

**Clergy of the ELDoNA,  
affiliated congregations and missions**

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Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

**Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen**

Good Shepherd L.C., Tony, WI; Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI; Peace L.C., Ironwood, MI; Pure Blessings Lutheran Church, Brandon, WI

**Rev. Jerald Dulas**

Sts. Peter & Paul L. C., Simpsonville, SC; All Saints Lutheran Mission, Myrtle Beach, SC; St. Michael & All Angels Lutheran Mission, Martinez, GA; St. Bartholomew Lutheran Mission, Fort Myers, FL; St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC, Ormond Beach, FL

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Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

**Rev. Kent Heimbigner**

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Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

**Rev. Michael Henson**

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Lamb of God Ev. Lutheran Church, Rogers, AR

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St. Boniface Lutheran Church, Niles, MI

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Christ Lutheran Church, Richmond, MO

**Rev. Eric Stefanski**

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Harrison, AR; Emmanuel Lutheran Mission, Conway, AR

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

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**Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun**

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

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St. Henry Lutheran Mission (WI and MI), especially Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI

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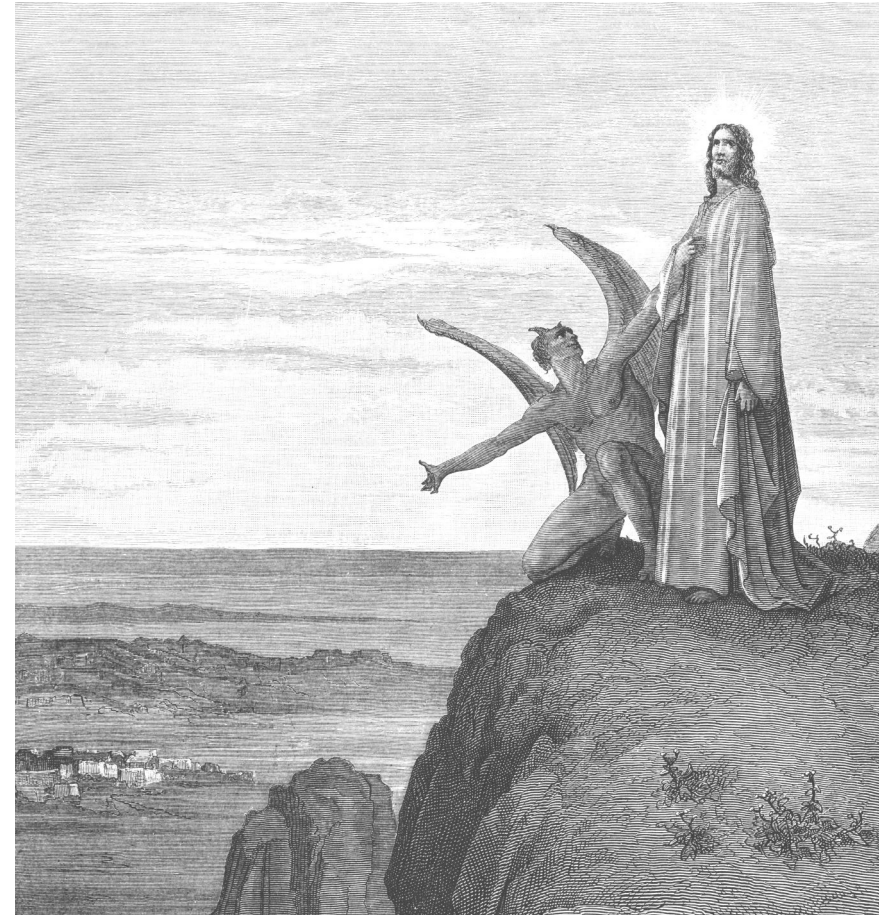
Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

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**Rev. Daniel Mensing**

# THE LUTHERAN HERALD



**MARCH 3–APRIL 5, 2025**

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

## The Calendar

*The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941): TLH; 2022 Supplement: ASBH

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

March 2	Quinquagesima	ASBH 18
March 5	Ash Wednesday (D.S.)	ASBH 19
March 9	Invocavit (Lent 1)	ASBH 20
March 12 (W)	Ember Wednesday in Lent	
March 14 (F)	Ember Friday in Lent	
March 15 (S)	Ember Saturday in Lent	
March 16	Reminiscere (Lent 2)	ASBH 21
March 17 (M)	St. Patrick, Bishop & Confessor	ASBH 81
March 19 (W)	St. Joseph	ASBH 83(Synod Workbook) (Also in this issue of <i>The Lutheran Herald</i> )
March 23	Oculi (Lent 3)	ASBH 22
March 25 (T)	The Annunciation	ASBH 83 (Supplement)
March 30	Laetare (Lent 4)	ASBH 23

### St. Ignatius Lutheran Theological Seminary classes continue

Spring 2025 Quarter begins until Monday, **March 10**. Classes for the Winter Quarter are:

E000—Greek (3 hrs.)

S002—Lutheran Confessions 2 (3 hrs.)

H001—Apostolic Church and Early Church to Nicea (3 hrs.)

Classes will run from **March 10–April 11**, and then will take a three week break for Holy Week, Easter Week, and Synod & Colloquium. Classes will resume **May 5** and continue until **June 6**. (June 6 is also the 139<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Salem Lutheran Church and the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the ELDoNA.)

St. Ignatius currently has two students, Duncan Geldenhuys (Australia) and Jonathan Teo Zin Han (Singapore).

There man - y a hap - py day is spent,  
Then He the storms of life will calm,  
De - spair not in thy sore dis - tress,  
Re - lieve their wants, their bur - dens ease,

There Je - sus glad - ly will con - sent  
Will bring for ev - 'ry wound a balm,  
Lo, Christ is there the bread to bless  
Let them to - geth - er dwell in peace

To tar - ry with His bless - ing.  
And change to joy thy sor - row.  
The frag - ments mul - ti - ply - ing.  
And love to one an - oth - er! A - men.

Festival of St. Joseph

83. In House and Home Where Man and Wife

I Hus og Hjem, hvor Mand og Viv  
Magnus B. Landstad, 1861  
Tr., Ole T. Arneson, 1908

Kommt her zu mir  
German melody, c. 1400

1. In house and home where man and wife  
2. If thou hast giv - en Him thine heart,  
3. And if thy home be dark and drear,  
4. O Lord, we come be - fore Thy face;

To - geth - er lead a god - ly life,  
The place of hon - or set a - part  
The cruse be emp - ty, hun - ger near,  
In ev - 'ry home be - stow Thy grace

By deeds their faith con - fess - ing,  
For Him each night and mor - row;  
All hope with - in thee dy - ing;  
On chil - dren, fa - ther, moth - er;

# Lesson from the Book of Concord Quinquagesima Sunday

## Chapter II, Article IV.

### [B. What is Justifying Faith?]

The adversaries [Roman Catholics] feign that faith is only a knowledge of history, and, therefore, [they] teach that it can coexist with mortal sin. Hence, they say nothing concerning faith, by which Paul so frequently says that men are justified, because those who are accounted righteous before God do not live in mortal sin. But that faith which justifies, is not merely a knowledge of history, but it is to assent to the promise of God, in which, for Christ's sake, the remission of sins and justification are freely offered. [It is certainty or the certain trust in the heart, when, with my whole heart, I regard the promises of God as certain and true, through which there are offered me, without my merit, the forgiveness of sins, grace and all salvation, through Christ the Mediator.] And, that no one may suppose that it is mere knowledge, we will add further: it is to wish and to receive the offered promise of the remission of sins and of justification. And the distinction between this faith and the righteousness of the Law, can be easily discerned. Faith is the divine service, which receives the benefits offered by God; the righteousness of the Law is the divine service which offers to God our merits. By faith, God wishes Himself so to be honored, that we may receive from Him those things which He promises and offers.

But that faith signifies, not only a knowledge of history, but the faith which assents to the promise, Paul openly testifies, when he says (Rom. 4:16): "Therefore it is of faith, to the end the promise might be sure." For he judges, that the promise cannot be received, unless by faith. Wherefore, he compares them correlatively, and connects promise and faith. Although it will be easy to decide what faith is, if we consider the Creed, where this article certainly stands: "The forgiveness of sins." Therefore, it is not enough to believe that Christ was born, suffered, was raised again, unless we add also this article, which is the final cause of the history: "The forgiveness of sins." To this article, the rest must be referred, viz. that, for Christ's sake, and not for the sake of our merits, forgiveness of sins is given us. For what need would there be, that Christ be given for our sins, if for our sins our merits can give satisfaction?

—Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §48–52

It is a very human thing to want to be rewarded for doing a good job. From very early in childhood we are taught to strive for the gold star and the A+ grade. We feel very wronged if we believe we deserve it but do not get it.

James and John believed they deserved special treatment from Jesus, special places next to Him in His glory. And why not? James and John were among Jesus' first disciples, they were part of His inner circle even among the twelve, and they would be leaders among the Apostles in time. James would become a martyr; John would live long enough to see all the other Apostles die; many violently, including his brother James.

Yet our Lord warns them that, even if they deserve such honor, honor and glory for ourselves is not what we should seek. Who else could deserve honor, power, and glory more than our Lord Himself? And yet we see Him washing His disciples' feet. He did not seek glory for Himself, but humbled Himself beyond measure, giving His life to pay for our sins. Thus, even if we absolutely deserve honor, power, and glory, we should rather seek to serve. That is what Christ did, and we can have no better pattern to follow than His.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully hear our prayers, and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus had already made clear what was required as regards discipleship, and many were not ready to receive life in the way He offered and taught. The disciples "believe and know." The Greek text is in the perfect tense and means, "We have entered a state of belief and knowledge that has continued until the present time."

The confession made by Saint Peter in his response to Jesus' test of faithfulness in Him and His Gospel is unique and packed with a great deal of significance. It indicates that Peter is confessing more than the common term of "Christ" (or "Messiah") used to describe Jesus. Peter is confessing the deity of his Lord. The faithful disciples believed and knew that Jesus was more than just a man. They were witnesses to His powerful miracles, and God's grace had provided them with faith to understand His Words.

Along with this wonderfully clear presentation of the divinity of Jesus Christ we also see an equally clear proclamation of the 'evil one' when Jesus declares "one of you is a devil." For as one inspired by the devil, Judas had become so much a part of the diabolical attack on Jesus that he is identified as being one with the devil.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; 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 is one of the most heart-rending historical narratives recorded in Scripture. In it we see the severe cost of human unwillingness to humbly submit our reason to the majesty of God. Our earthly reason must be able to submit to its role as solely ministerial before the glory and majesty of our omnipotent Lord and His divinely inspired Word.

The disciples say "hard to accept," not hard to "understand". They understood what Jesus was saying, for His words were clear and precise; but to accept them was hard—and only possible through faith. The thought of eating the flesh of the Son of Man and drinking His blood was doubtless shocking to all of Jesus' Jewish hearers, who would be horrified at the concept of cannibalism, as well as the drinking of any blood. The Levitical Law makes it clear that the blood of any creature is God's exclusively, for it contains the life. This is the reason why the Old Testament sacrifice of animals was required for the atonement of sin, because the price of sin is death (the loss of life).

Though Jesus is speaking of His body and blood in spiritual terms in this instance, He does not say their understanding of the receiving of His holy body and blood is incorrect, for His institution of the Lord's Holy Supper will institute this supernatural reality.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In this reading Jesus tells us that there is a connection between loving Him and keeping His Word. It would be inconsistent for someone to claim that they love Jesus but then ignore what He has to say. That connection goes further—in the Gospel of John, Jesus often speaks of the relationship that He has with the Father, as He does here. Concerning anyone who loves Him, Jesus says, "We will come to him and make Our home with him." Now, we know that we can only call Jesus Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit. And it is only through the Holy Spirit that our souls can cry out, "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6).

Being a believer in Christ comes with many benefits, but what a blessing it is to hear that God Himself should come to us and make His home with us! Yet, this should not surprise us, because God has revealed Himself to be a God of grace and mercy, abounding in steadfast love. It was His love for us from eternity that sent His Son to live and die for us. He strengthens us still with the Holy Spirit through His Word and Sacraments, which He has given us to create and sustain our faith in Him.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech The mercifully hear our prayers, and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

It is popular in American Christianity for people to have ashes imposed on their foreheads during Ash Wednesday services. Many people who participate in this tradition do so with good intentions.

At this time, it is truly good for us to hear what our Lord has to say in His Sermon on the Mount in the reading for today. He teaches us that personal devotion observances should not be displayed to the public at large. In short, it is far better, according to our Lord, to be fasting secretly than it is to seek attention with the appearance of piety.

There is indeed earthly reward to be had in this life, but it is temporary and easily lost. On the other hand, the spiritual rewards of heaven are eternal. Let us rather seek the treasure of heaven, which God has so richly blessed us with in this life, especially His appointed means of grace in Word and Sacrament, including Absolution, where we receive His forgiveness. There is no greater treasure to be found on earth or in heaven than God's forgiveness. And as the Church faithfully receives Christ's gifts and properly confesses His Word, we do not seek attention for ourselves, but rather give all glory to our Lord and Savior!

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, who hastest nothing that Thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus' statement that "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" is not a direct reference to the Lord's Supper. Neither does this statement deny or detract from the importance of the Sacrament. The Scriptures clearly do declare we are to eat and drink His body and blood in the Sacrament of the Holy Supper, which delivers eternal life and the forgiveness of our sins. In this discourse Jesus is emphasizing faith in response to His testimony.

Jesus speaks of faith's appropriation of Himself as God's appointed sacrifice, as the Lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of the world. While this text has been expounded upon by the sainted Martin Luther along these lines, it must be understood within the context of Luther's greater understanding and appreciation of the true body and blood of Jesus Christ present through the mystical union of bread and His body, as well as wine and His blood, in Holy Communion. Only through the faithful acceptance of this reality is salvation received.

We can rejoice in the richness of both of these images of Christ's flesh and blood that the New Testament Church has understood throughout her history. Unfortunately, like as in our text, many today who wish to be called Christ's disciples vehemently deny His Words regarding the Sacraments, as well as His true identity.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Verses 41-43 reflect Jesus' proclamation of "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house." People do not come to Christ on their own initiative; the Father draws them through the Word and the Holy Spirit. That drawing by Word and Spirit is made tougher by the corrupted world, the devil, and fallen human flesh (especially in the case of those who have known Jesus His entire earthly, incarnate life). They struggle to comprehend Jesus beyond His self-imposed humility as a man, and their limited, sin-fallen temporal experience and senses. Sadly, they do not perceive the spiritual and prophetic realities He clearly embodies and presents, thus failing to know Him as the Messiah, their Lord and Redeemer.

Only those who learn from God through divine revelation come to salvation, and all who faithfully learn from Him are saved. In this text Jesus is calling all to believe what He declares about Himself for their eternal salvation, for none come to the Father except they come through the Son. Jesus calls all to believe that He comes from the Father, and He promises to carry all who believe in Him as their Messiah to the Father in His eternal kingdom.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

One of the continuing challenges of living a Christian life is remembering that we have been saved *from* sin, not *for* sin. Our sinful flesh would tell us that since our sins have been forgiven, we should be free to do exactly what we want, exactly when we want.

But what should happen is that we should see God's Law in a very different light. Rather than try to find our righteousness in the Law, we should see it as a guide to how we should live and love others. Instead of trying to find things that we have done well or right and use those to prove our worth to God, we should instead acknowledge that we have failed to obey the Law as we should. We should let the Law teach us how to behave, how we should think about things, and what we should say and do.

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Have we? No. And since we have not, we cannot hope to earn our salvation that way. But because Christ gives us His righteousness, the Law is good for us, good for our neighbors, and it is clearly in keeping with God's will. Liberty in Christ from the condemnation of the Law is freedom to faithfully serve each other, not sin.

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

We can easily recognize the picture that Solomon draws of what he calls a “worthless person” or “wicked man.” Maybe we know people like this—they are, to put it in a single word, *trouble*.

This reading shows us how completely sin can take over a person’s life. There are people who spend time devising wicked plans, and then lying for the purpose of sowing discord and disagreement. People who have no problem lying, cheating, and swindling may not have a hard time shedding innocent blood, either. And it is hard for us to feel bad for people like this when calamity does come on them, if indeed we can see it come.

Far be it from us to engage in these behaviors! But if we are tempted, or especially if we see a Christian brother caught up in these behaviors, we should seek their repentance. As awful as all of these sins are, they are still sins for which Jesus took on human flesh to atone. He suffered for them as much as He suffered for “lesser” sins, and lesser sinners. Even many heroes of the faith and patriarchs had their weaknesses in these areas, like King David, who ordered the death of Uriah the Hittite, and like Jacob, who played many deceptive tricks on people.

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Through a trial of faith God directed the nation’s gaze to the source from which all their needs were supplied: the Lord God and His merciful grace. In the fullness of time Jesus was to come down from heaven, the very Bread of Life and supernatural food that gives life to the world. In John’s Gospel, Jesus called Himself “the true bread from heaven,” “the bread of God,” “the bread of life,” and “the living bread that came down from heaven.”

In Exodus, the people are directed to go out each day and gather enough for that day as a test of faith. This also points forward to Jesus’ petition about daily bread in the Lord’s Prayer, for we are to trust and have faith that God will graciously provide. In the Exodus story God would go beyond the natural processes of nature to make bread available. By miraculous intervention He would endow it with properties that would satisfy each person, regardless of the amount gathered. He lengthened the time of its ordinary usefulness every sixth day, and supplied it without interruption for the full forty years of their exodus through the wilderness. Likewise, Christ supplies our need through His holy Means of Grace, day in and day out, for our entire exodus journey through the temporal world. For we are but sojourners here till we return to our true home in Paradise with the Lord.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.



Our opening verse today indicates that perhaps some who had been opposed to Jesus now came to believe, but it is also clear that there are still those who perceive Jesus as a threat or enemy of the existing religious leadership. This sad situation continues to this very day within the fellowships of heterodox church bodies, where likewise, men's traditions often overrule Scripture and God.

The Pharisees were a legalistic and separatistic group who strictly, but often hypocritically, sought to keep the law of Moses and the unwritten tradition of the elders. The Sadducees were more worldly and politically minded, and were theologically unorthodox—among other things, denying the resurrection, angels, and spirits. It is hard to miss the similarity between these two groups and what in our day is labeled as “conservative and liberal” or “left and right.” But they set their differences aside to unite against who they perceive as their common enemy: Jesus (God).

Verses 51 and 52 declare God uses Caiaphas as His prophet to proclaim Jesus' death as the true Lamb of God to atone for the sins of the world and the redemption of those who believe. Jesus withdrew because He was not to die before His time, but He would not act imprudently. Knowing the attitude of His opponents, He withdrew. He would die for others, but in His time and place, not that of His enemies.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In our reading for today, Solomon gives us all divinely inspired advice that is of great value in living out our lives of faith on this earth. Many of these sayings are quite striking, and even though our society is not as familiar with the Bible as it once was, several of these sayings might still be very familiar, even to those who are not regular churchgoers.

In particular, verses 21-22 teach us something very important about ourselves, and about how we view our enemies. It is simple enough to view enemies as enemies, and to try to hurt them, or at least not help them. It does not seem very strange to want to see our enemy be hungry, or thirsty. But our enemy is still our neighbor, and it is good for us to show kindness.

These verses show us that not only is it God-pleasing to show kindness to those who have not treated us well, it also may affect our enemy's conscience. In the end, more than our own pride or feelings not being hurt, what we should be seeking from our enemy is repentance. This is yet another way to put “Love your neighbor as yourself” into practice.

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; 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 Invocavit Sunday

### Article XXI.

Of the Worship of Saints, they teach, that the memory of saints may be set before us, that we may follow their faith and good works, according to our calling, as the Emperor may follow the example of David in making war to drive away the Turk from his country. For both are kings. But the Scripture teaches not the invocation of saints, or to ask help of saints, since it sets before us Christ, as the only Mediator, Propitiation, High-Priest and Intercessor. He is to be prayed to, and hath promised that He will hear our prayer; and this worship He approves above all, to wit, that in all afflictions He be called upon [1 John 2:1]: “If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father,” etc.

—the Augsburg Confession

## Lesson from the Book of Concord Laetare Sunday

### The Fourth Petition.

*Give us this day our daily bread.*

Here we are mindful of the poor breadbasket, namely, of our body and the necessaries of the temporal life. It is a brief and simple word, but it is also very broad and comprehensive. For if you speak of, and pray for, daily bread, you pray for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy the same, and also against everything which interferes with it. Therefore you must enlarge your thoughts and extend them afar, not only to the oven or the flour-barrel, but to the distant field and the entire land, which bears and brings to us daily bread and every sort of sustenance. For if God did not cause it to grow, and bless and preserve it in the field, we could never take bread from the oven or have any to set upon the table.

To speak briefly, this petition includes everything that belongs to our entire life in the world. For on that account alone do we need daily bread. But to our life it is not only necessary that our body have food and covering and other necessaries, but also that we live in peace and quiet with those among whom we live and have our intercourse in daily business and conversation and in every manner possible; in short, whatever pertains to the interests of family, of neighbors and of government. For where these things do not prosper as they ought, the necessaries of life also must fail, and life cannot be maintained. There is, besides, the greatest need to pray for temporal authority and government, as that by which, most of all, God preserves to us our daily bread and all the comforts of this life. For though we had received of God all good things in abundance, we should not be able to retain any of them, or use them in security and happiness, if He did not give us a permanent and peaceful government. For where there are dissension, strife and war, there the daily bread is already taken away, or at least diminished.

—The Large Catechism, §71–74

St. Paul explains to Titus how he is to lead the Church. It is not an easy task for any pastor, especially in our modern era where more and more skepticism is placed on God's Word, even from those who claim to be Christians. The Apostle Paul calls Titus to promote sound doctrine. Many would tell us that sound doctrine is not "inclusive" or that it's too harsh. Many say that the instructions to women are outdated. Some say the instructions to young men are ineffective for attracting people to the Church.

No matter what anyone says, one thing is certain: these instructions are what God has said. Even if there is push-back, the pastor is called to lead the Church in the way given in this text, as well as according to the entire instruction of the Scripture. This is not to put burdens on the people or the pastors. Such wisdom is for the purpose that we would be led to live in the blessed freedom which Christ has won for us on the cross. It is a blessing from God for the pastor to exhort the people in sound doctrine and good works. And it should be a joy to live in Christ and flee from the sinful flesh.

All of these instructions, given by the pastor and received by the congregation, show us that our lives are together in Christ. By the power of God the Holy Spirit, we walk as one Body according to these ways.

Collect: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Our Lord said, "I am among you as the One who serves." Throughout His earthly ministry He taught us by His words and His actions what true humble service looks like. He submitted to the will of the Father. He called the prideful to lower themselves in repentant humility. He taught the faithful to understand their duties according to obedient love.

Satan taught the first woman to seek her will over God's and over the role she had been given with her husband. The first man failed and submitted to this disorder. We have struggled with such foolishness and disobedience ever since. Part of our Savior's work to crush Satan under His heel was to keep the Law of love in perfect obedience to the Father and give us new life according to that righteousness. In Jesus Christ we are made able to repent of our sinful vanity and instead live as true disciples who love and strengthen others in Him, as well. Our Lord has brought us into His kingdom of salvation, so we are to fear, love, and trust in Him above all things. That frees us to direct our focus and our energies to love and serve, rather than to dispute and seek our own "greatness." By the power of His Holy Spirit we are made able to truly give all glory to God with all our words and deeds.

Collect: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy Majesty to defend us from them that rise up against 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.

Our Lord loves and serves us, but that does not mean we give Him orders or dictate terms for His obedience. It is easy for us to look at the story of Christ's temptations and condemn Satan's words, but we must remember that our hearts are also wicked, and we try to command God to submit to our wills, as well.

Our Lord Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." Unfortunately, our thoughts and prayers often say, "If you are a loving and powerful God, do what I want..." The difference is faith and humility from God's Holy Spirit. Satan offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world, he told Him to use His power to make bread and eat of it, and he urged Jesus to show His glory as God's Son by testing the promise of the Scriptures. From a human perspective these could seem like 'reasonable' requests. But they were not. The devil twisted God's Words and promises, and he still encourages others to do likewise.

Our Lord has indeed commanded us to pray, and He has promised to hear, help, and bless us. But our Lord is above all, and His will is best, even when our thoughts and wills do not know the details that He sees. That is why we are to trust in Him and lean not on our own understanding (Prov. 3:5).

Collect: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy Majesty to defend us from them that rise up against 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.

The Apostle Paul gives the qualifications for ministers in our reading today, showing how they are to conduct themselves in the Office of the Ministry. A deacon or pastor may be imperfect. After all, everyone in the Church is there to have their sins forgiven. The minister needs his sins forgiven by Jesus just as the rest of the congregation does. The question is not whether a minister is doing everything perfectly, or, as some would argue, everything that the congregation wants them to do. This attitude has been to the hurt of many congregations, expecting the pastor to go even beyond what Scripture would have him do to appease the busy-bodies.

Instead, if your pastor is striving to be as the Apostle Paul has described, rejoice! Many so-called church bodies seem to let anyone preach, even if they are disqualified. If your pastor is qualified and shows his determination to live as Scripture teaches him, if your pastor shows diligence in his faithful service to God's Church, love him and support him. Your pastor is called not to serve himself, but to show you God's love through the preaching of the Word and the faithful giving of the Sacraments. Therefore, pastors who demonstrate these qualities should be given love and respect; not because they are great men, but because God is great and God has given you a faithful minister.

Collect: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

There is a difference between authority and power. Someone may seek authority to obtain power, but that is not a proper purpose of authority. The Apostle Paul, in explaining the conduct of his ministry as an Apostle, shows us the difference between unchecked power and Godly authority.

The Apostle Paul explains his conduct to show how a faithful minister is to act, proving that the Office of the Ministry is not for those who seek to have power over others in a selfish way. Paul states that he could have rightly asked for certain things from the Church at Thessalonica because he is an Apostle, but he chose not to burden the people. His love for the people and the common faith they shared made the Apostle Paul a spiritual father to them.

Authority in the Church is a good thing and God wants us to have pastors, deacons, and bishops that we can trust, so we can have peace under their authority. If your pastor shows love for you as he preaches the Word and gives the Sacraments faithfully, do not burden him but support him. Ministers look to the Apostle Paul, as he imitates Christ, even when it seems some hearers can be ungrateful. Seeking power for its own sake is not faithfulness to Christ. Authority which shows God's care for His people is worthy of honor and should be practiced more and more, for the sake of all in the Church.

Collect: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Sometimes God says "No" to our requests. He knows all and He sees all. He is supremely benevolent and almighty. He knows if our requests are made in faith according to His Spirit, or if they are made in vanity and dishonesty.

How we react to the Lord, whether He says "yes", "no", or "wait", is a matter of faith and humility. Penitential seasons in the Church year help us to remember that He has taught us to lean on Him in all things and depart from evil. If we faithfully pray, "Thy will be done," then we also believe that our sinful hearts can be wrong. His Word teaches us to repent of our sinfulness, when we see it and when we do not. And He teaches us to trust in Him as His little ones; not demanding things from Him like a spoiled child, but asking Him in meekness, yet also trusting boldly in His gracious promises!

It is not enough just to have the sins and evil spirits cast out of us; we must be filled with His Spirit, His truth, and His work. Our Lord teaches us to pray and discipline ourselves because He uses those exercises to guide us in His Word and be filled with strength and faith by His power. As our Lord reminded St. Paul, He also teaches us in these seasons: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Collect: Mercifully hear our prayers, we beseech Thee, O Lord, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy Majesty against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

This story about Daniel and the other sons of Judah is not a 'proof text' for being a vegetarian. This story is about faithfulness to God above all things. There was something about the food appointed by the king that would have defiled Daniel's faithful witness to the glory of the one true God. Throughout the book of Daniel, God used him to teach and influence this nation, and this first incident is no exception. He used these young men to show that even what one eats and drinks matters when glorifying the true God.

This lesson was where Adam and Eve failed and fell into sin. God said, "Don't eat that..." Satan said, "Go ahead, eat it..." and death came to mankind because of faithless, disobedient eating. Christ says to the Church, "This is my Body, this is my Blood; eat and drink it." People sinfully say, "I don't believe what Jesus said about this food and drink, but I'm going to eat and drink anyway because I think I'm right and pious..." Or they say, "I don't feel like going to Church to eat and drink the Sacrament where it is properly administered."

All of these examples matter! What we eat and drink should be done while remembering God's clear Words. If He clearly says to us, "Don't eat that," we faithfully glorify Him by not eating it. If He teaches us to ask and thank Him for our daily bread, then we should do it. If He says, "Take, eat; take, drink," then we should faithfully eat and drink according to His commands!

Collect: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy Majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

We do not desire to be apologetic about our faith, saying "sorry" or feeling embarrassed because of it. Israel fell into thinking that the unbelievers had better things, and they began mixing the practices of the faithful with the elaborate trappings of the unbelievers. Instead, God's faithful people are called to be set apart, defending the faith from attacks and refusing to be yoked with unholy things.

Anytime we try to mingle the corrupt things of this world with the things of God, it ends horribly. When Church services are compromised and replaced with entertainment, the Word of God is obscured, and the people lose real hope. Just as God troubled the people of Joshua's day for their error, so also trouble comes whenever God's Word and His Church are compromised. Therefore, we are to be diligent in keeping the faith. We are to live fully in obedience to God's Word and receive His holy gifts in the historic liturgy, which is firmly grounded in His wisdom and teaching. Do not compromise with the world, the flesh, or the devil. There is no compromise with evil. God will bless and keep His people in His ways by the power of His Word and Spirit.

Collect: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Some may see the appointment of festivals as being just a celebration on the calendar. Some may think the festivals distract from the Christian life. Both of these opinions are wrong. First, we see that the festivals of the Church significantly point us to Jesus. We see on this day of the Annunciation—the day when the blessed virgin Mary received the Word of God that she would conceive God in the Flesh—that God has kept His promise that we read in the prophet Isaiah. The virgin conceived and bore a son that would save us from sin. This gives us hope beyond all hope because we are reminded, in a very real way on this day, that God keeps his promises.

Second, while we do celebrate God’s work in the life of the saints, for Christians it is more than a celebration. It is a call to live as God would have us live in His mercy. King Ahaz did not want to receive the Word of God. St. Mary, by contrast, received the Word. Even when a great burden was placed on her to be the mother of the Incarnate God, Mary accepted it gladly. Let this be true for all Christians: that they are reminded of God’s love and do His will on this and every festival day.

Collect: We beseech Thee, O Lord, pour Thy grace into our hearts, that, as we have known the incarnation of Thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by His cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Our human assumptions about fairness and accountability are not the same as God’s standard of fairness and accountability. Our assumptions are corrupted by the sin that is in our hearts. We want to bend the rules or ‘move the goalposts’ according to our perspective. Whereas, God makes His established divine perspective clear.

God calls us to repent and be humble because we have failed and we have sinned. Faithful humility says, “Lord, I am wrong; You are right. Have mercy on me and help my unbelief!” The penitential seasons of the Church are a blessing because they help us remember to focus on this humility and discipline that makes us sincerely bow to God’s holiness.

Satan always tempts us to say, “God is not fair!” Or to say, “I am a son (or daughter) of God, therefore I am always right and no one can correct me or judge me.” The devil never stops encouraging us to doubt what God *really* said. Our Lord says, “The soul who sins shall die.” But He also calls us to repent and trust in His grace and forgiveness. The soul who turns and does what is right and faithful—namely, repent and believe in the Christ—that soul shall live!

Collect: O Lord, be gracious to Thy people, and as Thou makest them devoted to Thee, in Thy mercy comfort them with Thy kind assistance; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

To keep God's commandments, glorify His name, and walk as His holy people is to love and serve others so they may know God and believe as well. As the Church proclaims over and over: such acts do not save us or earn our righteousness; they show forth the righteousness that God has freely given us and sustains in us through faith by the power of His Spirit.

Our tithes, our service, and our love are for the sake of others, not for selfishly bringing glory and benefit to ourselves. Our glory is Christ's glory, and our greatest benefit is from Christ alone. Our tithes, service, and love for others should not be an afterthought. As we walk in Christ's righteousness, we should be deliberate and disciplined. We all need God's help and instruction to remember and focus on His work. We all stumble often while trying to walk in His ways. Thanks be to God that He does correct us, call us to repent, and show us the right way to discipline our heart, soul, mind, and strength. As we are made stronger by His Word and power, we are also made able to appreciate His blessings more and more, which helps us to serve better, and as the positive cycle goes on we are blessed according to His will, His kingdom, His power, and His glory!

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee, look down graciously upon Thy people, and mercifully turn away from them the scourges of Thy wrath; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

“In my distress, I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry entered His ears.”

As we go through this Lenten season, we see the Lord contending with the devil and demons in many of the texts on Sunday. Even the Gospel reading from yesterday discusses Jesus being the stronger man who has come to bind Satan. In the text that we read today, we see David has been delivered from bodily death and his enemies. David sings in recognition of God's protection. Consider that if David can do this in response to God's protection from his physical enemies, how much more should Christians praise and extol God for protection against the devil?

The Lord has contended with the enemy and won. Jesus rescues all who believe from death, hell, and the devil. These enemies are much more fierce than mortal enemies, and yet the Lord delivers the victory of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation for all who look to Him in faith. For this great gift of salvation, let us praise the Lord, because He has heard us in our distress and given us victory through Him alone.

Collect: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; 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 Oculi Sunday

### Article II.

Also they [the Lutheran pastors] teach, that since the Fall of Adam, all men begotten according to nature, are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence; and that this disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through baptism and the Holy Ghost.

They condemn the Pelagians and others, who deny that the vice of origin is sin, and who, to obscure the glory of Christ's merit and benefits, argue that man can be justified before God by his own strength and reason. —The Augsburg Confession

### Article II.

#### Of Original Sin.

The second article, Of Original Sin, the adversaries [the Roman Catholic theologians] approve, but in such a way, that they, nevertheless, censure the definition of Original Sin, which we incidentally gave. Here at the very threshold, his Imperial Majesty will discover that the writers of the Confutation [the Romanist response to the Augsburg Confession] were deficient not only in judgment, but also in candor. For whereas we, with a simple mind, desired, in passing, to recount those things which Original Sin embraces, these men, by framing an invidious interpretation, artfully distort a proposition that has in it nothing which of itself is wrong. Thus they say: "To be without the fear of God, to be without faith, is actual guilt"; and therefore they deny that it is original guilt.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession

(The *Augsburg Confession* was written in 1530, the *Roman Confutation* responded to the Confession in 1530, and then the *Lutheran Apology* (Defense) was written in 1531.)

## Lesson from the Book of Concord Reminiscere Sunday

### Article XIII. How Man is Justified before God, and of Good Works.

What I have hitherto and constantly taught concerning this I cannot in the least change, viz. that by faith (as St. Peter says) we acquire a new and clean heart, and God accounts, and will account us righteous and holy, for the sake of Christ, our Mediator. And although sin in the flesh has not been altogether removed and become dead, yet He will not punish or regard this.

For good works follow this faith, renewal and forgiveness of sins. And that in them which is still sinful and imperfect is not accounted as sin and defect, even for Christ's sake; but the entire man, both as to his person and his works, is and is called just and holy, from pure grace and mercy, shed upon us and displayed in Christ. Wherefore we cannot boast of our many merits and works, if they be viewed apart from grace and mercy, but as it is written, (1 Cor. 1:31): "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord," viz. that he has a gracious God. For thus all is well. We say besides that if good works do not follow, faith is false and not true.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

The Old Testament priesthood centered on sacrifice. But it was not intended to last forever, because mortal priests and animal sacrifices could not take away sin. Hebrews 10:4 says, “It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.” These things were signs so that when the Christ appeared the Israelites would recognize Him by the work that He did. He is the true High Priest, who lives forever, therefore He always prays for us to God the Father. He is the true Sacrifice for sin, for His blood—because it is the sinless blood of the Son of God—is sufficient to pay for all sins of all time. The earthly priesthood with its sacrifices has ended, because the Christ, whom it foreshadowed, has come.

Christ is the one true Priest who sacrificed Himself once only. Romans 6:10 says, “The death that He died, He died to sin once for all.” Therefore, we do not prefer to call the men in the Apostolic Ministry “priests”, but, in the words of St. Paul, they are “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1). They do not sacrifice Christ again, rather they distribute the benefits of His one sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.

Collect: O God, who didst call Patrick to preach the Gospel, grant to Thy servants steadfastness in the confession of the true faith that they would preach that unchanging Gospel in the midst of the darkness of this age; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Lord Jesus Christ tells His disciples, “Beware of false prophets... You will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:15-16). The chief “fruit” of faithful servants is that they actually preach the Scriptures and keep what Christ actually commanded therein. But there are other “fruits” of less importance which still help to distinguish the true preachers from the false. Gamaliel, in our text, identifies one of them, saying, “if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing...” The work of the Apostles did not come to nothing, but continued to the present day. It will continue till the end, because it is God’s work.

The doctrine of the Christian Church does not change. This does not mean that we should accept something as true just because it is old. There are many old lies. But it does mean that, if a doctrine is new, it is certainly false. And this is one way the saints of God can distinguish between true and false preachers. If anyone preaches something new, avoid him. Eventually he will come to nothing, even though he gains many followers at first. But seek that Church and those preachers who teach the doctrine of Scripture, unchanged since the time of the Apostles, which has been taught at all times by those faithful to Christ.

Collect: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength: Keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Bible consistently teaches that salvation by grace through faith in Christ is our greatest treasure—it is the entire purpose of the Christian religion. Those who become Christians for any other hope are deceiving themselves. Christianity is not about becoming rich, healthy, intelligent, or even about having power over demons; it is about having your name written in heaven. For this reason, there have always been Christians in every walk of life—both rich and poor, strong and feeble, influential and common. The externals do not matter for salvation, but what all God’s people have in common is that salvation by His grace, through faith in Christ.

As Christians, we should not assume we can command demons. This authority has not been promised to all believers, although Christ did give that authority to various persons at various times, according to His own wisdom. Not all are given this authority, and it is extremely dangerous to seek out demons. Rather, Christians should avoid demons and demonic influences of all kinds, unless perhaps their lawful vocation demands it. Nevertheless, the promise of salvation is for all who believe: “rejoice because your names are written in heaven.” This promise no demon can take away, for Christ and His Word are greater than the devil.

Collect: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength: Keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

King Solomon understood that bodily plague and sickness are only temporary. Outward suffering harms the body, but it doesn’t have to harm the soul. Therefore, the greater and true plague is sin, which corrupts every part of human nature—body and soul. But God is merciful and, if we repent of our sin, He will hear and forgive. Thus St. John writes, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:8–9)

Because of sin, which dwells in our nature, everything we are is tainted. There is no earthly sacrifice good enough to please God or draw His favor to us. If we offer Him our love, even this is tainted and unworthy of Him. The only thing we can give to God is our sin. When we repent of sin by prayer to God, our Lord Jesus Christ takes our sin away—for He took all sin upon Himself and put it to death in His flesh on the cross. In exchange, He clothes us with His divine righteousness. God hears the prayers of those clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ, for only Jesus can remove our sin.

Collect: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength: Keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

St. Joseph wonderfully keeps the Eighth Commandment—“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:16)—because he refuses to disgrace Mary, even though he had a right to do it in the eyes of the world. Joseph did not know, before the angel told him, that Mary’s child was the Son of God. It appeared that she had been unfaithful and his decision to protect her reputation was motivated by mercy. St. Matthew calls him “a just man,” because his sincere faith in God’s mercy bore fruit in showing mercy to Mary when it appeared she did not deserve it. St. Joseph’s attitude toward Mary exemplifies what Christ says in Matthew 25: “inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (v. 40).

In our own vocations we also are called to keep the Eighth Commandment, because Godly love, says St. Paul, “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:7). We keep the commandment when we protect our neighbor’s reputation and do not expose him to public embarrassment. Our Lord Jesus Christ, also, became man and died for the forgiveness of our sins, even though He knows how deeply evil we are.

Collect: O Lord, by the working of the Holy Spirit Thou didst inspire in St. Joseph a quiet obedience to the Word: Guide and direct us to emulate such virtue in our life and conversation as shall glorify Thee in faithfulness day and night; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Lord Jesus Christ is that grain of wheat which, “if it dies, it produces much grain.” When He died on the cross, He purchased for Himself a Church—a community of believers, justified by His blood. And this is how the Church in heaven praises Him: “You are worthy... for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood...” (Revelation 5:9).

It follows from this that every Christian desiring to follow the Christ must die, as He says, “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me.” But what kind of death does He demand? Not bodily death, for all men suffer that. But the death He demands is to die to sin. This death He accomplishes in us through the Sacrament of Baptism, as St. Paul explains: “As many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death” (Romans 6:3). The Christian, having died with Christ in Baptism, also produces much grain by confessing the Word of God in his daily life.

He who has been baptized no longer belongs to himself, but to Christ. In this way, the faithful martyrs sacrificed their earthly lives for Christ, their lives already belonging to Him through Baptism. It was through Baptism, not martyrdom, that they were confident of their salvation. May we also thus trust in the promise of Baptism.

Collect: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength: Keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.