

SATURDAY, JUNE 5: ACTS 16:9-15

ST. BONIFACE

Sometimes the work of the Church seems successful, other times it seems like tragedy or failure. St. Paul and St. Boniface are examples of all those experiences. Today we remember St. Boniface for his service to the Church in preaching and administering the Sacraments in the “mission field” and standing against false religion.

People are often given the impression that mission work is some worldly type of servant event. They are told that building houses, digging wells, teaching people to read, or bringing medical aid are the things that make for the “missionary work” of the Church. These are excellent works of love and service to others, but the mission of the Church is to preach Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins, to teach people to observe all that He commands, to rightly administer the Sacraments, and to establish the faithful Apostolic Ministry in their midst.

Sometimes the work of the Word and Sacrament Ministry has visible success. St. Paul found Lydia and her household to be faithful, receiving the Gospel and Baptism, but later he was also beaten and imprisoned for his work in the name of Jesus. St. Boniface cut down the tree that was a symbol for a false god and built a church that would teach the people to worship the true God, Jesus Christ, in remembrance of His death on the cross. But after successfully serving the Church in Germany, the bishop’s life would end in violence and martyrdom. In life or in death, we are called to serve His will for the Church!

Prayer: O God, who dost guide Thy Church through the faithful ministrations of Thy servants, grant that Thy ministers, like St. Boniface, stand steadfast against those who would work iniquity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



Pastors and Seminarians in attendance at the 2021 Colloquium and synod (l. to r.): Pr. Mensing, Pr. Carver, Pr. Henson, Pr. Sullivan, Pr. Dulas, Pr. Heimbigner, Pr. Rutowicz, Sem. Jacob Henson, Sem. Ben Henson, Bp. Heiser, Pr. Ahonen, Dcn. Oncken, Pr. Warr, Dcn. Jackson, Pr. Burnet, Pr. Moll, Pr. Stefanski, Pr. Rydecki, Pr. Scheck, Dcn. Smithey

MAY 3–JUNE 5, 2021

**A PUBLICATION OF
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NORTH AMERICA**

The Calendar

May 9	Rogate	TLH 458
May 10–12	Rogation Days	
May 13	The Ascension of our Lord (White)	TLH 387
May 16	Exaudi	TLH 267
May 23	Pentecost	TLH 224
May 26	(W) Ember Wednesday in Pentecost	
May 28	(F) Ember Friday in Pentecost	
May 29	(S) Ember Saturday in Pentecost	
May 30	Feast of the Holy Trinity	TLH 247
June 5 (S)	Festival of St. Boniface, Bishop and Martyr	TLH 494

(If you would like a complete list, see your pastor, or contact the diocesan office via email at info@eldona.org)

ST. IGNATIUS LUTHERAN SEMINARY—The Spring Quarter concludes May 28. Summer Intensives begin June 7 and continue through July 9.

ASSISTANCE FOR PR. MARIN AND THE CONFSSIONAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF COLOMBIA—The ongoing difficulties suffered by our brethren in Colombia were discussed at the recent synod. Covid-19 related lockdowns continue to hinder the work of the Church, and the ability of the Marin family to earn a living. (It should be noted that despite the lockdowns, a mission in Santa Barbara, approximately 40 miles from Medellin, has been started.) It was unanimously decided that a diocesan offering would be collected in connection with the upcoming Ember Days in Pentecost to help support Pr. Marin and his family. **TO SEND ASSISTANCE:** Please send checks made out to “ELDoNA” to the diocesan treasurer, Rev. Michael Henson, at Trinity Lutheran Church, 1000 North Park Ave. Herrin, IL 62948. (Please include a note designating that it is for “Colombia Assistance”—however, the check must be made to ELDoNA or the treasurer will not be able to deposit it.)

DAY OF NAME FOR ST. BONIFACE EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH—The Church marks the Festival of St. Boniface on June 5th. This festival is the day of name for the parish in Niles, Michigan. May the Lord continue to bless Pr. Rutowicz and the saints of St. Boniface Ev. Lutheran Church!

FRIDAY, JUNE 4: GALATIANS 4:1-7

TRINITY

It is valuable to consider today’s reading in context. St. Paul uses the idea of children to teach the Church about our proper relationship with God. But the previous chapter ends by talking about being “sons of God through faith,” about Baptism, and about a proper understanding of Abraham and the promises given to him.

We can call God “our Father” only because we are sons and daughters through Baptism and faith. Any false teacher or uninformed person can speak about “Father God” or recite the words of our Lord’s Prayer, but if they do not have faith that comes from the Spirit of Truth, then they are just using (or misusing) words. They are still in slavery to sin.

The Church throughout the ages faithfully calls out to the one God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is true and just that we are called slaves, because we were put in bondage by our earthly mother and father when they listened to the Serpent. But God also raised people out of earthly bondage in order to teach us that He will restore us according to His own power and truth. Abraham and his true children were righteous by faith; they were free because of God! That is still true in the Christian Church, as we are sons and daughters of the promise that Christ Jesus crushed the Serpent and gives us freedom and everlasting life by His own power and mercy.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith and evermore defend us from all adversities. Amen.

THURSDAY, JUNE 3: JOHN 15:18-26

TRINITY

Jesus Christ fulfills the message given to Isaiah in yesterday's reading. Our Lord spoke to the Jews and their leaders, and they hated Him. He did the divine works of His Father, and they rejected Him. They have no excuse because the Word of God Almighty came to them and they continued to be blind, deaf, dull, and self-willed. They hated Jesus without cause, simply because He exposed the vanity of their corrupt ways.

However, Jesus does not want these people to die in their sins, just as the Lord did not want the people of Isaiah's time to remain in their unrighteous resistance. God is gracious, and the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are all focused on bringing people to righteousness! He did not want the hearers of Isaiah to stay unfaithful, but He also did not want them to think that they would be healed by their own powers. Only He can purge unclean hearts and lips. Likewise, Jesus did not want the Jews and their leaders to remain in their hatred toward the Father, but He also did not want them to think their own illusions of glory and good works make them righteous with God. It is only the free gift of His Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father and the Son to testify that we are only righteous and forgiven on account of Jesus Christ crucified!

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith and evermore defend us from all adversities. Amen.

DIOCESAN ANNIVERSARY AND ANNIVERSARY OF SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH—June 6 is the 135th anniversary of the founding of Salem Lutheran Church in Malone, Texas; it is also the 15th anniversary of the founding of the diocese.

DIOCESAN FAMILY CAMP THIS SUMMER— Family Camp didn't happen last year due to Covid, but that's not stopping us this year. Summer Camp is a great opportunity to meet other people from diocesan congregations, learn God's Word and the Church's confession. **Here's the information you need to know about this year's Family Camp:**

When: Monday, July 19—Friday, July 23, 2021

Camp begins Monday evening with Supper and Vespers. Camp concludes with Matins on Friday morning.

Who: All youth, young adults, and families of the diocese (and friends)

Where: Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Kerrville, Texas. Daily activities, classes, games, and meals will take place at the church, located at 204 Spence St. in Kerrville.

Accommodations: La Quinta is offering us a group rate of \$89/night, which is a significant discount from its usual rate. When you call to make reservations tell them that you are with the ELDONA Family Camp. Telephone Number (830) 896-9200

If you are the only one coming from your parish, speak with your Pastor or Pastor Sullivan to find a room to share with other participants.

Travel: San Antonio International Airport is 1 hour from Kerrville. Austin-Bergstrom International Airport is 2 hours from Kerrville.

Theme: The Church's Year. The pastors of the diocese will take us through the church calendar, its feasts and festivals, saints and martyrs, to show why the Church marks time the way she does. **Special Event:** This year we'll be travelling to Enchanted Rock State Park for the final day of Camp. Entrance fees for the Park are \$8 for persons 13 years of age and up. Children 12 and under are free.

Cost: Besides travel and hotel, the only cost is \$20 to cover meals. Please let your pastor know ASAP if you plan on attending Camp!

Lesson from the Book of Concord Cantate Sunday

Chapter V. Of the Law and the Gospel.

Statement of the Controversy.

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

Affirmative.

Pure Doctrine of God's Word.

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

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

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

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

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

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

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2: ISAIAH 6:1-13

TRINITY

The Church still sings the song of God's angels, declaring the Lord God Almighty is "Holy, holy, holy." The Sanctus is another example of worship in the Christian Church that is used by the faithful to remember and give thanks for our connection with the company of heaven—men, women, and angels—who have praised God before us.

Isaiah 6 reminds us that the holy Word of Almighty God sanctifies His people, but it also exposes the rebellion and self-will of many others. The prophet showed humility and repentance for his uncleanness before God, but the Lord took away his iniquity and cleansed him from sin. On the other hand, God foretold that His Word would be resisted and disregarded by most of the people. They would keep on being blind, deaf, and dull because they had no faithful humility and repentance. They would follow leaders who were not men of God. The blind led the blind to seek their own glory and self-indulgence, and they lost sight of the promised Seed who would come to bring true glory and salvation.

The Church still bows before the Lord in repentant humility, even as we sing heavenly praises to His holiness. The faithful remnant is those who see, hear, and understand by the power of God's Holy Ghost that we are sinful and unclean. But we also rejoice in the forgiveness and eternal life He gives us in His glorious Son, Jesus Christ!

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith and evermore defend us from all adversities. Amen.

Faithful Christians are familiar with the Aaronic benediction from liturgical worship. This three-fold blessing is one way the Christian Church confesses it is catholic and connected back to people of God in the time of the Old Testament. We worship and are blessed by the same God.

The fulfillment of this divine promise given to Moses is shown in Baptism. Our Lord Jesus commanded the Apostolic Ministry to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). As Christ lived and taught in fulfillment of all that Moses and the prophets testified about Him He also connected forgiveness and salvation to this blessing of water, Word, and the divine name. Those who are baptized into Christ according to His command are made children of God's kingdom and blessed with the three-fold name that continues to give all the holy comforts promised in the benediction taught to Aaron!

Neither Baptism nor the liturgical benediction is a magic spell. They are the ways that faithful sons and daughters of the one true God are connected to Him. Baptism places His name upon us in connection with water, but the Sacrament also connects us to the ongoing teaching and worship of the Church. Likewise, the Aaronic benediction blesses us at the end of the Divine Service, but it is not an end; it is to keep our hearts and minds connected to His grace throughout the rest of the week!

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith and evermore defend us from all adversities. Amen.

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

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

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

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

Negative.

Contrary Doctrine which is Rejected.

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

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

God promises that Judah will return from exile. He will settle them in their own land. Foreigners will be joined to them. They will take as captives those who previously had taken them as captives, so that they will rule over their oppressors. The result is rest from sorrow, fear, and their slavery.

Isaiah is speaking of the Church. The devil had taken Adam and Eve captive through sin, so that all their descendants are born captives to temptation, sin, and death. As captives and slaves to sin, humanity brings upon itself sorrow, fear, and hard bondage in which we must willfully do our master's bidding. We are ruled by sin. Temptation and desire must be obeyed so that we reap sorrow and fear of God's wrath in our consciences.

But God has had mercy on Jacob. St. Paul says in Ephesians 4:8, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." By atoning for all sins and by defeating death on the third day, Christ has led captivity captive. All who believe this Gospel receive the gifts of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit, who removes our sorrow by giving joy in the perfect remission of sins. He overcomes the fear of temptation, giving us confidence in the promise that He strengthens us. We are no longer captives to sin who must do that master's bidding. We are sons of God and slaves of righteousness.

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

Here in the writing of Moses we have one of the most potent confessional statements and catechetical tools in all the Scriptures. The wisdom and discipline of our Lord's Words in these verses still apply to the Church of the New Testament, just as much as they did to His people in the Old Testament. God teaches us that every aspect of our lives should be focused on love and service in His Word, directed by faith throughout all things.

There are so many "other gods" and other teachings that seek control of our lives. Some people drift without any meaningful focus or discipline, while others are quite zealous and studious in unfaithful ways. Our Lord Jesus reaffirmed the wisdom of Deuteronomy 6 in His commission to the chosen Apostles in Matthew 28: "Go therefore and make disciples..., teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..." (verses 19-20).

Right confession of the Divine Truth and faithful worship are to be the characteristics of our whole life, not just Sunday mornings. May the Lord keep us steadfast in that focus, and make us able to teach the same to our families, friends, and everyone else that we can according to the vocations that He gives us.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith and evermore defend us from all adversities. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Trinity Sunday

ARTICLE I.

Our Churches, with common consent, do teach, that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and yet that there are three Persons, of the same essence and power, who also are co-eternal, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. And the term “person” they use as the fathers have used it, to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself.

They condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this article, as the Manichaeans who assumed two principles [gods], one Good, the other Evil; also the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and all such. They condemn also the Samosatenes, old and new, who contending that there is but one Person, sophistically and impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Ghost are not distinct Persons, but that “Word” signifies a spoken word, and “Spirit” [Ghost] signifies motion created in things.

—The Augsburg Confession

TUESDAY, MAY 4: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-21

CANTATE

Too often we believe that sinning is inevitable. Yes, we have sin. The sinful flesh remains after baptism, daily tempting us with ungodly thoughts and desires. But fulfilling those desires and entertaining those thoughts isn’t inevitable, because of what God makes us through the Gospel and Holy Baptism.

St. Paul writes, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” By virtue of faith we are sons of God. In Baptism we have put on Christ. God has given the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts by faith and bear His fruit in our lives. Part of that fruit is the abstaining from sin. This means that when the devil, the world, or our own flesh tempts us with sin and places the sinful thought before our mind, we remember that we are new creatures. Those sinful thoughts aren’t what we are about. As the new creation in Christ, we are about loving our neighbors and living as God has commanded. We “make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Romans 13:14), striking down temptation at its first beginning.

We repent of the sin that dwells in our flesh and live in thanksgiving, that by faith in Christ we are righteous in God’s sight. When temptation arises, remember that you are in Christ and a new creation, so those things aren’t what you are about.

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

The Jews thought they were sons of God because they were Abraham's descendants. But they weren't sons in God's house. They were slaves to sin because "whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." Neither biological descent from Abraham nor pursuing righteousness by works of the Law bring freedom from sin. Freedom from sin's harsh servitude can only be achieved by faith in Christ, who has atoned for the sins of the world and sets sinners free from slavery by faith in His death for their sins. Jesus sets believers free from sin so that they may be sons of God and abide in God's house forever. By faith in Christ, sins are forgiven and we are freed from sin's tyranny over us. By faith we are free indeed.

Being free from sin's slavery means that it is no longer our master. We don't have to fulfill the flesh's wicked desires that arise from within our hearts. In fact, we are to fight the desires of the flesh. If we consent to those desires then we actively sin, and live as if sin were our master again. We fight each temptation by living instead as sons of God who are free from sin's tyranny. As sons of God we want to avoid sinning. Sons want to please the Father in heaven by living according to His commandments, loving their neighbors around them, and by growing in righteousness outwardly and inwardly.

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

What happens when God gathers His people together? The liturgy of the Divine Service is much like God's own words to the prophet Ezekiel. Those who had been "scattered" by God and placed into exile were promised by God to be gathered by Him. Once gathered, God would bring to their remembrance "all your doings with which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed." In the Divine Service, God gathers us and brings to our remembrance who we are; "poor, miserable sinners."

But, like with the people of Israel, God, for His own name's sake, does not deal with us as we deserve and in accordance with our "corrupt doings." Instead, He forgives those whom He has brought to repentance, and renews their faith in His Promise.

Repentance and the forgiveness of sins echoes from century to century, millennia to millennia. God does not change, and neither do His commands. We have His faithful and life-giving Word to lead us into all that is pleasing in His sight. While we fully understand that His Law will always condemn us--and rightfully so--we also know that what He prescribes in His Law was, and is, a faithful guide for holy living.

Moved by His Spirit, we repent of our sin and, moved by that same Spirit, we trust in God's promised forgiveness. As God's people, we cherish God's Word, both Law and Gospel.

Prayer: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Who doesn't like Christmas? A lot of the world likes Christmas, albeit for the wrong reasons. People like getting gifts and having thoughts of world peace, even if those thoughts are short-lived.

As Christians, we like Christmas for the right reason. God the Father gave us His Son in order to redeem poor sinners like us. The Gift of Christmas came wrapped in swaddling clothes and is truly "the gift that keeps on giving." Today's reading makes it clear that Jesus gives gifts to His Church. However, much like Jesus in swaddling clothes, the gifts He gives may not look all that attractive.

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." Many of the Apostles were fishermen. Nothing really attractive there. Many of the prophets were just ordinary, everyday men. To bring this whole matter of gifts closer to home, take a look at a picture of the members of the ELDoNA. They all look quite different. Dress them up in everyday clothing and you wouldn't even know they were pastors.

Yet, they are Jesus' gifts to you. They are to bring you the truth of God's Word so that you are not "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine." He gave them to you so that they might equip you for life in this world, but more importantly, that you are equipped to die in Christ and thus live forever in Him.

Prayer: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Christian life is more than abstaining from sin. That is a necessary first part; we cannot continue to live in sin, but must daily fight and put temptation aside the moment it strikes. Paul says in Colossians 3:5 that we are to put to death our earthly members: "fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." The old man includes anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language (Colossians 3:8). These things must be daily put away, as often as they tempt us.

The second part is that we "put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Colossians 3:10). To put on the New Man is to put on "tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering," so that we bear with one another and forgive those who sin against us. The New Man loves his neighbor as he loves himself. Living in God's grace and the forgiveness of sins, he has peace with God and is thankful that God has made him His son.

The New Man also lets the Word of Christ dwell richly in him. He puts God's Word into his heart through his ears and eyes. This strengthens his own faith, but also gives him something with which to encourage others. Finally, the New Man fulfills his vocations in Jesus' name and to His glory, since Jesus has made him new.

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

Isaiah's language recalls the story of Lot in Sodom. The angel struck the men of Sodom with blindness so that they groped for the door to Lot's house, but were unable to find it. Their outward situation matched the state of their hearts. These men had consented to temptation and fulfilled the flesh's desires. They remained in those sins and blinded themselves to their own depravity.

Isaiah's words show us that when we consent to temptation and fulfill the flesh's desires, whatever they may be, we are blinding ourselves and choosing to walk in darkness rather than light. The Holy Spirit shines the light of God's Law on us so that we clearly see our sin for what it is and what it brings: blindness and condemnation. He leads us to repentance, sorrowing over our sin and turning immediately to Christ's forgiveness and the perfect peace He gives the conscience. If we do not immediately turn from our sin when the Spirit convicts us, but rationalize, minimize, and excuse our sin, then we "walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 John 1:6). May this not be so among us! Instead, let us pray each day that the Lord keep us from sin, strengthen us with His Holy Spirit in the moment of temptation, and if we do consent to sin, that we turn immediately from it in repentance and resume walking in the light of Christ.

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

Once again, "the Word" makes all the difference. The Holy Spirit was at work in the lives of the people in Cornelius' household as Peter preached the Word to them. The Lord showed "no partiality," as the Jews who had accompanied Peter saw how the Spirit worked upon the hearts of Gentiles. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Peter preached the simple truth of Christ crucified, risen, and placed as judge over all people.

Jesus, the man "who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil," is now seated at the right hand of God and over all the universe. A real, live human being sits at the right hand of God as ruler over all of creation, forever. While we do well to remember that Jesus is true God, we dare not let His being true God overshadow His true humanity. Were it not for Jesus being a real flesh and blood human being, there could be no hope for poor, miserable sinners such as we. All who trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins have the corruption of their sin blotted out from the sight of His Father, just like those of the household of Cornelius.

Prayer: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

We hear that the people of Samaria “had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” and had not yet received the Holy Spirit. This can be a bewildering text for Christians, especially for Lutherans who hold baptism in high regard. It is difficult to understand what is going on in the case of the Samaritans because in Monday’s reading about the events of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was received at the time of Baptism.

Some have conjectured that because the Church was in its infancy, God used Peter and John to bring unity to the Church by closing the centuries old rift between the Jews and the Samaritans under the banner of Christianity. While that may be true, it remains conjecture.

What is important for Christians to understand is that God was at work among the Samaritans by having them baptized “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” and that God continued to work among the Samaritans by sending the Apostles Peter and John to them that they might lay hands upon the Samaritans.

So it is with our daily lives. We do best to focus on what God is doing, bringing us to daily repentance and forgiveness, rather than speculating about what other things God might be doing in our lives. There is no need to speculate about what God is doing in our lives, because God is always doing what is best for us for Jesus’ sake.

Prayer: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Jesus said in Luke 9:56, “The Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” Paul demonstrates this by saving the jailer’s physical and eternal life. Once the earthquake frees his prisoners, the jailer knew that his life would be required for their escape. He draws his sword to end his life. Out of the darkness Paul’s voice brings good news which saves his life. “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.”

The jailer then asks Paul for good news to grant him eternal life. Salvation comes by faith in Christ Jesus’ death on behalf of sinners and His perfect righteousness for sinner’s benefit. The jailer takes them to his house so that his entire household can believe and be baptized for their salvation. “He took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.” The jailer washes Paul and Silas’ physical wounds, then Paul and Silas cleanse him and his family “through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

Through the preaching of the good news of the forgiveness of sins and Holy Baptism, the Triune God applies the blessings Christ earned on the cross to us. “By His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). In the Gospel and Baptism His stripes heal the wounds of our sins and wash us clean from guilt.

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Rogate Sunday

Chapter IX.

Article XXI. Of the Invocation of Saints.

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

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

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

TUESDAY, MAY 25: JOHN 3:16-21

WHITSUNTIDE

It is no wonder that many people think they are saved. When people read John 3:16 many just stop at that verse and seem to think, "I believe God loves me, so I'm in. I'm saved." By not reading the subsequent verses they miss the point John is making about sin and sinful people: "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." There is real evil in this world, evil that rejects God's grace found only in Christ and His redeeming work.

Those who reject Jesus as the Savior may well believe He was real. They may find Jesus to be a great teacher of ethics. Maybe they tout that Jesus was all about social justice. Whatever else they believe about Jesus, however true it might be, such ideas are not saving faith. Saving faith begins with acknowledging the damning consequences of sin, that you are a sinful human being and all you have done without His Spirit is against God. Only then does a person begin to appreciate Jesus' life, His suffering, His death on the cross, and His resurrection. Real appreciation for Jesus is found in the fact that, as Holy Scripture tells you, He did it for poor, miserable sinners like you and me.

Prayer: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

While attending seminary I had to take two courses on preaching. One professor liked to emphasize the use of stories and illustrations in a pastor's sermon. So, many of the sermons presented were long on stories, while short on theology. What I found interesting was that this same professor, out of the many Lutheran churches he could have attended, liked the preaching of a man who rarely used stories or illustrations in his sermons. Why?

“Then [Jesus] said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem’” (Luke 24:46-47). Maybe there is something to be said about listening to Jesus and what He taught as central to preaching.

Should anyone really be surprised that Jesus' instruction was focused on preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins? The disciples of Jesus had heard the preaching of Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist. The message he brought was quite clear, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:2). This is the same message which the prophets had preached for centuries.

If there was anyone who could have told great stories, it was Peter. He was witness to countless miracles of Jesus. Instead, Peter preached repentance and forgiveness of sins, “and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”

Prayer: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

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

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

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

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

MONDAY, MAY 10: 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-6 ROGATION MONDAY

St. Paul exhorts St. Timothy to teach those under his care to pray for those outside of the Church, for all men and for those in secular authority over us. Praying for those outside of the Church does two things: it teaches us love for our neighbor, and prompts love from our neighbor.

When we truly pray for all men and for our government apart from all internal malice—when we truly care for their wellbeing—it is hard for us to continue in hatred for our neighbor and those who are over us in secular government. No one can feel hatred toward the person for whom he truly prays. This in turn prompts love from the person for whom we pray, for nothing draws a person closer to us more than seeing that they are loved by us.

St. Paul even gives the reason; this act of praying for those outside the Church is meant to bring them into the Church. Our Lord Jesus desires all men to be saved, to come to the knowledge of salvation. Just as our dear Lord offered up His life as a ransom for all men—men who hated Him—in order to draw them to Himself, we pray for those outside the faith so that we may draw them to the Christ, that they may see the love that He has for them.

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord Pentecost Sunday

THE THIRD ARTICLE. Of Sanctification.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; the Resurrection of the body; and the Life everlasting. Amen.

What is meant by this Article?

Answer. I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me through the gospel, enlightened me by His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith; in like manner as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the true faith; in which Christian Church He daily forgives abundantly all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and will raise up me and all the dead at the last day, and will grant everlasting life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.

—The Small Catechism, Part II

SATURDAY, MAY 22: JOHN 8:12-19

EXAUDI

The testimony of the Lord Jesus is true. As true God and man, Jesus' testimony is enough to prove Him to be who He said He was. Moreover, the Father and the Spirit testify of who Jesus is, as well as the Prophets of the Old Testament. Yet, many did not believe the testimony of our Lord because of their failure to know the Word of the Father who sent Jesus.

What a terrible thing to reject the testimony of Jesus! For His testimony about Himself is freedom! Our Lord declares, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." Our Lord's testimony of Himself is that He would rescue dying sinners from the pangs of death. He would bring victory over sin and the devil. He will heal those who have dwelt in darkness and give them light. Jesus' testimony about Himself is the story of our salvation.

Yet there are many who will harden their hearts and refuse the Lord's testimony as the Pharisees did. We, as baptized believers, mourn and weep for those who reject the testimony of our Lord. Many will love the darkness rather than the light, and will scoff at the testimony of Jesus Christ. We, however, know the truth of the testimony of Jesus and that truth has set us free!

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

TUESDAY, MAY 11: ROMANS 8:24-28 ROGATION TUESDAY

We are sinners, that is for certain. Being sinners, we may find ourselves praying for things which do not truly benefit us. We pray out of the sinful desires of our hearts. As St. Paul says, "we do not know what we should pray for as we ought." We are full of sin and lack understanding of what is truly beneficial to us.

This is where the Holy Ghost helps us. The Holy Ghost reminds us of the hope that we have in the Lord Jesus. He reminds us that this life will pass away, that our home is in Heaven. We have the promise of eternal life with our Lord God in the world to come. The Holy Ghost reminds us of this hope through the faith created in us by Him. We, therefore, can pray according to this hope.

Much in the same way that the pastor prays on behalf of the people in the General Prayer, the Holy Ghost prays on our behalf. The Holy Ghost takes our sinful words and thoughts and intercedes on our behalf "with groanings which cannot be uttered." He makes intercession for us saints according to the will of the Lord God. He makes our sinful prayers pleasing to God so that we are granted the things for our benefit. We are granted a reminder of the promise of the things to come.

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

You may have noticed that the readings this week all deal with prayer, as did the Propers from this past Sunday, Rogate Sunday. These three days leading up to the Ascension of our Lord are sometimes known as “Rogationtide”. They are days of prayer in the Church which prepare us for our Lord’s Ascension to the right hand of the Father.

On this last day of Rogationtide we hear the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf. He had come into the world to redeem the world from sin, death, and the devil. He took upon Himself our flesh and did the will of the heavenly Father, perfectly fulfilling the Law of God on our behalf. He completed that which we were unable to begin. On the night before His crucifixion He prays that all those who would come to Him—who come to the truth of salvation in Him—might remain in the truth.

These words are fitting for us on the day before our Lord’s Ascension, for they remind us that our Lord Jesus has never left us or deserted us, but has continually done all things for our benefit that we might remain in Him, and His Word might remain in us. Through faith in the works that our Lord Jesus has done on our behalf, we remain in Him and He remains in us.

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

False teachers have used today’s passage of Scripture to push a teaching which states that it is our prayers that make the Lord give us what we want. This is a blatant error. As the Small Catechism says “God gives daily bread, even without our prayer...”

What our Lord teaches us in this passage is that He gives good things to those who seek Him. That does not mean that our lives will be perfect and we will have a nice new car in the garage. What it does mean is that the more we understand and seek the Lord, especially in His Word and Sacraments, we will be more and more conformed to the likeness of Christ.

When we have needs or troubles, we look to the Lord who has conquered death to give us hope. When we struggle with doubt or sin, we look to the perfect Word and gifts the Lord has given us in the Church. When we are tempted to despair, our gracious heavenly Father knows the good things we need to know Him by faith in Jesus.

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

Everything will come to an end. The Church looks at the trials and tumults of this life, not as the world looks at them, but with the vast hope we have in Christ Jesus.

We have been clothed in the white robe of righteousness that the Lord has given us in Baptism. By the giving of the Holy Ghost we are enabled to live and, as the Apostle Paul puts it, desire to be further clothed. This “further clothing” is a deeper understanding of Christ and His Word, knowing that death has been swallowed up in victory.

Our groans and longing to be with the Lord and to see His day, again, are not groans of hopelessness, but of fervent longing for our Master’s return. Therefore, we are always confident, as the Apostle states, because we are given the Spirit to walk by faith and not by sight. We know the outcome of all history and it is the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

We celebrate the Ascension of our Lord today. Our Lord Jesus ascended into Heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father to intercede for us poor sinners. Having ascended into Heaven to sit upon the throne that He won by His death on the cross does not mean, however, that He has left us alone.

In the same way that our Lord spoke to His Apostles the words that showed the prophecies in holy Scripture are fulfilled in Him, so too the ones He sent out into all the world showed the world that salvation is found only in Him. Our Lord continues to send to us those who preach the good news of salvation found in Him alone. He is with us continually in His Word. Wherever His Word is preached in its truth and purity, and His Sacraments are administered according to His institution, the Lord is there with us.

He has not left us alone, but sends to us those who strengthen our faith by giving to us the means of grace. By these the Holy Ghost continues to create and sustain faith in us. Our Lord uses these gifts to draw us to Him; to remind us that He sits on the right hand of the heavenly Father for our benefit, for He intercedes on the behalf of us poor sinners, showing the Father the wounds that paid for our sins.

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

The Lord God has chosen us before the foundation of the world to be His people. He had known our salvation even before He created us. He had determined to send to us His Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to fulfill the requirements of the Law which we are unable to do on account of our manifold transgressions. He even determined to offer up His Beloved Son as a ransom for the sins of the whole world. He paid the penalty of our sins for us. This was the plan from before the foundation of the world.

Those who have trusted in Him after hearing the Word of truth, the Gospel of our salvation, are sealed with the Holy Ghost of promise. He guarantees our salvation by continuing to preach into our ears the salvation purposed from before the foundation of the world and found in the Only-begotten Son of the heavenly Father, our Lord Jesus, the Christ.

When our sins burden us and weigh us down with doubts and despair, the Holy Ghost is there with the promise that we have been chosen by the Lord God for salvation since before the world began. He planned to save you even before you were born. Take comfort in that promise, for His salvation is for you who have heard the Word of truth and have been sealed with the Holy Ghost of promise.

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

Often it can seem like the Church is in ruin. So many schisms have sprung up that it can be difficult to have peace in the midst of so much division. However, just as the Lord promised to bring His people out of captivity, the Lord promises to gather His Church.

Though it seems as if we live in a great dispersion, we must remember that the Lord kept His promises to His Old Covenant people. We have a better promise in Christ. Though the Old Covenant saints had their hope in the promise, it had not come to fulfilment yet.

Just as we can often doubt due to the current climate in visible Christendom, we must remember that the Lord will gather those within His Church at the Last Day. We battle schism, heresy, and dissent in the Church as it arises, and with hope and faith we know that the Lord is not slow to fulfil His promises.

Just as the Lord gathered His people and promised to give them a new heart, so he gathers us, His Church, and gives us new life in Christ. He promises not to leave, nor forsake us, even when we come under trails from those who wish to break the Church. By God's grace in Christ, the Church will be gathered to Him.

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

TUESDAY, MAY 18: ISAIAH 19:19-25

EXAUDI

Our reading today shows the incredible love God has for sinners. Egypt is well known from the Exodus story as an enemy of the Lord and the Lord's people. Oftentimes, when an analogy for an evil place or person was needed, Egypt served that analogy. Despite this, the prophet Isaiah tells us that the Lord will have Egypt offering thanks to Him and will serve Him. The Lord will heal Egypt, despite the reputation and rebellion that was associated with Egypt.

Let us remember that the Lord has redeemed us despite our rebellion and sin. He has called those who were once His enemies and washed them in the waters of Holy Baptism. He has taken our reputation and declares His Absolution to us. He has loved us so profoundly that He would die for our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness through faith! What a great salvation we have in Christ Jesus, and what a merciful God we serve!

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

SATURDAY, MAY 15: PHILEMON 3-21

ASCENSIONTIDE

Onesimus is a slave who runs away from his master. That St. Paul calls him “unprofitable” would suggest that he was not that great of a slave, either. By the grace of the Lord God, this slave named Onesimus ends up in Rome and meets St. Paul, who is in chains for preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. A slave of mankind—of Philemon—meets a slave of Christ—the blessed Apostle, St. Paul. Having met this slave of Christ, the slave of Philemon receives the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ willingly and gladly. Onesimus is converted through the Word of God, through the preaching of St. Paul. St. Paul then sends this slave back to his master, Philemon.

This reflects our condition. We are unprofitable slaves to sin. Rebellious against our Lord and Master whenever we flee from Him and His Commands by our unholy, sinful actions. By the grace of the Lord God we end up sitting at the feet of a faithful preacher of the Word of God, who proclaims into our ears the good things that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has done for us. Through the preaching of the Gospel we turn from our sin and cling in faith to the works and merits of our Savior Jesus Christ. We are transformed from slaves to sin into brothers of one another, and of our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Exaudi Sunday

IX. Of Excommunication.

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

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

The selections from the Book of Concord for the Sundays of the Church Year are from H. E. Jacobs' translation of the Book of Concord, and are taken from the table of suggested lessons for Sundays and Festivals of the Church. (The table of appropriate lessons was originally found in Pipping's Christliches Concordienbuch [Leipzig 1734].)

MONDAY, MAY 17: JOHN 17:20-26

EXAUDI

Just as our Lord Jesus Christ prayed for Saint Peter that his faith would not falter, so our Lord prays for all of us; and this prayer teaches us about life in the Church. Jesus prays that those who believe in Him would be one. Just as Jesus has unity with the Father, so we as believers are united to one another in Christ.

Notice that Jesus prays for those who “will believe in Me through their [the Apostles’] word.” This is the first part of Church unity and fellowship. All who believe, teach, and confess the word which the Apostles brought in the sacred Scripture are made one. If this word is not believed and confessed, then there is no fellowship. Even if a sectarian group says they believe in the Apostolic word and yet contradicts or modifies it, then we cannot have fellowship.

This is a terrible tragedy when brothers cannot walk in unity. We pray, just as our Lord prays, that all schisms and causes of offense would be done away with, and all those who wander from the truth of Scripture would be brought to repentance. Until such time, we keep this Apostolic word and unite with those who do likewise, knowing that Christ is still advancing His kingdom.

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