

the Lutheran doctrine lives in the faith of Lutheran Christians, then it is possible to show a characteristic Lutheran Cultus, a departure from which by a Lutheran Church is blameworthy and cannot endure.”

Following this study and the “rule” of the General Synod South, the new Common Service is truly unique because it is not a copy-and-pasting of one liturgy, however faithful; it is the common consensus of all of them.

(to be continued...)

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



2022 Diocesan Family Camp in Florida

AUGUST 1-SEPTEMBER 3, 2022

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

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)

August 7 Trinity 8 TLH 517

August 10 (W) *St. Laurence, Deacon and Martyr (Red)*

August 14 Trinity 9 TLH 625

August 15 (M) *St. Mary Theotokos (White)*

August 21 Trinity 10 TLH 420

August 24 (W) *St. Bartholomew, Apostle (Red)*

August 28 Trinity 11 TLH 369

August 29 (M) *The Beheading of St. John the Baptist (Red)*

ST. IGNATIUS SEMINARY UPDATE—The Fall Quarter for the Third Year of the program of studies at St. Ignatius seminary begins Monday, September 5. There will be a Vespers for the commencement of this year’s studies at 1 P.M. on Sunday, and will be broadcast on the diocesan Facebook and YouTube channels.

SEMINARY SUPPORT—It is asked that congregations would take a door offering on Sunday, Sept. 4, in support of St. Ignatius. Any financial assistance for the seminary may be sent to “ELDoNA” c/o Rev. Michael Henson, Trinity Lutheran Church, 1000 North Park Ave., Herrin, Illinois, 62948.

SUMMER VISITATION SCHEDULE—Bishop Heiser conducted many of his visitations between July 6 and July 18, visiting our clergy and many of the congregations in Arkansas, Missouri, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota. He is scheduling further visitations to take place in September and October.

DIOCESAN FAMILY CAMP—St. Patrick’s in Chipley, Florida hosted this year’s Diocesan Family Camp. Approximately 40–45 people from various congregations of the diocese participated in the camp. Everyone had a very enjoyable time at the Surfside Christian Retreat in Panama City Beach. In addition to classes, prayer offices, and various activities at the camp, the Divine Service was celebrated at St. Patrick-Chipley. Our thanks to Pr. Warr and the saints of St. Patrick’s for a wonderful week! Everyone was agreed that a return to Florida for a future camp would be wonderful.

OVERVIEW OF THE “COMMON SERVICE”—PART III & IV Pastor Scheck (Christ Ev. Lutheran Church)

III. THE “RULE”.

The task of developing a liturgy, which would unify all possible Lutheran bodies in America was taken up in 1879 by what was called the General Synod South. They proposed, in cooperation with all other bodies willing, to prepare a new common Order of Service based on the original Lutheran liturgies of the 16th century. And this is the rule that they would follow:

“The common consent of the pure Lutheran Liturgies of the sixteenth century, and when there is not an entire agreement among them, the consent of the largest number of those of the greatest weight.” In other words, this common Order of Service would be built from the bottom-up by the best examples of the original Lutheran reformers.

IV. The Common Service of 1888.

In 1888, the “Common Service” was published. It was named, the Common Service, because it was “common” or in agreement with universal Lutheranism. The Service was possible chiefly because of the work of two men: Rev. Beale M. Schmucker and Rev. Edward T. Horn. Rev. Horn, 7 years earlier, had published an essay in which he compared hundreds of Lutheran liturgies from the 16th century to show their common consensus. These are his words:

“We claim that the ideal Lutheran Service is easily discoverable. It is to be found in the Lutheran Liturgies of the sixteenth century. We refer to these because they are the work of the representative teachers of our Church. They embody the principles of the Reformation. If it can be shown that the great representative teachers of the of the Lutheran Church substantially agreed upon the proper constituents of Christian worship and upon the order in which these ought to be used, and that those parts of the earlier worship which they retained accurately agree with the Gospel they restored, while the parts rejected were the outcome of the errors they opposed, and if it is evident that the same general conception of Christian worship exists and flourishes wherever

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 3: PHI. 1:19–30 11TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

St. Paul believes in Christ and knows that he is going to heaven, therefore, he has “a desire to depart and be with Christ.” However, by remaining in the flesh, the fruit of his ministry will be of great advantage for the Philippians. St. Paul has a win-win situation. If, as a result of his imprisonment he dies, then he will be with Christ. If he lives through this trial, then he will use his freedom to serve the spiritual progress of the Philippians. Of most importance to St. Paul is not the final outcome, but the process. St. Paul’s primary concern is that in the process “Christ will be magnified,” whether by his death or by his life.

Our Lord has given us great freedom in our life choices. In those decisions regarding the benefit for ourselves or others, consider how Christ would be magnified. In addition, St. Paul knows that the believer should be prepared to suffer for Jesus’ sake. Therefore, “let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.



Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

Article XXVI.

It has been the general persuasion, not of the people alone, but also of such as teach in the churches, that making Distinction of Meats, and like traditions of men, are works profitable to merit grace, and able to make satisfactions for sins. And that the world so thought, appears from this, that new ceremonies, new orders, new holydays, and new fastings were daily instituted, and the teachers in the churches did exact these works as a service necessary to merit grace, and did greatly terrify men's consciences, if they should omit any of these things. From this persuasion concerning traditions, much detriment has resulted in the Church.

First, the doctrine of grace and of the righteousness of faith has been obscured by it, which is the chief part of the Gospel, and ought to stand out, as the most prominent in the Church, that the merit of Christ may be well known, and that faith, which believes that sins are forgiven for Christ's sake may be exalted far above works. Wherefore Paul also lays the greatest stress on this article, putting aside the law and human traditions, in order to show that the righteousness of the Christian is another than such works, to wit, the faith which believes that sins are freely forgiven for Christ's sake. But this doctrine of Paul has been almost wholly smothered by traditions, which have produced an opinion that, by making distinctions in meats and like services, we must merit grace and righteousness. In treating of repentance, there was no mention made of faith; all that was done was to set forth those works of satisfaction, and in these all repentance seemed to consist.

Secondly, these traditions have obscured the commandments of God; because traditions were placed far above the commandment of God. Christianity was thought to consist wholly in the observance of certain holydays, fasts and vestures. These observances had won for themselves the exalted title of being the spiritual life and the perfect life. Meanwhile the commandments of God, according to each one's calling, were without honor, namely, that the father brought up his family, that the mother bore children, that the Prince governed the Commonwealth,—these were accounted works that were worldly and imperfect, and far below those glittering observances. And this error greatly tormented devout consciences, which grieved that they were bound by an imperfect state of life, as in marriage, in the office of magistrate, or in other civil ministrations; on the other hand, they admired the monks and such like, and falsely imagined that the observances of such men were more acceptable to God. ...

Wherefore our teachers must not be looked upon as having taken up this matter rashly, or from hatred of the bishops, as some falsely suspect. There was great need to warn the churches of these errors, which had arisen from misunderstanding the traditions.

—The Augsburg Confession, §1–11, 18–19

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 2: MARK 9:33–37 11TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

“He who dies with the most toys wins.” Yes, the phrase is intended to be somewhat facetious. Nevertheless, it illustrates the point that being the greatest or being first all depends on how you define greatness or “firstness”. We know that the disciples were arguing about “who would be the greatest,” but we don't know what their criteria was to claim greatness for themselves, or to dethrone the greatness of another. Their reasons were probably worldly.

Jesus does not chastise them for the desire to “be first.” He teaches them that the spiritual criteria for greatness is service. As regards salvation before God, we can offer Him nothing of value—even our good works are as sinful rags. We are saved by Jesus, the greatest Servant of all, who came not to be served, but to serve us, and give up His life for our forgiveness and salvation.

As regards our neighbor, we are to be a “servant of all.” Now that we are saved, our neighbor—even the little child in our midst—needs our service.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

At the end of 1 Thessalonians St. Paul has a boatload of commands for his hearers to perform. In verse 14 he says to warn, comfort, uphold, and be patient. In verse 15 he says to see and pursue. In verses 16-18, rejoice, pray, and give thanks. In verses 19-20, do not quench and do not despise. In verses 21-22, he says to test, hold fast, and abstain. Dr. Martin Luther also put a boatload of ten commands at the end of the Morning Prayer in the Small Catechism. He wrote, “Then go joyfully to your work, singing a hymn, like that of the Ten Commandments....”

Some think that since we profess to be Christians saved by the Gospel, we would be against the Law, or, at least, de-emphasize it. In reality, those who trust in the free gift of salvation are the only ones who are able to stomach the fuller strength of the Law. We know that we cannot keep the Law, but our failure does not lead us to despair, because we trust in the promise of salvation for those who believe. We pray for forgiveness and mercy, and for the strength to please God.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The “leaven of the Pharisees” is their hypocrisy, which is the sinful evil that leads these Jewish leaders to resist and persecute Jesus and His Gospel. Hypocrisy is one of the more despicable sins, especially diabolical when practiced by religious leaders. Jesus assures us that nothing can be concealed that will not be disclosed before God. In this context, the meaning is that nothing hidden through hypocrisy will fail to be made known. Things whispered in secret will be loudly and publicly proclaimed.

In relation to hypocrisy Jesus warns all to fear no one or anything but the One who has the power to throw you into hell. God alone has this power. Respect His authority, stand in awe of His majesty, and trust in Him. Verses six and seven give the basis for this trust in the holy Living God. God knows and cares for all the Creation, and if not one sparrow falls, nor a single hair from your head exists without His knowledge, how can it be imaginable that He does not care for you, who are worth vastly more than a single sparrow that is sold for less than a penny? When a person acknowledges that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus acknowledges that the individual is His disciple, and thus a holy heir to Paradise.

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

Once again Jesus' free and forgiving association with sinners provokes the dissent of the "righteous," the Pharisees and the scribes. This is the first of three parables Jesus relates in succession, in a divine effort to open the eyes of the dissenters to the wonder and glory of the history which is taking place before their eyes. It is the culmination of the Lord's holy promises to seek and save the lost.

The parable of the lost sheep makes it plain: God is in Christ seeking His own; these sinners are His creatures, in whom He has an owner's interest, for whose return He is willing to take trouble, at whose recovery He and all His angels have joy in heaven. The Lord's question posed in the parable is simply this: when Jesus admits penitent sinners to table fellowship with Himself, shall there be murmuring on earth while heaven rejoices?

This is the time of grace, which is filled with His love and mercy. The "righteous" dare not misunderstand or refuse to receive it, for the next time the Lord's promised Messiah comes it will be as Righteous Judge of all the Creation.

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

When Simon says to himself that Jesus should know "what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner," he implies that she is unrepentant and without forgiveness. Jesus corrects Simon by showing that her resulting actions of love prove that she already has faith and forgiveness. "Works serve thy neighbor and supply the proof that faith is living" (TLH 377:9).

Jesus tells a story about a creditor with two debtors. It is extremely important that Jesus' question, about which one will love more, concerns those who have already had their debt forgiven. In other words, it is a story teaching about the love which follows faith. This woman is a "sinner" for sure, but she is a repentant sinner. She is a sinner who has come to show her love to Jesus. Jesus approves of her washing His feet with her repentant tears. She has kissed His feet and anointed them with oil.

The Prophet Jesus does know what manner of woman she and we are. Through repentance and faith in Jesus, we are forgiven sinners, whose works only seek to love Jesus, who has forgiven our many sins.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 30: JOHN 9:1–7 **11TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY**

Sometimes a particular affliction can be seen as the consequence for a particular sin. But that is not always the case. Here this man's blindness was neither the result of his sin, nor of his parents'. Jesus speaks of a greater purpose! This man was born blind so that Jesus could heal him. The vocation of the Messiah included the performance of signs in connection with the teaching of the Word of God. In John 6:29 Jesus said, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." Having been sent into this world, Jesus is doing His Father's work of creating faith in the Messiah. The Old Testament promised His coming, and now with His arrival, Jesus is the One "whom He sent." By healing this blind man Jesus sheds light on who He is—Jesus is "the Light of the world."

Our life is in God's hands. We pray for a higher purpose. Whether we are confessing sins or professing the Savior, we ask that God's works would be revealed in our Christian life.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3: MAT. 15:10–20 **7TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY**

In today's appointed text we hear Jesus paint the portrait of the true man of God as a plant who has been mercifully planted by grace through faith by the Father. Thus Jesus separates His disciples from the traditions of the elders, which interpreted and expanded the Law in such a way that it enabled a man to transgress the commandment of God with a show of legality. Jesus leads His own beyond this hypocrisy, even beyond the whole legal conception of cultic purity, to a worship in purity of heart. Jesus is here transcending the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament while at the same time affirming the will of the Law, that there be a pure, undefiled people of God to worship Him.

This historic narrative of Jesus' teaching is also recorded by other Gospel writers. Verses 17 and 18 of this text are recorded by Saint Mark in his Gospel account of this exchange, where he, likely communicating with a more Gentile audience than Saint Matthew, records that this goes as far as making all food clean (Mark 7:18-19). This is valuable in demonstrating that the subtle differences among the Gospel accounts do not demonstrate error, but rather present a richness and depth that add clarity by offering the different perspectives of the various authors and hearers.

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

Today's text presents the parable of the seed growing secretly. The parable of the sower stresses the importance of proper soil for the growth of seed and the success of the harvest; here, the mysterious power of the seed itself is emphasized. The Gospel message contains its own power. This parable, which is only found in this Gospel according to Saint Mark, conveys both a warning and a word of encouragement to all of Jesus' disciples. However important their role may be (or they may believe it is), they are not to imagine that the Kingdom is their kingdom, or its triumph their triumph. The Kingdom remains God's divinely mysterious creative work. We are only laborers in His divine Vineyard; nothing more, and nothing less.

God's work is a mystery to the fallen mind of man and thus must be received through faith. He is "Lord of the harvest," man and his organizations are not. This serves as a wonderful encouragement for Christians, for however slow and unspectacular the "progress" of the Kingdom may be, the outcome is in the sure hands of the Creator. Men may pray throughout time "Thy kingdom come" with patience and confidence.

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

God's Word teaches a salvation (and declaration of righteousness) through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. In contrast to this, the scribes and Pharisees considered themselves to have become righteous by their performance of good works. Therefore, they made it a practice to regularly shun those who had not yet made themselves righteous by doing the required amount of works.

Jesus agrees with the leaders' premise that these "tax collectors and sinners" were spiritually sick and in need of salvation. However, Jesus explains that those who are sick people should not be shunned by a doctor until they become well. That would be unloving. Jesus is the doctor reaching out to the spiritually sick with the preaching of the Word of God to heal them. Through the repentance worked by the Law, and faith worked by the Gospel, Jesus' teaching at Levi's house is bringing righteousness and salvation to these sinners.

Were these scribes and Pharisees actually "righteous"? No. How could they be when they are without mercy toward those who need help? Jesus' correction calls into question their claim of not needing "Doctor" Jesus. We are saved by grace through faith, and not by works.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

FRIDAY, AUGUST 5: LUKE 17:1–2

7TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Article XI.

Of Confession, they teach, that Private Absolution ought to be retained in the churches, although in confession an enumeration of all sins is not necessary. For it is impossible, according to the Psalm: “Who can understand his errors?” [Psa. 19:12].

Article XII.

Of Repentance, they teach, that for those that have fallen after Baptism, there is remission of sins whenever they are converted; and that the Church ought to impart absolution to those thus returning to repentance.

Now repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is faith, which, born of the Gospel, or of absolution, believes that, for Christ’s sake, sins are forgiven, comforts the conscience, and delivers it from terrors. Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost. Also those who contend that some may attain to such perfection in this life that they cannot sin. The Novatians also are condemned, who would not absolve such as had fallen after Baptism, though they returned to repentance. They also are rejected who do not teach that remission of sins cometh through faith, but command us to merit grace through satisfactions of our own.

—Augsburg Confession

Jesus gives His disciples—who are to be the Apostles of their Lord and living extensions of His ministering of love by grace—a burden that only faith can bear. He teaches them to love in such a way that does not put temptation or stumbling blocks in the way of His little ones. Weak and wavering brethren might be overwhelmed or easily confused. Error is dangerous to everyone. Faithful teaching requires a loving disposition and calls for disciplined self-sacrifice, and Jesus commands His disciples to forgive a penitent brother as often as needed. He asks of them a servant’s humble devotion, working with a love which considers a duty done the least that love can do.

For anyone to walk in such faith and service requires that we request an increase in our weak faith if there is to be any hope of success. Jesus delivers this increase in the assurance that it is not the power of our believing, but the power of God in whom we believe that achieves the impossible. By His grace and Spirit we are made able to bring forth fruit in bearing patiently with little ones, forgiving without limit, and always trusting in Jesus.

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

SATURDAY, AUGUST 6: LUKE 11:34–36 7TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Today's text speaks about the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, of which we are called to be torch bearers, carrying that holy Light into a fallen, darkened world. Those challengers of Jesus and His Gospel who are asking for a sign do not need more light, they need good eyes to allow the holy, divine Light already present before them to enter. God has not obscured the Light of His revelation; Jesus is not a lamp set under a basket. He is a lamp set on a cross for all to see.

His words and works are clear for all to see and experience. But as the unsound eye deprives the body of the light, though the light is present in all its wonderful fullness. The unsound eye of unbelief can deprive the whole man of the Light which is designed to make man's life wholly bright, fully illuminated, by the gracious revelation of God. These words are a warning, where the various reactions of men to Jesus' revelatory deeds are all examples of the unsound eye that leaves fallen sinful men in darkness.

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

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27: ACTS 4:13–20 10TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

The priests and other religious leaders in Jerusalem continued to be obstinate in their unbelief. However, they did recognize that the work and teaching of Jesus Christ continued to have an effect on people there. God was continuing His work through His Apostolic Church! The unfaithful leaders sought to silence this message and take the saving name of Jesus from the people.

The Apostles remained faithful in their vocation. They preached repentance and salvation in the name of Jesus Christ, and they did the miraculous works that God had prepared for them to do. The self-willed leaders saw the warning, and they hated it. The Lord was saving sinners and helping the broken, and it took glory and power away from the ones who resisted God's truth.

The Apostolic Ministry still preaches repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus. It still administers the miraculous Sacraments and it teaches the saints to all do the work we have been called to according to God's benevolent good will. False teachers and self-willed adversaries also continue to antagonize the Church. They confuse Christ's lambs and they seek to protect their own sense of control. But we must obey God rather than men. To Him be all glory, in the name of Jesus Christ!

Prayer: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lamentations gives a picture of the results of persistent faithlessness. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), but destruction and trouble usually come before that final death. When God inflicts punishments and consequences on the unrighteous, it is one more way that He is mercifully teaching sinners to repent before it is too late.

Jerusalem was in no better spiritual condition in the time of our Lord Jesus. He came to them with love, and warnings, and teaching. But many had become vile hypocrites, murderers, and rebels. Our Savior even allowed them to harm and murder Him so that they, and all sinners, could see the Son of Man lifted up, the Lamb of God slain to take away the sin of the world. They could behold His vile state and nakedness and either repent, seeing by faith that He was truly the Son of God, or they could see Him and mock. To mock the Lord is to be in peril of seeing Him later as the righteous judge who says, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”

Our God continues to show His grace through the Church as He calls sinners to repent and believe in His Son who was crucified for our life and forgiveness. He continues to work through His faithful people so we also show His mercy to those who are vile in their sin, so they might be saved through Him.

Prayer: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Eighth Sunday after Trinity

Article XIV. Of Monastic Vows

As monastic vows directly conflict with the first chief article, they ought to be absolutely abolished. For it is of them that Christ says (Matt. 24:5, 23 sqq.): “I am Christ,” etc. For he who makes a vow to live in a monastery believes that he will enter upon a mode of life holier than the ordinary Christians, and by his own works wishes to earn heaven not only for himself, but also for others; this is to deny Christ. And they boast from their St. Thomas that a monastic vow is on an equality with baptism. This is blasphemy against God.

Article XV. Of Human Traditions

The declaration of the Papists that human traditions serve for the remission of sins, or merit salvation, is altogether unchristian and condemned, as Christ says (Matt. 15:9): “In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” And Titus 1:14: “That turn from the truth.” Also their declaration that it is a mortal sin if one do not observe these statutes, is not right.

These are the articles on which I must stand; and if God so will I shall stand even to my death. And I do not know how to change or to concede anything in them. If anyone else will concede anything, he will do it at the expense of his conscience.

Lastly, the Pope’s bundle of impostures still remains, concerning foolish and childish articles, as the dedication of churches, the baptism of bells, the baptism of the altar-stone, with its godfathers to pray and offer gifts. Such baptism is administered to the reproach and mockery of holy baptism, and should not be tolerated. Afterwards, concerning the consecration of wax tapers, palm-branches, cakes, spices, oats, etc., which nevertheless cannot be called consecrations, but are nothing but mockery and fraud. There are infinite other such deceptions, which we commit to their god, and which may be adored by them, until they are weary of them. We will not be confused by them.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

MONDAY, AUGUST 8: MATTHEW 7:22–29 8TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

“He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

Our Lord teaches as “one having authority.” What does that mean? When confronting a question of doctrine or practice, the scribes would quote various teachers, and then say what they thought the right answer was. Jesus was different. He just flat told them how it was. This, of course, is because He Himself is the source of all Scripture, so His interpretation is always the right one. He does not need “back up” authority.

More to the point is what He was teaching. Hear His Word. Do it. Build on this rock; do not be foolish and build on sand. And when we hear His Word, what do we hear? We hear words of Law. We are not to act as though we are free to sin; as believers we do not even want to. Rather, we strive to obey, trusting that the Giver of the Law wants only what is best for us.

Nevertheless, despite our best efforts, we remain sinners. So when we hear Jesus’ Word, we also hear His Word of Gospel. We receive the good news that our sins are forgiven. And we have the confidence that this is no mere pious wish. It is an authoritative Word of Jesus. Our sins are forgiven.

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

THURSDAY, AUGUST 25: MATTHEW 23:34–39 10TH S. A. TRINITY

Sometimes the ways of unrepentant sinners are clear and obvious. If they try to harm or kill those who teach righteousness, that is obvious. But there are others who break the Fifth Commandment, as well as other Commandments, in more subtle ways, and they are just as troubled as those who are openly wicked. Sinners might not seek to murder one who offends their self-security, but they often hate the messengers in a way that ignores Christ’s sermon in Matthew 5:21-22. 1 John 3:15 also states it clearly: “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

In either case, our Lord is not just brow-beating these sinners. He rebukes them so they might be saved from murdering themselves with eternal death! If they resist the Word and Spirit of God that brings repentance and faith, and they persist in their self-willed animosity toward righteousness, they are in serious peril of losing all chances for repentance and forgiveness.

Christ calls us to faithful thoughts, words, and deeds because all sin is dangerous. And it is far too easy to despise correction and ignore our own stumbling. Our Lord desires to have all repent and be saved, but some will resist until it is too late. Thanks be to God that He mercifully sends His Word and Spirit. May He continue to work through us all so that sinners may be saved in Him!

Prayer: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 24: 1 COR. 3:11–17 ST. BARTHOLOMEW

The work of the Apostles is held up by our Lord as an example for us all. We belong to the one catholic and Apostolic Church and confess the Apostles' Creed. Men such as St. Bartholomew are remembered because our merciful God has chosen to give us His holy Word and Sacraments through men, so that we can be built up as His holy people.

The Apostles underwent teaching and correction from the Lord. They endured fires and crosses as they preached the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen in the age to follow His glorious ascension. Most of them were martyred, and all of them will be exalted in the life of the world to come (Luke 22:28-30).

None of us has the right to quarrel about our greatness in God's kingdom. We are all called to be faithful and humble, serving in whatever way He prepares for us! The false teachers and hypocrites will worry about such things, but their works also betray the lowliness of their real position. They need to be warned and corrected, as all of us sinners do, so that they may repent and faithfully know their right place as true servants of our only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Prayer: O Almighty God, who hast built Thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Head Cornerstone, grant us to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine that we may be made a holy temple acceptable unto Thee; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 9: JOHN 7:14–24 8TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

How often do people with “alternative moralities” (often reflecting their participation in, or support for, “alternative lifestyles”) like to pull Jesus' words, “judge not that you be not judged,” horrifically out of context, as a means to tell Christians to shut up about morality? These words of Jesus, however, clarify further those other words.

We are not to assess others—let alone Jesus Himself—by some arbitrary “yardstick” that we bring to the table. Rather, we are to judge according to the Word of God. If God's Word commanded circumcision on the Sabbath, surely it cannot be sinful to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus seeks the glory of the Father, and thus there is no unrighteousness in Him.

We seek to know the Word of God that we may judge, not by our own standards, but by God's Law. And we judge most particularly ourselves. God grant us to look honestly into the mirror of the Law, to repent, and ever to cling to Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins.

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

“I say these things that you may be saved.”

Jesus has some rough things to say to those listening. He tells them they do not hear the voice of the Father, and that they do not have the Word of God within them. He notes that they diligently search the Scriptures because they think that they convey eternal life, but then notes that those Scriptures “testify about Me”! But Jesus is not saying these things out of an egotistical desire to best someone in an argument. He is clear: “I say these things that you may be saved.”

Today, we celebrate St. Laurence. According to tradition, in the middle of the third century A.D., the emperor commanded him to turn over the wealth of the Church. Laurence asked for three days to gather the resources, and used that time to distribute the Church’s wealth to the poor. The emperor was enraged and martyred him. Faithful to his Lord, St. Laurence was more concerned to do things “that (people) may be saved” than to save his own skin.

God grant us to understand ourselves in humility, to repent when we are speaking out of an egotistical desire to “win an argument,” and to choose our words carefully, that they may be according to the Lord’s Word. And in the hearing of them, may others also be saved.

Prayer: Quench in us, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the flame of vice, even as Thou didst enable blessed Laurence to overcome his fire of sufferings, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

God tells us through His prophet that we sinners and hypocrites need to amend our ways and our doings. As we hear often in the Church, we are only saved by God’s grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. Our ways and our doings do not save us or contribute to that salvation in any way. But our ways and our deeds show forth what He is doing inside of us by the power of His Spirit.

If we resist His Spirit, our ways will be careless and turned in on our own wills. But if we are faithful, even when our ways are rather crooked and stumbling, He creates humility in us that seeks the good, straight, and righteous correction. Faith makes us repent, rather than deflect with pretenses about “the Temple” or our appearance of pious works. The humble servant understands that true worship comes from the commands of God, not from our will. We have no right to say to the Lord, “These efforts, these works, these outward things ought to be good enough for you, therefore you should judge me as righteous...”

We are called to “hear the Word of the Lord.” That means He is the one who teaches us. He is the one who judges rightly. He is the one who warns us about our sins, but He also is the one who makes us righteous in His Son Christ Jesus. His Word and His ways are profoundly gracious!

Prayer: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY, AUGUST 22: MAT. 11:16–24 10TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

The unbelieving people thought they were wise in their own eyes. They judged God's faithful messengers according to their own understanding and condemned them. For this foolishness our Lord rebukes them and warns them. They failed to hear and understand the holy promises and commands that were passed down through the faithful fathers and prophets, but they still thought they were doing good in the eyes of God, even though they didn't know Him, or care about His Word.

It is a harsh warning to liken a people to those of Sodom. Even obstinate unbelievers knew what Christ was saying with that reference! But as usual, sinners are unwilling to consider that they are as wicked as the infamous examples that are meant to bring them to repentance. Folks like to call others hypocrites and Pharisees, but they don't like to consider that their own sin is just as deadly.

Our Lord corrects and rebukes us because He wants us to be His glorious Church, without the spots or blemishes of sin and self-will. That is why He continues to teach us to observe all that He commands, sometimes even with harsh warnings. He wants us sinners to repent, and He wants the repentant to grow stronger in faith and love so we may truly enjoy all the treasures that He gives!

Prayer: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 11: MAT. 12:46–50 8TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

“Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.”

Would you like to be counted among the kinsmen of Jesus? The question is rhetorical, of course; the answer is necessarily “yes”. Jesus tells us what is necessary for that: “Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven.” It is simple. Do God's will.

What, then, is the will of God? According to the Law, His will is what we know as the Ten Commandments, summarized as “be therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). On the one hand, we love God, so we want to. On the other hand, none of us can do it.

Our Lord Jesus Himself gives us another answer: “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:29). The people ask what work they must do, and Jesus answers by saying what work God must work in them. That work of God is faith. Dear ones in Christ, repent of your sins. Trust in Jesus and give God thanks for giving you the faith to do so. Do this, and together we will be numbered among the sons of God and be made co-heirs with Christ, rendering thanks to God forever.

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

“You...outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

I once saw a bumper sticker that said, “It’s not if you win or lose; it’s how you look when you play the game.” I hope the words were meant sarcastically, but sarcastic or not, it points out how superficially so many people live. Jesus is rebuking, harshly, the scribes and Pharisees. They are guilty of a particular kind of superficiality: they are guilty of superficial righteousness. Outwardly they look good, but inwardly they are as disgusting as it gets.

The world loves to accuse Christians of that too, and in some cases the accusation looks like it might be warranted! We cannot hide our hearts and minds from God. He sees it all. No matter how well we “filter” ourselves for the rest of the world, God sees us on the inside. He knows how, and who, we really are. “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

It is not enough just to look good. To stand before God we must be cleansed to the core. That is exactly what God has done for us in Christ Jesus; not just polished us up a bit, but made us new creations, complete with forgiveness of sins, new life, and eternal salvation.

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Tenth Sunday after Trinity

Of Chapters and Cloisters.

That chapters and cloisters were formerly founded with the good intention to educate learned men and chaste and modest women, and ought again to be turned to such use, in order that pastors, preachers, and other ministers of the Churches may be had, and likewise other necessary persons for the administration of the government in cities and governments, and well-educated maidens for mothers and housekeepers, etc.

If they [i.e., chapters and cloisters] will not serve this purpose, it is better that they should be abandoned or altogether destroyed, rather than continued with their blasphemous services invented by men as something better than the ordinary Christian life and the offices and callings appointed by God. For all this also is contrary to the first chief article concerning the redemption made through Jesus Christ. In addition, that they also (as all other human inventions) have not been commanded, are needless and useless, and besides afford occasion for dangerous and vain labor, such services the prophets call Aven, i.e. pain and labor.

—Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article III

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20: LUKE 16:10–13 9TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Note carefully our Lord's choice of words: "You cannot serve God and mammon." He does not say, "you should not," as if it were a moral question, but, "you cannot." It is a literal impossibility. This means that, if you think you have found a "balance" between the demands of God and the demands of the world, you are actually serving mammon and not God. Now mammon—earthly wealth—is not wicked. It becomes wicked when it becomes an idol. The man who serves mammon must always be anxious about getting more and preserving what he has. The man who serves God is thankful, whether he has much or little.

Even Christians are distracted by mammon. It is not always selfish, either. We see that wealth can produce much good in the support of the Gospel, the Ministry, and the poor. But the power of wealth is an illusion. God will support His Church with or without it. God often takes good things away to teach us this truth. It is this false trust in mammon of which we must repent.

Knowing our weakness, our Lord Jesus Christ conquered the idol of mammon by enduring extreme poverty and saying, "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). We are not saved because we serve God perfectly; we are saved because He served God perfectly for us.

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

SATURDAY, AUGUST 13: MAT. 21:18–22 8TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

"Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

Now here is a passage with which many have done a great deal of mischief. "Name it and claim it" was the buzz phrase. It was Janis Joplin's "oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz," elevated to the level of actual dogma. It is based on a terrible misunderstanding of prayer, which imagines God can be forced to honor the covetous words of our old sinful natures.

Prayer is not a magic formula for operating the "grand vending machine in the sky." When our Lord says "believing," He does not mean believing in the power of the petition; He means believing in the God who is being petitioned. And a believing, faithful prayer says back to God what He has given our mouths to say.

What God has promised, pray for that. What He has forbidden, pray against. And what He has not specified in Scripture, be tentative about. Pray "Thy will be done." Pray with confidence that it will be. And then, God grant us faith to rejoice in whatever answer He is pleased to give us. When we pray, however God is pleased to answer, rejoice that He is giving you the best possible answer, for the sake of the love He has for you through Christ Jesus.

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

The Seventh Commandment. Thou shalt not steal.

After our person and wife or husband, temporal property is the nearest good. That also God wishes to have secure, and has commanded that no one shall damage or injure his neighbor in his possessions. For to steal is nothing else than to get another's property wrongfully into our possession. This comprehends all kinds of advantage in all kinds of trade to the disadvantage of our neighbor. This is indeed such a widespread and common crime, but so little regarded and observed, that it exceeds all measure, so that if all thieves—who nevertheless do not wish to be considered such—were to be hanged to the gallows, the world would soon be desolate and would be without both executioners and gallows. For as we have just said to steal is not only to rob our neighbors' coffers and pockets, but to be too far-reaching in the market, in all stores and shops, wine- and beer-cellars, workshops, and in short whenever we trade or take or give money, goods or work.

As, for instance, to explain this somewhat roughly for the common mass of people, so that it may be seen how godly we are: When a manservant or maid-servant does not serve faithfully, and does damage, or at least allows it to occur when it could be prevented, or otherwise from indolence, idleness or malice neglects the goods entrusted to him, to the spite and vexation of master and mistress. And when this is done purposely (for I do not speak of unavoidable casualties), you can dispose of thirty, forty dollars a year, which if another had taken secretly he would be hung by the rope. But you even bid defiance and make your boast of it, and no one dare call you a thief! ... Likewise also in the market and in common trade this course prevails to the greatest extent, where one openly defrauds another with defective goods, false measures, weights, coins, and by taking advantage by expert arts and uncommon transactions or dexterous inventions, in short by getting the best of the bargain and wantonly oppressing and distressing him. And who indeed can even recount or imagine it all?—The Large Catechism, ¶[223-225, 227

FRIDAY, AUGUST 19: LUKE 12:54–59 9TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Don't wait; the gifts of God are available, don't neglect them. That is what our Lord is teaching. It is a most tragic sin that we do not value Baptism and the Lord's Supper for what they are: the gift of salvation. Time is short, all men will appear before the judgment seat of God, and God has provided these heavenly gifts to make us ready and at peace.

Emperor Constantine, who summoned the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.), waited till his deathbed to be baptized, because he believed, in confusion, that sins committed after Baptism were not covered by Baptism. This serves as a historical warning. It is dangerous to wait when the gifts of God are here and ready. Baptize your children as soon as possible and take the Supper often, because you need these things daily. Luther says in the Large Catechism, "Those indeed who are true Christians, and esteem the sacrament [the Lord's Supper] precious and holy, ought to urge and impel themselves thereto" (Part V:42).

The Christ says that we must "discern this time." This is the time of salvation. It is the time of the New Testament, when salvation is found in the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, which, in turn, are found in the sacraments of the Christian Church.

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

THURSDAY, AUGUST 18: JOHN 5:39–47 9TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

There will always be those who blame the Bible for the divisions in the visible Church. Everyone who reads the Bible should come to the same conclusion, right? Obviously not. The Jews and the Christians both read Moses, but as Jesus—who is God in the flesh—testifies, “If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.” Therefore, it is not the Bible, nor is it the doctrine of the Bible, that causes division in the visible Church. Rather, it is unbelief, which sinful men (sometimes unknowingly) mix with the true doctrine of the Bible. For this reason divisions are useful when they make it easier to identify the true from the false. St. Paul writes, “There must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized” (1 Corinthians 11:19).

Tragically, all Christians also suffer from the temptation to mix lies into the doctrine of the Bible. We must always be humble and on guard against ourselves, lest we idolize our opinions over the Bible’s doctrine. But how can we ever be confident of the truth, if our own flesh fights it? The Holy Spirit, knowing the weakness of our nature, made the Bible clear, as St. Paul explains: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine” (2 Timothy 3:16). He will always be on solid ground who lets the Bible speak for itself.

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

MONDAY, AUGUST 15: LUKE 12:32–48 ST. MARY, THEOTOKOS

Today is the festival of St. Mary. Her title, “Theotokos” (“God-bearer”), confesses that the Child which she bore is God in the flesh, so she is correctly called “the mother of God.” The Apology of the Augsburg Confession teaches that we honor the saints when we, “according to our several vocations, follow out the examples of their faith” (Article XXI). St. Mary’s faith was demonstrated in her being ready in her own calling for the Lord’s appearance.

St. Mary did not know she would be visited by an angel. She did not know the day of the Christ’s coming. But, when Gabriel appeared to Mary unexpectedly, he found her ready—that is, believing. “Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching,” says our text. Likewise, St. Mary is greeted, “Blessed are you among women!” (Luke 1:28), because she believed in the promised Christ and, by this faith, was ready.

St. Luke introduces St. Mary as “a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph” (Luke 1:27), which tells us she was chaste in her father’s house and faithful to her betrothed. In other words, she was quietly carrying out her vocation in the household. Her faith was manifest in quietly doing her duty, but doing it in faith. For this we honor her, and by God’s grace we patiently perform our own duties in anticipation of the Christ’s return.

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

TUESDAY, AUGUST 16: LUKE 6:32–36 9TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Obviously, the Lord Jesus Christ is not telling us to neglect friends and family for the sake of our enemies. He is calling us to repent of our natural selfishness, which is idolatry. He does not say “do not love those who love you,” but, “love your enemies.” In other words, love all men, but it is harder to love your enemies.

The question is: why do you love someone? Do you love them sincerely and unconditionally, or do you “love” them because you hope to get something out of them? Even wicked men appear to love the members of their own family, because they hope to receive some satisfaction from them. But sincere love is not selfish; it desires the greatest good for both friend and enemy. Therefore, the real test of love’s sincerity is whether it can love an enemy.

God is love (1 John 4:8), therefore He perfectly loves His enemies. He loved them in that He paid the penalty for their sins on the cross. All men, including you and me, are His enemies naturally through sin, as St. Paul explains: “God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Our ability to love others is not what saves us; Christ’s love saves us. Those who receive His love through faith are enabled by the Holy Spirit to love others also.

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

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17: MARK 12:38–44 9TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

When is generosity a sin? It is sin when it proceeds from selfishness and not from faith. The Pharisees would pray “as a pretense,” to win men’s praise. Likewise, when they gave generously, they did not care about the poor or about the work of the temple. They were buying the praises of men for themselves. On the contrary, the poor widow does not appear generous, but Christ praises her because her generosity proceeded from faith—that is, from thanksgiving for God’s forgiveness through Christ Jesus.

This should cause us to reflect: why do I give offerings to the Church or help those in need? Is it out of thanksgiving? Or is it because I want to be praised, or because I want the satisfaction of feeling generous, which is idolatry? Unfortunately, as Christians our motives are always mixed. As our minds are renewed through faith, we desire to return thanks to God. But, as we are still sinners in the flesh, we want men’s praise and we want to feel good about ourselves. Because of this, it was necessary that God selflessly give His only begotten Son to redeem us from sin.

We are not Christians because we are generous. We are generous because we are Christians, for God was generous toward us first.

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