

Ash Wednesday
St. Matthew 6:16-21
March 2nd, 2022
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Treasures in Heaven

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew we hear from our Lord + Jesus about fasting. Notice He does not say “IF” you fast, but “WHEN” you fast. Fasting is to be done by those who cling to the Christ in faith. Our Lord + Jesus also tells us the purpose of fasting in today’s Gospel reading. The purpose of fasting is to turn us away from earthly things, to heavenly things. We are to fast in order that all we may learn to break ourselves of the habit of trusting in our earthly possessions, and learn to trust solely in the things that our Lord + Jesus desires to give to us from Heaven.

We are not to trust in the approval of other men. We are not to put our trust in things that can be taken away from us by thievery. Nor should we trust in things that will be destroyed by time; those things which will be destroyed by rust and moths. In short, we are not to place our trust in earthly things which can not only be taken away from us without a moment’s notice, but we are also not to place our trust in the things of this life which we will not be able to take with us when we die and enter into the grave. To place our trust in these things is fool’s errand. Why would we ever want to look for help from things that are such as feeble and weak as we are? Why would we take comfort from things that can be destroyed at any moment?

This is why many in the world are shaken to their very core when tragedy strikes. When fires, or earthquakes, or tornadoes, or floods, or hurricanes destroy our earthly possessions, the person without a firm faith in the One, Triune Lord God will feel that they have lost everything. And for them—for the unbeliever and those who place their trust in their earthly possessions—that is actually true. They have been stripped of their false gods. They have lost everything. They have lost the gods to which they have clung to in this life to give them hope and comfort from the trials and tribulations of the is life. The ironic thing is that the things that they looked to for comfort from trials and tribulations have been taken away by trial and tribulation. Earthly possessions do not stand the test of time, because they are all taken away from us in time. These things serve as very poor false gods.

Yet, we all find ourselves clinging to these things in our lives at one point or another. We like our earthly possessions. We like our homes and cars and clothes and furniture and money, and the like. Because we like these things we naturally grumble when they have been taken away from us by theft, rust or moth.

We even strive for the approval of other people. We all want to be like by other people, and when we learn that there are those who do not view us as we would have them view us, we are shocked and dismayed. This is why some have gone to great lengths to achieve the approval of other men. There are even those who diminish their Christianity in the presence of other people, so that they may gain that person's approval. Many false church bodies have distorted the teachings of the Lord + Jesus, the Christ, simply to appear more caring about the world (which is really no care at all). True care for the world comes in preaching the truth of the Word of God in all its purity, in order to lead the world to repentance and bring them to the truth. It is not care to deceive people for likes, especially when it leads to their eternal destruction.

False Christians certainly seek the approval of mankind or against the Lord God, but our Lord + Jesus in the Gospel pericope speaks of those in the Church who are after mankind's approval. People who think they are not sinners always put their good works forward as proof of how good of a person they are. This is why we need to be constantly reminded that our good works avail us of nothing. Good works cannot justify. Only faith justifies. Only faith in the works and merits of the Christ justify us before the Lord God in Heaven. But this temptation to seek the approval of other people is always before us. Those that disfigure their faces in order to appear to be fasting certainly have their reward. They have the earthly reward of the praise of other men. This praise is also very fleeting.

Our fasting is never done to gain the approval of other people. Our fasting is not done in order to earn earthly rewards. We give up food, and other earthly pleasures, not for an earthly crown, but we do it for a heavenly crown. The purpose of fasting is to replace eating food, or replace other earthly pleasures, with prayer and study of God's Word. In other words, our fasting is done to teach us to forsake the earthly things that can be taken from us in a moment, so that we cling to the things that we will have for all eternity. We fast to secure treasures in Heaven. This is certainly the benefit of what the reading, studying, hearing, believing and inwardly digesting the Word of God does for us. It places us into the Kingdom of Heaven. It takes us out of this world of woe, into the heavenly realms where we hear about God's great love for us, and about how He perfectly fulfilled the Law for us and suffered our punishment on the tree of the holy cross.

When we read and hear the holy Scriptures, we hear what our Lord + Jesus has done for us. He has baptized us, and feeds us with His Body and Blood in bread and wine. He cleanses us of our sins through Absolution. He has placed us into the Church where whenever two or three are gathered together in His Name He has promised to be with us. In this Church, among each other, surrounded by other Christians who cling to the Lord + Jesus in faith, He opens the mouth of the preacher of the pure Gospel, and fills our ears with all the treasures of Heaven that He has won for us.

Even though our earthly possessions can be taken away from us at any moment, the eternal heavenly treasures can never be taken from us. When we cling in faith to our Lord and Savior, we will never lose the forgiveness of our sins, the promise of our eternal life in Heaven, or the salvation from sin, death and the power of the devil. If we cling in faith to the treasures of Heaven, then when we lose all of our earthly possession, we can say, unlike the world, that we have lost nothing. For we do not cling to a false god which can be easily destroyed or stolen. No, we cling in faith to the One, True Triune God, Who will never leave us nor forsake us. He is our refuge and strength in time of trouble and sorrow. He is our Lord God in times of joy and happiness. He will never leave us. Even in the times when we turn our back on Him and are looking for hope and comfort from our earthly possessions, He is still there waiting for us, calling to us, to turn to Him in faith and receive His blessed heavenly treasures.

This, my dear friends, is what our Lord + Jesus tells us today in the Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew is the reason for fasting. It is to draw us closer to Him. We fast so that we may learn to put away our earthly needs, and cling in faith to our only hope and salvation—our

Lord + Jesus, the Christ. He has suffered and died for us; He paid our ransom on the tree of the holy cross. His perfect and innocent suffering and death bought us back from sin, death and the power of the devil. He did all these things to give us everlasting heavenly treasures which can never be taken away from us. Therefore, my dear friends, when you fast during this Lenten season, lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, by taking the opportunity to read and study God's Word, and to spend time in prayer and conversation with the Lord God, asking Him for forgiveness of your sins, and thanking Him for all His heavenly treasures which He has won for you, and desires to give to you.

Through Him we will receive a crown of eternal life. A crown that will never be taken from us but that we will have for all eternity. May the Lord + Jesus, the Christ, grant this unto us all. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!