Homer, AK

Rev. Brandon Warr

St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX
(Vacancy) Faith L. C., Beaverton, OR

Rev. Floyd Smithey

Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Church,
Simpsonville, SC; Sts. Peter & Paul
Lutheran Mission, Knoxville, TN

International Fellowship:

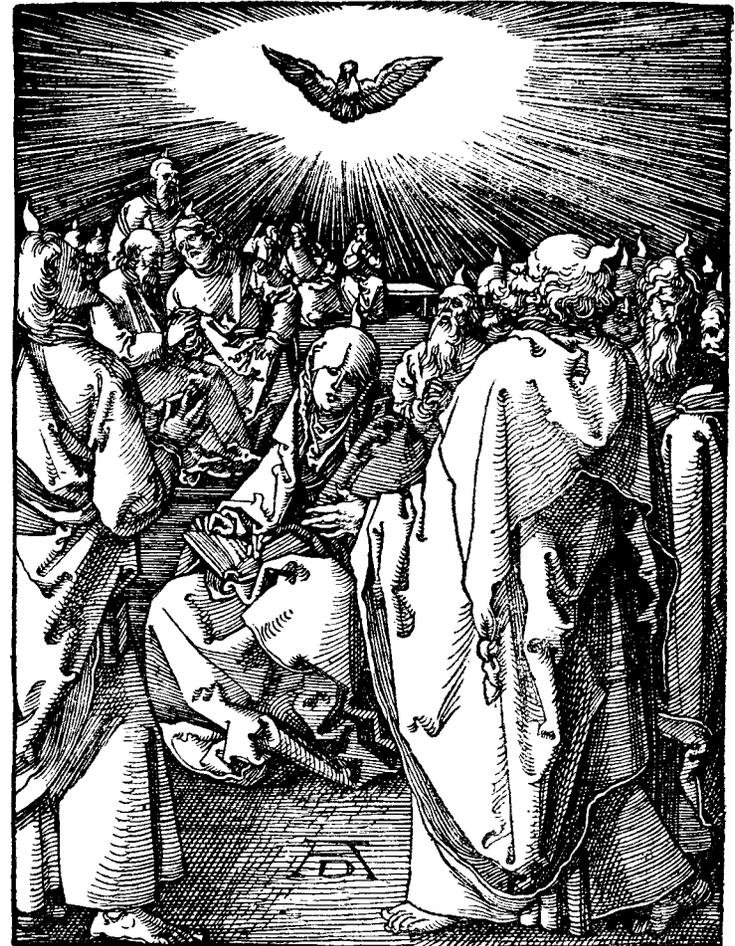
Rev. Fillmore Alvarez

St. Mary's Lutheran Church
Navotas City, Philippines

Rev. Carlos Marin

Iglesia Confesional de Colombia
Medellin, Colombia

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



JUNE 1–JULY 4, 2020

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

The Calendar

May 31	Pentecost	TLH 224
June 5 (F)	St. Boniface, Martyr	
June 7	Feast of the Holy Trinity	TLH 247
June 14	Trinity 1	TLH 393
June 21	Trinity 2	ELHB 277
June 24 (W)	The Nativity of St. John the Baptist	TLH 292 or 272
June 25 (R)	Presentation of the Augsburg Confession	TLH 267
June 28	Trinity 3	TLH 319
June 29 (M)	St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles	
July 2 (R)	The Visitation	TLH 275

(Hymns of the Day are for the appointed Festival or Sunday.)

Summer Visitation Schedule

June 14	Faith Lutheran Church (Beaverton, OR)
June 24	Pr. Sullivan & Holy Cross L. C. (Kerrville, TX)
July 1	Pr. Mensing & Divine Savior L. C. (Tucson, AZ)
July 3	Pr. Rydecki & Emmanuel L.C. (Las Cruces, NM)
July 22	Pr. Warr & St. Patrick L.C. (Chipley, FL)
July 24	Pr. Dulas & St. Peter & St. Paul L.C. (Simpsonville, SC)
July 26	Pr. Carver & St. Paul's L.C. (Taylorsville, NC) Rev. Smithey, Knoxville, TN
July 28	Pr. Stefanski & Holy Trinity L. C. (Harrison, AR)
August 12	Pr. Scheck & Christ L. C. (Richmond, MO)
August 13	Pr. Mueller & Redeemer L. C. (Cambridge, MN) Pr. Ahonen & Good Shepherd L.C. (Tony, WI)
August 14	Pr. Ahonen & Peace L. C. (Ironwood, MI)
August 15/16	Pr. Rutowicz & St. Boniface L. C. (Niles, MI)
August 16	Pr. Handrich & Holy Cross L. C. (Peoria, IL)
August 17	Pr. Henson, Dcn. Harroun & Trinity L. C. (Herrin, IL)

SATURDAY, JULY 4: ACTS 26:1-32 3RD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.”

Orthodox Christianity is accused of being “too exclusive” because she will not share fellowship with other beliefs. St. Paul writes, “you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons” (1 Corinthians 10:21). Christianity’s issue is not with the person, but with false beliefs. The Church, in fact, eagerly desires that all men become Christian and be saved—anyone who repents and believes is included in the Church.

God desires that all men be saved by believing in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This should also be every Christian’s desire. This is why Christ humbled Himself to death; this is why He sent St. Paul to Jerusalem and then to Rome. This is why the ministers of the Church, today, still preach the same Gospel every Sunday: that every sinner may repent of his sins, hear the Gospel of forgiveness through faith in Christ, and be saved.

Therefore, we must also be ready to forgive the sins of all who have wronged us or who hate us. What St. Paul says in verse 29 applies even to the Jews who accuse him. Our attitude toward unbelievers must be the same as that of our Lord, who prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Prayer: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

When St. Paul was first called to be an Apostle of the Lord—while he was still blind—the Lord spoke to Ananias concerning him and said, “he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). By today’s text, St. Paul has become a public spectacle: he is judged by Gentiles, accused by Israelites, and is about to testify before a king—King Agrippa. That which the Lord prophesied about him is coming to pass.

After two years in prison, nothing has changed for St. Paul: the Jews still accuse him falsely and want to ambush him on the road. Meanwhile, the Roman authorities are ignorant of the true issue, not understanding the Gospel of the Christ. But all this is to fulfill God’s plan of spreading the Gospel to the entire world.

St. Paul now appeals to Caesar. Because he is a Roman citizen, he has the right to ask that Caesar decide his case, rather than the local governor. But St. Paul is not really concerned for his trial; he remembers what the Lord said to him: “you must also bear witness at Rome” (Acts 23:11). His trial and his appeal to Caesar are all part of God’s grand scheme to have the Gospel preached. By sending St. Paul to the capital of the empire, God causes the Gospel to be heard in all the known world.

Prayer: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

While Summer is often a relatively quiet time in the life of the Church, the necessity of ‘catching up’ on everything which has not been able to happen for several months poses a challenge. As you will note from the episcopal visitation schedule, there is a great deal to accomplish before the new seminary term begins in September. This is, of course, a wonderful situation! With several new pastors in the diocese, the importance of these visitations is only emphasized. And, of course, I am looking forward to visiting with the everyone at Faith Lutheran in Beaverton, where we have not been able to have local services in months.

It will be a joy to be visiting with several of the congregations as the Church observes various festivals this summer, but I must confess that I look forward to being at Salem for the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession on June 25. Salem Lutheran Church will celebrate her 134th anniversary as a congregation on Pentecost, but on June 25, the Lutheran Church celebrates the 490th anniversary of the presentation of the defining confession of our Age, and the 440th anniversary of the Book of Concord. This is a day which should be marked with an even greater fanfare than Reformation Day, for with the presentation, the true Reformation was *defined*. On October 31, 1517, it was uncertain to the eyes of men whence the labors of Dr. Martin Luther and his coadjutors might lead; on June 25, 1530, the clear confession was heard, and its words will echo throughout the latter days of this fallen world. As that great Lutheran theologian, Polycarp Leyser, wrote in 1593: “Thus, let us be certain that our church, too, which follows and tells of that same faith which all the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and confessors embraced from the Word of God and taught is truly the Catholic Church; and this because Christ its Head acknowledges and considers it as such, although it may be held in by specific boundaries, and, as far as the appearance of Roman splendor is concerned, can in no wise be compared therewith. Now let the Jesuits cry out that we are heretics, that we are schismatics. Let them deny us the title of ‘catholic.’ What do we care for their swinish grunting? What do we care about their rude and asinine braying? As if Peter cared that Annas and Caiphas considered him a heretic and his colleagues as schismatics because they confessed Jesus as the true Messiah and Savior of the world without consulting the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem!”

Yours in Christ, Bishop James Heiser

Lesson from the Book of Concord Pentecost Sunday

THE THIRD ARTICLE. Of Sanctification.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; the Resurrection of the body; and the Life everlasting. Amen.

What is meant by this Article?

Answer. I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me through the gospel, enlightened me by His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith; in like manner as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the true faith; in which Christian Church He daily forgives abundantly all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and will raise up me and all the dead at the last day, and will grant everlasting life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.

—The Small Catechism, Part II

The selections from the Book of Concord for the Sundays of the Church Year are from H. E. Jacobs' translation of the Book of Concord, and are taken from the table of suggested lessons for Sundays and Festivals of the Church. (The table of appropriate lessons was originally found in Pipping's Christliches Concordienbuch [Leipzig, 1734].)

THURSDAY, JULY 2: ACTS 24:1-27 3RD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Yesterday we remembered how the saints are commanded to pray for those in authority, whether they be good or wicked. St. Paul himself writes to Timothy these words: “I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). This is easy to do when the government does its job, like when the Roman commander protected St. Paul from the Jews. It is much harder to pray for our rulers when they are wicked or incompetent. Nonetheless, we should pray for wicked rulers even more, both for their own sake and for the sake of those under their authority.

Felix, the governor of Caesarea, is, at best, a selfish judge. He is unwilling to condemn an innocent man, so he allows St. Paul some freedom and comfort until his case is decided. However, he also postpones St. Paul's sentence, first, because he hopes St. Paul will bribe him and, second, because he wants to do the Jews a favor. Because of this perversion of justice, St. Paul, an innocent man, remains in prison for two years.

Under such conditions it seems natural to hate and curse the authorities. But God has ordained the government for our good. Rulers are men, and their sins cause us suffering. We must still pray for them as fellow sinners in need of God's mercy, since God has had mercy on us.

Prayer: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the General Prayer of the Church we ask that God would bless our political leaders—that He would “endue them with grace to rule after Thy good pleasure, to the maintenance of righteousness and to the hindrance and punishment of wickedness, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (TLH, p. 23). We pray in this way for our government, even if our political leaders are wicked. God uses the government to give us safety and things pertaining to our daily bread. In St. Paul’s case, the government—that is, the Romans—protected Him from the murderous Jews, guaranteed him a fair trial, and ultimately helped him spread the Gospel.

The government is God’s tool. He has established earthly governments and blesses them. He fulfills His purpose through them, whether they recognize it or not. The Roman commander who has charge of St. Paul does not understand what is going on. Since he is a pagan, he does not realize the importance of the Gospel which St. Paul is defending. Nonetheless, he is faithful to St. Paul simply by doing his duty as a commander. Ultimately, by allowing St. Paul to publicly defend himself, the Romans caused St. Paul’s Gospel message to spread further.

Likewise, the Church always prays for the government, because it is God’s tool to do good for those who fear Him, and to protect the preaching of the Gospel.

Prayer: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Old Testament Feast of Weeks, or Harvest, is celebrated in the 3rd Hebrew month of Sivan (May/June). It was also called Pentecost because it occurs 7 weeks after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. At Pentecost the first fruits of the wheat harvest were brought to the Lord (Exodus 23:16). Rather than giving to God our leftover extras, we are instructed to practice first-fruits giving. We give God the first portion, trusting that He will provide for us with the remaining. Similarly, St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16:2, “On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper...”

Because Jesus Christ has risen from the dead we trust that we, His mystical body, will rise again on the Last Day. 1 Corinthians 15:20; 23: “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep... But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.” On the Day of Pentecost the first-fruits gift of the Holy Spirit for declaring “the wonderful works of God” was poured out upon the Apostles of Christ’s Church. Through these Apostles, and the ordained ministers who follow in their train, God is continuing to pour out His Holy Spirit for the creating and strengthening of faith for salvation. We trust in Jesus’ promise, “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19).

Prayer: Almighty God, You have given us Your Holy Spirit so that we now believe in that which we will receive by sight on the Last Day. Forgive us our sins of not trusting in Your provisions for our life. Amen.

When Peter stands up to preach on the Day of Pentecost he announces that his sermon is from the Old Testament text of the Prophet Joel. Your pastor also preaches based on texts of God's Word. (Someone once asked me from where I got my sermon. I looked at them quizzically. They said, "Well, do they [referring to the synodical organization] send it to you?" I laughed out loud, "From God's Word!")

The Apostles learned from Jesus to preach based on the Scriptures. When Jesus rose from the dead, Luke tells us, "...beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). He reminded them saying, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24:44).

With the Holy Spirit's guidance Peter not only preaches based upon the Word, but he delivers the Christocentric message about Jesus of Nazareth and His work of salvation on our behalf. Once again, Jesus taught them, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39). Jesus is the Lord and Christ. He took upon Himself our sins so that we would receive the forgiveness of sins through faith in Him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, in accordance with Your purpose and foreknowledge, You delivered up Your Son to suffer and die to pay the penalty for our sins, and furthermore You raised Him up from the dead and raised Him to Your right hand. Give us faith to believe in Jesus Christ for our salvation. Amen.

The unbelieving Jews show their true colors. It is not St. Paul himself they hate, but the Gentiles. Specifically, they hate the teaching that God wants the Gentiles to be saved, for they call for St. Paul's death at these words of the Lord: "I will send you far from here to the Gentiles." Then again, it is not so much the Gentiles they hate, but God Himself. They despise a God who would save the Gentiles. This is a truly satanic opinion, for Satan desires nothing more than that men not be saved.

God desires all men to be saved, for which reason He commands the Apostles to "teach all nations" (Matthew 28:19). This concerns what we confess in the Nicene Creed, where we acknowledge there is "one, holy, Christian, and apostolic Church." This Church is made up of everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. There is not one church for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. Neither is there one kind of salvation for the American and another for the Chinese. All who believe the Gospel of the Christ, as taught by His Apostles, are therefore holy and members of this one Christian Church. Anyone who desires to be saved must be found in this Christian Church through faith.

Prayer: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

In St. Matthew's Gospel the Lord Jesus lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!" (Matthew 23:37). Also: "It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher... If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!" (Matthew 10:25). Since the Lord Jesus was sentenced to death at Jerusalem, we are not surprised that Jerusalem also persecutes His servant, St. Paul.

St. Paul goes to Jerusalem for the Pentecost (Acts 18:21, 20:16), and therefore "purposed in the Spirit... to go to Jerusalem, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome'" (Acts 19:21). On the way, he is repeatedly warned that he faces persecution and imprisonment if he goes to Jerusalem. But St. Paul, firm in his purpose, declares, "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." When he arrives at the temple, all that was warned would happen to him suddenly happens, for those who hated the Christ still hate His ministers.

The unbelieving world tries to thwart the work of the Church and her faithful pastors, through physical violence and murder, if necessary. We must not fear them, but trust in the Lord Jesus, who overcame the world and death for us.

Prayer: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Holy Scriptures include two teachings: the Law and the Promises (or Gospel).

The Law shows us our sin and produces sorrow over those sins. When St. Peter accused the Jews in Jerusalem of crucifying God's Son, the text says that people "were cut to the heart." Having been shown their sin, they understood the wrath they deserved and expressed their contrition. They asked, "What shall we do?"

The Promises of God are pure Gospel (good news). The Gospel reveals the promise of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter tells them to "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." Through baptism into Jesus Christ, St. Peter proclaims the good news of God's promise of the forgiveness of sins. "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved..." (Mark 16:16). There were many who believed. They "gladly received his word [and] were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them."

In accordance with God's direction, the Law is to be preached first, and then the Gospel is to be preached to those who are contrite. Peter says, "Repent and let every one of you be baptized..." We, too, apply the Law to our lives that we might confess our sins. We, then, trust in the promise of the forgiveness of sins. That is what it means to continue steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine.

Prayer: Keep us, O Lord, in Your Word, that confessing our sins we would believe in the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus said, “And where I go you know, and the way you know.” Jesus told the disciples that they know two things, but Thomas says, “We do not know.”

Jesus was going to the Father. When He says that He goes to prepare a place, Jesus is speaking about His suffering and death. Through our Lord’s sacrificial death He restores our relationship with the Father. Due to man’s fall into sin we lost our “place” in paradise where we had original righteousness, and enjoyed sweet fellowship with God. Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:24. Nevertheless, the way back does not require GPS directions. Furthermore, once Jesus secured our atonement, we receive the benefits of His death through faith in God’s promise to give those benefits in Word and Sacrament. Those benefits are in Christ. The way to forgiveness and Christ’s secured righteousness is through faith in Jesus. “No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

Thomas was wrong. Like Thomas, sometimes we don’t realize what we already have. When we have faith in Jesus we have “the way, the truth, and the life.” The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, was given to us in our baptism. Yesterday’s reading included, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). The preaching of Pentecost delivers the resurrection of Christ. “Because I live, you will live also.” Through the Word, God reveals Jesus to the world.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us not to forget the gifts we received in our baptism into Your Son, so that with the confident hope of our resurrection, we may lead joy-filled lives. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Third Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XII. Of Repentance.

In the twelfth article they [the Romanists] approve of the first part, in which we set forth that, to those who have fallen since baptism, the remission of sins can be imparted at whatever time, and as often as they are converted. ...

Let any one of the adversaries come forth and tell us when the remission of sins takes place. O good God, what darkness there is! They doubt whether it be in attrition or in contrition that remission of sins occurs. And if it occur on account of contrition, what need is there of absolution, what does the power of the keys effect, if sin have been already remitted? Here indeed they also labor much more, and wickedly detract from the power of the keys. ... For if the power of the keys do not console us before God, what then will pacify the conscience?

Moreover, the power of the keys administers and presents the Gospel through absolution, which is the true voice of the Gospel. Thus we also comprise absolution, when we speak of faith, because “faith cometh by hearing” (Rom. 10:17). For when the Gospel is heard, and the absolution is heard, the conscience is encouraged, and receives consolation. And because God truly quickens through the Word, the keys truly remit sins before God, according to Luke 10:16: “He that heareth you heareth Me.” Wherefore the voice of the one absolving must be believed not otherwise than we would believe a voice from heaven. And absolution properly can be called a sacrament of repentance, as also the more learned scholastic theologians speak. ... Thus faith is conceived and strengthened through absolution, through the hearing of the Gospel, through the use of the sacraments, so that it may not succumb while it struggles with the terrors of sin and death. This theory of repentance is plain and clear, and increases the worth of the power of the keys and of the sacraments and illumines the benefit of Christ, and teaches us to avail ourselves of Christ as Mediator and Propitiator.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §1, 5, 7, 39–41, 42–43

The first day of the week is Sunday. When “the disciples came together to break bread,” this means that they celebrated the Lord’s Supper. We can gather from this passage that it was normal practice to worship on Sunday. In the history of the Church, Sunday worship was normally presumed to be Eucharistic worship. The Eucharist was seen as the most prominent aspect of this worship since the entire worship is referred to by this one part.

We are not commanded in the New Testament to worship on Sunday, but it is clearly Apostolic precedent. The day of Christ’s resurrection becomes the most important day of the week. One of the earliest documents of the early Church to mention Sunday worship was called the “Didache.” It said: “Assemble on the Lord’s Day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist.” In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession our Lutheran worship is described: “In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday...” There has been a clear pattern throughout the history of the Church; Sunday is marked by the preaching of the Word and administering the Body and Blood of Christ to the faithful. Let us strive to make that our practice as well.

Prayer: O Lord, who never failest to help and govern those whom Thou dost bring up in Thy steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Thy holy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Forgiveness is promised by the Word. The benefits are received through faith. Jesus explains to His believing disciples, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” Today’s text happens after Judas left the upper room to betray Jesus. Earlier in John 13:10b-11, Jesus said, “...and you are clean, but not all of you.’ For He knew who would betray Him.” Judas heard the Word, but did not trust in it. Whether Judas ever actually believed is not our concern. To those eleven who did believe, Jesus tells them, “Abide in Me, and I in you,” and “Abide in My love.” We come to faith through the Word, and we abide in Jesus through that same Word. Jesus connects the two when He says, “If you abide in Me, and my words abide in you...”

The Word presents to us the great love of Jesus who, in laying down His life for His friends, gives us new life and great joy. “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” We are given the joy of salvation, so that we can bear up when the world hates us. The Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost so that through her ministers the Church will preach the good news of salvation. Some will receive the Word and abide in it. Others will hate us because of our abiding connection to Jesus. When it says that they hated Jesus without a cause, it means that He had done them no wrong. Yet, there is a reason for their hate toward Jesus and Christians. Jesus said, “He who hates Me hates My Father also.”

Prayer: Lord, keep us always in You and Your love. Amen.

At first glance it seems to be contradictory. How can the believer have both tribulation and peace? Jesus says, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

The world considers us to be traitors. At one time, all of us were united with this world’s selfish and sinful agenda. Ephesians 2:2-3 states, “...you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

But now through the life-giving Word, we have come to believe in the work of God’s Son. The peace which passes understanding--as the Pastor says after the sermon--is the blessing of knowing that through faith you are reconciled to God, and thus you are saved. Jesus said, “I have given them Your word.” When we are justified and sanctified by the Word of God, believers are “not of this world,” just as Jesus is “not of this world.” Though the world gives us tribulation, with our eyes fixed on Jesus we have peace. We know that Jesus has overcome the world. Our Jesus leaves us in the world to preach to others, and prays that we are protected from the evil one.

Prayer: O Lord, we pray that others will come to believe in You through the preaching and teaching of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Even though the men are called “disciples” in verse one, they had not heard that the Holy Spirit had come. They only received “John’s baptism,” which Paul sees as inadequate. Paul’s question, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit?” asks if these men had experienced the charismatic phenomena that the Apostles did, or the Samaritans, or the pagans at Cornelius’ house. It is obvious that Paul asks this because faith and the imparting of the Spirit go together.

Faith and baptism go together as well. Paul tried to determine if these men are Christians by asking about the Spirit and baptism. The Spirit phenomena and baptism were the outward markers that told us about the faith in the heart. But this pattern that we see here is simply descriptive, not prescriptive. Speaking in tongues is not a necessary requirement for being in Christ. That phenomenon was unique to the original spreading of the Church. Nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to speak in tongues. We are commanded to be baptized.

Paul was questioning these men to see what it was that they believed. As he discovered that they had not experienced the charismatic phenomena of Pentecost, he became suspicious. He asked about their baptism to see what sort of faith they had, because the faith is what he really wants to know about. The Church continues to baptize and make disciples, as God gives His Holy Spirit and faith as He has promised.

Prayer: O Lord, who never failest to help and govern those whom Thou dost bring up in Thy steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Thy holy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“...by occupation they were tentmakers.”

St. Paul comes to Corinth and meets Aquila and Priscilla and stays with them. This was a convenient arrangement because they were all tentmakers. The life of the early Christian Church did not have the modern trappings that church bodies accumulated later. There were no church buildings--as we know them--at that time in history. There were no synod organizations, no missions boards, no institutional structures like now. But the Church in the 21st century is rapidly returning to this situation.

The eras from the reign of emperor Constantine through the 20th century had institutional structures in which the Church operated. We praise and thank God for the remnants of the past that we still enjoy, but the Church is less frequently found in buildings with steeples anymore. Pastors often need to be “tentmakers” again. We should rejoice that we can live in imitation of St. Paul. Christians should do all they can to have success and victory in this world for the Gospel, but we should simultaneously remember that we are sojourners in a fallen world. We are pilgrims on our way to heaven. May we have the wisdom to see the Church where she really is, with pure doctrine and rightly administered Sacraments.

Prayer: O Lord, who never failest to help and govern those whom Thou dost bring up in Thy steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Thy holy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Trinity Sunday

ARTICLE I.

Our Churches, with common consent, do teach, that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and yet that there are three Persons, of the same essence and power, who also are co-eternal, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. And the term “person” they use as the fathers have used it, to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself.

They condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this article, as the Manichaeans who assumed two principles [gods], one Good, the other Evil; also the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and all such. They condemn also the Samosatenes, old and new, who contending that there is but one Person, sophistically and impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Ghost are not distinct Persons, but that “Word” signifies a spoken word, and “Spirit” [Ghost] signifies motion created in things.

—The Augsburg Confession

In today's reading Peter and John are going into the temple to pray. As they are about to enter, a man lame from birth asks for alms. But the disciples have something far greater to give. Rather than merely sustain the poor man's existence through alms, his affliction is cured. Peter is quick to point out the source of the man's healing: "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Still, the newly healed man clings to Peter and John, and the crowd was amazed by "their" miracle. Fearing they would credit the healing to them, Peter preaches a sermon on the Second Article. He first points out the Law, that they themselves had crucified the very Author of life by following and allowing their religious leaders to carry out the execution.

But Peter then follows up with the Gospel, saying that God used their evil action and inaction to accomplish salvation in Him. And now, through repentance and faith, salvation would be theirs. Peter promises "times of refreshing," which is the same joy and relief we experience every time we repent, confess, and are absolved.

Prayer: Before Thee, God, who knowest all, with grief and shame I prostrate fall. I see my sins against Thee, Lord, the sins of thought, of deed, and word. They press me sore; I cry to Thee: O God, be merciful to me! (TLH 318:1)

Violent mobs have always been a threat against Christians throughout the history of the Church. During the time of the Roman Empire, Christians were repeatedly maligned and mobs were employed by politicians to deflect guilt away from themselves. Nero was one great example of this. Here the Jews drag Jason and some other Christians before the rulers of the city. The Jews charge Jason, Paul, Silas, and all the rest of the Christians with treason.

We note in this charge an echo of the charge of treason that the Sanhedrin made against Jesus. Roman officials would care about treason more than Jewish heresy. But suffering physical pain and humiliation like our Lord is one of the greatest honors a Christian can be given. To be brought low, like our Savior, for His sake brings us into greater union with Him. This is a great reason so many early Christians peacefully went to their deaths in the ancient world. They knew suffering and death were not just random accidents, but God's plan to glorify them. So, we too can rejoice in our persecution. If we suffer for Him in this world, we will share His glory in the next.

Prayer: O Lord, who never failest to help and govern those whom Thou dost bring up in Thy steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Thy holy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

It is interesting how women play such an important part in the message of the Gospel. It was women who were the first to see the risen Lord. This is not an account of events the early Christians would lie about. Here, as Paul opens up Europe to the Gospel, we meet another woman. Lydia was probably wealthy. She is also the first convert in Europe. She was not a Jew, nor a convert of Judaism, but one who believed in the one true God like Cornelius did.

Lydia becomes an example for other Europeans to trust the message of the Gospel. Lydia also displayed another interesting behavior. When she comes to believe Paul's message, she is immediately baptized. But not just her; her entire household was baptized. Her whole household came to believe. Unlike in our individualistic society, in her society households did things as units. It is possible that she had a large household with servants and children. It isn't that they did not have individual faith, but it would have been very difficult to go against the household. Who knows how many people came to the Lord that day!

Prayer: O Lord, who never failest to help and govern those whom Thou dost bring up in Thy steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Thy holy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”

The Sadducees were among several varieties of Judaism in Jesus' day. They had two distinguishing features: they were in charge of the temple, and they did not believe in the resurrection. Therefore, they were livid when Peter and John took it upon themselves to preach the Gospel of the resurrection in “their” temple. But even though the two were arrested, the sowing of the Word had already done its work. As the text reveals, the number of Christian men alone was about 5000.

Wherever and whenever the Word is sown the Holy Spirit is at work bringing dead souls to life. So even though Peter and John would now face the same duo of Annas and Caiphas who did their worst to Jesus, God's servants could know their work was not in vain. Nor were they intimidated by the whole of the Sanhedrin. The same Holy Spirit who was converting hearts was now working in Peter: “This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” May we be so emboldened as they, and be faithful Gospel witnesses wherever God has placed us, knowing such sowing will never be in vain.

Prayer: On what has now been sown, Thy blessing, Lord, bestow; the pow'r is Thine alone to make it spring and grow. Do Thou in grace the harvest raise, and Thou alone shalt have the praise. (TLH 46:1)

After Peter and John were thrown in jail they were miraculously released by an angel, who instructed them to continue preaching. They were arrested again, but by now the people were stirred in their favor. Nevertheless, the Sanhedrin lashed out as before: “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!” Once again, the Sanhedrin is missing the point. They are worried about the people joining with the Apostles and having their own reputation stained. However, Peter is preaching the Law not to embarrass them, but to bring repentance. For the eternal good of all, he must continue to preach both Law and Gospel.

That is what precipitates his bold reply: “But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’” That statement has become a battle cry of embittered Christians ever since. When there is no contention between Church and State, you can render to God and Caesar in appropriate measure. But when the two clash, when civil authority steps on what God has clearly commanded, there can be no discussion or debate over which takes precedent. “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

Prayer: Dear Lord, You have all authority in heaven and on earth. Grant us leaders who will guard our freedom to worship You in sincerity and truth; and grant us the courage to say and do what is right when that freedom is put in jeopardy. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Men came to the Church in Antioch and caused confusion. These men were known as “Judaizers.” They were believers who said that in order to be saved one must first follow all the Law, and then the Messiah was for you. Circumcision was the visible test of following the Law. Failure to keep the Law meant no salvation. This was mixing Law and Gospel. The Council of Jerusalem stepped in to settle the dispute. When it was decided to “not trouble” the Gentiles, it meant that the Law was not to be imposed on them as a means of salvation.

The Law cannot save Jew or Gentile. So, we mustn’t look at the letter that was sent to the Church in Antioch as a new set of laws to be followed by the Church. It was advice to soothe the conflict. The Greeks were to be reminded that the Christian concepts of sexual morality were very different from that of the prevailing culture, and that they should be vigilant. The other three points had to do with dietary practices that were free, but were difficult for the Jewish brothers. Out of love for them, the Gentiles were asked to refrain from them, even though they had freedom. So, this was advice for that time and place, not new laws for Christians. Christians can eat, for example, duck blood soup or blood sausage.

Prayer: O Lord, who never failest to help and govern those whom Thou dost bring up in Thy steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Thy holy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Second Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XIII.

Of the Use of the Sacraments, they [the Lutheran theologians] teach, that the Sacraments were ordained, not only to be marks of profession among men, but rather to be signs and testimonies of the will of God toward us, instituted to awaken and confirm faith in those who use them. Wherefore we must so use the Sacraments that faith be added to believe the promises which are offered and set forth through the Sacraments.

They therefore condemn those who teach that the Sacraments justify by the outward act, and do not teach that, in the use of the Sacraments, faith which believes that sins are forgiven, is required.

—The Augsburg Confession

THURSDAY, JUNE 11: ACTS 6:1-15

TRINITY

Up until Acts chapter 6 the focus has been on the work of the Apostles. But with the work of the Church now burgeoning, others are charged to help with the task of caring for the needs of the people. One of them, Stephen, stood out: “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.” Such work did not go unnoticed by enemies of the Church, as many sought to undermine him by bearing false testimony, just as it was with Jesus.

The attacks were twofold, designed to stir up the two main camps of the Sanhedrin: “They also set up false witnesses who said, ‘This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.’” The Sadducees would be upset about any threat against the temple, of which they were in charge. The Pharisees would be equally livid from any words spoken against the Law or Moses, since their obsession was rule-making and rule-keeping. But in all their accusations, they could not refute Stephen’s God-given wisdom, and even had to confess that his face was like that “of an angel.”

Prayer: Fight the good fight with all thy might; Christ is thy Strength and Christ thy Right. Lay hold on life, and it shall be thy joy and crown eternally. (TLH 447:1)

“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.”

These words of Stephen echoed previous condemnations from the Old Testament. “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people!’” (Exodus 32:9). “...and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart” (Jeremiah 9:26). So there was nothing new under the sun. All of mankind had fallen from Adam’s fall, and even many of God’s chosen people had embraced their fallen nature. From generation to generation, the same plague was exercising its power.

But Stephen was not like them. In contrast to their evil hearts and violent rejection of God’s servant, he was reassured with a vision of God’s glory, even seeing the “Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” Stephen nearly repeated the same words Jesus had spoken in His hour of trial before the Sanhedrin (Luke 22:69), and closed with words fitting to His Savior’s last: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Thus Stephen became the first in a long line of Christian martyrs. Even today we are charged to have no less courage in the hour of trial, for mankind will never change in its inherent abhorrence of the Gospel. But equally important, the Gospel will never change in its inherent power to change the most rebellious heart.

Prayer: If Thou but suffer God to guide thee and hope in Him thro’ all thy ways, He’ll give thee strength, whate’er betide thee, and bear thee thro’ the evil days. Who trusts in God’s unchanging love builds on the Rock that naught can move. (TLH 518:1)

People often ask, “If God is real, why doesn’t He still work healing miracles like in the Bible?” Mortal mankind should also remember that we do not usually see wicked people immediately struck dead or divine plagues poured out on perverse cities as we do in the Scriptures, either. God works in whatever ways He sees best for the time and context.

Even in the time of Acts, the people failed to see Paul’s miracle as a testimony to the Gospel of Jesus Christ that he preached. They perceived his preaching and work according to their assumptions about their own false gods. The same thing happens to God’s miracles in our time. God has not stopped doing miracles, but He does them in ways that work together for the good of the faithful. However, whether something is a miracle or a regularly occurring blessing from God, the weakness of man will always try to misconstrue it according to vain reasoning.

We are taught to pray for daily bread and to give thanks for the frequently occurring blessings that He provides for us. We are unable to do even this without God’s help and Spirit. So rather than focus on seeing new and unusual miracles, our trust is in the greatest miracle of all times, which is the death and resurrection of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Prayer: O God, the Strength of all them that put their trust in Thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without Thee, grant us the help of Thy grace that in keeping Thy commandments we may please Thee both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Pride and envy are the works of Satan. His words to Eve taught her to do what was right in her own eyes rather than obey the Lord. His works among God's people throughout the ages have compelled souls to ignore divine blessings in favor of self-importance. And the Enemy's lies have continued to confuse mankind and pervert the straight ways of the Lord.

In contrast, humility and trust are the works of God's Spirit. Paul began his sermon by saying, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen..." Humility makes us willing and able to listen. Faithful humility makes us able to listen and trust in the Word of God, even if it challenges our own mortal understanding. The opponents of the Church in the time of Acts, and throughout history, pridefully resented the call to repentance and the power of God in Jesus Christ.

Thankfully our Lord has continued to give us the help of His grace and Spirit. We are made able to listen to His Word in the fellowship of the Church and receive the Sacraments according to His commands. These blessings strengthen us in faith and humility, which overcome the pride and envy of Satan and his lies.

Prayer: O God, the Strength of all them that put their trust in Thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without Thee, grant us the help of Thy grace that in keeping Thy commandments we may please Thee both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In today's reading we see the value God places on one, solitary soul. Philip is told by an angel to go and evangelize one man. When we read of the encounter, we can understand why. The Ethiopian eunuch is reading perhaps the most Gospel-rich text in all the Old Testament. He quotes Isaiah 53:7-8, which points directly to the Suffering Servant. The gate is wide open for Philip, who merely has to "fill in the blank" with Jesus' name. Rejoicing in his newfound enlightenment, the eunuch sees some water as they travel together down the road, and wishes to be baptized (no doubt Philip mentioned this Sacrament as a natural follow-up in this brief catechesis). After the baptism, Philip is taken away, and the eunuch rejoices in the miracle he's been granted. God has sought him out and brought salvation to his soul.

What a message this is for us. God cares not only for the whole world, but for each and every one of His elect. Let us rejoice in our individual and miraculous calling to faith, and treasure, nurture, and preserve it by continual immersion in God's Means of Grace.

Prayer: Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures 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 liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen. (Collect for the Word)

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The First Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XXIV.

Falsely are our churches accused of Abolishing the Mass; for the Mass is retained on our part, and celebrated with the highest reverence. All the usual ceremonies are also preserved, save that the parts sung in Latin are interspersed here and there with German hymns, which have been added to teach the people. For ceremonies are needed to this end alone, that the unlearned be taught. And not only has Paul commanded to use in the Church a language understood by the people [1 Cor. 14: 2, 9], but it has also be so ordained by man's law.

The people are accustomed to partake of the Sacrament together, if any be fit for it, and this also increases the reverence and devotion of public worship. For none are admitted except they be first proved. The people are also advised concerning the dignity and use of the Sacrament, how great consolation it brings anxious consciences, that they may learn to believe God, and to expect and ask of Him all that is good. This worship pleases God; such use of the Sacrament nourishes true devotion toward God. It does not, therefore, appear that the Mass is more devoutly celebrated among our adversaries, than among us.

But it is evident that for a long time, it has been the public and most grievous complaint of all good men, that Masses have been basely profaned and applied to purposes of lucre. For it is unknown how far this abuse obtains in all the churches, by what manner of men Masses are said only for fees or stipends, and how many celebrate them contrary to the Canons. But Paul severely threatens those who deal unworthily with the Eucharist, when he says [1 Cor. 11:27]: "Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." When, therefore, our priests were admonished concerning this sin, Private Masses were discontinued among us, as scarcely any Private Masses were celebrated except for lucre's sake.

Neither were the bishops ignorant of these abuses, and if they had corrected them in time, there would now be less dissension. Heretofore, by their own negligence, they suffered many corruptions to creep into the Church. Now, when it is too late, they begin to complain of the troubles of the Church, seeing that this disturbance has been occasioned simply by those abuses, which were so manifest that they could be borne no longer. Great dissensions have arisen concerning the Mass, concerning the Sacrament. Perhaps the world is being punished for such long-continued profanations of the Mass, as have been tolerated in the churches for so many centuries, by the very men who were both able and in duty bound to correct them. For, in the Ten Commandments, it is written (Exodus 20), "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain." But since the world began, nothing that God ever ordained seems to have been so abused for filthy lucre as the Mass.

There was also added the opinion which infinitely increased Private Masses, namely, that Christ, by His passion, had made satisfaction for original sin, and insti-

THURSDAY, JUNE 18: ACTS 12:1-25 1ST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Human events reflect spiritual realities. God-hating people resent and reject that idea, but it is still true. The king's contempt for Christ's Church and the Jews' pleasure at the death of a Christian showed that their spirits were against the Gospel. As 1 John 1:8 says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The Church was preaching the need for repentance and forgiveness from God through faith in Jesus Christ. That message does not deserve a response of contempt, or death. But Satan stirs men's spirits to hate such truth.

In the case of Peter, God could have let him remain in prison to be an example of faith, or let him be executed at that time so his martyrdom could be a further testimony. But the Lord saw fit to cause events to go as they did, and show that His will was more powerful than the spiritual darkness of the king and expectations of the Jews.

The events of our lives can go in many, many different directions. We can hope, pray, and work to see they go a certain way, but we must always remember that God's will is better than ours. We are taught to pray "Thy will be done" because it is better for our lives to reflect His Spirit, rather than the weakness of our sinful nature.

Prayer: O God, the Strength of all them that put their trust in Thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without Thee, grant us the help of Thy grace that in keeping Thy commandments we may please Thee both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17: ACTS 11:1-30 1ST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Our Lord Jesus came preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Repentance has always been a part of God’s will for us ever since we fell into sin. Preaching the Gospel to all nations and teaching faithful disciples to observe all that Christ commands includes man’s need for repentance. Repentance is always necessary because we are by nature sinful and unclean. In Baptism God gives us His Spirit so that we may be honest about our sin and weakness. He cleanses us and calls us according to His own holy name, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When He brings us to repent and calls us clean, this is not a game; it is not pretend. From Adam and Eve, to Israel, to all nations, He has taught us to confess our sins and cling to His promises for forgiveness and salvation. His instructions about circumcision and dietary laws were to teach that greater truth which was established before them.

But now we have His commands and promises that teach repentance and forgiveness in the Sacraments of His Christian Church. He cleanses us as His little children in the waters of Baptism with Word and Spirit, and He tells us to take and eat from His own sacrificed flesh and blood. These make us clean, make us part of His Kingdom, and strengthen our faith according to His Spirit!

Prayer: O God, the Strength of all them that put their trust in Thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without Thee, grant us the help of Thy grace that in keeping Thy commandments we may please Thee both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

tuted the Mass wherein an offering should be made for daily sins, venial and mortal. From this has arisen the common opinion that the Mass taketh away the sins of the living and the dead, by the outward act. Then they began to dispute whether one Mass said for many were worth as much as special Masses for individuals, and this brought forth that infinite multitude of Masses. Concerning these opinions our teachers have given warning, that they depart from the Holy Scriptures and diminish the glory of the passion of Christ. For Christ’s passion was an oblation and satisfaction, not for original guilt only, but also for all sins, as it is written to the Hebrews (10:10), “We are sanctified through the offering of Jesus Christ, once for all.” Also, 10:14: “By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.” Scripture also teaches that we are justified before God through faith in Christ, when we believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. Now if the Mass take away the sins of the living and the dead by the outward act, justification comes of the work of Masses, and not of faith, which Scripture does not allow.

But Christ commands us [Luke 22:19]: “This do in remembrance of Me”; therefore the Mass was instituted that the faith of those who use the Sacrament should remember what benefit it receives through Christ, and cheer and comfort the anxious conscience. For, to remember Christ, is to remember His benefits, and to realize that they are truly offered unto us. Nor is it enough only to remember the history, for this the Jew and the ungodly also can remember. Wherefore the Mass is to be used to this end, that there the Sacrament [Communion] may be administered to them that have need of consolation; as Ambrose says: “Because I always sin, I am always bound to take the medicine.”

Now, forasmuch as the Mass is such a giving of the Sacrament, we hold one communion every holyday, and also other days, when any desire the Sacrament it is given to such as ask for it. And this custom is not new in the Church; for the Fathers before Gregory make no mention of any private Mass, but of the common Mass they speak very much. Chrysostom says that the priest stands daily at the altar, inviting some to the Communion and keeping back others. And it appears from the ancient Canons, that someone celebrated the Mass from whom all the other presbyters and deacons receive the Body of the Lord, for thus the words of the Nicene Canon says: “Let the deacons, according to their order, receive the Holy Communion after the presbyters, from the bishop or from a presbyter.” And Paul [1 Cor. 11:33] commands concerning the Communion: “Tarry for one another,” so that there may be a common participation.

Forasmuch, therefore, as the Mass with us has the example of the Church taken from the Scripture and the Fathers, we are confident that it cannot be disapproved, especially since the public ceremonies are retained for the most part, like those hitherto in use; only the number of Masses differs, which, because of very great and manifest abuses, doubtless might be profitably reduced. For in olden times, even in churches most frequented, the Mass was not celebrated every day, as the Tripartite History (Book 9, chapt. 33) testifies: “Again in Alexandria, every Wednesday and Friday, the Scriptures are read, and the doctors expound them, and all things are done, except only the celebration of the Eucharist.”

—The Augsburg Confession

“Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem...’”

The Lord accomplished many good things for His Church through St. Paul, but even Paul was a broken sinner. Before his conversion he was quite an infamous sinner! Verse 21 notes that the people knew him as one who “destroyed” those who called on the name of Jesus Christ.

God works through us in spite of the weakness of our mortal nature. That is why faith makes us humble and able to look past the brokenness of others as He delivers profound blessings through them. The people were not expected to forget Paul’s former persecution against Christ; it magnified the Lord’s grace! King David was guilty of adultery and murder, but God still came to Jerusalem as the Son of David. Even names like Ananias and Judas have the baggage of being associated with wicked sinners, but these common names also belonged to faithful men.

God’s work through us does not ignore our sinful weakness, nor does it validate our wickedness. We always need to repent and turn from all our evil ways. But we also must remember that Christ crucified and all His commands are the focus of our faith. He calls us to bear with one another, and to forgive one another, even as He loves us and accomplishes good things with us.

Prayer: O God, the Strength of all them that put their trust in Thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without Thee, grant us the help of Thy grace that in keeping Thy commandments we may please Thee both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

God used His laws and distinctions about food to teach the Church that He is the one who makes things good and holy, not our own mortal efforts. The laws of ceremony and civil order given to Israel through Moses were meant to teach His people discipline and faithful obedience, but when He brought His blessings to other nations He taught in different ways. The important transitional time of the Church in Acts makes it clear that all of His teachings, old and new, are focused on the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified for the salvation of all who believe!

As we learn and confess with the holy Sacraments, it is not the vessel itself that accomplishes great things; the water, bread, wine, and called servant bring us holy blessings because of God’s Word and power with them according to His commands. So whether it is people, or water, or food and drink, if God works truth and righteousness through them, faith embraces the divine blessings and looks past weaknesses in the earthly means.

Yesterday we considered St. Paul’s past in light of God’s grace. St. Peter also manifested some well-known weaknesses, but God accomplished profound blessings and teachings through him as well. May He strengthen us all in true faith to see such lessons for what they are, as they direct our wills and deeds in service to Jesus Christ our Savior!

Prayer: O God, the Strength of all them that put their trust in Thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without Thee, grant us the help of Thy grace that in keeping Thy commandments we may please Thee both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.