

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



SAINT PHILIP AND SAINT JAMES, APOSTLES (FESTIVAL DAY: MAY 1)

MAY 1–JUNE 4, 2022

**A PUBLICATION OF
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF
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The Calendar

The Lutheran Hymnal (1941): TLH; *The Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* (1912): ELHB;
The Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary (1913): ELH

(Monday: M; Tuesday: T; Wednesday: W; Thursday: R; Friday: F; Saturday: S)

May 1	Easter 2—Misericordias Domini/ St. Philip and St. James, Apostles	TLH 436
May 2 (M)	St. Athanasius, Bishop, Confessor, Doctor	
May 8	Easter 3—Jubilate	TLH 268
May 15	Easter 4—Cantate	TLH 260
May 22	Easter 5—Rogate	TLH 458
May 23–25	Rogation Days	
May 26 (R)	The Ascension of our Lord	TLH 387
May 29	Exaudi	TLH 267

ST. IGNATIUS SEMINARY UPDATE—The Spring quarter began on February 28. The classes this quarter are as follows:

E009—Greek Readings 3 (1 hr.)

S005—Creation and Redemption (3 hrs.)

H004—Reformation (3 hrs.)

E004—Isaiah (3 hrs.)

The seminary midterm break will begin Saturday, April 9 and classes will resume Monday, May 2. The break is situated around Holy Week, Easter, and the annual Colloquium and Synod of the diocese.

SUPPORT FOR ST. IGNATIUS SEMINARY—The work of the seminary is of critical importance for the ongoing purpose of this diocese, preparing future pastors to serve in congregations of our fellowship. In the past year, there has been a significant decrease in financial support for St. Ignatius. While the seminary has sufficient reserves to continue its work for several years, it is important that we do not deplete these reserves. If you would be willing to help provide such support, it can be sent to ELDoNA via the treasurer, Rev. Michael Henson, Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church 1000 North Park Ave. Herrin, IL 62948

Lesson from the Book of Concord Misericordias Domini Sunday

Article XIV.

Of Ecclesiastical Order, [the Lutherans] teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.

Article XV.

Of Rites and Usages in the Church, they teach, that those ought to be observed which may be observed without sin, and which are profitable unto tranquility and good order in the Church, as particular holydays, festivals, and the like.

Nevertheless, concerning such things, let men be admonished that consciences are not to be burdened, as though such observance was necessary to salvation. They are admonished also that human traditions instituted to propitiate God, to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are opposed to the Gospel and the doctrine of faith. Wherefore vows and traditions concerning meats and days, etc., instituted to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.—The Augsburg Confession

Article IV. Of the Papacy.

That the Pope is not, according to divine law or according to the Word of God, the head of all Christendom (for this name belongs to Jesus Christ solely and alone), but is only the bishop and pastor of the Church at Rome, and of those who voluntarily or through a human creature (that is a political magistrate) attach themselves to him, not to be under him as a lord, but with him as brethren and associates, as Christians; as the ancient councils and the age of St. Cyprian show.

But today none of the bishops venture to address the Pope as brother; but they must call him most gracious lord, even though they be kings or emperors. Such arrogance we neither will, can, nor ought with a good conscience to approve. Let him, however, who will do it, do so without us. —The Smalcald Articles, Part II, §1–2

In today's text Jesus speaks of two ways to tend sheep. In the villages and towns there were communal sheepfolds where all the village flocks were sheltered for the night. These folds were protected by a strong door, and only the guardian of the door, the gatekeeper, held the key. It was to that kind of fold that Jesus refers in verses 1-3.

But when the sheep were out on the hills during the warm season and didn't return at night to the village, they were herded into folds on the hillside. These sheepfolds were simply open spaces enclosed by a wall. There was an opening by which the sheep came in and went out. But there was no door of any kind. Instead, at night, the shepherd lay down across the opening so that no sheep (or anything else) could get in or out, except over his own body. And so, in the most literal sense, the shepherd himself was the door.

That is the image Jesus meant when He said, "I am the door." Through Him alone man has access to God. Without Jesus, God would be at best a stranger, and at worst an enemy. But through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we are shown God's grace. We see His merciful nature in His loving sacrifice, even to death on a cross. And through faith in that redeeming sacrifice He becomes the very door of our salvation.

Prayer: God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son didst raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Peter who had sworn undying allegiance to his Lord was also the same disciple who denied his Lord three times. Jesus had now risen, and the time had come to confront Peter, as well as restore him. Jesus questions Peter three times in succession, paralleling the three denials. Pointedly, He addresses Peter as “Simon, son of Jonah,” rather than “Peter, the rock.” We also see an interesting word choice in Jesus’ first question, “. . .do you love Me more than these?” Jesus uses the Greek word for love, *agapas*. It is the same word He uses in John 3:16, highlighting the unlimited bounds of God’s love. Peter’s response is honest and truthful: “Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.” Two things stand out. First, Peter confesses that God knows what is truly in Peter’s heart. Second, the word for “love” Peter uses in his response is not *agape*, but rather *philo*—the love of a trusted friend. Thus, Peter is admitting his love has not, and never will measure up to God’s standard, hard as he may try.

Of course, this is also true of us. God calls us to love Him and our neighbor with unconditional love—a love we are to strive for, but unfortunately can never achieve. That is why we pray that God continues to work in us, that we may love Him and our neighbor with a Christ-like love, and to forgive us for the many times we fall short.

Prayer: God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son didst raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

No matter who the individual appointed to be God's shepherd, he will always fall short. Pastors from any age cannot come close to the standards of the ultimate Shepherd, Jesus Christ. That is why we hear these words that God speaks through the prophet Ezekiel: "I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken. I will make a covenant of peace with them..." Obviously, this cannot mean King David of the Old Testament, for he has already been dead over four centuries. Rather, Jesus will be the new and better King David, who will always rule wisely and compassionately, bringing peace to troubled humanity. This harkens back to Monday's reading, where we see the Good Shepherd literally laying down His life for the sheep.

The "peace" to which our text refers is not just an outward or worldly peace, but an inward and spiritual peace. When we have peace with God we are restored to the Father through faith in what Christ has done. In the resurrection we will see peace in the fullest sense, without doubt or worry. Everything will once again be in harmony—a new Eden where we will walk with God in complete and eternal peace.

Prayer: God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son didst raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Jesus is a hunter. But He does not hunt that He may find and kill, but that He may find and save. His very nature compels Him to do so. And since there are always plenty of lost sheep to be found, He is incessantly active. Scripture is replete with examples that highlight His restless diligence. Whether it be a lost coin, a lost son, or a lost sheep, Jesus wants us to know how much He values each and every one of us. We hear His words in today's reading about the one lost sheep: "And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

Likewise, we are to have the same attitude in seeking the lost. Out of loving concern for the eternal welfare of our brothers and sisters, we are called to seek those who have gone astray. It is this mindset, then, that sets the stage for the next verses which address how we are to admonish those who have drifted from the flock.

Prayer: God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son didst raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

God tells us through the prophet Jeremiah that He has not been pleased with the shepherds who have governed Israel. They will be removed and punished for their lack of faithful care, and God will step in and appoint new watchmen: “I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,” says the Lord.” In fact, God Himself will be the ultimate Shepherd—the “Righteous Branch”—who will not only rule with righteousness, but will *become* our righteousness. This prophecy points ahead toward Jesus becoming incarnate in human flesh.

As our perfect replacement from womb to tomb, Jesus would live the sinless life we could never lead. By His perfect life and sacrificial death Jesus Christ would be the atonement for all mankind. Through the gift of faith, given to us by the Word and the Spirit, that righteousness becomes ours. May we forever marvel at the Divine Exchange, in which Jesus takes our sin and gives us His righteousness. As a result, the Father sees us as He sees His own Son. “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:11).

Prayer: God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son didst raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

SATURDAY, MAY 7: HEBREWS 13:7–21 MISERICORDIAS DOMINI

The theme this week has been the role of the faithful shepherd and the indispensable nature of his work. We have already seen that such men are few and far between. Even the best of them fall short, for all men are sinners. But whoever is your called servant, you should respect and support him. The writer to the Hebrews states it clearly and succinctly: “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”

It is easy to follow the shepherd when things are going well and people are in agreement. But there would be no need for admonition if that were always the case. The difficulty arises when the pastor must adhere to God’s Word when he knows the reception will not be welcome. That is when the congregation must support him all the more, when his task becomes difficult. It is important to remember they are keeping watch over our souls—and must give God an account of their actions. At stake for all of us is eternal life, and therefore the faithful shepherd is one of the most precious gifts a flock can have. Let us pray that God would continue to provide such pastors in His Church, and that the sheep would treasure and support them.

Prayer: God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son didst raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Jubilate Sunday

The Third Petition. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Thus far we have prayed that God's name be honored by us, and that His kingdom prevail among us; in which two points is comprehended all that pertains to the honor of God and to our salvation, that we come into the ownership of God and all His possessions. But the great need is, that we cling firmly to them, and do not suffer ourselves to be torn therefrom. For as in a good government it is not only necessary that there be those who build and govern well, but also those who make defense, afford protection and maintain it in security; so here also, although we have prayed for the things of the greatest need, viz. for the Gospel, faith and the Holy Ghost, that He may govern and redeem us from the power of the devil, we must also pray that His will be done. For if we are to abide therein, there will be wonderful encounters, so that, on account of them, we must suffer many thrusts and blows from everything that ventures to oppose and prevent the fulfillment of the two petitions that precede.

For no one believes how the devil opposes and exerts all his powers against them, and cannot suffer that anyone teach or believe aright. And it hurts him beyond measure to suffer his lies and abominations, that have been honored under the most specious pretexts of the divine Name, to be exposed, and that he be disgraced, and besides be driven out of the heart, and suffer such a breach to be made in his kingdom. Therefore, with all his power and might he chafes and rages as a fierce enemy, and marshals all his subjects, and enlists the world and our own flesh as his allies. For our flesh is in itself indolent and inclined to evil, even though we have accepted and believe the Word of God. The world, too, is perverse and wicked; this he incites against us in various ways, and kindles and adds fuel, that he may hinder and drive us back, cause us to fall and again bring us under his power. That is all his will, mind and thought, for which he strives day and night, and never rests a moment, but employs all arts, malicious devices, ways and means which he can invent.

We therefore who would be Christians must surely reckon upon having the devil with all his angels, together with the world, as our enemies, who will bring every possible misfortune and grief upon us. For where the Word of God is preached, accepted or believed, and produces fruit, there the holy

cross cannot be wanting. And let no one think that he shall have peace; but he must risk whatever he has upon earth—possessions, honor, house and estate, wife and child, body and life. That hurts indeed our flesh and the old Adam. For the test is to be steadfast and to suffer with patience whatever afflictions befall us, and to yield whatever is taken from us.

Therefore there is just as much need, as in everything else, that we pray without ceasing: “Dear Father, Thy will be done, not the will of the devil and of our enemies, nor of anything that would persecute and destroy Thy holy Word, or hinder Thy kingdom; and grant that we may bear with patience and may overcome in whatever it be our lot to suffer on account of this Thy will, so that our poor flesh may not yield or fall away from weakness or indolence.”

In these three petitions we find expressed in the simplest manner the need which pertains to God Himself, yet all for our sakes. For whatever we pray concerns only us, namely, as we have said, that the will of God, which must be done without us, may also be done in us. For as His name must be hallowed and His kingdom come without our prayer, so also His will must be done and succeed, although the devil with all his adherents raise a tumult and rage in fury, and undertake to utterly exterminate the Gospel. But for our own sake we must pray that, even against their fury, His will be also done without hindrance in us, that they may accomplish nothing, and we remain firm against all violence and persecution, and submit to the will of God.

Such prayer must indeed be our protection and defense now, to repel and overcome all that the devil, pope, bishops, tyrants and heretics can do against our Gospel. Let them rage all together and attempt their utmost, and deliberate and resolve how they may destroy and exterminate us, that their will and counsel may prevail. One or two Christians with this petition alone shall be our wall against them, upon which they shall dash themselves to pieces. This consolation and confidence we have, that the will and purpose of the devil and of all our enemies must fail and come to naught, however proud, secure and powerful they know themselves to be. For if their will were not broken and frustrated, the kingdom of God could not abide upon the earth or His name be hallowed.

—The Large Catechism, the Lord’s Prayer

In yesterday's Gospel (John 16:16-23), Jesus spoke of a little while of sorrow followed by endless joy. Much of our sorrow in this life comes from not understanding God's plan behind our suffering. That was true for Jesus' disciples. It was also true for Job. In addition to the rest of his afflictions, he was sorrowful because he didn't understand why the Lord would bring those afflictions on him. And in his prolonged sorrow, he finally gave in to his flesh and began to assume that God's understanding was flawed, too.

But the Lord humbled him again with a stern reminder that the Lord's knowledge and understanding go far beyond what any man can fathom. If God had the understanding to design and build the whole creation without our help, then surely He also knows how to rule the lives of men according to a good and gracious plan.

Today's Scripture offers a warning, but also great comfort. When you're hurting and you don't understand God's plan for your life, don't let Satan take advantage, so that you accuse God of a lack of mercy or understanding. Instead, remember that there is a God in heaven who knows and understands all things, who created all things in wisdom, and who has redeemed mankind through the death of His Son and promised His believers a joyful end.

Prayer: Almighty God, who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and to follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Fasting was common under the Law of Moses. It was a custom regularly practiced by the faithful as an aid to focus, not on the things of this world, but on the unseen God and His holy Word. The Pharisees practiced regular fasting, about which they often boasted. John the Baptist's disciples also fasted, as faithful adherents of the Old Testament.

But the times were changing. A New Testament was in the works. And the practices would change accordingly, like pouring new wine into new wineskins. The disciples of Jesus did not fast while the Bridegroom was with them. There was no need for them to focus on the unseen God or to subject themselves to that bit of sorrow for the brief time when the Son of God walked visibly among His friends.

Even though we don't see Jesus as they did, we believe His disciples' eye-witness account of His resurrection, and we know that He is with us always, even to the end of the age. Though we still have sorrow, we also have the joy of the resurrection and of Jesus' living presence in preaching, and of His real presence in the Sacrament. Filled with that joy, we may still choose to fast from time to time, but, for Christians, it can never be the defining custom that it was under the Old Testament.

Prayer: Almighty God, who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and to follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Isaiah has prophesied times of great sorrow for Jerusalem: destruction and exile for their idolatries and rebellions against the Lord. But in today's reading, he prophesies times of even greater joy. After punishing His people, after bringing them to repentance in Babylon, the Lord would also have mercy on them, forgive them their sins, restore them to their place, and even bring the Gentiles streaming into the spiritual Jerusalem of the Holy Christian Church. Their sorrow would turn to joy.

Underneath the wreckage of the visible Christian Church as it exists today, the joy-filled invisible Church, the New Jerusalem, still remains. She continues to cling to Christ alone as her Savior from sin. She continues to give birth to new children through preaching and Holy Baptism. And she continues, through her preachers, to bring the comfort of free forgiveness through faith in Christ Jesus to those who are already her children, and to those who will become her children. In the midst of all this world's sorrow, the Church and her children continue to rejoice in Christ and in His resurrection from the dead, and in the promise of the future glory of the New Jerusalem.

Prayer: Almighty God, who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and to follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Considering all the sorrows we face in this world, let us not add to them by rejecting the path of love that the Lord has laid out for us who are righteous by faith in His Son. Instead, let us find joy in living according to our roles and vocations, applying the love of Christ to all that we do and say, in all the various roles that we've been given.

In the context of marriage, the Lord would have wives submitting joyfully to their husbands in love, as the Church submits to Christ. He would have women pursue the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. That's not the message that women hear from the world or that bubbles up from our sinful flesh, but then, the world and our flesh have never been friendly to Christians. For their part, husbands are not to be gruff or uncaring toward their wives, but are to cherish and honor them as their coheirs of eternal life, whom God made to be the "weaker" one, that is, softer in demeanor, less forceful, less physically strong.

All Christians are instructed to be compassionate, tenderhearted, and courteous. We are to turn from evil and do good, to seek peace and pursue it, learning from the Lord Jesus to find joy in serving, in submitting, and in loving.

Prayer: Almighty God, who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and to follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Not many sorrows can compare with the sorrow of death. Even Jesus wept at the death of His friend Lazarus and at the sorrow it caused among those who loved him.

But the answer to death, in God's good and gracious plan, is not to cancel it. Not yet. Even this sorrowful separation is woven into His grand design. Lazarus had to die from his illness so that Jesus' glory might be made known. Lazarus' sisters had to suffer his loss for a few days in order to gain a revelation of Christ's power over death, prior to His own death and resurrection. No, Jesus would not prevent the death of Lazarus. Instead, He would use it to strengthen the faith of many. They had to be sorrowful for a little while, but then they would see the glory of the Lord and rejoice.

Our "little while" of sorrow over the death of our loved ones will last longer than the sorrow of Mary and Martha, until He who is the Resurrection and the Life comes in glory and speaks over the graves of mankind. But we have His assurance that even death will work together for good to those who love Him. Look to Christ, the Conqueror of death, and let the joy of the coming resurrection temper the sorrow of this temporary loss.

Prayer: Almighty God, who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and to follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In today's reading, Jesus' words to His disciples in Sunday's Gospel find their ultimate fulfillment: "Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you" (John 16:22).

It is for good reason that this life is referred to as the "great tribulation" for Christians. We are surrounded by sin, including our own. We are hounded by the devil and hated by the world. There are wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, and pestilences, false prophets, and faithless friends. But St. John was allowed to see how the story ends for those who, in the midst of this great tribulation, have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For those who have believed in Christ Jesus and have been united with Him in Holy Baptism, there is endless joy after this time of sorrow. There is perfect peace and rest, perfect praise and worship. When those baptized believers fall asleep here, they awake to that endless joy, and to the face of the One who will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Let this vision of the glory that awaits all believers accompany you in every time of sorrow. The words are true. The witness is faithful. And the joy will be both real and permanent.

Prayer: Almighty God, who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and to follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Cantate Sunday

Chapter V. Of the Law and the Gospel.

Statement of the Controversy.

Whether the preaching of the Holy Gospel be properly not only a preaching of grace, which announces the forgiveness of sins, but also a preaching of repentance and censure, rebuking unbelief, which is rebuked not in the Law, but alone through the Gospel.

Affirmative.

Pure Doctrine of God's Word.

1. We believe, teach and confess that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to be maintained in the Church as an especially brilliant light, whereby, according to the admonition of St. Paul, the Word of God may be rightly divided.

2. We believe, teach and confess that the Law is properly a divine doctrine, which teaches what is right and pleasing to God, and reproves everything that is sin and contrary to God's will.

3. Therefore everything that reproves sin is and belongs to the preaching of the Law.

4. But the Gospel is properly such a doctrine as teaches what man who has not observed the Law, and therefore is condemned by it, should believe, viz. that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins, and, without any merit of theirs [no merit of the sinner intervening], has obtained and acquired forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life.

5. But since the term "Gospel" is not used in one and the same sense in the Holy Scriptures, on account of which this dissension originally arose, we believe, teach and confess that if by the term "Gospel" the entire doctrine of Christ be understood, which He proposed in His ministry, as also did His apostles (in which sense it is employed, Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21), it is correctly said and written that the Gospel is a preaching of repentance and of the forgiveness of sins.

6. But if the Law and the Gospel be contrasted with one another, as Moses himself is called a teacher of the Law, and Christ a preacher of the Gospel, we believe, teach and confess that the Gospel is not a preaching of

repentance or reproof, but properly nothing else than a preaching of consolation, and a joyful message which does not reprove or terrify, but against the terrors of the Law consoles consciences, points alone to the merits of Christ, and again comforts them by the precious preaching of the grace and favor of God, obtained through Christ's merit.

7. As to the revelation of sin, because the veil of Moses hangs before the eyes of all men as long as they hear the bare preaching of the Law, and nothing concerning Christ, and therefore do not learn from the Law to perceive their sins aright, but either become presumptuous hypocrites as the Pharisees, or despair as did Judas; Christ takes the Law into His hands, and explains it spiritually (Matt. 5:21 sqq.; Rom. 7:14). And thus the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners (Rom. 1:18), how great it is; by this means they are instructed in the Law, and then from it first learn to know aright their sins—a knowledge to which Moses never could coerce them.

Therefore, although the preaching of the suffering and death of Christ, the Son of God, is an earnest and terrible proclamation and declaration of God's wrath, whereby men are for the first time led aright to the Law, after the veil of Moses has been removed from them, so that they first know aright how great things God in His Law requires of us, nothing of which we can observe, and therefore should seek all our righteousness in Christ—

8. Yet, as long as all this (namely, Christ's suffering and death) proclaims God's wrath and terrifies man, it is still not properly the preaching of the Gospel, but the preaching of Moses and the Law, and therefore a "strange work" of Christ, whereby He attains His proper office, i.e. to preach grace, console and quicken, which is properly the preaching of the Gospel.

Negative.

Contrary Doctrine which is Rejected.

Therefore we reject and regard incorrect and injurious the dogma that the Gospel is properly a preaching of repentance or reproof, and not alone a preaching of grace. For thereby the Gospel is again converted into a law, the merit of Christ and the Holy Scriptures obscured, Christians robbed of true consolation, and the door opened again to the Papacy.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

The Lord’s gracious promises to His people—to choose them, to bless them, to sustain and protect them—give us hope when we are surrounded by our spiritual adversaries. The mercy and grace which God promises to those who love Him go hand-in-hand with the destruction of those who hate Him and who persecute His chosen generation. When God promised the people of Israel that He would deliver them from bondage and bring them to their own land, He also promised to overthrow their enemies and to put the oppressors in subjection. The Church has the fulfillment of these promises in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, its Head. When He rose from the dead, He not only brought life and immortality to light for all believers, but He crushed the head of that old serpent, the devil, and triumphed over death and the grave. While we still must contend with our spiritual adversaries here in this life, we know that the battle has already been won by the Captain of our Salvation, who shares this victory with us.

St. Paul writes to the Romans, “The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.” As God finally delivered Israel from their captivity and brought them back to their own country, we look forward to the day when Christ will lead us out of this old world, into the Paradise of the world to come.

Prayer: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise, that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The New Creation is built upon the foundation of Christ's vicarious atonement for the sins of the world. In His great Passion, He died the death of us all. In the Resurrection, He brought us newness of life. For the sake of His suffering, death, and resurrection, the Lord forgives the sins of all those who are penitent. When God forgives sin, they are forgotten—He places them behind His back (Isaiah 38:17), He casts them into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19), and He removes them from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). In short, everything is as pristine as it was in the beginning, all because Christ, the Second Adam, has atoned for the sin which the first Adam brought into the world. In Christ, therefore, we are new creatures. Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

We should not squander this amazing gift by living according to the flesh, but live by His Spirit according to His holy commandments. In order to grow this new creation, that it might spread throughout this fallen world, the Lord instituted the holy Ministry to preach the Word of Reconciliation. An extension of Christ's own Ministry and the Ministry of the Apostles, pastors today preach repentance for the remission of sins, in Christ's stead imploring sinners to be reconciled to God.

Prayer: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise, that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

People are not born morally neutral. While we might be able to maintain a certain level of civic righteousness, spiritually speaking we are by nature dead in trespasses and sins. We are born blind slaves to the devil, and subject to death and damnation. The only way to be saved from our sins and to enter into new life is by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. He is the Resurrection and the life. And so, Christ warns those who do not believe in Him, “If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” The Truth that sets us free from spiritual bondage is the Gospel of His death and resurrection.

Our natural corruption is so total, however, that we cannot by our own reason and strength believe or even understand this Truth. The Holy Spirit of God must work this understanding in us through the preaching of the Cross of Christ. The image of Christ, lifted up for our sins, testifies His true identity as the Son of God and the only Savior of fallen mankind. His resurrection from the dead is the public demonstration that He is the Lord of Life, “in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14). For the sake of our eternal salvation, we must continue in this Word of Reconciliation!

Prayer: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise, that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Through faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead we are made over into new creatures; our lives of sanctification are a direct result of being grafted into Him by faith. Therefore, our lives must reflect this marvelous reality. Just as Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, so He should be demonstrated in our works. Compassion, kindness, humbleness, meekness, patience, and forgiveness—these are all characteristics that describe the way in which Jesus has dealt with us, and so we should show these same traits to one another. No Christian is perfect as long as he lives here in this world. We must regularly put to death our old Adam, drowning him in the waters of our Baptism, and by faith put on the new man, “who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Colossians 3:10).

To deal with our brothers and sisters according to Christian virtue, we should always remember it is by God’s grace and compassion that our own sins are covered. As God has loved us, so we should love one another. We all need the mutual help and support of our fellow Christians to continue in holiness of living. And so, St. Paul teaches us, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Prayer: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise, that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The theme of Cantate is to “sing to the Lord a new song”—to break forth with joy and singing, rejoicing in the Lord for the salvation which He has brought to us through Christ. The sound that echoes throughout the Christian Church of all times and places is a victory cry—not the work of our victory, but Christ’s victory over sin, death, and the devil. God Himself laid bare His holy arm and fought for us on the field of battle.

During the season of Lent, our hearts become heavy with lament and sorrow because of our sins. But at the Resurrection, our consciences are comforted and our spirits are lifted by the Gospel of our forgiveness. As we say in the Divine Service, “We laud and magnify Thy glorious name, evermore praising Thee and saying, ‘Holy, holy, holy; Lord God of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of Thy glory!’” Now that we have been redeemed from iniquity, the Lord commands us to go out and spread the news of this victory to all the world. But, “Touch no unclean thing... be clean,” the Lord tells us. Let us not taint His triumph by continuing in sin, but show to the world how our God has cleansed us from our sins. May we demonstrate the fruit of the Resurrection in our lives of sanctification.

Prayer: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise, that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!” This is the only message that can quiet the terrified conscience. By nature, all we know of God is His power and godhead. To only know God as the almighty Maker of Heaven and Earth who is holy and just does nothing but terrify the sinner. St. Paul writes to the Romans: “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Romans 1:18). The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is not known to us by nature. It must be revealed to us by the Holy Spirit through His Word.

In prison, the Apostles testified of this Gospel in their prayers and by singing hymns. When the jailer, terrified by the power of God, cried out, “What must I do to be saved?” the Apostles proclaimed to him the Gospel of Jesus Christ and taught him the Word of God all night. Through this Word of the Gospel of free salvation by faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit gave this jailer and all His household true saving faith. They were baptized and they rejoiced in the peace which God grants to penitent sinners.

We never know when the Holy Spirit will work in those around us. So let us always be proclaiming the Gospel in our prayers and in our songs, testifying to all the grace of God through Christ!

Prayer: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise, that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Rogate Sunday

Chapter IX.

Article XXI. Of the Invocation of Saints.

The twenty-first article they [the Roman Catholics] absolutely condemn, because we do not require the invocation of saints. Nor on any topic do they rhetoricate with more prolixity. Nevertheless they do not effect anything else than that the saints should be honored; likewise that the saints who live should pray for others; as though indeed the invocation of dead saints were in addition necessary. They cite Cyprian, because he asked Cornelius while yet alive to pray for his brothers when departing. By this example they approve the invocation of the dead. They quote also Jerome against Vigilantius: "On this field," they say, "eleven hundred years ago, Jerome overcame Vigilantius." Thus the adversaries triumph, as though the war were already ended. Nor do they, in their stupidity, see that in Jerome against Vigilantius there is not a syllable concerning invocation. He speaks concerning honors to the saints, not concerning the invocation. Neither have the rest of the ancient writers before Gregory made mention of invocation. Certainly this invocation, with these opinions which the adversaries now teach concerning the application of merits, has not the testimony of the ancient writers.

Our Confession [the Augsburg Confession] approves honors to the saints. For here a threefold honor is to be approved. The first is thanksgiving. For we ought to give thanks to God because He has shown examples of mercy; because He has shown that He wishes to save men; because He has given teachers or other gifts to the Church. And these gifts, as they are the greatest, should be amplified, and the saints themselves should be praised, who have faithfully used these gifts, just as Christ praises faithful business-men (Matt. 25:21, 23). The second service is the strengthening of our faith; when we see the denial forgiven Peter, we also are encouraged to believe the more that grace truly superabounds over sin (Rom. 5:20). The third honor is the imitation first of faith, then of the other virtues, which everyone should imitate according to his calling. These true honors the adversaries do not require. They dispute only concerning invocation, which, even though it would have no danger, nevertheless is not necessary.

Besides, we also grant that the angels pray for us. For there is a testi

mony in Zach. 1:12: "O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem?" Although concerning the saints we concede that just as when alive they pray for the Church universal in general, so in heaven they pray for the Church in general, albeit no testimony concerning the dead praying is extant in the Scriptures, except the dream taken from the second book of Maccabees (15:14).

Moreover, even supposing that the saints certainly pray for the Church, yet it does not follow that they are to be invoked. Although our Confession affirms only this, that Scripture does not teach the invocation of the saints, or that we are to ask the saints for aid. But since neither a command, nor a promise, nor an example can be produced from the Scriptures concerning the invocation of saints, it follows that conscience can have nothing concerning this invocation that is certain. And since prayer ought to be made from faith, how do we know that God approves this invocation? Whence do we know without the testimony of Scripture that the saints perceive the prayers of each one? Some plainly ascribe divinity to the saints, viz. that they discern the silent thoughts of the minds in us. They dispute concerning morning and evening knowledge, perhaps because they doubt whether they hear us in the morning or the evening. They invent these things not in order to treat the saints with honor, but to defend lucrative services. Nothing can be produced by the adversaries against this reasoning, that, since invocation does not have a testimony from God's Word, it cannot be affirmed that the saints perceive our invocation, or that they especially perceive that God approves it. Wherefore the adversaries ought not to force us to an uncertain matter, because a prayer without faith is not prayer. For as they cite the example of the Church, it is evident that this is a new custom in the Church; for although the old prayers make mention of the saints, yet they do not invoke the saints. Although also this new invocation in the Church is dissimilar to the invocation of individuals.

Again, the adversaries not only require invocation in the worship of the saints, but also apply the merits of the saints for others, and make of the saints not only intercessors, but also propitiators. This is in no way to be endured. For here the honor belonging only to Christ is altogether transferred to the saints. For they make them mediators and propitiators, and although they make a distinction between mediators of intercession and mediators of redemption, yet they plainly make out of the saints mediators of redemption.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §1–14

Rogate is the 5th Sunday after Easter, and the three days before Ascension are called Rogation days. The words “Rogate” and “Rogation” come from the Latin word *rogare*, which means “to ask.” Historically, the importance here is that the people were “asking” God to appease His anger because of Christ and give protection from calamities in towns, and especially protect the early summer crops. This would include praying for civil leaders, as we see in our text for today. Notice the language St. Paul is using here—if he can instruct St. Timothy to lead the congregation in prayers for unbelievers and even leaders like Nero, then we too can pray for all our elected officials; even those with whom we disagree politically.

Bumper stickers, decals, hats, and t-shirts that bear the slogan “Pray for our President,” with Bible references to 1 Timothy 2:1-2 or Romans 13:1, are not inappropriate. However, an unfortunate practice has also occurred. Some post a similar slogan, “Pray for Obama,” “Pray for Trump,” and now “Pray for Biden,” but the Bible reference is Psalm 109:8, which says: “Let his days be few, And let another take his office.” This is not praying for the president; it is being provocative. We need to listen to our Heavenly King’s instructions and pray for our earthly leaders, so that we may live peaceable lives together with them.

Prayer: O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

We continue in the week of Rogate, and this is our second day of Rogation. Recall from yesterday that the words “Rogate” and “Rogation” come from the Latin word *rogare*, which means “to ask.” We ask God to remember His grace toward us because of Christ, to protect us from calamities, and to bless and protect the fruits of the earth. In our prayers to God the Father, we are blessed to know that the persons of the Trinity are always interceding for us. St. Paul tells us in our text today that the Holy Spirit is making intercession for us, and Hebrews 7:25 says, “Therefore He [Jesus] is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

In our times of suffering, we have hope; in our human weaknesses, we have the Holy Spirit’s help. In all of our circumstances, we have the assurance that God is working all these things out for our good. All this encourages us to pray, as Luther says in the Catechism, “as dear children ask their dear father.” Since we are reconciled by Christ to God the Father, we are bold to pray in Jesus’ name, with His intercession and the intercession of the Holy Spirit on our behalf, as well!

Prayer: O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

This is our third day of Rogation. Recall from Monday and yesterday that the words “Rogate” and “Rogation” come from the Latin word *rogare*, which means “to ask.” We ask God to remember His grace toward us because of Christ, to protect us from calamities, and to bless and protect the fruits of the earth. Yesterday we heard in our text that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. Today in our text we hear about Christ interceding for the Apostles and His disciples.

It is very important to note that we who are present-day disciples are also included in His prayers; in the very next verse after our text, Jesus says, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word” (John 17:20). In that verse Jesus directly refers to us—we who are present-day disciples of Christ, because we have believed in Him through the Apostles’ message. Even though Jesus knows that He will soon be betrayed, arrested, falsely accused, and handed over for death on the cross, He still takes the time to directly pray for us! What a comfort to know that we are constantly in His thoughts, even at His darkest times, because then even in our darkest times we can be sure that He is still interceding for us.

Prayer: O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Today is the Festival of the Ascension of our Lord into Heaven. There are four major Feasts in our church year: the Nativity, the Resurrection, Pentecost, and the Holy Trinity. We also have “festivals of our Lord” and “festivals of the saints of the church.” These are the lesser commemorations. There are over 40 “festivals of the saints of the church” (and other church-related commemorations), but there are only a few “festivals of our Lord,” Annunciation, Circumcision, Epiphany, Transfiguration, Presentation, and Ascension. Of these, Ascension is a crowning jewel, so to speak, in Jesus’ crown. When we confess the Ascension of Christ in all three ecumenical creeds, it is not just His ascending into heaven, but also ascending to a throne in heaven to reign! For example, “He ascended into heaven; He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty; from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead” (Athanasian Creed).

It is also important for our faith to see that the Ascension is not a reversal of the Incarnation; as if in the Incarnation Christ came down from heaven, and then in the Ascension Christ simply went back up. No, the Ascension is not a reversal of the Incarnation but its fulfillment! Christ does not ditch His human body when He returns to heaven. Instead, He returns to heaven still incarnate, but with a resurrected body. In Him, that is our hope for us as well.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe Thine only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind thither ascend and with Him continually dwell; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

St. Paul tells us that we have been “blessed with every spiritual blessing.” In fact, Paul seems to go out of his way to impress upon us just how blessed we are! We are God’s own prized possessions, and He lavishes His blessings upon us. The gist of it is this: God is great, He greatly loves us, and He greatly blesses us.

First, God is a great and wonderful God. He is not just a little god, with only a little bit of power and love; but He is a great and mighty God with an immense amount of power and love. Second, God greatly loves us as a treasured possession. He could just give us a tiny bit of the love He actually has. But He doesn’t do that. Instead, He gives us the vast supply of His love. He treats us as His prized possession, a treasure to His heart that He greatly loves. Third, God greatly blesses us. Because He is a great God and He greatly loves us as His treasured possession, He also greatly blesses us with His blessings. He could just throw us one or two blessings, like dogs under the table. But God doesn’t treat us that way. Instead, He lavishes His blessings upon us—He pours them out in super-abundant fashion.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe Thine only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind thither ascend and with Him continually dwell; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

St. Paul speaks of his conduct as a pattern for our behavior. In our day, biblical patterns for behavior have largely been lost and the true Gospel of the forgiveness of sins is often turned into a false Gospel of license to sin. If nothing really counts as sin, then there is no need for forgiveness, and therefore there is no need for Jesus to die on the cross. Thus, regrettably, the compromised churches of our day have become “enemies of the cross of Christ” because they render it moot. Likewise, Paul aptly pictures the leaders of such churches as “belly-servers,” since all appears to be done for the paycheck, rather than to please God.

Paul reminds us that “our citizenship is in heaven.” So also, Jesus tells us in John 17 we are “in the world,” but “not of the world.” The compromised churches follow the pattern of the world. But the true Church on earth is the voice of God to the culture, speaking the holy Word which stands over and against the sins of this world, ready to proclaim the true Gospel of forgiveness, but only when appropriate.

Instead of focusing on earthly matters, such as cultural standards of beauty and success, we look to Christ above who is our hope. We stay focused on the fact that our life is in Christ and our citizenship is in heaven.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe Thine only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind thither ascend and with Him continually dwell; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Exaudi Sunday

IX. Of Excommunication.

The greater excommunication [i.e., execution or banishment], as the Pope calls it, we regard only as a civil penalty, and not pertaining to us ministers of the Church. But the less [i.e., the so-called 'lesser excommunication'] is true Christian excommunication, which prohibits manifest and obstinate sinners from the sacrament and other communion of the Church until they are reformed and avoid sin. And ministers ought not to confound this ecclesiastical punishment or excommunication with civil penalties.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

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].)

Not only did Jesus pray for His disciples who traveled with Him and heard His teaching, He prays for those who would yet come to believe in Him through the word of these first disciples and believers. Jesus prays that those who would come to trust in Him through the preaching and teaching of God's Word would also be one in Him, and one with each other. John also speaks of this in his first epistle when he writes: "That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

Through His Word, God graciously calls His elect to faith in His Son as Savior and Redeemer. He grants them the forgiveness which Christ won for them on the cross, thus bringing them into fellowship with Him, with Christ Jesus His Son, and with all believers of all time who trust in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. In fact, the closer we walk with our Lord Jesus by continuing in His Word and holding fast to Him in faith, the more united and one we become with Christ and all others who trust in Him. Many seek unity among Christians and churches without regard for the teaching of God's Word. True unity, on the other hand, is created by the Holy Spirit and given to us as we hear and believe all that God's Word teaches!

Prayer: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In the burden of the Lord against Egypt, God also reveals hope for Egypt. Though Egypt be afflicted and smitten, yet many Egyptians would return to the Lord, and God will hear their prayers and heal them. This is fulfilled in the holy life and innocent suffering and death of Christ Jesus for the sins of the world. Through the preaching of the Gospel, where once God judged the land for the idolatry and wickedness of the people, God later showed great mercy. Many people of Egypt came to know and trust in Christ Jesus as the true God and their Savior from sin, eternal death, and damnation.

In the years before Christ's birth, Egypt became home to many devout Jews who studied the Scriptures and looked for the coming Messiah and Savior. Following Christ's birth and sacrifice, Egypt was the home of many who believed in Christ Jesus and followed Him. From this we see that even when God judges a land and its people for their wickedness and unbelief, His ultimate desire is to show them mercy and grant them repentance and faith in Christ Jesus, their Savior.

Prayer: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

From the Word of the Lord given through the prophet Ezekiel we learn that even when believers must suffer in this world—whether it be persecution from those who err, or suffering as a result of God’s judgments upon the wicked and unbelieving—God remains our sanctuary and protector. In His Word God tells us: “‘For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,’ says the Lord, who has mercy on you” (Isaiah 54:10). And, in Psalm 46:1-3 we read: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.”

Even when God’s judgments fall upon our own land and people because we have rejected the Lord and turned aside to evil, God is still able to preserve those who continue in repentance and faith. He shows mercy to those who turn from sin and wickedness and trust in Christ, who died for our sins and rose again in victory.

Prayer: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Our earthly bodies wear out and grow old. As God told Adam after he had sinned, we are dust, and to dust we shall return (see Genesis 3:19). Isaiah describes it this way: “We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isaiah 64:6). In this life we groan, not just because our bodies grow old and things hurt, but because we are yet inclined to sin and evil; we are unable to serve our God in righteousness and true holiness. As believers in Christ Jesus, we look forward to the day when we put off this body infected by sin, and are clothed with our heavenly bodies, made to live forever in holiness as a part of God’s eternal kingdom.

While we do not necessarily long for death and the putting off of our old bodies, we do long for life and the changing of our vile and sinful bodies into glorious and heavenly bodies, like unto our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wrote to the believers in Philippi: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20-21).

Prayer: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Though we trust in Christ as our Savior, it seems we often have difficulty trusting that God will hear and answer our prayers in the way that is best for us. We often fail to go to God in prayer over our needs, and then leave matters in God's hands. In today's reading, Jesus points out that even earthly friends and parents, though selfish and sinful by nature, will give us those things we ask of them, whether from genuine love and concern, or for selfish and sinful reasons. Jesus urges us to pray with confidence that our heavenly Father, who loves us more than any earthly friend or father can, will hear and answer our prayers in the way best for us. It is as Jesus said: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:11). And, as Jesus said, He will surely give the Holy Spirit as well: "... how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13).

Prayer: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus is a light shining in a very dark place. His Word shines into our hearts and upon our thoughts, desires, words, and deeds. It exposes our sins and erring beliefs for what they are. The light of His Word shows us the only way of life—agreeing with the witness of God’s Word, acknowledging our utter sinfulness, and looking to His atoning sacrifice on the cross for pardon and forgiveness for all our sins. Walking in the light is not to deceive ourselves and cover up our sins; it is to confess them and look in faith to Christ for mercy.

St. John wrote in his first epistle: “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7-9). And why? “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2).

Prayer: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.