

The Lutheran Herald

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Lententide

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The 1st of March has come and gone. To many it was just another day filled with the ordinary cares and anxieties of every day life, a day like all other days holding its fair share of joys and sorrows, achievements and failures. A day in which the sun rose and set; a day in which men were born and died; a day in which the masses passed another milestone toward their eternal destiny. Thus the world ironically viewed March 1, 2006.

However, to those who belong to the *Una Sancta*, the Holy Christian Church, the 1st of March ushered into the liturgical year a day of notable importance, Ash Wednesday. From the earliest ages of the Christian era, yes, even into the Apostolic period, the Church has observed the Easter festival. Prior to the celebration of the Resurrection feast, a special period of fasting and preparation was observed. The length of the fast varied. At first an eight day period was the rule; later however that time was extended to forty days. The forty day observance is analogous to the period in the life of our Blessed Lord commemorating His temptation in the wilderness.

Ash Wednesday derived its name from the custom of signing the foreheads of the faithful with the ashes of last year's palms in token of mourning, and today this custom is still observed in some branches of Christendom. Throughout the Christian world, thousands of altars have been adorned with violet, the symbolic color of penitence and sorrow. However, Lent in the evangelical churches is far more than the observance of mere external rites and ceremonies. Rather, Lent reaches down from the Cross into the innermost depths of man's soul. Lent is the thorn-crowned

Redeemer suspended on a Cross rescuing us from our due penalty of sin.

It is Lent. What does this holy season mean to you? What preparations are you making to greet your Risen Lord on the Feast of the Resurrection? Lent is the springtime of life, and as all the world of nature is resurrected about us, thus we remember Him who was dead and is alive again.

Lent should be a season of spiritual refreshment in all our lives especially as we walk with Jesus on the road to the cross. There on the Way of Sorrows we may rightly view the staggering price God paid to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil.

With renewed effort, the Church again holds forth the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. From Christian pulpits around the world, faithful pastors are proclaiming the everlasting Gospel of life and salvation through Christ the Crucified. The call of the Church is to proclaim what Christ has accomplished for us! That means She admonishes her children toward remembering their baptism, in which a person is united with Christ in His death, and yet raised to new life, just as Christ was raised from the dead, to live in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness. That means She is urging her children to remember the significance of baptism with water; namely, which involves the daily drowning out of that old man with us (repentance), and coming forth to live the new life of Christ, which is no more than Christ in us.

So now, to be more personal, ask yourself, "What does Lent mean to me?" If this holy season is to hold any

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Lent and Confession

by Pastor Paul A. Siems
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During the season of Lent it is appropriate to ask: “*What does it mean to be confessional?*”

From the Scriptures there seem to be four primary statements about confession. The first is directed at every human being. The second marks a distinction between unbelievers and believers. The third distinguishes between pseudo-believers and true believers. The fourth demonstrates the form that true confession takes in the life of the true believer.

I. *That at the Name of Jesus Every Knee Should Bow and Every Tongue Should Confess*

This is the proclamation of St. Paul in his epistle to the Philippians, which is the appointed Epistle reading for Palm Sunday.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11 (NKJV)

In this proclamation, the apostle declares that at the Last Day in particular every creature in the universe will of its own accord acknowledge the truth. When

Jesus comes again in His glory, all unbelief will be burned up by His glory. Every creature, every man, woman, child, and angel will bow down and confess the truth, that Jesus Christ is Lord. No atheism or agnosticism will survive the second coming of the Lord of glory. When the universe dissolves, with mankind and all the angels standing before the God of all creation, no one will continue in arrogance. Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess the truth.

In many ways, this has already begun even now. For example, who has ever heard of anyone cursing in the name of Allah, or Buddha, or any of the pseudo-gods? Why does Hollywood never use any of the many names of the other gods of other religions to make strong statements? Why is this? The answer is actually very plain. When people want to make a strong statement, they call upon the most powerful name available to them. When people want to curse or swear or make an emphatic point, they call upon a name that has the power to do that for them. People instinctively know that the names of other gods have no real power. But the name of Jesus, the one true God, who has offered Himself as the Savior of the world and has accomplished that impossible victory, His name has ALL power. At His name the most powerful of the demons are rendered powerless and must submit. Even legions of demons bow to the power of His name, as the demoniacs demonstrate when they come out to Jesus and confess Him as the Son of God in Matthew 8:28-29.

When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. And suddenly they cried out, saying, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?”

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The Unchanging, Catholic Content of Easter

by Pastor C. D. Hudson
Christ Lutheran Church, U.A.C.
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Dear Saints

As “historic” Lutherans, we have freely made a life-long commitment to all that an unchanged Holy Scripture reveals to us and commands us. Thus we seek not to re-define the Church Catholic, nor its doctrine and practices according to our opinions, which are so often influenced by our ever present sinful human nature, even withing the realm of faith. Even here it is the age old struggle of the Spirit against the flesh. This is why we continue to celebrate in a reverent and penitential way the holy season of Lent, which leads in to one of the most “holy” days in the life of the Bride of the Christ, the festival of the Resurrection of the only Lord and Savior of all, Jesus of Nazareth. This is a mystery, indeed one of the greatest mysteries in this fallen world, one that can only be recognized, and most certainly believed as true because the one true God, the Holy Trinity, is doing His sanctifying work in our life.

The commemoration and celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, the very one whom even Satan and his minions declared: “I know who You are—the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24) is truly a Catholic (that is “universal”—not “Roman”) holy festival, as it must be, for it is the very essence of the hope of the only saving faith, a resurrection unto the reality of heaven, even for us.

This is truth divinely revealed, a truth which we do not doubt, because it forever remains unchanged. And yet, because we are living in a time when it is believed by so many—even withing the Church Catholic—that what is newer or novel is always “better,” this false and empty philosophy is being both believed and promoted by many who contend they are followers of the Christ. This is one of the reasons why the “traditional” (read “ancient” and thereby out of date) liturgy of the Bride of the Christ has come to be looked upon as a problem rather than a blessing. It is contended by some that it “turns people away” with its old fashioned language, that it does not speak to the “needs” of people today, and this misguided way of thinking most certainly includes many who contend they are Lutheran. It mat-

ters not that the traditional liturgical forms used by Lutherans has consisted to an overwhelming degree of quotes from Holy Scripture, for Holy Scripture is considered (by many) to be out of date as well! The tragic consequences of the corruptive inroads of this “philosophy” was seen so clearly this past Christ-mass (for it is a Mass, that is a Divine Service in honor of the Christ) holy day season when pastors of some of the largest non-denominational congregations in this country actually canceled services on that most holy day, encouraging the members to stay home and have a “family day.” As I explained to the saints whom I am so privileged to serve, why should we be surprised? The visible “marks” of the true Church are not to be found in their midst! Remember, the only way a sinner can tell if he is in the true Church is if he is worshiping where “. . .the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered. (Augsburg Confession, Article VII). Indeed, in many of those congregations the Sacraments hold virtually no place at all in the life of the members and the proper distinction between the function of the Law and Gospel is consistently nonexistent.

Dear saints, I submit this is what will inevitably come to pass when the Catholicity of the Church is no longer recognized, in the life of an individual or a congregation or denomination, even one with the name ‘Lutheran.’ This is precisely what has been lost in the LC—MS. As this spiritual decay continues unrestrictedly, Church becomes something we “do.” It becomes something “we” want it to *be* and yes, to *say* as well. What the generations of the faithful who have preceded us taught and contended for—at times to the point of shedding their blood, or surrendering their life for—no longer have meaning for our life, our worship, our faith and inevitably, the confession we make.

With this in mind, I offer you the following in relations to the holy festival of the Resurrection of the only Lord and Savior of all, Jesus of Nazareth. These are words from just a few of the multitudes of the *faithful saints who from their labor rest*, who contended vigorously

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for the ancient Catholic and Apostolic faith, the same unchanging faith revealed in an totally inspired and inerrant and **unchanged** Holy Scripture, properly explained in the historic Lutheran confessions, *The Book of Concord* of 1580. These are words from among some of the multitudes of the saints who were blessed by the Holy Trinity to stand in the breach, to contend against biblical and doctrinal falsehood and compromise, that they might be a blessing to the saints of their own time and ours, for the truth which they wrote and preached about remains, and will remain unchanged unto the end of time: the truth divinely revealed in Holy Scripture alone! Tragically, men of this kind are fast becoming increasingly difficult to find in our day, for these men strove not to please man, but the Creator of all of mankind, the Holy Trinity. They were—theologians.

Leo the Great was the Bishop of Rome from 440–461 A.D. At that time, the Church of Rome was profoundly different than it was at the time of the Reformation, and most certainly now. Leo was a highly gifted theologian who contended vigorously and successfully against a number of heretical teachings which were disturbing the Church greatly. By the blessed intervention of the Most High, many of his sermons were preserved, among which are a number that theologically address both Lent and the Resurrection of the only Lord and Savior of all, Jesus of Nazareth. I invite you to “hear” and “prayerfully ponder” the catechetical instruction of one of the voices of the Church Catholic:

And so the LORD was handed over to their savage wishes, and in mockery of His kingly state, ordered to be the bearer of His own instrument of death, that what Isaiah the prophet foresaw might be fulfilled, saying “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulders” (Isaiah 6:9). When therefore, the LORD carried the wood of the cross which should turn from Him into the scepter of power, it was indeed in the eyes of the wicked a mighty mockery, but to the faithful a mighty mystery was set forth, seeing that He, the glorious vanquisher of the Devil, and the strong defeater of the powers that were against Him, was car-

rying in noble sort the trophy of His triumph, and on the shoulders of His unconquered patience bore into all realms the adorable sigh of salvation: as if even then to confirm all His followers by this mere symbol of His work, and say, (Matthew 10:38) “and he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me” (Sermon 64.4)

In sermon 67, Bishop Leo teaches that the Christ’s Passion was for our redemption and is a mystery and an example:

The fact, therefore, that at the time appointed, according to the purpose of His will, Jesus Christ was crucified, dead, and buried was not the doom necessary to His own condition, but the method of redeeming us from captivity. For “the Word became flesh” in order that from the virgin’s womb He might take our suffering nature, and that what could not be inflicted on the (only-begotten) Son of God might be inflicted upon the Son of Man. For although at His very birth the signs of Godhead shone forth in Him, and the whole course of His bodily growth was full of wonders, yet had He truly assumed our weaknesses, and without share in sin had spared Himself no human frailty, that He might impart what was His to us and heal what was ours in Himself. For He, the Almighty Physician, had prepared a two-fold remedy for us in our misery, of which the one part consists of mystery and the other of example, that by the one Divine power may be bestowed, by the other human weaknesses driven out. Because as God is the Author of our Justification, so man is a debtor to pay Him devotion (Sermon 67.5).

The most blessed event of that first Easter of long ago is not an incident in the past, but is in fact to be part

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The demons know the power of the name of Jesus. And so do men, even though they try to hide from the truth. Those who deny Jesus with their lives actually confess Him with their lips quite frequently. In fact, there are many people who do not know how to finish a sentence without in some way calling upon the name of the Lord. They misuse His name, but they use it nonetheless.

This kind of confession of Jesus is common to all creatures. It is not a confession that flows from faith. This confession is simply the unavoidable fact of reality. Jesus Christ is Lord.

II. No One can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit

There is a second confession of Jesus as Lord that comes from another source. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's heart to confess Jesus from a relationship of trust and reliance upon Him as not only the inescapable Lord of the universe, but also as the gracious Lord of Life.

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "**Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.**" (1 Cor 12:3)

Here we observe the distinction between the confession of unbelievers and believers. It is impossible to operate from any degree of reason and deny completely that Jesus is Lord. People may turn in arrogant pride to their own delusions, but it is not possible to deny Jesus in every way. The creature knows its Creator. Mankind especially knows his Creator, being created in His very image. God wrote His law upon the hearts of all men. This knowledge is displayed in the existence of governments and laws in attempts to maintain at least some sense of order and justice for daily living.

Yet still, the sinful heart turns away from the Lord. The sinful heart desires to make its own way in the world. Yet the truth remains apparent. Moreover, the Holy Spirit continues to call to the world through the preaching of the Church and even through nature. But only through the preaching of the Gospel can anyone actually encounter the Lord Jesus. This is why the Church is despised in the world. The Church is the very body of Christ and His perpetual call to repentance and

faith. The world cannot avoid facing the Lord while the Church exists. Therefore they persecute the Church and mock her preaching. The Holy Spirit comes to them with the Gospel, but they recoil with resentment and anger. Then they curse the name of Jesus because it is the only way by which they can ultimately refuse the Holy Spirit's loving invitation and urging. St. Paul demonstrated this in his life before the Lord's intervention on the road to Damascus.

Truly the Holy Spirit is continually at work calling all sinners to repentance and faith. For those who do hear the Gospel and receive the gift of faith, the command to be baptized is given, whereby the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the sinner to make him holy and pure. From this powerful indwelling of the Holy Spirit a true confession of Jesus is born in the person so that this person begins to call upon Jesus as Lord. This confession of Jesus comes from a heart that is moved by God's love to trust in Him and to rely upon Him in everything. This is the beginning of a life of true confession.

III. Whoever Confesses Me Before Men

Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. (Matt 10:32-42)

Since this confession of Jesus involves the person's entire being, it is absolutely impossible to keep this confession private. This confession of Jesus incorporates the person entirely into Christ and into His body. This newborn reliance and trust in God's love and mercy draws the person to continue in this Holy Communion established by God. The person is moved to seek the body of Christ where this true confession of Jesus is nurtured and kept alive. The true believer cannot exist apart from this confession of the Holy Communion of Saints.

Yet many so-called Christians try. Some tell themselves that they do not have to participate in "a church" in order to be a Christian. Yet as soon as the person embraces this lie, his reliance shifts from God's love to his own love. It is no longer the confession of

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Jesus that drives the person's life, but the confession of the person's own "faith." "I can believe" becomes the person's motto. "I can believe without subjecting myself to others." By this, the person begins to deny Jesus as Lord. No longer does the person confess Jesus and rely upon Him, but begins to rely upon his own reason and his own designs. Christ established His Church for the life of the saints. This person determines that he knows better how to save himself apart from what Christ has established. His confession is no longer one of faith in Jesus as Lord.

There are more subtle ways of denying Jesus before men, too. These seem very noble and appeal to a person's sensibilities. This false confession involves great religiosity. People who deny Jesus in this way do so with inestimable devotion. They build great buildings. They invest large portions of their earthly wealth. They sacrifice enormous amounts of time. They gather for most if not all of the occasions for worship that are available. They go out of their way to show love and tolerance for others. They are patient and kind to everyone. They smile and make people feel welcome. They pray, praise, and give thanks continually.

Yet for all this, their confession is false. They convince themselves that they are confessing Jesus, but in reality they are confessing themselves. They join themselves to their own works and their own confession. They make themselves a communal lord of the Church. They bind themselves to one another, gathering to hear "faithful preaching" and to confess the creeds and to worship God in love. They speak the name of Jesus. They reach out with the Gospel. Yet all this remains a false confession, a pseudo-confession. They are like those of whom John writes in John 12:42-43, "Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

Yes, for all the talk about confessing Jesus as Lord, the real lord in their lives is the associations of friends and family and church. So they confess Jesus with their lips but not with their hearts. They bind themselves in communion with those who practice falsely. Why? Because they love the praise or fellowship of men more than the praise or fellowship of Christ. In reality, they are no different from the person who becomes con-

vinced that "I can believe" is what really matters, and not the communion to which one is bound. To those who cry out and say that this is not of God, they cast them aside and drive them into little gatherings where the Holy Communion of Christ is recognized as St. Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Truly there are many like the Corinthians whom the apostle upbraided so strongly. Truly there are many who discern not the Lord's body, but their own body. They are convinced that they confess the Communion of Christ, but in truth they confess a communion of their own making. And so they go through all the right motions and say all the right things, believing that they are proclaiming the Lord's death till He comes. Yet they reject those who confess the death of Jesus as everything and embrace those who add to and subtract from the sufficiency of the grace of the Lord.

Nevertheless, as the apostle writes to the Galatians:

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

The pseudo-communions grow and flourish, but so does the dissension and strife. The focus becomes more and more on what they do, and less and less upon the confession of Jesus and what He has done and does for His Church. They form little Bible studies of their own rather than studying together and uniting in common faith. They pick and choose pastors and other lead-

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BOOK REVIEW

Review of *The Cube and the Cathedral* by George Weigel (New York: Basic Books, 2005). 202 pages. \$23.00 (hardcover)

The Cube and the Cathedral (subtitled “Europe, America, and Politics without God”) is a book worthy of serious consideration. Weigel, a Senior Fellow with the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., has made a career of articulating a “New Right”/American Catholic position on many of the issues confronting modern and post-modern Western society. Weigel has devoted much of his effort attempting to make Romanism liberally ‘democratic’ (in the classical sense)—no mean feat, considering Romanism’s record of political and religious oppression, and that none of the papally dominated territories of the New World became such ‘liberal democracies,’ and that European nations usually became more free almost precisely to the same degree that the Roman Catholic Church lost political power in those countries. Thus one can readily see how Weigel’s sustained defense of such a position, while having retained his academic credibility, identifies him as a writer of considerable ability.

The Cube and the Cathedral owes its title to the author’s comparison of two Parisian landmarks: the 40 story tall “cube” (La Grande Arche) and “the” cathedral (Notre-Dame, to be specific). For Weigel, the two buildings are emblematic of two cultures:

Which culture, I wondered, would better protect human rights? Which culture would more firmly secure the moral foundations of democracy? The culture that built this stunning, rational, angular, geometrically precise but essen-

tially featureless cube? Or the culture that produced the vaulting and bosses, the gargoyles and flying buttresses, the nooks and crannies, the asymmetries and holy “unsameness” of Notre-Dame and the other great Gothic cathedrals of Europe? (2)

Weigel’s ‘choice’ is what might be referred to as the ‘Visa or Mastercard choice’—why must it be one or the other?

Weigel does an admirable job of setting forth many of the ills of modern European culture. One chapter (“Puzzles”) consists of a series of questions concerning the current secular humanistic/anti-Christian ‘climate’ which now exists in Europe—a ‘climate’ that he observes is leading toward the death of European culture. This series of questions leads Weigel to what he considers to be “the” question:

Why did Europe have the twentieth century it did? Why did a century that began with confident predictions about a maturing humanity reaching new heights of civilizational accomplishment produce in Europe, within four decades, two world wars, three totalitarian systems, a Cold War threatening global catastrophe, oceans of blood, mountains of corpses, Auschwitz and the Gulag? (23)

Simply put, the answer is that Europe had largely left the old faith behind.

... history is driven, over the long haul, by culture—by what men and women honor, cherish, and

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worship; by what societies deem to be true and good and noble; by the expressions they give to those convictions in language, literature, and the arts; by what individuals and societies are willing to stake their lives on. (30)

To the degree that the faith was abandoned in Europe, the people were taking up other beliefs—beliefs which lead them to ruin. Now, having endured such devastation, many Europeans are simply electing for their generation to be the last generation. We are witnessing the decision of whole nations to commit cultural suicide by not giving birth to another generation. As Weigel puts it, “Europe has stopped reproducing itself because most Europeans have stopped going to church.” (164) The demographic reality is that the next generation of Europeans which are being born *today* are Moslem. What the Turk could not take by force at the gates of Vienna is now being given freely by a generation more concerned with their own desires and comforts than anything else. The children of Darwin and Nietzsche believe that man’s existence lacks transcendent meaning or purpose—reducing men (at least in their imaginations) to animals, they eliminate men altogether.

Weigel acknowledges “It is not the Church’s business to run Europe or European states; the day of altar and throne are long since past” (122). Rather, “What the Church proposes to Europe today is a challenge: a challenge to the moral quality of its civilization.” (122-3)

Weigel asserts that the moral vacuum which modern Europeans have tried to create will not endure; it is simply a question of what will take its place. In his estimation, the greatest threat in that regard is Islam.

But the moral vaquity of the Europeans

can readily be found within our own culture, and Weigel is concerned that “the ‘Europe problem’ will metastasize beyond the European Union’s current membership.” (137)

One can readily agree with Weigel that “great social and political questions are, more often than not, ultimately theological in character.” (142) Even when people try to drive theology out of the ‘public square’ they are doing so for primarily theological/metaphysical reasons. However, the choice which Weigel would present—the Cathedral (medieval Europe) or the Cube (post-modern Europe)—offers a choice between that which *was*, and can be no longer, and that which *is*, and cannot last. Weigel holds out the hope that Europe might be “reevangelized from their former African colonies.” (146) Perhaps. But such a thing can only be known to the Holy Trinity.

The Church is a Remnant in this fallen world. Sometimes the culture is more ‘friendly,’ sometimes less. In the General Prayer, we pray for the civil authorities “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” It often seems that all too quickly peace in this world vanishes like a mist. Perhaps one might say that Weigel has diagnosed the problem, but not the solution: he offers what seems a ‘theology of glory,’ with the Roman Church once more directing culture. What we need is the theology of the cross, which sustains the Church even amidst the sorrows of this fallen world.

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*Independent Lutheran Colloquium
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*St. Boniface Lutheran Church
Niles, MI*

*Pictured: Pastors James Heiser,
John Rutowicz, Eric Stefanski,
Paul Siems, C. D. Hudson and
Mr. Sean Fant*



Through water and the Word the Lord God gives the new birth in the Christ. The Lord recently added Nicholas Weisz and his mother, Shelly Weisz, to His Bride, the Church, as member at Christ-Richmond.



Confirmed in the Faith—Loren and Judy van Duyn, and Christ and Shelly Weisz, new members at Christ-Richmond.



Another enjoyable Christmas Eve program at Salem. Pictured: (back row) Tyler Garcia, John Heiser, Bradley Kelm, Ana Heiser, Haley Kelm; (front row) Hunter Garcia, Conner Garcia, Jonathan Henkel, Alexis Baxter, Noah Baxter. Kenny Kelm served as Acolyte.



CONGRATULATIONS to Greg and Jessica Markwardt, married on the Festival of the Annunciation (March 25th) at Salem-Malone.

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ers to suit their own definitions of the truth. They form their variations of worship style and hold a variety of services to please each constituent group among them. Yet they tell themselves that they are one church of one common confession of the same Lord. They love the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Yet truly God is not mocked. For He does gather to Himself His little flock who know no Lord but Jesus. They often have no great buildings. They often have few resources. Yet they are content and at peace in the knowledge that they confess Jesus as Lord, and only Jesus as Lord. They receive no recognition as a glorious and splendid church. The world pays them hardly any attention at all. They simply gather together in the name of the Lord Jesus and confess together, **“He truly is all that we need.”** They hear the same message preached at every service. They chant the same liturgy together. They wrestle with God in the Scriptures until they share a common understanding of the faith. They joyfully confess this faith together without wavering in understanding. They come to the Holy Communion as one body and proclaim the same Lord together and receive Him in unity. They proclaim the Lord’s death with the same understanding and reliance upon Him before one another and before the world. They rise up together and hear their Lord proclaim, **“Amen.”**

IV. If We Confess Our Sins

Finally, the true confession takes on a peculiar form in the life of the true believer. The true confession changes the believer’s heart and mind completely. No longer does the person concern himself with his own accomplishments. Rather, he counts all his own accomplishments as filthiness and confesses them as such. He not only bows the knee in recognition of the sovereignty of God over all things, but he especially bows the knee in confession of the sovereignty of God’s grace in Christ Jesus. This is where the true difference is observed between those who confess Jesus as Lord from faith and those who confess Him as Lord merely as fact.

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. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.
(1 John 1:6–10)

Faith in Jesus changes a person completely. The person realizes that he is without any hope apart from the saving grace of Jesus. The true confession does not embrace any works of man, not even works of worship. Rather, the true confession denounces everything except Jesus. The true confession is displayed when the person bows before his Lord along with all others who know Jesus as Lord and confesses with them his own unworthiness of anything good and of any praise whatsoever, so as to look up to receive forgiveness and healing and peace from the only one who can give it. When this is what confessing Jesus as Lord means to the person, Jesus truly is his Lord in every way. Then the person is truly free from every other obstacle to true faith. Then the person has only one real focus in life, and shares that focus with the true communion of saints. Then he recognizes the body of Christ and gathers in His body to receive from His Lord every good gift that has been prepared for him.

Conclusion

In the end, true confession has nothing to do with the one confessing. It has everything to do with the one being confessed. True confession is not really the work of the individual, but of the Holy Spirit. True confession is not about what a person believes and not about the person’s personal faith, but about the one to whom this faith looks and trusts. The true confession is entirely about Jesus, the Lord. It is His wondrous work in us through the Holy Spirit. It is His activity in the life of the believer to bind the believer to Jesus and to keep the believer safe in His grace, mercy, and peace. True confession is not really an action on our part, but rather the life that God gives us in communion with Him. True confession is the living expression of faith at work in us, by God’s grace. Truly it is a confession of Jesus, and

through this confession He rules our hearts as our loving Lord. How good it is to confess Jesus as Lord!

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what Bishop Leo calls “an undying lesson to the Church.”

And so, dearly-beloved, when the Son of God says, (Matthew 26:39) “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me,” He uses the outcry of our nature, and pleads the cause of human frailty and trembling: that our patience may be strengthened and our fears driven away in the things which we have to bear. At length, ceasing even to ask this now that He had in a measure palliated our weak fears, though it is not expedient for us to retain them, He passes into another mood, and says, “. . . nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will,” and again, (Matthew 26:42) “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.” These words of the head are the salvation of the whole Body: these words have instructed all the faithful, kindled the zeal of all the confessors, crowned all the martyrs. For who could overcome the world’s hatred, the blasts of temptations, the terror of persecutors, had not Christ, in the name of all and for all, said to the Father, “Thy will be done”? Then let the words be learnt by all the Church’s sons who have been purchased at so great a price, so freely Justified: and when the shock of some violent temptation has fallen on them, let them use the aid of this potent prayer, that they may conquer their fear and trembling, and learn to suffer patiently (Sermon 67.5).

Another of those faithful saints who have preceded us is Proclus, who became the Bishop of Constantinople in 434 A.D. and fell asleep in 446 in the same Nicene confession we have made. We are likewise blessed that a number of his sermons on the Holy Week festivals and Easter Morning have been preserved

through the passing of many centuries. In relation to the events of Good Friday, Proclus preached:

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- passion that cleanses the world.
 - death, starting-point of immortality, sprouting to life.
 - descent into Hades, bridge to a new life for those who were killed from the beginning.
 - afternoon, recalling the condemnation in paradise in the afternoon.
 - cross, healer of a tree.
 - nails that fastened the world to knowledge of God, and transfixed death.
 - thorns, the grapes of the Jewish vine.
 - gall, producer of faith’s honey, and accuser of the evil of the Jews.
 - sponge, that erased and wiped off the sin of the world.
 - reed, that registered in the heavens the faithful, and destroyed the tyranny of the serpent, the instigator of evil.
 - mystery, not believed by the faithless, but worshiped constantly by all the faithful.
 - sign, gainsaid by the faithless, but glorified by the faithful.
 - mystery, a stumbling block to the Jews, and folly to Gentiles, but to us, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God according to what the apostle Paul says, “for the foolishness of God is wiser than men” In order to annihilate death, and despoil Hades, and to bring to life those dead from the beginning— through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and power, forevermore. Amen. (Homily 11.4)

Dear saints, this is our true and enduring “heritage,” as the saints of the Bride of the Christ in our particular time and place. This is what we have been divinely elected to “believe, teach and confess” exclusively out of divine grace as the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth continues His saving work in this dying world. We dare not engage in that which is going on in so much of Christendom in our

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real significance for you, the first step which you must take is a spiritual inventory of your life. A wise man once said, "Know thyself." And as you look into the mirror of God's holy Law, do you find yourself to be a miserable and condemned sinner? Perhaps you might ask yourself some very pertinent questions: Have I always loved, revered, and trusted in my God above all things? Am I guilty of using God's holy name in a flippant or irreverent manner? Do I always use language in conformity with what I profess to be? Do I attend God's house regularly and am I attentive to the Word? When did I receive the Blessed Sacrament last? Where do I stand in relation to obedience, love, chastity, honesty, contentment, and the like? Am I really living by the rule of faith? These and a host of other questions one might ask himself.

When a self-evaluation has been taken, the one conclusion that we must identify with is that of St Paul, recorded in Romans 7:18-24. "I know that in me that is in my flesh dwelleth no good thing. O, wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Here I realize that I am a sinner and stand justly condemned before my God. However, the handwriting which was against me has been taken away by the precious blood of Christ. The Scriptures assure me in Isaiah 1:18: "that though my sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool." Thus I am driven to the cross of my thorn-crowned Redeemer, and as I look up into His blood-stained face I hear Him say, "Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven. Go in peace."

Immediately, you remember your baptism, in which God brings this beautiful gift of forgiveness and grace to you, announcing that He has rescued you from all sin, death, and the power of the devil. Through the kindness of Jesus Christ, you are motivated to continually hear, read, learn and inwardly digest the Word of God, and run to the throne of grace as often as possible to receive His very body and blood which was given and shed for you in the Lord's Supper.

This, dear friends in Christ, this is the message of Lent. It is the message of pardon; it is the message of peace; it is the message of eternal salvation. "Thanks be to God there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ" (Read Romans 8:1-4.) As you meditate on the

Holy Passion of Christ throughout the rest of this Lenten Season may you be drawn ever closer to Him, Who loved you and gave Himself for you.

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time, yes, even within Lutheranism, striving to make the Church into our own image, refashioning her holy and saving message according to our own desire!

The Christ has risen! He has risen indeed! Thus declares the only word of eternal life, an unchanged, and unchanging Holy Scripture, and the Symbols which we have publically declared are "a true and clear exhibition of Holy Scripture," the Book of Concord of 1580. The first is of the only true God, the Holy Trinity, the other is certainly of men, but men who were moved by the same God to *believe, teach and confess* this one saving faith. The Lutheran confessors were also true theologians!

By the Holy Trinity's ongoing work of sanctification in our life, we are both being continually moved and enabled to giving all the praise and glory for our salvation where it is due, to Him who willing suffered, died and rose again from the dead three days later, never to die again, the only Lord and Savior of the world, to atone for the sins of the world—even ours! This is the message, heart, and ongoing reality of the Church Catholic, the Church of which we are by grace through faith a part. To the Christ be all the glory, both now and forever! Amen and Amen.

*On Sunday, June 4th, A.D. 2006,
The Feast of Pentecost,
Salem Lutheran Church
of
Malone, Texas*

*will celebrate the 120th anniversary of her birth as
a Lutheran congregation, giving thanks to the
Holy Trinity for all His many blessings to His
people throughout the generations.*

*The occasion will be observed with a Vespers
at 4:30 p.m.,
with a meal following the service at 6:30 p.m.
The courtesy of an R.S.V.P. for attendance at the
meal would be appreciated.
Please call: (254) 533-2330.*