House Postil

Dr. M. Luther

SERMONS ON THE GOSPELS

FOR THE

SUNDAYS AND PRINCIPAL FESTIVALS

OF THE

CHURCH-YEAR.

Content Page

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN.

VOL. I.

SECOND EDITION.

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PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION.

One of the most deeply felt wants of the Ev. Lutheran Church in this country has been that of books setting forth her genius and doctrines in the English language. Many are ignorant of her character who would gladly be informed, if the means were within their reach. Many would love her, if they only knew her. Many who love her well would labor more zealously for her welfare, if they knew her more intimately. Some have taken advantage of the paucity of means for obtaining information respecting her, and have injured her by misrepresentation. All that she needs ask is a candid hearing; but to secure it she must speak in the language of the people among whom she lives and labors.

The literature of the Lutheran Church is rich in every branch of sacred learning: in some departments she stands without a rival. But unhappily her treasures have been mostly locked up in Latin and German caskets, to which but comparatively few have keys. This has impeded her progress and hindered her prosperity among the American people, and been a source of regret to many who pray for the prosperity of Jerusalem. Her circumstances demand that these treasures be unlocked for the glory of her Lord.

The publisher of this volume has determined to contribute, according to his ability, towards accomplishing this end by publishing Lutheran

books in the English language. That he has chosen Luther's sermons, in pursuance of this design, requires no explanation, and certainly no apology. Not only Lutherans, but Christians of almost every name, must acquiesce in the judgment that the great reformer has a right to be heard; and those who prize the pure truth which was again brought to light in the glorious reformation, will hail with joy the announcement that the greatest preacher since the days of St. Paul is now to address the everlasting Gospel in his own vigorous way to the English community.

Of the translation it will not be necessary to say much, as the reader has it before him and can judge for himself of its merits. That it is faithful to the original, which was the chief end aimed at, will, we trust, be the verdict of all. Those who are acquainted with Luther's peculiar style need not be reminded that it is no easy task to reproduce his sentences in another language; but we doubt not that the incomparable Luther will everywhere be recognized in these sermons, though it be not his mother tongue in which he here preaches.

It is proper to state that the translation was made by Rev. E. Schmid, A. M., Professor in Capital University, excepting the first six sermons, which had previously been translated by Rev. D M. Martens, A. M., and that the whole passed through the hands of the present writer before it was given to the printer.

It is the publisher's purpose, if this volume shall meet with favor, to complete the House-Postil in three additional volumes, and, if sufficient encouragement be given, to issue translations

of other works of Luther. The second volume will be issued as soon as the sales of the present shall justify the undertaking.

In the hope that these sermons, which, through three centuries, have strengthened and cheered so many millions of souls in their original form, will be found of service in building up the Redeemer's kingdom also in their English dress, we commend the volume to the Holy Christian Church, whose welfare it is designed to promote.

M. LOY.

Columbus, O., June 26th, 1869.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER'S

PREFACE TO HIS HOUSE-POSTIL.

These sermons were preached by me at certain times in my dwelling, in the presence of my household, that I, as the head of the family, might do my duty towards them, by instructing them how to lead a Christian life. God grant that they may have heard these words not only with their ears, but that their hearts may also have retained them. I sincerely hope that my endeavors may not have been fruitless, according to Isaiah 55: "My word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Though some of the seed may have fallen by the way-side, some upon stony ground, and some among thorns, there is also good ground, here and there, where it will bring forth fruit and not return void. A German proverb says: A pertinent saying shall find an attentive hearer. If there are but few who heed it, there is, at least, now and then one who will do so, so that it is not spoken entirely in vain.

It would seem as if the Patriarchs had practiced this custom of preaching in their dwellings to their households. We read that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob now and then erected altars, around which, together with their whole family, they worshiped the Lord by preaching, by prayer and by giving thanks to God. Afterwards others, neigh-

bors and those dwelling in adjacent hamlets and towns, met with them for the same purpose. It is not to be presumed that a Patriarch would build an altar for his own exclusive use, but rather that his wife, his children and servants also congregated there, and followed the example of the master of the house. He could not be silent on such occasions, but performed the part of pastor and preacher by instructing them and telling them of the promises which God had made to them. When the neighbors convened with them, such household sermons became public and of a parochial character, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles and Matt. 10. Christ gave the command to His disciples that they should first preach in the houses, where the neighbors would congregate, and afterwards whole cities and countries should form churches.

I was not aware, however, of the fact that these my household sermons were taken down by Magister Veit Dietrich; much less did I expect them to appear in print, and to be distributed throughout the land. I thought they were long since forgotten; but if they can please and edify others, I rejoice at it, and willingly give them as mere fragments and crumbs which have been left. For we now have the Bible itself, thanks be to God! and also the copious and valuable writings of many learned men, from which a Christian can easily derive instruction. As the proverb says: The cow wades in pastures up to her body, thus it is with us in our day; we are abundantly supplied with the rich and nourishing pasture of the Divine Word. God grant that we may use it with gratitude to our growth and strength, before the time of

famine comes as the reward of our ingratitude; may we be preserved from the fate of feeding on thorns and pebbles again, as we were forced to do while under the pope, but may we rather bring forth much fruit and be the disciples of Christ, John 16. Unto Him be all praise and honor now and forever! Amen.

SERMONS ON THE GOSPELS.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

MATT 21, 1-9. And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

THE Jews had many beautiful and glorious promises concerning the Messiah or Christ, how He should appear on earth, establish an everlasting kingdom, redeem His people from all evil, and help them forever; as we see in all the writings of the prophets, that they speak beyond measure gloriously concerning the future kingdom of Christ. And these writings were well known to the Jews. But false preachers and carnal teachers arose, who taught the people the opinion, which

they gladly received and to which their hearts were inclined, that Christ would come in worldly glory, and make an entry in power, as other worldly kings are accustomed to do, so that everything should be most grand and gorgeous; that He would make the Jews powerful princes and rulers all over the world; as they think even to-day, that when their Messiah shall come, they shall be lords of all the world, and the heathens their servants. After such a Messiah or Christ they are still gaping, but do not long for the Messiah, *i. e.* the Lord Christ, that He should deliver them from sin and eternal death.

That the Jews might be warned and not permit themselves to be deceived by such carnal teachers, God long before proclaimed in plain words through the prophet Zechariah that Christ would not come as a temporal king in great pomp and splendor, but that He would enter Jerusalem, in which, as the capital of the country, was the temple and its service, without all worldly grandeur, riding upon an ass, as the Gospel relates.

And that the Jews might not excuse themselves and say: If we had known that He would come in such poverty, we would have looked for it and received Him, the prophet told them this very clearly so long a time before. And the event took place in the full light of day, that the Savior rode upon the borrowed ass, without saddle or anything else, the apostles laying their clothes upon it, so that the poor king could sit thereon.

Therefore the Jews can by no means excuse themselves. For here is clear and plain prophecy: When Christ shall ride into Jerusalem, He will not come, as worldly kings are wont, on a proud steed,

clothed in armor, with implements of war, but He will come, as the Evangelist says, *meek*, or as the prophet terms it, *lowly*. It is as if the prophet would thus warn every one, saying: Mark well the ass, and know that He who comes on it is the true Messiah. Therefore, beware; do not look for a golden crown, sumptuous apparel or costly ornaments, or any great display. For Christ will come poor, with a meek and lowly heart, and will not be seen otherwise than riding upon an ass. This is all the pomp and glory He will show the world at His entry into Jerusalem.

This prophecy induced our Lord now to make this entry, and He attaches much importance to it. Therefore He also gives the disciples such strict command about this matter; and will not enter Jerusalem by night, or secretly, but openly in the full light of day; not alone, but in the midst of a great multitude of people going before and following after, calling aloud to Him as the true Son of David, and wishing Him great prosperity in His kingdom. Jerusalem must know of this entry, must see and hear the ass and this poor King, concerning whom Zechariah had prophesied, warning the Jews not to be offended at His poverty and humble entry, but to dismiss their idea that Christ would come with great worldly pomp. He will indeed be a king, says Zechariah, but a humble, poor king, who has nothing of the appearance of a king, judging by the outward pomp which worldly kings and princes usually show before men.

On the other hand, says Zechariah, this poor and humble King will have a power greater than that of all emperors and kings who have ever lived on earth, great as their power may have been. For

He is called *Justus et Salvator*. Not a rich, noble and mighty king before the world, but the *Just One* and *Savior*, who shall bring with Him righteousness and salvation, attack sin and death, be the enemy of sin and destroyer of death; for He comes for the purpose of saving from sin and eternal death all who believe in Him, receive Him as their king, and are not offended at the poor borrowed ass. Those who receive Him in faith and find their consolation in Him, receive forgiveness of sins, and shall not die, but live forever. And though after their bodies they must die and be buried, it shall be to them, and be called by them, not death, but only a sleep.

This the prophet would teach us of this King, when he gives Him these two glorious, nay divine, titles and names, calling Him the *Just One* and *Savior*, who shall rob death of his power, hell of its destruction, tread the devil under His feet, and thus deliver us who believe in Him from sin and death, and introduce us to the society of angels, where there is eternal life and salvation. He leaves other kings in possession of their external government, authority, pomp, castles, houses, money and goods, allows them also to eat, drink, clothe themselves, and build in a more costly manner than other people; but this art they do not understand, this work they cannot do, which this poor and humble King, Christ, understands and does. For no emperor, king or temporal authority, with all their power, can deliver you from one sin, or with their money and goods heal the least disease, much less afford help against eternal death and hell. But this lovely King, Christ, delivers me, not only from one sin, but

from all my sins, and not me only, but the whole world. He comes to take away not only sickness, but death, and not only from me, but from the whole world.

This is what the Evangelist desires to have announced to the daughter of Zion from the prophet; not to be offended at His lowly coming, but to close the eyes and open the ears, that she may not see in what poverty He rides, but hear what is said of this poor King. Reason looks only on this poor and humble form, that He rides upon an ass without saddle or spurs, like a beggar, and is offended at it; but does not see that He can deliver us from sin, destroy death, and give us everlasting holiness, righteousness, eternal salvation and eternal life. Therefore we must tell and proclaim it, that the people may hear and believe. This is what the Evangelist means when he says: "Tell ye the daughter of Zion." Why? In order that she may know it, and not heed, nor be offended at this, that He comes in such poverty and soon after dies ignominiously. For all this takes place for *your* good, in order that He, as a Savior, may help you against the devil and death, to sanctify and deliver you from sin. Whoever will not receive this with his ears and heart, but would see it with his eyes and feel it with his hands, deprives himself of this King; for it is very different from what we find it with other kings. What they do, they do with pomp, and everything has a grand, imposing appearance. In Christ we do not find this; His office and work is to help us from sin and death, and this He does in no other external manner but through His word and gospel, which He orders to be told and preached to us, and through the signs

which He gives besides the promise, through which also He works and shows His power; as that He first plunges us into baptism, where our eyes see nothing but simple water, like other water. Likewise, He has comprehended it in the word we are preaching, where our eyes see nothing but man's breath. But we must beware and not follow our eyes here, but shut our eyes, open our ears and hear the word. This teaches us how our Lord Jesus shed His blood for the forgiveness of our sins, that we might live. These gifts He would bestow upon us in holy baptism, in the Lord's Supper, in the preaching and absolution; there we certainly find them. Now it is true, it seems small matter that through the washing of water, through the word and sacrament, such great things should be accomplished; but do not let your eyes deceive you. There also it seemed a small matter that He who rode on a borrowed ass, and afterwards suffered Himself to be crucified, should take away sin, death and hell. No one could see it in His appearance; but the prophet says so. Therefore we must simply receive it with our ears, and believe it with our hearts; with our eyes we cannot see it. Hence the Evangelist says, as already mentioned: "Tell ye the daughter of Zion." And the prophet says: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, behold thy King cometh unto thee," as if he would say: This is told to *you*, and God wishes to have it proclaimed to *you*, that you may find consolation in Him by faith, and be defended by such faith against doubt and despair on account of your unworthiness and sins. What is it that is told, and on account of which she is to rejoice? It is this: "Behold thy King cometh unto thee."

What kind of a king? A holy and just King, a Physician and Savior, or Helper, who would heal and save you. He would give His glory and righteousness to you, that you may be free from your sins; His life also He would lay down for you, that through His death you may be delivered from eternal death. Therefore be not offended at His lowly and humble form, but thank Him for it, and comfort yourself in Him. For all that He does and accomplishes in His coming, is done for your good; thus He would deliver you from your sins and from death, and justify and save you.

This now is our King, the dear Lord Jesus Christ, and this is His kingdom and office. It deals not with golden crowns and kingdoms, or with great worldly pomp; no, but when we must die, and cannot retain this life any longer, then it is His office and work to deliver us from sin, death and the power of hell; and through the preaching of the gospel He announces to us that we shall certainly receive this gift or benefit from Him, so that when we are in trouble on account of our sins, or in danger of death, we can comfort ourselves by faith and say: Now help is afforded me through my dear King, Jesus Christ, the Just One and Savior; to this end He came, so lowly and poor, and suffered Himself to be nailed to the cross, that He might justify and sanctify me; in Himself He hath destroyed my sin and death, gives me His own righteousness and victory over death and hell, and gives me also His Holy Spirit, that I might have in my heart a sure seal and witness of His help. See now, whoever believes this as he hears it, and as it is preached in the gospel, he also has it. For to this end holy baptism was instituted by our

Savior that He might clothe you with His righteousness, and that His holiness and innocence should be yours. For we are all poor sinners, but in baptism, and afterwards in our whole life, if we turn unto Christ, He comforts us, and says: Give me your sins and take my righteousness and holiness; let your death be taken from you, and put on my life. This is, properly speaking, the Lord Jesus' government. For all His office and work is this, that He daily takes away our sin and death, and clothes us with His righteousness and life.

This announcement we should indeed hear with great joy, and every one should thereby be bettered and made more holy. But alas, the contrary is true, and the world grows worse as it grows older, becoming the very Satan himself, as we see that the people are now more dissolute, avaricious, unmerciful, impure and wicked than previously under the papacy. What causes this? Nothing else than that the people disregard this preaching, do not use it aright for their own conversion and amendment, that is, for the comfort of their conscience, and thankfulness for the grace and benefit of God in Christ; but every one is more concerned for money and goods, or other worldly matters, than for this precious treasure which Christ brings us. For the most of us, when we do not feel our misery, the fear of sin and death, would rather, like the Jews, have such a king in Christ as would give us riches and ease here on earth, than that we should comfort ourselves in Him in the midst of poverty, crosses, wretchedness, fear and death. The world takes no delight in this, and because the gospel and Christ do not give it what it desires, it will have nothing to do

with Christ and the gospel. Therefore our Lord in turn rebukes this world and says: Do you not rejoice in this, nor thank me, that through the sufferings and death of my only begotten Son, I take away your sins and death? Then I will give you sin and death enough, since you want it so; and where you were possessed of and tormented by only one devil, you shall now be tormented by seven that are worse. We see farmers, citizens and all orders, from the highest to the lowest, guilty of shameful avarice, inordinate life, impurity and other vices. Therefore let every one who would be a Christian be hereby warned as of God himself, joyfully and thankfully to hear and receive this announcement, and also pray to God to give him a strong faith, that he may hold fast this doctrine; then surely the fruit will follow, that he will daily become more humble, obedient, gentle, chaste and pious. For this doctrine is of a character to make godly, chaste, obedient, pious people. But those who will not gladly receive it, become seven times worse than they were before they heard it, as we see everywhere. And the hour will surely come when God will punish this unthankfulness. Then it will appear what the world has merited by it. Now, since the Jews would not obey the prophet, it is told to us that our King comes meek and lowly, in order that we may learn wisdom from their sad experience, and not be offended by His poverty, nor look for worldly pomp and riches, like the Jews; but learn that in Christ we have a King who is the Just One and Savior, and willing to help us from sin and eternal death. This announcement, I say, we should receive with joy, and with hearty thanks

to God, else we must take the devil, with walling, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The example of the Apostles and others who here enter in with our Savior, admonishes us to the same. For since the Lord Jesus is a King, He must also have a kingdom or people, and these must render Him, as their King, becoming service. What this service is, this history tells us. For here we find people who acknowledge Christ as King, and are not ashamed to walk by the side of the ass, on which this King rides. Among these the Apostles are the first who acknowledge this Lord as the true Messiah that justifies sinners, and is a Savior from death. Therefore "they bring the ass," that is, they direct the Jews, who have hitherto lived under the law and borne its burden, to Christ. Besides the ass they bring to Christ also the young colt, the heathen, who were yet unbridled and not under the law. For Christ is a Savior of all men; all preachers and teachers must lead every one to Him. This is one becoming service we should render this King, that we acknowledge, receive, praise and glorify Him as the Just One and Savior, and direct every one to Him.

Another service is that we also "sing hosanna" to this Christ, that is, that we wish prosperity to His kingdom, let our confession of Him be heard publicly, and do everything we can for the growth and promotion of His kingdom. For the word "*hosanna*" means as much as: "O Lord help, Lord give success to the Son of David," as we pray also in the Lord's prayer: "Thy kingdom come." For the devil and his servants will not fail to make every possible effort to hinder this kingdom, and either to destroy or adulterate the word. We must

therefore wish and pray, that God would hinder and repel the will of the devil.

The third is, that we "take our garments and spread them in the way" for the Lord Jesus, which is done when we, to the best of our ability, help the office of the ministry with our money and goods, in order that good, learned and pious men may be educated to teach in the Church; and when we support those who are in this office in such a manner, that they can wait on their office and studies, and not neglect them. In short when we use our money and goods to the end that the offices in the Church may be well filled, and the people provided with good officers, then we spread our garments in the way for Christ, that He may ride along with all the more honor. Thus we ought to serve the King, and not pay any heed to the High Priests and Pharisees, who look with no favor on this entry with so little pomp and display, and are full of anger and impatience because He is called a King, and received and honored as such, desiring to prevent it if they could. But Christ will not allow them to prevent it. For since He is a King, He must also have His courtiers and court-service. And happy are they who serve Him, for He is a King who will serve us again; yea, He comes for the sole purpose of serving us, not with money and goods, but with righteousness against sin and help against death and eternal damnation.

Therefore we should be ready and willing to serve Him, and pay no heed to the vain talk and example of the pope, bishops and others, who do not, like the Apostles, lead the ass to Christ and set Him thereon, but wish to throw Him off and rule over the people themselves, after their own

pleasure, with doctrines of men; who cannot endure it that He should ride with His gospel and be seen or heard. These false teachers also have their disciples, who play the hypocrite for them and strew palm and olive branches in the road before them, but throw stones at Christ; for they persecute His gospel and all who preach it. Such will at last become conscious, with the Jews, that they have despised the just King and Savior, whilst those who have received and confessed Him, and turned their poverty to His service, will receive from Him eternal life and glory.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

LUKE 21, 25–36. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And He spake to them a parable: Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is nigh at hand. So likewise when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

IT has always been God's way, from the beginning of the world, that when He would introduce something new, He sends great signs beforehand. Thus, when He was about to punish the Egyptians and deliver His people from their hand and make of them a peculiar people, He first sent all kinds of signs, both bad and good; as locusts, hail, boils, &c., which were terrible and destructive to the Egyptians, until at last all the first-born were killed in one night, and the rest of the people

drowned in the Red Sea. But to the Jews were given favorable signs; God led them through the Red Sea on dry ground, caused their enemies to be drowned in it, gave them bread from heaven, and the like. This was a sure indication that God intended to do something great with this people, to introduce a new government and order. And similar indications were given when He was about to punish the hard-hearted Jews and spread His kingdom in the Christian Church over the whole earth. For when the Lord Jesus hung on the cross, the graves were opened and the dead came forth; there was also an extraordinary eclipse of the sun, and an earthquake, and the veil of the temple was rent in twain. This was all a sure indication of a new order of things, that Judaism should fall and the kingdom of Christ be established and spread abroad.

This divine plan, not to do anything great without sending special signs beforehand, the Jews well knew, having learned it by their own experience. Therefore the Apostles here come to the Lord Jesus and ask Him what sign shall precede the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, before the one and eternal kingdom of Christ shall be established. For, since they had so often heard and are now certain that He is to be a King, and according to the Scriptures to extend His kingdom over the whole world, yet see that His own people, and especially the city of Jerusalem, does still not receive Him, but those who are highest in authority persecute Him, they think that He must do something great in order to gain and retain His kingdom and authority, and punish and cast down His enemies. They think, according to their old Jewish notions, that it will be accomplished with

external might and power; or that He must send great signs and wonders from heaven, as Elijah did, and as several of His Apostles wished Him to show the Samaritans who would not receive Him. They now wished to know the signs and indications beforehand, when His kingdom should begin, and how He would introduce it. For they still had a longing after external worldly power, and were still too far from the true knowledge of the eternal kingdom of Christ, which was not, after the manner of the world, to rule over lands and people, or thus make changes in the governments, but should be a spiritual, eternal kingdom in the hearts of men, through the office of the ministry of the gospel, and by the Holy Ghost.

Hereupon the Lord answers them and says: There shall indeed signs precede not only the destruction and end of the city of Jerusalem, but also of the whole world; for the temple, together with the whole city and all its government, shall, on account of the persecution of the gospel, be destroyed, and that at no distant day. But when they (those who shall live to witness it) shall see the city surrounded by a host, it shall be a sufficient sign to them that the end is near, and they must not think that they shall yet rule with Him in the land of Judea. In like manner He says that everywhere in the world there shall be seen signs of its end; therefore they should not think that He would establish a new order and government, in which everything would accord with their wishes and in which there would be universal obedience to their imaginary beautiful order; but should know that His kingdom is not of this world, and that the world will persecute and oppress Christ and His

Gospel and Church, until the end. The signs by which it shall be preceded do not consist in this, that He would interfere with the kingdoms by exercising external might and power, or by His appearing as Lord of this world, as they then still thought that everything would be subject to Him, and that everywhere in the world His Christians would rule; but only such signs shall be seen which indicate that God will in the end let this world perish with all that is in it; and such signs shall be seen in the sky, the sun, the stars, in the sea, on earth and in all creatures, so that every one can see that in the end everything must perish together in one mass. And such signs shall be an indication to the Church of God, that on earth and in the present life she shall not have temporal peace, rest or joy, but that in this wicked world she shall have much great and severe tribulation and anguish, and shall not only be persecuted by the world, without bodily protection and help, but shall also suffer most by those common punishments, with which God will visit the world, so that it shall seem as if God would suffer her to be overwhelmed altogether. To sum up, it must come to this, that the Church must learn not to comfort herself with this world and its life, dominion and treasures, but to consider and know this beforehand, that henceforth it shall become worse and worse in this life, especially in the times when those terrible punishments and confusion shall prevail in the world, and that thus she shall remain in tribulation to the end; and yet amid such punishments and the destruction of the world, God will wonderfully preserve her until that day when the Son of God shall come, create new heavens and earth, cast all the

wicked into everlasting punishment and make an end of all evil for His elect. This is the chief point of the sermon of our Lord concerning the signs, which we should especially observe, so as not to trouble ourselves with the questions, how or when, or how long or how short a time before the end of the world such signs shall take place. It is sufficient for us to learn, in the first place, that Christ would hereby show us that just as God has sent manifold signs of His wrath against sin, and of His punishment into the world at all times, so these terrible signs shall always remain, which shall indicate and bring with them horrible punishments, but in the last times especially they shall appear in greater numbers and more rapid succession.

Therefore we should observe here why the Lord spake these words, and for what reasons it was and still is necessary to tell and know these things beforehand: namely, in the first place, that the Church might know that such signs and the punishments following them, are not by mere chance, as the wicked world thinks; but that God has threatened them as a punishment for contempt and for all other sins, and that they are also sent as a sure indication of God's great anger and displeasure against sin, especially as they are to increase more and more in the last times, so that we may thereby be warned of the final and utter destruction of the world, since it will not forsake its sins, but in the midst of punishments continues to despise God and remain impenitent, and thus also in the end, at its destruction, will be found so, on which account God's anger and punishments will

remain over it forever. Secondly, we must know that the Church of God on earth must also suffer amidst these punishments, nay, is perhaps more oppressed by them than others, because she also yet has sins. For God desires especially that this be known in His Church, how great and terrible is His anger against sin, in order that she may live before Him in fear and humility, and sigh all the more after grace. In the third place, we should also hold fast this consolation, that God will not therefore cast away His Church and those who turn to Him, although He suffers them while on earth to be brought under all manner of great tribulation, and even though they must endure more anguish than other people; nor is it His will that they should despair of His help, and think that God will suffer them to go down and perish with the wicked amid the punishments and signs of His anger; but He allows this to befall them, to exhort every one to repentance and conversion, and especially to give those who turn to Him by true repentance, faith and amendment of life, an opportunity to exercise their faith, to call upon Him, and confidently to expect help from Him in the midst of their tribulation and under the cross. Even as He also frequently, both in other places and in this gospel lesson, admonishes us to pray and call upon Him, and promises mitigation of the punishments and help from God, and also assures His Church, that she shall be preserved to the end of the world, even to eternal life.

Of the signs Christ says, in the first place, that there shall be terrible signs in the sun, moon and the whole heavens, and other creatures also in the water and the sea, which, as I think, are not to be

referred to a particular time, as though they should all take place within a short time before the last day, and be seen only by those who live to see that day; but He speaks in common of all kinds of signs which may happen at any time in all parts of the world, before the end, of which, although some, as eclipses of the sun and moon, are considered natural, and are of such a nature that, by a certain knowledge of the courses of the heavenly bodies, it can be told beforehand when they will happen, yet there are also many others which are unusual, and not known beforehand, which come unexpectedly and suddenly, in spite of all mathematics; like that eclipse of the sun when Christ was crucified, which did not happen at that time when such eclipses take place by the usual course of nature. For science teaches us that it must take place at the time of the new moon, when both, sun and moon, occupy one position in the heavens, and are so near together that the moon comes before the sun and covers it, so that it cannot shine, and of course it could happen at no other time. Therefore, if any eclipse of the sun happens at the time of the full moon, or one of the quarters of the moon, as at the time of Christ's passion, it does not take place naturally, but is an especial sign. But whether such and other signs in the heavens appear in the natural order of things or not, they are still signs, and God intends that they should signify something to the world, as the eclipses of the sun and moon always do, of which we have seen many and great ones, especially in these last years, and often several in one year. Thus, especially if the end should be near, there may soon be many strange, new and unusual signs. As in the last

twenty or thirty years many strange appearances and signs have been seen here and there, as many strange rainbows and other signs, the cross, two or three suns, shooting stars, comets following each other, fiery heavens, the sun blood-red several days in succession, besides that which may yet daily happen. These would appear terrible if they were seen at one time, or together, or if they were described and noticed at once; but since they happen singly and one after the other, we soon forget them when they are past, and have become accustomed to them.

Secondly, He speaks of other signs which are to happen below in the air, in the sea and on the earth. Such are strange and terrible thunderstorms, great and dreadful roaring and disturbance of winds, which storm and rage in an unusual manner, as if everything were to be destroyed. It has happened in different places, that the land together with the people were drowned or sunk, as has occurred within our recollection. Thus during several years we have heard of great earthquakes, of the sinking of several places in Italy, Sicily, and other places by the sea, of which Christ also speaks especially in other passages. All these are to be indications and signs that the world must soon come to an end and be destroyed. As in the case of a man who is to die: he must first begin to complain, to lie sick of a fever or pestilence; he evidently declines and falls away, until his color is that of death, his lips are livid, his eyes are sunken, &c. These are to him signs that he is near his end. Thus also the world must, as it were, first get sick, and groan and creak before it breaks and goes down.

In the third place He also mentions some signs which shall happen to men, and mentions especially that men's hearts shall fail them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. This shall follow after and in addition to the other signs. For such signs in heaven and in the air and water will not pass by without results, but will bring with them terrible plagues and changes in the world, of which they shall be signs. As Christ also explains this especially in Matt. 24. that "nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and pestilences and earthquakes," &c. All these are to prevail with great power before the last times, and all are to be signs that God will finally punish the world, nay, subvert it altogether, that there shall be seen great devastation of kingdoms and lands, and finally fearful division and destruction of governments, and of nearly all virtue, honor and discipline, and everything shall be full of fearful tyranny, barbarism, unfaithfulness, treachery, and all manner of vice, unhindered and unpunished; as the Savior also says, that as love has waxed cold, iniquity will abound, so that every one will have to say, it is not possible that the world will long exist thus, as we see these things at this time to such a degree, that no improvement can be hoped for. All this is accompanied by those signs which Christ says shall happen to men, viz, "men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." For when those people who are not altogether abandoned, and especially those who are still upright, honorable, good-hearted, wise and sensible people shall see such wretchedness

and terrible things on earth, and everything becoming so bad, and when extreme want and severe punishments, as war and destruction, shall befall them, and they think of these things which are still beyond and must yet follow, they will not be able to bear it all, and the hearts of many will fail them for fear, as we have often seen and still see, that many people in such extremity are so cast down by distress and sorrow, that on account of it they die, or their lives are shortened. And this that He says, "Men shall fear," I regard as a chief point, which we have especially also seen and experienced under the papacy, especially those people who wished to be pious, and have lived a strictly spiritual life. What misery, what anxiety and torture of consciences has been caused by doctrines and commandments of men, as Christ also speaks of this in Matt. 24. among the plagues of the last time in the Church, and says that many false teachers shall arise, who shall also do great signs and wonders and deceive many, and, if it were possible, even the very elect.

We who are now old, and who were formerly buried in the darkness of the papacy, know how good, pious hearts were terrified and driven to the verge of despair by the pope's command, who through his monks laid innumerable snares for consciences, which they called *casus conscientiæ*, with which they filled great books, setting forth how great a mortal sin it is not to keep such commands; as when a monk did not at all times strictly and in every respect keep and observe his adopted rule and order, or when merely through forgetfulness he did not put his cowl on according to rule, or a priest did not read his prayers, which they call *horas*, or,

when he was to celebrate mass, allowed himself to take a drop or two of water, or when one did not make as full a confession of each and every sin, or did not fast as strictly as he should, and thus went to the Sacrament, or did not render the imposed satisfaction, &c. With such things timid and fearful consciences were so terrified that no one knew how to help them; and even when, with the greatest diligence, they had done all that they possibly could do, they could still not be satisfied, because they thought they had not done enough. So they ran hither and thither, here to this saint, there to another, to Rome, to St. James at *Compostel*, some unprotected and barefoot, others also in their armor, and here and there on new pilgrimages, especially to places where the Virgin Mary (as the shameless monks and priests devised) would be gracious, do wonders, &c., until it came so far that the common people, nay even princes and lords, persuaded by the monks, had themselves enrolled in their orders when dead, and buried in a monk's cap. And thus, without ceasing, they tortured their poor consciences with their works, that I do not believe there ever could have been greater distress and anguish; as I myself have seen many, who could not endure such dread and fear of the terrible judgment of God, and on account of it gave themselves up to despair. The reason of all this was that the doctrine of the gospel and the true consolation in Christ had become darkened in the pulpits, nay gone out altogether, and no one knew anything about the doctrine of faith, through which forgiveness of sins is promised us in the Scriptures, not on account of our merit, but for Christ's sake, through grace. The pope's sermons

had brought it so far that we feared Christ almost as death, because they showed in Him no grace nor consolation, but represented Him as an angry, terrible Judge, before whom no man could find grace, unless he had enough holiness or good works of his own, or intercessions of the Virgin Mary or other saints, to cover up all his sins. For I also was one of those who called upon the Virgin Mary, that she might be our mediator, and reconcile us with that strict Judge, Christ; as also in all churches scarcely anything else but such idolatry (which now they pretend to have forgotten, as though they had never had any error nor idolatry) was publicly taught, read and sung. Everywhere the prayer for the intercession of Mary was first, and they had special *horas*, which they observed and sung to Mary seven times a day, in which they always repeated especially this verse, which they also repeated to the people on their death bed, and called it into their ears as they were giving up the ghost: *Maria, mater gratiæ, Tu nos ab hoste protege, In horo mortis suscipe!** Everywhere the burden of all the prayers and sighs, even of the holy monks, was this: Help, thou dear mother of God, and intercede for us against the severe judgment of thy Son, else our souls have no comfort, nor help, nor refuge. Now this was a terrible dread and anguish, which only false doctrine begets and which must follow if we would be pious, and yet not have the true knowledge of the doctrine of the gospel. But now, thanks be to God, since the pure doctrine and consolation in Christ

* Mary, mother of grace, protect us against the enemy; receive us in the hour of death!

shines again, such anguish is past, but alas too soon forgotten. For the young people, who now grow up, know nothing of it. And the Papists themselves have received so much strength from our doctrine, that they have got rid of such anguish and fear, and are now good fellows, belonging to those who regard neither God's grace and consolation, nor the terrible signs of the last day and the judgment. For these were surely terrible signs, that such anguish and distress were in the Church, and we should not so soon forget them. For although, as I hope, they are mostly past, they may happen again, if the world will not be truly thankful for the gospel, but will strive, as the Papists are now doing, again to darken and suppress the Word of God, that there may again be greater distress.

Now those, in whom such anguish and terror were found, were generally not ungodly and abandoned, but good-hearted, pious, God-fearing people, and still are, so that those are not signs of condemnation; for it is a good sign that such hearts do not despise God's anger, but heed the warning of the future judgment, and sigh after such consolation and deliverance. And we may well believe that many of them are wonderfully preserved in their last hour, who have again laid hold upon Christ, and comforted themselves in His sufferings and death; but since they are so weak, timid and uninstructed, they cannot endure all these terrors. So we said above that such terror and misery in the world mostly fall upon the Church and cause her anguish, and that some, though they are not overcome by it so as to despair of Christ altogether, are still very much weakened and almost

consumed by such burdens. Therefore, although they must bear and feel such signs, they are sent as a terror, not to them, but to the wicked, who nevertheless are so hardened and secure, that they care nothing for such divine threats and signs, but despise them. They imagine that as God does not follow them up immediately with His wrath and turn the whole world upside down, but grants them a little time, there is no particular danger. And if we tell them much about signs, and they themselves see to-day this, to-morrow something else, they let it pass by, and say: Such signs happened formerly, and the last day has not come yet. Therefore also the Lord lets such ungodly people go, and further preaches of His coming for the consolation of Christians. For if the world can despise the terrible signs and punishments which it sees, it will pay still less heed to this preaching and threatening, but it will serve to leave many without excuse, and their condemnation will be rendered all the greater by their own conscience. But since they will not believe when it is preached to them, it will come to this, that they must see and feel, when the day of judgment shall suddenly come upon them, as Christ says: "Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

This will be a splendor and glory different from that of all emperors and kings on earth, of which they would not before have been persuaded, although He should incessantly have threatened with signs every day. For then the whole air shall be filled with elect angels and sainted men, everywhere hovering in the clouds around this Lord, they shall be brighter than the sun, and He, the

Lord, and all the saints with Him, will pass sentence upon the damned who will stand trembling below on the earth with the devil, and have their punishment with everlasting destruction from the presence of the glory of the Son of God, whom they would not acknowledge, and whose word they despised, as St. Paul says 2. Thess., chapt. 1. But that to the Christians, who believe and wait for such signs and the coming of our Lord unto judgment, all this happens for comfort and salvation, the Savior says further: "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."

This is a very precious consolation, with which Christ would kindly comfort His Christians on earth, who at all events suffer much and many kinds of anguish and trouble, and terror on account of the signs of the final judgment besides. He explains the signs in quite a different way for them, and would have them look upon them otherwise than they are naturally looked upon. For although it is true that God shows His Church such signs, and lets them see and feel the punishments, that they may, in the first place, thereby be admonished to repentance, that is, that they may not, like others, despise His anger; in the second place that they may know that in this life they must always be under the cross and tribulation, in order that they may hate sin, think upon and wait for another life, where all evil shall cease, and that in such tribulation they may call upon and sigh to their Savior for deliverance; yet all these signs shall serve also to comfort the Church of God, that those who are in the Church may perceive and know that God therewith threatens the

wicked world, and the judgment will surely follow, when the wicked shall receive eternal pain and torment, but they shall be delivered through their Savior, the Son of God, and enter into eternal joy. Wherefore, under the terrible image of the signs and tribulation which came upon earth, they are to await the coming of the Son of God, full of comfort and joy. Therefore He gives them an interpretation of these signs which is full of comfort. I know well, He says, that such signs will terrify you and make you afraid, so that it shall seem as though I had altogether forgotten you and my Church, and as though I would let you perish together with the world; but I say unto you, when you see such signs, and they would terrify you, that, as my Christians, you shall prepare yourselves for my coming, by waiting for it full of comfort and joy, lifting up your heads, as those who heartily desire my appearing. And withal you shall know this, that, when the signs appear most terrible, and the distress on earth is greatest, then I am nearest to you, and your redemption is at hand. Therefore also, under this dreadful appearance, you all are to see nothing but your redemption. Let the others be frightened and fear, who know of no redemption and care nothing for me; but you who believe in me, who have suffered for my sake, and live and die in this faith and confession, you have no wrath and punishment to look for, but shall find your salvation and joyful deliverance, which you have so long desired and prayed for, when you asked that my kingdom might come to you, and that you might be free from sin, and delivered from all evil. Therefore, although the signs shall appear fearful and terrible

to you, when the sun and moon shall be changed, all creatures are mingled in confusion, and finally the world itself is full of fire, yet you shall not judge by such appearance, but know that this indicates something different, nay, the very opposite to you, from what it does to the ungodly world, which, together with its prince, the devil, persecutes you, and does not fear the future judgment. These signs will be and bring to them what they seem, and indicate to the world by their terrible appearance that the day of judgment shall be to them a day of eternal mourning, weeping and gnashing of teeth, nay of their damnation and hell, which they will not believe nor regard until they experience it. But to you, whom this dreadful scene now terrifies, it shall show and bring nothing but deliverance, and the day of my appearing shall be a day of eternal joy and salvation.

For I know that you need such redemption, and in order that you may have it, I must come thus and make an end of the world; for if I am to deliver you, I must first attack those who hold you captive and hinder your redemption. Therefore as a Christian, you must have such thoughts about the signs of the last day, as if you were lying captive among enemies and murderers in a high tower, and your pious ruler should come and begin to besiege the tower with great power, so that everything should begin to fall around you; you would not be afraid of the noise and cannonading, but would much more rejoice, if you knew it was for your redemption. Thus you should do here too, says Christ. Let it not terrify you that the world must bend and squirm; this is not intended for you, but for those against whom you have cried out.

Therefore look upon this advent as the appearing of your redemption; for I come not to cast you into hell, but to deliver you from the injurious, sick, infirm, wicked world, to separate you from the devil and his murderous servants, and to place you among the angels, where you shall no more suffer, but live in eternal glory.

Such comfort is also imparted in the beautiful parable of the budding trees, which He gives them that they may all the better appropriate to themselves this consolation. In spring, He says, when winter ceases and the whole earth becomes new; when the cold departs and the warmth takes its place; when the dry trees become green and blossom again, tell me, how does all this begin? Is it not true that buds first begin to swell, then to open? Then every one says that winter is past and summer will soon be here. Let this parable be your teacher, and the trees in the field your book, that you may learn to know how to await the last day. For God has written this article of the last day and resurrection of the dead not only in books, but also in trees and other creatures. As summer surely will follow when the sap rises in the trees, and they put forth leaves; so when the earth shall quake, the heavens tremble, and the sun and moon look dark and gloomy, then be no more afraid than you are when the young leaves appear and summer is about to come. Such signs shall be to you like the sap and leaflets on the trees, that you may with joy look for the eternal summer, and know that there shall now be an end of your distress and anguish. For this wretched life on earth is like the unfruitful winter when everything dries up, dies and decays. But it shall then have an end, and

the beautiful, eternal summer shall come, namely, the kingdom of God, by which the kingdom of the devil shall be destroyed, on account of which you have had to suffer so much in this world. For in this world you must live among ungodly, wicked, false, penurious people, who blaspheme and slander the gospel, and seek to bring about all manner of misfortune. This you must see and hear every day, and may expect it to become still worse. From this I will redeem you by my coming, that you may no more see nor suffer such things.

Even as Peter says of pious Lot, who in his day had to live among the bad people of Sodom. These caused him all manner of sorrow by their disgraceful life, and tormented his just soul from day to day by their unrighteous works, and by sins which may not be mentioned, which he had to see and hear with innocent eyes and ears, until they became too great, and God could have no more patience. Then two angels came and led pious Lot out of the city. No doubt it was also a terrible sight for him to see how the heavens became black, how it lightened and thundered around him, how the clouds opened and began to rain down fire and brimstone, and how the earth was opened and everything sank away from his view. That Lot should not have been surprised at this, is impossible; but he had this consolation, that this terrible manifestation was not on his account, or meant for him, but for the Sodomites, who were wicked, presumptuous fellows, and would not amend. They must not only be surprised at this fiery rain, but also perish in it and go down to the bottomless pit. But to pious Lot it was like a beautiful tree which begins to put out leaves and look green, as an indi-

cation of summer. For he sees in it God's help and gracious deliverance from the ungodly.

Thus also will it be with us at the last day, should we live to see it. It will be terrible to behold when the heavens and the earth begin to be wrapped in flame; but a Christian must not look at the appearance, but hear how Christ explains it; namely, that it is a beautiful blossom, a young, thrifty branch, so that, although nature may be terrified at this dreadful sight, the heart may nevertheless cleave to the word, strengthen itself against the external appearance and say: Well, be not afraid, since it neither is, nor means anything injurious, but only that my Redeemer and redemption are near at hand. So now be welcome to me, O God, my dear Lord Jesus, and come, as I have my lifelong often prayed that Thy kingdom might come, and the kingdom of the devil at last have an end. Whoever can thus receive the Lord Jesus, will in a moment be translated to eternal glory, where he shall shine as the sun.

In this way our dear Lord Jesus teaches us rightly to regard the last day, that we may know what it is to us, and to what end we are to wait and look for its coming. The pope preaches concerning Christ that He is a terrible Judge, whose wrath we must appease with our good works; likewise that we must call upon the saints and enjoy their intercession, if we would not be damned. For thus they have everywhere painted Christ in the papacy, that He will come to judgment with a sword and rod in His mouth, both of which indicate wrath. But since Mary and John the Baptist stand at His side, they have sought their intercession and that of other saints, as pious Father Bernard also imagines

that if Mother Mary shows her son her breasts, He cannot deny her anything. This is a sure indication that they did not rightly understand these words of our Lord, and thus the true knowledge of Christ was darkened; namely, that He is our Savior, Reconciler, Intercessor, Mediator, ordained of God, for whose sake we are to find grace and mercy with God, and that He will come, as He says in this gospel, not to terrify nor condemn those who flee to Him, but to comfort, redeem, save and bless them, if in true faith and a holy life we look forward full of consolation to this blessed day. But He will judge and punish those who have not believed in Him, and who have mocked and troubled His Christians on earth. This, He says, believe firmly, and doubt not, and rejoice at my advent, for it shall be for your good, that you shall be delivered from sin, the devil, death and the world, and saved forever through me.

But there is one thing more at which timid consciences are much troubled. For our Lord says the last day shall come suddenly, that it shall happen to men as to a little bird of the forest, which flies about in the morning, is hungry, hunts its food, hopes it will find it as hitherto, finds it, sits down and is full of joy; but in an instant, before it knows it, the net falls over it, and it is caught and killed. Pious, God-fearing men, take this to heart, and since they learn from their daily experience how soon man may fall, they are timid and fearful. For they think, who knows how this day may find you? Perhaps it may come at the time when you are least prepared, least expecting it, and lying in this or that sin; so it may happen that this day of rejoicing will be to you a day of

everlasting sorrow. But in this case the Lord would not leave us without comfort, and teaches His Christians how to defend themselves against this anxiety and says: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

Now this is also a very necessary lesson, which we should always keep in our hearts. The Lord does not forbid eating and drinking; nor does He tell us, like the pope, to let everything lie, and go into a cloister and become spiritual. No, eat and drink; this God allows: seek after your food too, for therefore has God commanded labor. But of this beware, lest at any time your hearts be so overcharged with all these things, that you forget my advent; but watch, that is, wait every hour and moment, live in the fear of God, and with a good conscience. Let this be the first. After this, pray also, that you may escape all affliction and distress, and be deemed worthy to stand before the Son of man; as this is also summed up beautifully in the last two petitions of the Lord's prayer: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." If you do this there will be no danger; then the last day may find you at table or in bed, in church or the market place, waking or sleeping, it will be to you a day of salvation. For it will find you in the fear of God and under His protection.

But here we must also know this, that we can-

not pray to God nor call upon Him in a proper manner, if we are not willing to forsake those sins of which we know, and to amend our lives. Therefore true repentance belongs to an acceptable prayer; I say, true repentance, and that we beware of sins against our conscience, that is, that we do not knowingly and designedly follow an evil inclination against God's command; but trusting in God's goodness, pray in the name of the Lord Jesus, that He would keep you in His fear, enable you, through His Holy Spirit, to avoid sin, and strengthen you in the true faith unto the end, that you may await this blessed day with joy, and receive the Lord Jesus as your Redeemer with heart-felt confidence. Such prayer is heard, through Christ; of this there is no doubt. And in these words: "That you may be deemed worthy to escape," &c., God gives us the consolation, that in the case of those who are converted to Him, and in their conversion call upon Him in true faith, He will alleviate and to some extent remove those punishments and tribulations which shall befall the rest of mankind, in order that the Church may not perish in this distress, and the pious not give way to sadness, but may be lifted up by the consolation that God will help and sustain His Church unto the end. For although God is really angry on account of sin, and punishes it terribly, nevertheless in this life He visits punishment and tribulation upon men especially to this end, that they may thereby be admonished to repentance, and be converted to Him, and thus, although they have well deserved His just wrath, they may still find mercy, as St. Paul says, 1 Cor. 11, 32: "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be

condemned with the world." Therefore our Savior also gives us this admonition, that in this last great tribulation and distress of the Church we should, through prayer, turn to Him as our refuge, and know that God will then cease from His anger, in order that His Church may not perish, but be sustained through all the punishments and in the destruction of the world, and finally be perfectly redeemed. And, according to this admonition and promise, this is to be a daily exercise of faith and prayer, that they may truly comfort themselves with the assurance that God will not consume them in His wrath, but that even in wrath He will remember mercy. Therefore we should follow this advice and doctrine, and prepare ourselves properly for this gracious day of redemption. May our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ grant this to all of us! Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

MATT. 11, 2–10. Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee.

IN this gospel there are two points demanding our notice; first, that John sends his disciples out of prison unto Christ, to hear Him and see His miracles, and receive Him as the true Messiah or Christ. This should encourage us also willingly to hear the words of our dear Lord Jesus, and to regard it as the greatest treasure, in which indeed is our salvation. The other point is, that our Savior not only so highly praises John the Baptist, as a pattern for the preachers, since he so faithfully performed the duties of his office that, even when he was in prison and could not any more preach himself, he sent his disciples to Christ, but also rebukes the unbelief of the Jews, because they so lightly esteemed this preacher, and paid no heed

to his words. This should serve as a warning to us, not to despise God's word, but willingly to hear it and be bettered thereby.

The first, that we should hear the word of Christ diligently, is indicated by this that John, when he was already in prison, as soon as he heard of the wonderful works of Christ, sent his disciples to Him with the command that they should ask Him: "Whether He were the one that should come," concerning whom Moses and all the other prophets had written so much, and concerning whom there should be so much preached in the New Testament? That is, whether He were the promised Christ, concerning whom it was written that the Jews' kingdom and Moses' doctrine should continue until His coming, after which Moses' doctrine and worship should cease, and a new doctrine and worship be established, not only among the Jews, but also among the heathens in the whole world, as this had been clearly and unequivocally prophesied. Therefore, since soon after John's imprisonment it had commenced, and the Lord Jesus Himself had begun to preach concerning eternal life and the kingdom of God, John now wishes to direct his disciples to the Lord Himself; sends them therefore to Christ, that with their eyes they might see the miracles, and with their ears hear that doctrine proclaimed, concerning which the prophets had so long foretold that Christ would thus bring them upon earth and reveal Himself. Therefore this sending is nothing else than as if John would say: It is true I myself know that He is the very Christ, as I have hitherto preached concerning Him, but the people do not believe it yet, and since I am now in prison, and must quit

preaching, they would no more regard my testimony concerning Him. Therefore that you may be assured of this, and my preaching be not in vain in you, go to Him yourselves now, and hear it from His own lips, in order that henceforth you may separate yourselves from me and all Jewry, and cling alone to this Man, upon whom depends everything pertaining to your and the whole world's salvation. This is the final purpose of this message of John to Christ, that his disciples should themselves see and hear Him, learn to know Him, and thus believe in Him and be saved.

Well, what does Christ say to this message? He says neither Yes nor No, when they ask Him whether He were the one, but refers them to the public testimony of His works and says: Here you see, hear and comprehend that I am He; for just as Isaiah and other prophets have foretold that Christ should heal the lame, give the blind their sight, &c., thus you see it now before your eyes, and need no further instruction nor answer, if you will but rightly receive this. This is now a precious, beautiful sermon concerning Christ, embracing everything which can be preached concerning Him, what kind of a King He is and what kind of a kingdom He has; namely, a kingdom to which the blind, lame, leprous, deaf, dead people and especially poor sinners, and all who are wretched, needy and nothing. belong, and in which they find comfort and help.

We should diligently mark this sermon concerning Christ and His kingdom, and always let it be heard among us that Christ has such a kingdom, and is such a King, and is willing to help wretched, poor people, in body and soul, when the

whole world and all that is in it can afford no help. For such a skillful Doctor never came before, who could restore the blind to sight, cleanse the lepers, &c.; just as there never was a preacher who could have preached the gospel to the poor, that is, who could truly comfort sad, wretched, anguished consciences, and cause timid hearts, filled with sadness and sorrow, to rejoice and be glad.

Moses is indeed the greatest preacher, having himself received the Ten Commandments from God, for I do not speak now of other Jewish laws. God evidently testified that this is His eternal, unchangeable will, which He also otherwise plants into men's hearts, that we should be obedient unto Him according to these doctrines and commandments. And nothing higher can be preached respecting the doings and life of all creatures than this, that we love God above all things, &c. But however good and precious such preacher is, nevertheless he cannot comfort one poor sinner with his (*i. e.* the law's) preaching. Nay, he does the contrary; for all his preaching amounts to this: Thou shalt and must keep the law, or be damned. Here then begins distress; for those who are conscious of their sins and would like to be delivered from them, embitter their lives, use all possible diligence to keep the law, but cannot be satisfied, nor by such means obtain a joyful heart and conscience. For thus also the saints of the Old Testament complain, who are tired of Moses' government, who oppresses them through the law with an intolerable burden (as St. Paul says, Acts 15), and have an earnest longing after the kingdom of grace promised in Christ; as for instance Psalm 14: "Oh, that the salvation of Israel were come out

of Zion! When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of His people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad." And Psalm 102: "Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favor her is come." Again, the hypocrites think that if they externally keep the law, they need think neither of the gospel nor of Christ; there is no fear, they think; God must take them into heaven on account of their fasting, prayers and almsgiving. These are self-secure, strange spirits, who care nothing for God nor His grace.

Now it is true, we must have the preaching of Moses, in order that we may admonish and incite the people to a proper discipline and conversation, just as in civil government we must have jailors and hangmen to keep the people in fear and subjection, and to punish rude, lawless fellows, who will not submit to such external discipline, but live in adultery, steal, are covetous, &c., &c.? In addition to this the Ten Commandments must also be retained in the Church for the sake of those who are already holy and are Christians, in order that they may know what is a truly godly life and what are good works which they are to do, and that now since they are turned unto God, justified by faith in Christ, and God's children, they may also begin to live in obedience towards God. But when that hour comes, when we are to stand in the anguish of death and the struggle of conscience against the terrors of divine wrath and hell, and are to have comfort and gain the victory, tell me, what will the law of Moses help you then, even though you have diligently kept it and led a holy life according to it? Is it not true that you must confess and say:

My dear heavenly Father, although I have been no adulterer, thief nor murderer, yet I am unclean and full of sins before Thee; therefore I desire and pray Thee, that Thou wouldst be gracious and merciful unto me, else, with all my good works, I must despair, as David also says, Psalm 143: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant; for in Thy sight shall no living man be justified." And Psalm 130: "If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?.'

Bearing upon this we read a story in the Lives of the Fathers: An old hermit stood nearly three whole days in one place, and continually lifted his eyes towards heaven, sighed and complained. But when his disciples asked him what ailed him, he asnwered: O, I am really afraid of death. Then his disciples related what a strict life he had always led, how diligently he had observed the divine commandments, thinking they would thus comfort him. But he said: I tell you I am in great fear; I have, as you say, diligently observed God's law, yet I cannot drive away this fear; for I know that God's judgments are very different from man's judgments. Behold, this man was brought to perceive that when our last hour comes, and we must appear before God and His judgment, and begin to see that God's judgment is searching, earnest and severe, then our holiness and good works will not stand, nor can we be justified through them.

Therefore, although we should preach the law and constantly practice good works, and live according to God's law always; yet when we are to die, we must say like this old father: Oh God, who will now help? This is also one of those distressed ones of whom it is here written, but he

does not know to what he shall hold fast. For he does not know what the Lord here says: "The poor have the gospel preached to them." He sees and has nothing more yet than the law; this leaves him with a troubled conscience, in fear and anguish, and cannot comfort him. But the gospel is a message concerning Christ, which says to the sinner: My son, be of good cheer and joyful, be not afraid; for you must know that Christ has commanded to announce His grace to the poor, *i. e.* the distressed and troubled hearts; He places His purity, which is divine and eternal, before you, washes away your sins, reconciles you to God, and has purchased for and offers to you forgiveness of sins and eternal life through His sacrifice and death. He commands this grace to be offered to you through His word; therefore doubt not; for, as you hear, if you but believe it, so it shall certainly be to you.

Therefore Christ and the prophets very properly call this announcement a gospel, that is, a gracious, comforting, blessed doctrine or ministry; just as if a rich man should promise a poor beggar a thousand dollars: this would be to him a gospel, a joyful message, which he would gladly hear and heartily rejoice over. But what are money and goods compared with this comforting and gracious announcement that Christ has mercy upon the distressed, and is such a King as is willing to help poor sinners, who are captive under the law, to eternal life and righteousness. This, He says here, is my kingdom, which differs much from earthly kingdoms. For here they help the strong and honor the pious, and, on the other hand, condemn and punish the wicked; they

govern strictly and with the edge of the sword, cut and strike everywhere around them, and cannot, nor should they, tolerate any vice or immorality. Here they must everywhere be hangmen, scourges, sword, water, fire, that they may be able to practice the office of punishing. But this kingdom of Christ has nothing to do with strong, holy, innocent men, but with poor, weak, wretched sinners, condemned by the law, as Christ here says: "The blind receive their sight, the dead are raised up," &c. Now, to raise the dead is a great miracle, but this miracle is far greater and more glorious, and yet does not seem so: God so loved the world that He gave His Son, whom He had set apart from eternity to be a King of the poor and the sinners, and to preach to them the gospel. Of such a King and gospel Moses and the law do not preach; for their judgment is directly thus: Whoever is a sinner belongs under the power of the devil and death; but whoever would be in the kingdom of God must be holy and without sin. And it is true. For Moses' kingdom is also the kingdom of our Lord God, and the doctrine which he preaches is also God's word; just as the temporal government may also be called the kingdom of God; for it is His will that we should live obediently under this also. But this kingdom is only on the left hand, where He places father, mother, emperor, king, judge, hangman, and commits the government unto them, or commands and makes known through His ministers, angels or men, what we are to do.

But His right kingdom, in which He Himself rules and works, is where the gospel is preached to the poor, in which thou learnest, when thy own

piety cannot stand before Him nor help thee, to say: Lord, I have done what I could, have been obedient to and faithfully served my parents and superiors, have faithfully instructed my house, children and servants, and governed them as well as I could, have not done my neighbor any evil, have not stolen, not committed adultery, &c.; but all this does not help me before Thy judgment, nor does it bring me to Thy kingdom; for I am not therefore without sin before Thee, and this my obedience was very imperfect, and besides there is still much impurity in me. Yet, dear Lord, I will not despair on that account, for I once heard from Thy gospel that Thy Son, my dear Lord Jesus Christ, did six kinds of miracles. Among these this is mentioned also, that the poor have the gospel preached to them, that is, that He was ordained of Thee, heavenly Father, to comfort distressed, terrified hearts. Of this message I will also avail myself; for it belongs to me, since I am so poor and wretched, and cannot find any help in me nor in the whole world besides.

Thus the prophet Isaiah prophesies concerning Christ in the fiftieth chapter, where He, the Lord Jesus Himself, says: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned," that is, God hath put His word upon my tongue, and hath commanded me to preach it, so that I know how to speak to the weary, that is, rightly to comfort timid consciences. The Evangelist here explains this and says (as is also said in Is. 60): "Christ preaches the gospel to the poor." For therefore and to this end He is made a King; namely, that He should evangelize, that is, comfort and strengthen poor, timid, afflicted hearts; wherefore His king-

dom is also called, and is a kingdom of comfort and help, in which they are no more to terrify the timid, nor let them remain in anguish, but to deliver them through true, divine comfort, and make them joyful again. This is not, and cannot be done by the preaching of the law, but only through this preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the joyful, good news, that through Him our sins are taken away, and that through His sufferings and death we are redeemed from eternal death. This preaching belongs to the poor, says the Lord; to them I will go; for I cannot go to the great saints, who do not want to be sinners, have no need of my gospel, nay persecute it, call it heresy, and say that through it good works are forbidden and Moses and the law spoken against.

Therefore He says further: "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." Yes, truly blessed. For the whole world is offended in this King and His gospel, in which every one ought, of right, to rejoice; as we see in the gospel history that the Pharisees, Scribes, High Priests, Priests, Levites, and all who were high and great, look upon and condemn Christ as a deceiver, and His doctrine as heresy. He never can preach rightly for them; they always think that He turns things around and gets them wrong; that He would cast the pious and righteous (as He indeed does) into hell, and not suffer them in His kingdom; but would exalt the sinners to heaven: even as the Papists nowadays also accuse us, saying: Is this the right kind of preaching, that you attach no importance at all to good works, and open heaven for wicked fellows? Such detraction our Savior also had to suffer among the Jews. But here it is

written: "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." Now, if you would rightly hear Christ, receive His word, and come unto His kingdom, you would experience that the gospel does not forbid good works, as the Papists lie about us; but it teaches and admonishes Christians to do good works, to be earnestly concerned not to do anything against God's word and their conscience lets civil government, emperors and kings remain, and lets the hangman use the sword, scourge, and other things that belong to discipline. Why then are you offended in the holy gospel, and slander it, as though it taught that we should do nothing good? The gospel does not condemn nor forbid good works, but this it does forbid, namely, to build upon and trust in our life and good works when we die and are about to enter into another life, where we need help and comfort against sin and eternal death; and it teaches that we are to look unto the Lord Jesus, with firm confidence to rely upon His work and merit, that through Him we shall find grace and eternal salvation in that life.

For to this very end God has given us such a body, with so many useful members, that we should not be idle on earth, but walk with our feet, grasp with our hands, speak with our mouth, see with our eyes, &c. And since man lives and has the use of his members, he must do something, and can just as little be without works as he can live without constant breath, or the pulsation of the heart. But with regard to such works and to our whole life, God's law demands that they should all be done in obedience to Him and according to His will. This the gospel not only permits, but also confirms, and teaches that we should do it with all

diligence. But when man is to leave this world and appear before the judgment of God, then the gospel bids you look for another comfort, upon which you can surely ground and rest your firm hope of eternal life.

Therefore if you have lived well here, that is, right and good, thank God for it; but in dying do not depend upon this, as though God must give you heaven on this account; but hold fast to this King, Christ Jesus, who alone, as the Evangelist announces, shall have this office, to give the blind their sight, to make the lame walk, to cleanse the lepers, to give the deaf their hearing, to raise the dead, and to preach to the poor disconsolate the gospel, that is, to show and give to them eternal consolation, life, joy and salvation. To this end His Father sent Him, not that He should hang us or break us on the wheel because of our sins, but that He should comfort our poor consciences, and help them forever.

But those who do not regard Him thus, nor expect such grace from Him, but are offended in Him and His doctrine, and despise Him as the Jews did and the hypocrites do nowadays, He will restrain in His own time. And this is one cause of offense which the world finds in the doctrine of Christ, that it does not want to depend on God's grace, but upon its own works and merit. Therefore it accuses the holy gospel with being a deceptive doctrine, which forbids good works and makes people dissolute and wild. Secondly, the world is offended in Christ because He is Himself so poor and needy. Again, as He Himself bears the cross and suffers Himself to be suspended on it, He also admonishes His Christians to take up their cross and follow Him

through all kinds of affliction and tribulation. The world is hostile to this and fears it, as we see when we confess the gospel, and are to venture and suffer something for its sake, that whole multitudes fall like worm-eaten fruit in summer. In the third place this is also an offense, if we pay more regard to our own heart and conscience, how we may happen to feel, than to the gospel of Christ; that is, if our own deeds and omissions concern us and trouble us more than the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, promised in the gospel, comforts us. This kind of offense is not so common as the first two for only true Christians are affected by it. But it distresses beyond measure; and were it not for the help and assistance of the Holy Spirit, not one of us could overcome such offense.

Thus the dear Lord Jesus is everywhere in the world a preacher who gives offense; as, soon after this gospel, He announces in still clearer terms that people will be offended at this doctrine, will despise it and persecute it. But what judgment awaits the world on this account, we learn from the sermon against the three cities, Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida, and also from the serious complaint of Christ against the Jews, when He says: John was a strict preacher, ate only wild honey and locusts, drank nothing but water, led a strictly ascetic life, but what did it avail? You accused him of having a devil. I, says He, eat and drink with every one, and am very friendly towards the people; but I am looked upon by you as a glutton and wine-bibber, associating with publicans and sinners. So no one can get along with these venomous serpents, the hypocrites and self-

righteous. If one leads a free life and is friendly to every one, it will not do. If another leads a strict, ascetic life, it will not do either. What shall we do to please the miserable world? This perhaps would please her, if we would praise everything that she does, although she does nothing right.

Such offenses we must suffer. For if, when the Lord Jesus Himself preached, and miracles were as common as rain and snow, viz: that the blind receive their sight, the ears of the deaf are opened, the lame were made to walk, the lepers were cleansed and the dead were restored to life, all this availed nothing, but the word was still despised, and He, the Lord Jesus Himself, for its sake, was nailed to the cross, and the Apostles were driven from the land of Judea, and not able to remain in safety anywhere in the world: why should we complain much about it? Is it a matter of surprise that the world in our times despises the gospel and its true and faithful preachers, and tramples them under foot? For our Lord Himself and the Apostles met with no different fate, who preached not only the word, but also did great and noble miracles, the like of which we do not perform, but only preach the word which gives offense. Therefore we must become used to this and be content. It is and will remain a doctrine at which not common people, but the most holy, pious, wise and powerful on earth take offense, as experience shows. But blessed are those who know and believe that it is God's word; they are healed, strengthened, and comforted against such offenses. But those who do not know it turn away from the word to their own righteousness, are puffed up on

account of their own good works, and regard the gospel as a doctrine which gives offense and stir up strife. Thus the gospel becomes a stumbling-block and gives offense. And this, as already said, is the case with those who are regarded by the world as the greatest saints and wisest people. Therefore we may well utter our complaint against the blind world with the Lord Jesus, and say: "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented." If we preach the gospel, it avails nothing; if we preach the law, it avails nothing again. We can make the wicked world neither truly joyful, nor truly sorry; that is, they will not become sinners, nor allow themselves to be comforted against sin; they will be neither blind nor seeing, as is shown by the example of our opponents, the Papists, which we have before us.

Now this is the other part which is here to be observed, that the gospel is a doctrine and preaching for the poor, that is, for sorrowful, distressed consciences, who are sensible of their wretchedness and distress, and are affrighted and terrified at the wrath and judgments of God; not for the rich and full, who direct all their actions and thoughts to this, that they may have great honor and riches here, and to live in pleasure and luxury. Therefore it is a strange, wondrous doctrine in their ears, when the Lord says: "The poor have the gospel preached to them," which they do not desire to know nor learn, nay, which they regard as folly. They not only take offense at it, but persecute and slander it as heresy; as we see in the case of the pope and his spiritless cardinals, bishops, &c., also in the greater part of the greatest and mightiest

temporal rulers and potentates who adhere to them, so that all who are pious, holy, great and powerful in the world, oppose the gospel.

Against such offense, as already said, our Lord warns His little flock, and says: "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." As though He should say: You see and experience, and will continue more and more to see and experience, that the world is offended at my word, and will for its sake persecute you who confess it. This I tell you before; and for this very reason that you may then be wise, and not let yourselves be led astray nor troubled, but think: The same thing happened to the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. Though He preached powerfully, and did so many great and notable miracles, it availed Him nothing. And that we might carefully remember this, and not suffer ourselves to be moved by the world's wisdom, glory, power and great numbers, He has faithfully warned and admonished us to hold fast to His word, when He says: "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me;" since it happened to our Lord Himself, that His own people, to whom He had been promised and sent as a Savior, were offended in Him. And since, although they saw the great and glorious miracles which He did before their eyes, they still would not be induced to believe His preaching and receive Him; nay since, on the contrary, they crucified Him, we may well keep silence and not complain, if we also are despised, laughed at and persecuted on account of the gospel. Such doctrine and warning against offense is highly necessary, especially in our time when almost every one slanders and takes offense at the dear gospel.

Thus, from this sermon of Christ we derive an

excellent doctrine, upon which our salvation and eternal life depend; namely, we learn how Christ is a King of grace and all comfort, who will encourage poor distressed consciences through His gospel, comfort them in the terror of sin, and help them to attain eternal life. For this is, properly speaking, His kingdom, which comes to us through the word, if we, when the burden of sin and death oppresses us, (for to such only it is preached), receive and believe the word. This comforts and assures us then to go on joyfully, building our hope on Christ, and with confidence to say: I believe in my dear Lord, who gives the blind their sight, makes the lame walk, cleanses the lepers, restores the deaf to their hearing and raises the dead. This word I have, and am therefore sure that He will not forsake me in my greatest necessities, but will lead me out of death and the kingdom of the devil into eternal life and the kingdom of heaven. For to this end He became man and appeared on earth, to comfort me, a poor miserable sinner, with His gospel, and forever to deliver me from sin and death.

Let this be said of the first part of the gospel lesson, in which Christ admonishes us highly to esteem the preaching of the gospel, as our highest comfort and grace, through which we come to His kingdom, and to avoid offenses which would turn or frighten us away from it. The other part also inculcates the same doctrine and admonition; for there we hear how highly the Savior praises John the Baptist, in view of his preaching and firmness and reproves the people because they did not regard nor believe his preaching, and says: "What went ye out into the wilderness to see?"

In the first place, no doubt, you went out to

hear what there might be new, looked at him like a cow at a new gate, not caring much about him or his doctrine. For now that he is in prison you think his office and preaching are at an end, since he himself accomplished nothing further, and no Christ, of whom he spoke, appeared yet anywhere.

Now, He says, you did not regard John as being anything else than a reed shaken by the wind, and still think that he was nothing different, and imagine that as your thoughts are, so John's and my preaching must be. But I say unto you, John is not a reed; do not look upon him as a preacher who will turn his word hither or thither, as you would have it, or who will preach to you a Messiah as your fancy paints Him; for you wish only a Messiah who will praise you as holy people, and you wait for a kingdom which is only worldly, in which you may have great honor, possessions, might and power. But there will be nothing of this; as John preached, so it shall be, and neither devil nor hell shall set it aside; for he stands with his doctrine and testimony like a wall, nay like a rock against all winds and storms; as you may see how he proves it in his imprisonment, when he sends his disciples to me. Therefore do not think that you will hear anything different from him, or see anything different in me from what he preached to you; and be no longer such a reed, if you do not wish to be shaken by every wind and storm of the devil. Do not imagine that this doctrine can be bent to suit your inclinations, and that he will preach or keep silence to suit the people, as you do; for you are such preachers as take handfuls of barley (as written Ezek. 13), or, like our new Papists, a rich bene-

fice, and preach what the people like to hear. No, to speak or keep silence, as the people wish, is not the way in the kingdom of God; but to preach thus, as did St. John, who keeps on, holding fast to the same doctrine and testimony, sacrificing for it even his own life.

In the second place he is not clothed in soft raiment, like those who are at the courts of kings and princes, but is clothed in a coarse garment of camel's hair, and is bare-footed and bare-headed. These are his ornament and glory, with which he is content. Therefore he is not a preacher for those either who would like to take hold of the gospel where it is soft and mild, and when it serves their purpose, as those are who indeed receive the gospel when they can draw advantage from it and are enriched by it. Such is the case with the greater part of those among us, (nay even among the Papists themselves), the nobility, citizens and farmers. They know well how to use their freedom from all former papal tyranny and burdens to secure for themselves temporal goods, and appropriate to themselves whatever they can; but that they should, on the contrary, show their thankfulness to the gospel with one penny, and give something to their minister or the poor church, to this no one can induce them. But here it is said that John is not such a court-preacher, who would be clothed in soft raiment; that is, who preaches of a temporal kingdom, worldly goods, honor, power and good days, or shows a Christ who brings and gives such; but is clothed in coarse raiment, and uses plain and sharp language, for the sake of which we must suffer, and from which we must not expect luxury and an easy life.

The third part, concerning John's preaching and office, is, that Christ does not want him to be regarded as a prophet, but much higher and greater, so that no prophet can be compared with him in his office. For prophets have hitherto been persons whom God sent immediately to preach, with divine testimony that they had the Holy Ghost; but they all preached Christ as about to come, and, in general, a prophet is one who says or preaches about future things. Among these do not look for John the Baptist; but this is his name and office, as God calls him through Malachi, *the angel*, or forerunning messenger, *of God, who shall prepare the way of the Lord*, point to Him and say: Now you need no longer wait for Him: He is already here; only see that you receive Him. Thus, then, you are to regard this firm, strong, rough man, when you see or hear him, that he brings with him the Lord Himself, concerning whom the prophets wrote, and whom you have awaited. And in these words of the prophet Malachi it is indicated how God will work and operate upon the hearts of men through the preaching and word of John, and not in any other way. For where Christ is to be received and people are to be saved through Him, He must first be pointed out and recognized by this preaching. Therefore He says: "Behold, this is the messenger whom I send before Thee," that is, wherever I am to give my Spirit and eternal life, there this messenger, that is, this minister, sent of God, must prepare the way.

This was a necessary sermon for the Jews, of the greatest moment to them, and their salvation or eternal condemnation depended on this, that

they should find Him. For if they would be saved, they must be prudent and wise, and not miss nor neglect the time, which nevertheless the greater part of them have done for more than fifteen hundred years; for they were in the greatest danger that, if they would not receive Him, they would be deprived of their salvation, and all their hoping and waiting would have been in vain. It depended even on this short period, as if it were but a moment, during which the old Mosaic government should cease, and the new kingdom of Christ be established in all the world. Therefore God before warned them in the Scripture, showed and indicated the time and manner, how and when He should come, and besides sent this John to show and tell them clearly that Christ had already come, in order that they might by no means miss Him, nor have any reason or excuse to offer. Therefore, He says, look well to this that John has taught you rightly and faithfully, and not as a prophet, but as he who goes immediately before the Lord and points Him out. For you have before heard prophets enough, and know well that your Messiah is to come, but now more depends on this, that you go to this John and receive and believe his preaching; so shall you no more hear the prophetic preaching, as of one yet to come, but him who prepares the way before the Lord. Let him tell you who Christ is, then you will not err, nor miss Him. Now you hear that he has preached and said thus: You need not wait for Him to appear with new and great pomp and splendor; but He stands already in your midst like other men, without any special pomp or show. This alone is his forerunning and sign, that I with

my voice and finger direct to Him, just as at court, before they see the prince, a youth or valet-de-chamber and door-keeper go immediately before him. When they see these, all must go out of the way and give place, and know that the next one who follows is the prince himself. Thus also here, when they heard the testimony of John they should have obeyed and said: Now we have the dear man; blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord, and be welcome now, dear Lord and King; here stands the temple, here are the priesthood, the service, kingdom, all; they are all Thine; do with them as Thou wilt, we will willingly serve and follow Thee with soul, body and goods.

Thus the Jews were faithfully warned of God, so that they could well have recognized their Messiah if they had wished it, and in Him have had their Lord and Savior, so that to this day they would both temporally and eternally have comfort, joy, honor and all good. But they are the great, excellent, holy people, who despise this message and say of John that he has a devil; see Christ preaching and working miracles, before their eyes, and in the midst of it all put Him to death. Still, that this preaching might not be in vain, there were a few pious hearts among them, who with gratitude received the testimony of this forerunner and the Lord Himself, and were filled with joyful surprise at the remarkable fulfilment of the writings of the prophets. These were the dear children of God, who were not offended in Christ and are blessed. The other Jews, the mass of them, who despised such witness, because they did not see in Christ what they wanted and as they wanted it, also have their reward, in that they are scattered to this

day, and now have neither Christ nor priesthood, temple, land nor people.

ADMONITION.

Therefore we also should let this sermon of Christ be an admonition and warning to us. For we also, through the preaching of the gospel, hear this voice of John the Baptist, which directs unto this Savior, Christ, and says: This is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world. To Him you should cling in faith and confession, and thank God that He has given you this knowledge, and this sermon and direction of John the Baptist shall endure to eternity. But now it depends upon this too, whether we are people who receive the testimony. For if, like the greater part of the Jews, and as, alas! is always the case in the world, we let it pass by, we will share the same fate with them and others. Factions and sects will come afterwards, through which the pure doctrine and God's Word will be darkened among us, and go out altogether. Then will they begin to seek Christ, and will be unable to find Him, just as was formerly done in the darkness of the papacy. For no one can give any other doctrine unto salvation than this, as Peter says, Acts 4: There is no other name nor doctrine, whereby we can be saved. If we neglect this, it is all over with us, as it is now with the Jews and Turks. There will be no lack of teachers; we will have enough of these, as the Jews and Turks also have, who will preach much and want to show the way to heaven, and every one will show diligence in seeking, as the Jews now also seek their Messiah; but, alas! it is a

seeking always in vain, and never any finding. For He made all depend only on this His messenger who pointed Him out with his voice and finger, that we might know where to find Him; else it would end in nothing, and our seeking would ever be in vain.

Therefore we must now say, as the prophet Isaiah writes in the 55th chapter: "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near." That is, hear this sermon concerning Christ and believe in Him, as it teaches you, and hold fast to it, then you have rightly found Him, so that He will remain with you and you with Him. This is now also preached to the world, and especially to us; but we do even as the Jews did to John and to Christ Himself, who so diligently warned them. Men are unwilling to hear the voice of this preacher, or to receive this Savior. The majority, — farmers, citizens, noblemen, lords, — persecute this doctrine; our own people, who are called Evangelical, do not regard it, and are tardy in furthering it. They think that other matters are of more importance, therefore neglect it, and pulpits, churches and schools go to ruin; and though with one finger they could save them, they will not do it, lest they should in the meantime neglect their own matters.

Well, even if John has been here with his sermon, and war and misfortune come, men will not be able to hear this sermon. For where war and desolation are, there God's Word, pulpits and schools find no room nor encouragement; instruction and discipline cease; contempt of God, and all manner of lawlessness and unrighteousness gain the ascendancy. And although the gospel is not

destroyed by war and murder, yet in the contempt and ingratitude of the world, it will perish through lying and false doctrine. Now we would have peace and prosperity, if we would be wise and hold fast to this man. If we make a mistake and neglect it, the punishment will also come, and the devil will govern bodily, instead of Christ, through murder, and in the soul through lies. The Jews also thought there was no danger; they had God's promise, and it could not fail, and their Messiah would certainly come; now God fulfils His promise, sends them the promised Christ, and lets John point to Him with his finger and say: Here you have Him; receive Him, and you have God, the kingdom of heaven and all. But what does it avail in their case? They let John preach, and had to acknowledge that he was a good man, but did not regard his preaching and testimony, and did not receive Christ. But they also paid for it dearly, and must pay for it to-day yet. God grant that we may not lose this finger on account of our great ingratitude, else we may also accept what we have deserved.

In short, this is the necessary, daily admonition, which may be given in the churches, to give heed to John's finger, and receive God's Word while we have it: that is, as Isaiah says, "to seek the Lord while He may be found: for I, says He, hear thee in an acceptable time, and help thee in the day of salvation." But the apostle Paul says: *Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation*, or of help; now we can find Him; hereafter we will have waited too long. If He is not here, or does not come to us, no one can find Him; if He is away, no calling nor crying after Him will avail

anything, as I and many others in monasticism have tried, who have tortured ourselves with much labor and grievous works, and yet could not thereby find the way to heaven, and would have had to go to hell if we had died thus. Therefore let us heed this warning, for it is no jest. It is a great treasure; but it depends upon this, that we receive it and hold it fast, as He says, Luke 11: *Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.* Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

JOHN 1, 19–28. And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that Prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water; but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

THIS is also one of the beautiful, glorious gospels about the highest article of our faith, where we do not hear anything about the Ten Commandments, or what we are to do, but about something higher; namely, what Christ is, and what He has done. For John praises Him so highly that, though he himself led a very holy life, yet he freely confesses: I am not worthy that I should unloose the latchet of His shoes. Therefore this gospel is of nearly the same import with the former, only that here there are other words and persons.

For, a week ago, we heard that every thing depends on this, that we do not miss this person, Christ Jesus, but receive Him and not let Him

pass by nor look after others. For whoever finds Him, finds redemption from sin, death and hell. For thus God hath resolved, that in Christ all fullness should dwell, and that He should be all. "He is the way, the truth and the life." Through Him alone all patriarchs, prophets, apostles and saints, from the beginning of the world, have been saved. This John knows and therefore directs his disciples to Him, that they may not neglect such a treasure. For this is always the miserable affliction and trouble of the world, that men adopt many kinds of plans and ways, aside from God's Word, for getting to heaven, as we have seen hitherto in the papacy, where one ran to a cloister and became a monk, another fasted, a third sought the intercession of this or that saint; and thus every one would have his own plan, and find his own way to heaven.

To guard against such injurious projects, God, in the first place, gave His Word to His people and therein promised that He would help them through the seed of the woman, that is, through His Son Jesus Christ; to Him He has directed us, that in Him alone should be the way to heaven. Whoever misses Him has missed salvation, although he have fasted himself to death, and prayed himself into lunacy. Again, whoever hath received Him by faith, and put His trust in Him, hath found forgiveness of sin and eternal salvation, and neither devil nor sin could hinder it. All the patriarchs and prophets followed this way, and thus were saved by faith in Christ. For if ever any one could have gone to heaven by his own holy life, it would certainly have been the holy Fathers and Prophets, who for God's sake labored and suffered

beyond measure in this wicked, ungodly world. But they all despaired of their own holiness, and clung with firm confidence to the promised blessed seed, who should crush the head of the serpent.

But the greater part of the Jews, at the time of Christ, would not follow this way, but thought, what should this carpenter be? We must observe the law, fast, offer services, look sad, give alms; this, no doubt, is the nearest and best way to heaven; this beggar, Jesus of Nazareth, cannot help us. For Christ was altogether poor and wretched, so that whoever did not cling to His miracles and teachings, could find nothing else in Him that made any impression. Now, in order that the Jews might not suffer Him to pass by, nor miss Him, our merciful Father so ordered it that John should go before our Lord Jesus and sound the trumpet, like a herald before the prince, so that when they heard it, they might open their eyes and look upon Him who immediately followed, who would be the right man. Therefore when the Jews here send this embassy and ask him whether he were Christ, or Elias, or that Prophet, he answers plainly, No, I am not He. And when they ask further, What art thou then, why baptizest thou, what sayest thou of thyself? he answers: I will tell you, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord;" that is, I am the trumpet before the prince; therefore hear my preaching, for He will soon come after me, and will baptize you with the Holy Ghost, whilst I as a servant baptize only with water. Yea, He standeth already among you; but you know Him not. Therefore this is

my office for which I am sent, that I should be a crying voice, or preacher in the wilderness, in order that, when you hear the sound of my trumpet, you might know that He is here. He who comes next after me is the one. For of this the prophet Isaiah has also prophesied in the 40th chapter: "The voice of one that cries in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord," &c. I preach not of myself, nor of the law of Moses and the service of your temple and priesthood, but speak openly, and to every one who will hear it, of this Savior who is to come. Therefore you must not wait for Him any longer, as though He were yet far off; but look upon Him now; He is already in your midst, though you know Him not; but I am to show Him to you, that you may know and receive Him. This office I now have, and say unto you: The next preacher who will come after me, is the Lord Himself. He does not yet preach openly, but will be heard soon after me; look well to it therefore, that you give heed to Him and do not miss Him.

Now as John preached, so it came to pass. For immediately after His baptism Christ began to work miracles in Galilee, and, soon after John, sent forth the preaching of His gospel by the twelve Apostles and other two and seventy disciples whom He sent out, commanding them to preach: The kingdom of heaven is at hand; that is, Christ is at hand, and He is the one of whom John testified and said: "He will come after me, but He was before me." Now John was a half year older than Christ the Lord; yet he says, "He was before me." This sounds very strangely, and would to the Jews have been a blasphemous word,

if they had understood it. For who could reconcile this, that John says "He would come after him," that is, that He had not preached before him, and hitherto no one had acknowledged Him as a preacher or man sent of God, "and yet He had been before him;" not only personally, or as to His being, but also as to His office and power, as He Himself says, John 8th chapter: "Before Abraham was, I am;" on account of which the Jews wished to stone Him.—But at this time the Jews did not understand nor regard this. But with these words John certainly intended to convey this meaning, and to indicate the divine glory of this Person, as he also sufficiently intimates when he says: "I am not worthy to unloose His shoe's latchet."

Therefore this declaration, "He was before me, although He shall come after me," is as much as to say: He is much greater, higher and mightier than I, or any man; for He is the one who was before I or others before me preached, that is, He is an eternal, divine Person, and before He was born on earth, from the beginning of the world, He was always with His Church, and worked all things therein. For if He was before John the Baptist, and yet did not live bodily among the people, He must also have been before all the other Fathers and Prophets, who believed in and preached Him, since the first promise was given concerning Him, immediately after the fall of Adam, that He should bruise the serpent's head, that is, redeem our first parents and the whole Church from the power of the devil, and give them everlasting salvation. Here the Jews should have given their assent and thought: What a Man and Person must this be,

before whom John so deeply humbles himself, and says that he is not worthy to perform the meanest service for Him! Dear John, are you not worthy? Nay, he says, I am not worthy of it; for whoever I might be, I would be nothing compared with this Man. Thus he casts all his holiness from him under this Man's feet, and says that he would gladly be content if he could only be permitted to clean His shoes.

Now in order that the Jews might not think that he was humbling himself too much, since he had inaugurated baptism, and was more than an ordinary preacher, he instructs them well concerning his baptism, and says: *I baptize with water*, that is, I have with me a sign of my preaching, like the other prophets.—Jeremiah wore a wooden yoke; Isaiah went naked and barefoot, when he prophesied to the Egyptians and Ethiopians how they should be plundered and stripped by the enemies, Is. 20. Thus, says John, I also have a new sermon and a new sign; I preach that you should prepare the way of the Lord. I would not need to preach this if the way had been prepared before. Then I wash and baptize you, as a sign that you are unclean and defiled, and must be cleansed; but I do not baptize you in my own name, or thinking that I could cleanse you, but in His name, concerning whom I preach; namely, that you may know and believe that He is the One who baptizes you through the Holy Ghost; and yet even through this my office and baptism, which I begin, He will work, and for His sake my water baptism will be valid and effectual. For concerning John's baptism we must know also this, that it was not only a sign or symbol or indication, as Isaiah's going

naked and barefoot, and as Jeremiah's wearing the yoke, were admonitions that the people should repent; but it was also a sign, through which they should be awakened to believe in Christ and know that for His sake, if they turn unto God and believe in this Savior, they should have forgiveness of sins. And thus John herewith commenced the office of the New Testament, that is, the same preaching concerning the Savior Christ, and the same baptism, which were afterward spread abroad further by the Savior Himself and the Apostles.

Thus the preaching of John is directed to this, that they should not let the man pass by, but think of Him. Behold, he has told us of one who should arise after him; this must certainly be this Jesus who now attracts so much attention by His preaching and miracles. But what happened? They heard John indeed, but did not believe his testimony, nay, put both of them to death, Christ and His fore-runner, cut John's head off and crucified Christ, of whom John had so faithfully preached, and warned every one to receive Him. Such pious hypocrites there have always been, who not only despised the preaching of the prophets, and persecuted and put them to death on account of it, but also afterwards crucified the Lord Himself, whom the prophets foretell.

And this is still the case: for Christ must be crucified, not only in His own person, but also in His members. With John we would fain direct every one to the right way of salvation and say: Out of Christ there is no forgiveness of sin, nor eternal life. But what takes place? The more faithfully we warn people against their own good works as a false ground, and direct them to the true

rock, Christ, the more our opponents call us heretics and condemn us. For this does not agree with their teachers, as every one knows. They direct them to their cloisters, to the sacrifice of the mass and to their masses for the souls of the departed, appoint vigils, ordain worship, go on pilgrimages, buy indulgences, &c. But this is not directing to Christ, but seeking other ways to heaven aside from Christ. Against this we speak, and admonish the people to hold fast the testimony of John, who directs unto Christ. The pope and his hangers-on cannot endure this, but condemn us on this account as heretics, and if they could they would reward and thank us just as the Jews did holy John. But why are they so inimical? why can they not tolerate us? For no other reason than because we, with John, preach that they should humble themselves before Christ, and that with all their good works they are not worthy to wipe His shoes. For they themselves must confess that John was much holier than they; yet he says: I will not and cannot speak in praise of my own holiness; if only this grace could be shown me that I might take off or wipe the shoes of this Man, it would be sufficient for me. Such humility we would like to call forth through the gospel, and therefore admonish every one, according to our office, to avoid sins and be pious: yet not to comfort themselves before God with such piety, but like John to regard their own good works and honorable life as filthy rags, when compared with the high, pure, perfect and great righteousness which our Lord Jesus Christ has wrought out for us by His sufferings and death. But pope and bishops, monks and priests will not follow the word; they cannot and will not let go

their confidence in their own and the deceased saints' merits.

Therefore they have no desire to be made partakers of the benefit and merit of our Lord Jesus Christ; comforting themselves with it, like God-fearing hearts, who feel their sins and dread the wrath and judgment of God, is entirely out of the question. Like insane people, who have never thought of, much less felt, what sin and death are, they keep crying out yet, that man is justified not only through faith, but that works also add their part, and are not willing therefore, like John, who disregards all holiness and thinks himself, compared with Christ, not better than an old rag with which to clean soiled shoes, to let Christ be their treasure; but set so much value upon their own human holiness and works that they think them worthy of eternal life. Therefore they can in no way tolerate comparing their worship and holiness with old rags; nay, they imagine that Christ delights in them, and that He must give them eternal life for them.

Therefore no one should take offence at this, that Papists of our time despise and persecute the gospel. The same thing happened to John, Christ, and the Apostles themselves; their doctrine was not only despised, but they all were, on account of it, persecuted and miserably put to death. Well, the Jews received their reward; so they who despise and slander us will not escape their punishment. But let us thank God, that we have the pure word again; and above all things, let us take heed to the preaching of John, when he says: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord;" and again "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the

world." Here he says nothing about our works, merits, &c., but points us directly to Christ, in whom we find and have it all.

Then, too, we ought diligently to contemplate the example of John's humility, that he, who, as Christ testifies, has not his equal among them who are born of women, so that of course all the monks and priests who ever lived under the papacy with all their holiness are unfit to bear him a drink of water, humbles himself so deeply as to say that, with all his holiness and good works, he is not worthy to stoop down and unloose the Savior's shoe-latchet. Let this be an example of humility in John which we not only notice, but also imitate. We should do good works, and that with the greatest diligence; for thus God has told and commanded us in the Ten Commandments, and it is surely not in vain that He has given us these from heaven. It is His word, hence He wishes us to keep it. Therefore let every one use diligence to live according to it, and thus to show forth his obedience and thankfulness towards God, that He has given us His dear Son, who for our sakes humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, on which He rendered satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. On this Man's obedience and work place your dependence, and build firmly upon it, and cast all the good you have ever done at His feet, and confess freely and heartily with John, that it is not worthy that you should wipe the Savior's shoes with it.

Before men it is indeed fine, clean, beautiful cloth, a costly treasure and virtue, that you are no adulterer, no thief nor murderer, that you give alms and are diligent in your office or calling; this

we may and should praise in the world, and regard it as satin, silk and gold. But when you come before God and His judgment, say: Before Thee, Lord, my best satin and gold are worse than tatters. Therefore judge me not according to my works; I will willingly let them be Thy old rags, and Thy Son's foot-clouts, and will gladly be content if I may only be deemed worthy of even this.

Thus St. Paul also does, when he says, Phil. 3 "I am an Israelite, as touching the law a Pharisee; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." This we may indeed regard as something unusual when a man can thus praise himself. "Yet, says he, for Christ's sake I regard all this holiness as loss and dung," and it is my highest joy and best consolation that I shall be found, not in my own righteousness, which is after the law, but in that which comes through faith in Christ, which God imputes to faith. Here Paul speaks still more plainly than John; the latter gives the matter a little finer turn, and calls his good works *shoe-clouts;* but Paul calls them *dirt* and *dung.* This is speaking filthily enough about our holy life. But St. Paul speaks of such a life as that of the Pharisees and hypocrites, in which men, without and aside from faith in Christ, place their confidence in their own works, and presume therewith to merit forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Now it is true that it is God's will that we should live in all virtue, and, as St. Paul says, touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless; as he also often writes in other places, and especially in the same Epistle to the Philipp-

ians, where he says, chapt. 2: "So live that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke," &c. Likewise: "If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." And since such righteousness is according to the law of works, surely it cannot be condemned. Nay, it is also certain that such a life and good works, in those who believe in Christ, are well-pleasing to God for the sake of the same Mediator, Jesus Christ, and that, according to the promise, they will be rewarded of God temporally and eternally.

But besides this, we should always and especially know, that we must not build the honor of our worthiness or merit, nor the comfort of our salvation, upon our life. For however good or holy our life may be, it is not without sin or impurity before God; therefore it cannot stand before the judgment of God, as the holy prophets often confess this in the Scriptures; but only the righteousness and holiness of the Son of God will avail there, who, through His obedience and the sacrifice of His sufferings and death, has propitiated and taken away God's wrath which we have deserved, and purchased for us and given to us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, so that for His sake, if we believe in Him, we are acceptable to God and heirs of eternal life. To this we can never attain through our own works and holiness. Therefore, although our life and the good works in us, who believe in Christ, are acceptable to God, and we thereby serve the Lord Jesus, and have the reputation of a good conscience before the whole world, yet we have on their account no honor before God and His judgment; as St. Paul also says Rom. 4,

about the holy father Abraham: "Abraham hath whereof to glory, but not before God." Therefore, when we speak of righteousness before God and forgiveness of sins, redemption from eternal death and merit of eternal life, we must humble ourselves with John the Baptist and Paul, and say: I cling to my Lord Jesus and His holiness, which He promises and gives to me in Baptism, in the Word and Sacrament, and am content to be a poor worm; in order that we may make a distinction between our life and holiness and the righteousness of Christ. For our holiness and life will not stand against God's wrath and eternal death, but every thing, if it be found without Christ, will be swallowed up by death.

The heathen have also maintained good discipline and propriety of conduct, and have done and suffered much for their country, wherefore also they ought to be praised; but thereby they have not attained to forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God, and with all their honor death has snatched them away. But in order that we may lay hold of that righteousness and holiness which avails before God and unto eternal life, it is necessary that we humble ourselves with John and say: Lord, here comes a poor little rag, an old, torn, filthy shoe-clout, or as Paul says, stinking dirt, if it should come before Thee without Christ. Before the world, and aside from Thy judgment, it may indeed be musk, satin and gold, but before Thee, Lord, let me be an old rag or foot-cloth, with which I may wipe the shoes of Thy Son, and grant me His righteousness; for He with His righteousness is my dearest and most precious treasure. For I know that through Him and His righteousness I

shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; whilst through my own righteousness I must go down into the abyss of hell.

Hence we must freely and fully conclude that our monk's and priest's life, cloisters and all things of this kind that may be mentioned, all belong to the devil in hell. For with their good works they do not look to this, that they may render due obedience to God, and give offense to no one, but that therewith they might be saved. Therefore they also sell their good works to other people. But this is denying Christ, nay mocking Him, as the Jews also mocked Him. Of such an abomination we should beware, and learn here how to meet such deceivers, that we may say to them: Thou poor man, dost thou undertake to save me with thy filthy works and holiness?—John, Paul, Peter and other saints could not do this; else they would not have thought and spoken so disparagingly of their own holiness. If we would still use the cloisters as training-houses, to educate youths and let them study the Scriptures, it would be a very beneficial, practical use. But the pope and his ungodly hangers-on will not permit this, but direct every one, through such cloister-life, to heaven. But they will surely find, in this way, a heaven where flame and fire strike out of the windows. Therefore it would be much better to have such cloisters rased to the ground, than that people should thus be turned away from Christ, and injured in body and soul.

Learn then from this gospel, as in a summary, that we should live justly and honorably among men, be diligent in good works, and give offense to no one. God demands such obedience by His law,

and will have us render it; and if we do not render it, He will visit us with the scourge, with the hangman, with the sword, and at last with the fire of hell. This, I say, we are bound to do by the divine law. But when thou comest before God say: Lord, as far as my works and holiness are concerned, I am lost. Therefore I desire to be an old rag at the feet of my Lord Jesus. For by my life I have deserved nothing but that He should cast me into hell. But I desire His holiness, that He would sanctify me with another, better and eternal holiness; thus I can surely comfort myself with and await eternal life.

Neither pope nor bishops are willing to hear this; for they see well what must follow; namely, that bishoprics and cloisters, the mass and all their false worship, would not last long; therefore they hold fast to them so tenaciously, the most of them for the sake of their belly, the smaller number because they hope to be saved thereby. John did not do this, neither did Paul; they do not wish to retain their own righteousness and holiness. So also all Christians should do, saying with Paul: My holiness is stinking filth and rubbish before God, if I would thereby seek to merit grace and eternal life,—and with John: My holiness is an old rag, if I compare it with the holiness and works of Christ. But the Papists will be neither dirt nor rags with their masses, vows, fasting and praying, but put us to death, because we do not agree with them, and strive to direct the people into another and better way. Well, they are a generation of vipers, out of which nothing good can ever grow; they will find what they are seeking. But let us take good heed to the mouth and

finger of John, with which He points and directs us, in order that we may not overlook nor miss our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom he so diligently and faithfully leads and guides us.

This is the chief doctrine of this gospel lesson, that John so diligently points from himself to the Lord Christ, and thus so deeply humbles himself, and so highly exalts and praises Christ. The other part, that the Pharisees and High Priests send to John and presume to put down and forbid his baptizing and preaching, because he himself says that he is neither Christ, nor Elias, nor a prophet; likewise, that he makes a difference between his baptism, wherewith he baptizes as a servant, and the baptism of Christ, who Himself is Lord, and who alone can give the Spirit,—these would be too long to treat of here, except that we should learn this from them yet, how the world, and especially what is wise and high in the world, is the enemy of God's works, and would like to smother and suppress them, as the High Priests and Pharisees do here. But John has the right spirit and power of Elias, that is, an unterrified heart, does not suffer his preaching nor baptizing to be forbidden, until Herod takes him by the head, casts him into the tower, and finally kills him. This he suffers, for God's sake, willingly and patiently, in the sure hope that, through His Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ, he will have a gracious God and eternal life. May God, our dear heavenly Father, grant us this through His Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

FIRST SERMON FOR CHRISTMAS.

CONCERNING THE HISTORY OF CHRIST'S BIRTH IN BETHLEHEM.

LUKE 2, 1–14. And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, (because he was of the house and lineage of David,) to be taxed with Mary, his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

THIS festival of the birth of our dear Lord Jesus Christ is instituted among Christians especially that we may preach this history and learn it well, that it may be kept in remembrance by the young and the common people, that it may

be impressed upon their hearts, and that they may rightly learn to know their Savior. For although we tell it yearly, yet we cannot sufficiently preach nor learn it. Therefore we will divide the gospel lesson into two parts: first, we will in the most simple manner relate the history as it took place; then, secondly, hear how the dear angels preach and sing about it.

The first point in the history is this: That Christ was born just at that time when the Jews and their property were for the first time taxed under the Emperor Augustus. At that time already our dear Lord Jesus began to reign in the world, although secretly, and the great Emperor Augustus, with his empire, must serve Him, although unwittingly, and by His command furnish the occasion for the Virgin Mary with her espoused husband to go to Bethlehem, and there, as the prophets had written, give birth to the Savior of the world.—Otherwise, if this had not been brought about by the emperor's command, Joseph and Mary would doubtless have remained at home. But since Christ is to be born at Bethlehem, the emperor must furnish the occasion thereto, and thus serve the Lord Jesus at His birth; although neither the emperor nor the world knew anything about it. For the world is so wicked and unfaithful, that she would otherwise rather have hindered than furthered it. But God so conducts His government that often she must do unwittingly what no one could induce her to do knowingly.

Now it was very inconvenient and hard for this virgin, so near the time of her delivery, that just at this time, in the midst of winter, she had

to undertake this long journey to a strange place, where she was not acquainted and knew no certain place to which she could go; and that these two people were very poor we know from this, that Joseph could not spare her, or leave her at home with his or her friends, or otherwise provide for her, until she should bring forth the child; but because he does not know where to leave her, nor any one to whom to commend her, she must go with him on this long journey (for from Galilee to Bethlehem in the land of Judea is as far, if not further, than with us from Saxony to France) and both take their little possessions with them. Perhaps Joseph also took an ass along for her. For they had to make arrangements now to settle down and live at Bethlehem, where they belonged on account of their lineage; which would also have been more convenient for them if they could have found a place. For hitherto, on account of their poverty, and because King Herod had persecuted the whole royal race of David and murdered many of them, this poor virgin and her parents had to live as outcasts back in the borders of the Jewish land at Nazareth.

When they now get to Bethlehem and the time has arrived that she should bring forth, everything is unprepared. For she finds no one among them all who wants to know her, and among so many women no hostess who would give her a chamber or other place in the house for herself, and was willing to be with her at this time, when one woman is generally willing to help another all she can; but must, together with her Joseph, stay in an open stable, where the common cattle of poor people are put; here she finds no

preparation, and has no help nor service from any one at this birth. And after the birth there is again no one who, for the young child's sake, would take her in and afford her a better place, even in a corner, or would offer her even the smallest service, except that Joseph perhaps spoke to a poor pious maid-servant, who may have occasionally made a fire for her, or brought her a little water, but had mostly to wait on her himself.

And for her, as mother, this is the hardest, that this young child, of whom, by faith, she knows that He is the Son of God, and by descent the true Lord and King of the Jewish people, does not among His own people and in His own fatherland, and in His father David's own city, meet with even so much favor, that He might have a borrowed cradle or a little bed, aside from His mother's bosom and the manger, where He is wrapped in such poor swaddling clothes as she could procure; and to this place the angels direct the shepherds, where no one would look for the child of the poorest, most wretched woman of the country. Here in the cold she had to warm the child, perhaps at a little fire of coals, bathe it, and when it would sleep and she could not hold it in her arms or fold it to her bosom, she had to lay it on a bundle of hay, and cover it with her veil, or cloak, or whatever she may have had.

This is in brief the history, which no doubt the Evangelist wished thus to present to us, who are generally so cold, that our hearts might, if possible, be warmed a little by contemplating the humble birth of Christ into the world. Bethlehem would indeed have been worthy to be sunken then to the depth of hell, since she did not even

honor her Savior so much as to lend Him the most humble cradle and pillow. His cradle is in the first place the bosom of His dear mother, afterward the manger.—Thus this child is rocked to sleep. This poor woman in child-bed, if she would not take cold, may cover herself with her cloak or whatever else she may have with her; for here there is no one who would lend child or mother anything, serve them, or help them in the least.

For shame, thou base Bethlehem, who dost show thyself so hard and unmerciful toward thy Savior, that thou dost not serve Him even in the smallest matter! Thou hadst deserved, even more than Sodom, that fire and brimstone should have come down from heaven and utterly destroyed thee. For although the Virgin Mary had been a beggar, or, if we may venture even to say it, a dishonest woman who did not regard her honor, yet in such a time of need any one should have been willing to serve her, and should not have let the little child lie among the cattle. Nay, but nothing of the kind takes place; this little child must be wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, in order that it may have somewhere to stay, and have its honors on earth. Thus this Lord was received on earth, where others gormandise, make a great show with beautiful clothes, grand houses, &c.

So much concerning the first part of the history, which is written for us that we might learn to take to heart this picture, how our dear Lord Jesus was born on earth in such poverty, and that we might never forget it, especially since we learn from the sermon of the angel that it was for our good. For here we see the great and wonderful

work of God, that for the sake of poor, wretched humanity He lets His only begotten Son take upon Him human nature and become true man, and as such endure all weakness and misery, nay take upon Him even our sins, though without sin in Himself, and become a sacrifice for them, in order that we might learn to thank and praise God for this great benefit, that we poor, wretched, nay even condemned men, to-day attain to such great honor of becoming one flesh and blood with the Son of God. For the very eternal Son of the eternal Father, through whom heaven and earth were created out of nothing, He, as we hear, became man, was born into the world like us, except that in Him there never was any sin. Therefore we may now boast that God has become our brother, nay our flesh and blood. This great honor was conferred, not upon the angels, but upon us men. And although the angels are more glorious creatures than we are, yet God has honored us more highly, and come nearer to us than to the angels, since He became not an angel, but man. Now if we men would properly think of this, and heartily believe it, this inexpressible grace and benefit of our heavenly Father would cause us great joy, and impel us to thank God from our hearts, to love Him, and willingly to submit to His will.

In the papacy they used to tell a story: The devil once came to church to mass, and when in the confession of the Christian faith, which they called the *Patrem*, they sang the words: "*Et homo factum est*"—the Son of God was made man—and the people did not kneel down but stood, he struck one on the mouth, rebuked him and said: You ruffian, are you not ashamed that you stand here

like a stock, and do not fall down for joy? If the Son of God had become our brother, like yours, we would not know what to do for joy.

I do not think that this is true; for the devil is too decided in his enmity to us and the Lord Jesus; but this is true, that he who conceived this story had the right spirit, and well understood how great an honor was conferred upon us in that the Son of God became man; not like Eve nor Adam, who was made of the earth; but He is still more nearly related to us, since He was born of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, like other men, except that the virgin was alone, and being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, conceived this blessed fruit without sin and by the Holy Spirit. In other respects He is like unto us, and a natural Son of a woman.

Adam and Eve were not born, but created. God made Adam out of the dust of the earth, and the woman of his rib. How much nearer is Christ to us than Eve to her husband Adam, since He is truly our flesh and blood. Such honor we should highly esteem and well take to heart, that the Son of God became flesh, and that there is no difference at all between His and our flesh, only that His flesh is without sin. For He was so conceived of the Holy Ghost, and God poured out so richly His Holy Spirit into the soul and body of the Virgin Mary that without any sin she conceived and bore our Lord Jesus. Aside from this, in all other respects, He was like other men; He ate, drank, was hungry, thirsty, cold like other men. Such and similar natural infirmities, which have descended upon us by reason of sin, He, who was without sin, bore and had like unto us, as St. Paul says: "He

was made in the likeness of men, and found in fashion as a man."

Thus the high, eternal, glorious Majesty deeply humbled Himself, coming down to us. For He might well have become a man such a He is now in heaven, where He has flesh and blood like unto us, but does not live this poor, weak, infirm life which we live on earth. This He migth have done from the beginning: and still it would have been great humility, and a great honor to the human race: but He did not wish to do it, in order that He might show how great and sincere a love He has for us, so great that He took upon Him our infirm nature, in order that He might take away our sin, by which our nature is depraved, and death, which reigns over us through sin, and thus make us like unto His own glorious body, which He now has, so that we can rejoice in this, comfort ourselves and boast that we have a Brother in heaven, who is the Son of God Himself, whom we may, nay should approach as our own flesh and blood. For he is a wretched man who does not come unto this Savior, nor permit this joy to come into his heart.

This now is the reason why this history is preached every year, that every young heart may form this image within itself, praise God for it, and say: Now, thank God! I am in no danger; for I have a Brother, the Son of God, who became such as I am. Why He became such, and what He wished to accomplish thereby, we will hear further on. For it can have been for no other reason than that He would deliever us from sin and eternal death, in which we formerly lay captive. But I am now speaking only of the great and high honor to the whole human race, of which we may truly

boast, and should rejoice, that the Son of God became man. Of such honor all men can boast. But herein Christians have the preference, that they shall enjoy this honor to eternity. This we should mark in the first place in this history.

Again, this very noble example serves this purpose: Since Christ, the Son of God, so deeply humbled Himself and bestowed all His honor on our poor flesh, and the Divine Majesty, before whom angels tremble, condescended so far, and went about as a poor beggar; up in heaven the angels worship Him, here on earth He serves us and lies down in our miry clay: since the Son of God has done this, as an offering of praise, honor and thankfulness to Him, we will also be truly humble, and according to His word bear the cross which He lays upon us, suffer all manner of tribulation, and follow Him. For what can it harm us, or why should we be ashamed of sufferings? Our Lord Himself suffered cold, hunger and sorrow, and all kinds of wretchedness and want. Especially, as already said, was His advent and birth into this world characterized by the greatest poverty and want. There was neither a room nor apartment of any kind, neither pillow nor bed-clothes; He had to lie in a manger before the cows and oxen. Now if your dear Friend, nay your Brother, the King of heaven and earth and all creatures, lies there in such wretchedness and poverty, shame on you, that you would have every thing so fine and glorious, and suffer nothing! Think who you are! Is it true that you are a poor sinner, and worthy of nothing better than that you should lie upon thorns? Yet, whilst your Lord lies on hard straw, in a manger,

you lie on a soft bed; and still you are discontented and complain of great sufferings!

But is not this a deplorable thing? We see how humble and poor Jesus is for our sakes; and we would be fine fellows, escape free and suffer nothing; nay, in our pride and impatience we are even angry and complain if we are to suffer a little. But this does not agree well together, that our Lord and Savior is born in such poverty and want for our sake, also dies for us on the cross, and we lazy fellows would always enjoy the greatest ease and peace. No, this will not do: "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord," says the Savior.

Therefore we should well learn, and earnestly consider, first, what honor was conferred upon us, in that Christ, the Son of God, became man. For it is such an honor, that if one were an angel, he might wish he were a man, in order that he might boast: My flesh and blood are exalted above all angels. Wherefore we men ought truly to count ourselves blessed. God grant that we may understand it, take it to heart, and thank Him for it. In the second place, we should diligently look upon the example of Christ, what He, who is Lord of all lords, in His first advent to us poor men, did and suffered for our sake. This would induce and impel us, from our hearts also willingly to help and serve other people, even though it required great self-denial, and we should, on their account, have to suffer. To this may God help us by His Holy Spirit, through our dear Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

SECOND SERMON FOR CHRISTMAS.

LUKE 2, 1–14.

WHAT THE ANGELS ANNOUNCE AND PROCLAIM TO THE SHEPHERDS ABOUT THIS HISTORY.

WE have now heard the history of this day, how Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born into this world, and what we are to learn from it. The Evangelist tells us that when this happened at Bethlehem an angel from heaven appeared to several shepherds, who were with their flocks in a field near by, accompanied by a great and glorious light, and spake to the shepherds about this birth in the following words: "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

This is the first sermon about this new-born child, our Lord Jesus, brought by the angels from heaven to us on earth. Therefore it is well worthy that we should diligently study it, and be careful not to think that we know all about it already. For though we should preach it every year and every day, we will never, here on earth, learn all about it.

But this sermon of the angels was very necessary; for though Christ should have been born twenty times, it would have been in vain if we had known nothing about it. For what does it profit a

man if he has a treasure in his house or cellar and knows nothing of it? It can give him neither pleasure nor joy. As the proverb says: *Ignoti nulla cupido*, a hidden treasure is a useless treasure, which we may walk over, as over the filth in the street, regardless of it. If God had not through the dear angels, and otherwise, preached to the people and revealed this treasure, no one could have desired, much less enjoyed it, no one would have rejoiced in it. The reason is that what one does not know does not affect him; it gives him neither joy nor sorrow, but is as though it had never been, or should never come to pass.

Therefore this is one of the chief parts of the gospel lesson for to-day, that the angel by his sermon reveals this birth, and shows us this treasure, in order that we may not pass by where this treasure is lying without knowing anything about it, and thus, of course, derive neither consolation nor joy from it. Therefore the angel begins his sermon about this matter, that we might be aroused to look upon this our great treasure, and says: "I bring you good tidings of great joy."

These words are well placed. The shepherds are frightened by this unusual apparition of the great light and glory, heaven and earth being in a moment full of light and fire, in the darkness of the night. The angel sees this, and therefore addresses them joyfully and says: "Fear not." As though he should say: You have no reason to be afraid; your fear is a sure sign that you know nothing yet of that noble, precious treasure which God has given you; else you would not fear, nay, you would rather rejoice and be glad in your hearts. For I come for the purpose of bringing you good tidings,

a great work and miracle, which, when you properly understand it, will cause you to rejoice and be glad beyond measure.

Thus the angel is chiefly concerned so to preach that it would take hold of the hearts and not be in vain, but would accomplish its purpose. Therefore he does not say: I announce to you a great, strange, wonderful work or history, which they do not know whether to receive or be glad of or not; for they, as poor common people, would not think, when anything special or great happens or is told, that it concerns them, or that God would do anything great for them, "but," says he, "I announce and bring to you good tidings" of joy only, and that not common, but "great joy;" and this joy not of great riches, power, liberty, and a quiet or easy life on earth, but of a new birth. This must not be one of these common old births, as all emperors and kings were born, where the birth of neither brought consolation and health to the other in his necessity, because we are born in sin unto death, but I speak of such a new, consoling, joyful birth, "that to you is born a Savior." This birth alone should and can cause you real and great joy, because through sin the devil has cast us men down very low, and brought us into great distress and misery, so that we are not only sinners by nature, and subject to eternal death, but must also daily in this world expect all manner of misfortune from him, so that hardly any one is secure against him for one moment, either in his life or property. He even rules in the world by nothing but murder, persecution of the pious, lies, deceit, robbery, stealing, &c. Besides such distress there is also this, of which the gospel often speaks, that he enters bodily into people and makes

them foolish and mad, to say nothing of the spiritual injury that he does by false doctrines, by filling people's minds with error and nonsense, contempt for God's Word, making them rave loudly against the truth, and filling them with pride, avarice, lasciviousness, hatred, envy, &c., so that we may truly say that such a man is nothing but a foul secret retreat of the devil. So shamefully has he reduced us by sin, that here on earth we cannot have a bit of bread in safety on account of him, and must suffer his torments in body and soul, and in addition, bear God's wrath and eternal death. Is not this a terrible, miserable, horrible kingdom of the devil?

Yet, if we rightly think of it, and compare the two together, this distress which we have from the devil is by no means to be compared with the glory, and the precious treasure and joy, of which the angel here preaches and says: "Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy; to you is born a Savior." With such a proclamation the angel would turn our eyes and hearts away from such devil's misery, and direct them to this Child; as though the work of a precious and salutary preacher would be accomplished if he could bring us to contemplate this Savior rightly and learn to acknowledge Him as our flesh and blood. And it is certainly true, if we could rightly engrave this lovely, joyful image in man's heart, the comfort and joy from this our Savior would infinitely outweigh all the sorrow and injury which we have from the devil, though it be a great and eternal injury.

If we would gain the victory over the devil with all his venom and wrath, hell and death, and

be secured against him, it must be done only by this sweet contemplation and comfort, of which the angel here preaches and says: "To you is born a Savior." If this truth is properly written in our hearts, the cause is already won. For with these words the angel would put such thoughts into our hearts: The devil has brought to shame and possessed me and all men, has brought us under God's wrath and into eternal damnation. This, alas! is true; but the injury is not so great that the treasure which God gives me is not inexpressibly greater; namely, that God my Lord not merely possesses the human race, or dwells therein, as the devil is wont to possess men; but He Himself becomes true man, so that the divine and human nature in Christ becomes one person. So near the devil cannot come to man. For although he may possess a man, yet the man remains man and the devil remains the devil; they are two distinct persons and natures. On the other hand, the Son of God hath taken upon Him human nature, so that I can truly say: This Man is God, and God is Man, in one undivided person.

Therefore our gracious God in heaven, from inexpressible love and mercy to the human family, has come much nearer to our wretched human nature, so despised and so greatly marred by the devil, and has entered much deeper into our flesh than the devil can. He may take possession of a man and torture a man, but he cannot become a personal man; the natures always remain separate; but through the joyful birth of this Child, God has united Himself in one person with our human nature, and the Son of God is truly our flesh and blood, born of the Virgin Mary, in a natural man-

ner, just as you and I were, excepting that He was conceived of the Holy Ghost without male seed, and did not inherit the venom of the devil, but received an altogether pure and innocent flesh and blood. With this one exception, our flesh and blood being impure and sinful, He is a man like you and me, who had to eat, drink, sleep, and awake, as other people must do by nature, as St. Paul says, (Phil. 2, 7.): "He was made in the likeness of men," so that whoever heard or saw Him had to say: This is verily a real, natural man, and no spirit. For He has in Himself all the characteristics of this natural life.

Behold, this is a beautiful, heavenly sermon of the angel, in which he promises us only joy and consolation from this birth, and would make of it something high and great, and present to our imagination the great honor that is shown us in this birth, and immediately make us proud of it in faith and heartfelt consolation, though at the same time very humble, when we are conscious of our wrong and misery, and contemplate the infinitely great love of God toward us unworthy creatures, who were the devil's own. For he would hereby say as much as this: O, dear men! now rejoice and be glad. You have an exceedingly high and precious treasure, and honor and glory immeasurably great have been shown you, after all the shame and disgrace which the devil has heaped upon you. For now you have lived to see a Man who is of your flesh and blood, and yet true God, the Lord of majesty, above all angels and creatures. Instead of the misery and wretchedness with which the devil afflicted you, you shall now have pure delight and pleasure, and, through this divine

work, be sufficiently avenged of the evil spirit, and be much more highly honored than he could before disgrace and ruin you; nay, you are much more highly exalted than we angels are. With this you ought of right to console yourselves, and see to it, that you heartily lay hold of this, and rejoice in it. Nay, you cannot rejoice so heartily and greatly, but that the treasure and cause of your joy should still be much higher and greater, compared with which everything on earth which you men call great, must be nothing; so that this must be called a great joy, and I do not know what else to call it. For it shall be an infinite, eternal, immeasurable joy, which will outweigh all height, greatness, and all temporal and transient things, and cannot be designated otherwise than by the word *great*.

Now we also ought to learn to believe this preaching; for here we hear an excellent preacher, who rightly understands this great and glorious work of God, and knows very well how to speak of it. For he knows right well what great harm the devil has done; but he also sees and herewith confesses how we poor men, by the birth of this Child, are honored far above the angelic nature.

According to his created nature the devil is also of the same angelic essence. But by pride he has fallen from his first glory into enmity with God, and did not, as the Apostle Jude says in his epistle, keep his first estate, and afterwards brought the human race to destruction also, so that he neither will nor can be converted to God or reconciled with man. The other holy angels, who continue in their purity and obedience, do not need this benefit for themselves. And although they have not this honor of the Son of God in their

nature, they do not envy us the same; nay, it is their highest joy that we have attained to it, and are no more the devil's own, but children of God, and co-heirs of the only begotten Son of God, so that they can now be our fellows and we theirs. They are not ashamed to preach this to the poor shepherds and to the whole world, but regard it also as their happiness, and do it with heartfelt joy and pleasure, so that not only *one* proclaims this, but after the proclamation the whole host of them sing about it with a joyful noise, and desire that heaven and earth should be full of this joy.

Now if we would rightly consider and take this to heart, we men ought to love and esteem each other heartily, even if we had no other gain from it. For I do not yet speak of the use and benefit, of which the angel speaks in the following words: "To you is born a Savior," but only of the honor. Yes, if we would rightly take this to heart, we could never be the enemy of any man; for who would hate or harm that image, that has a body and soul like my God and thine? Should we not, for the sake of this honor that God has shown us, love all men and do good to them?

The angels are created much more glorious creatures than we are: but God did not regard this and become an angel. In addition to this, the angels are also innocent and pure, holy spirits, who have not fallen like the other angels and us poor men. Thus it might seem that it would have been much more fit if God had become an angel. But no, He interferes in behalf of the insignificant, poor creature, full of sins, in the kingdom of the devil, which the devil plagues and torments most shamefully. Should not this soften our hearts a

little, that we should heartily love one another, and not despise and envy each other, but each show the other all manner of love and friendship, for the sake of this high honor and glory to which we are exalted in our Savior, the Son of God?

Several of the fathers, and especially Bernard, had such thoughts as these, that the devil, when he saw in heaven that the Son of God would become man, began to envy men and hate God, because He was not about to become an angel, but a man, and therefore out of pride and envy fell from heaven. This may indeed be a good thought, and we may infer from this work of God that the devil's fall was a sin against the Son of God. But the dear fathers wanted in this way to present the great honor and inexpressible benefit of God, displayed toward us in that God became man, took upon Him the poor flesh and blood that we poor men have, who have been poisoned and taken possession of by the devil through sin, and are on account of sin subject to death.

How unhappy must those people be who know nothing of this honor! But how much more unhappy those who hear from the angels, apostles and other preachers, that God has thus graciously visited our humanity, taken it upon Himself, and exalted it above all creatures, but do not regard it, nor receive any pleasure from it! Yes, truly unhappy and unblest must such people be, who do not feel this, and derive no comfort nor joy from it. But what shall we say of those who even slander, condemn and persecute this blessed doctrine?

If among many brethren one becomes a great lord, how do the other brothers rejoice! How great the pleasure they have in this! As we see in the

case of Joseph's brethren in the book of Genesis, where he makes himself known to them. But how does it come that we do not also rejoice in this inexpressible honor and glory, that it does not move our hearts to praise and thank God that His Son has become flesh and blood, and now sits at the right hand of God, the Lord over all creatures?

Whoever could rightly conceive of this in his heart, should for the sake of the flesh and blood that is above, at the right hand of God, love all flesh and blood here upon earth and never be capable of being angry with any one any more. One view of the tender humanity of Christ our God, should reasonably so fill our hearts with joy, that no angry or unfriendly thoughts could ever afterward find place within them. Yes, we might almost expect every one to carry the other on his hands for joy, on account of this our flesh and blood. Whoever has rightly thought of it in his heart that the Son of God has become man, should also be able to expect all good from the Lord Jesus, and nothing ill. For I know very well that I am not angry with myself, and do not wish to do myself any evil. But Christ is the same as I am, also a true man; how then can he intend to do any evil to Himself, that is to us, who are His flesh and blood? And, to sum up the matter, this fact that the Son of God became man, if we had the proper image of it in our hearts, would make only joyful hearts and consciences, and in a moment all the terrible examples of God's wrath, like the flood; the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and others, would melt away and disappear. All these must vanish in one moment if we would with believing hearts think of this one man who is God, and has

so honored poor human nature. For in this image I can see nothing else that has induced Him to take upon Him human nature, than only great, inexpressible love towards us, who before had lain under the wrath of God, condemned to eternal death.

But as already said, are those not altogether unhappy people, who hear, but do not regard this, letting this treasure lie, and engaging in questions as to how they shall fill their chests with gold, build grand houses, and appear in great pomp and despise, envy and hate their neighbor? It is the miserable devil who does this, to whom those people who do not regard God's Word give place in their hearts; who blinds them, so that they cannot see this joy of which the angel here preaches.

Now this is one point that should move us to great joy and a blessed pride, that we are honored thus above all creaturs, even above the angels, so that we can of a truth boast: My own flesh and blood sits at the right hand of God and rules over all. No creature nor angel has such honor. This should indeed be an oven to melt us all into one heart, and to awaken such fervor among us, that we would all love one another heartily. But, as we said, here the devil has his work, so that we hear this truth in the Church, but afterward do not think further of it, and soon forget it. He deprives us of this joy by suggesting other thoughts and cares, in order that we may not embrace this image in our hearts as we should. Now, if we had no more than this honor, we ought to leap and dance for joy.

But over and above this natural joy in this honor and glory, there is this yet of which the angel

further says, that this child Jesus would also be our Savior. This is the chief part, and brings to notice the true reason why we should be joyful. Here again there are unhappy and unblest persons who hear and know it, and yet do not regard it. For these words should melt heaven and earth, and change for us death into sugar, and all misfortunes, of which there are here more than can be told, into pure, sweet wine. For what man is there who can properly conceive of this, that the Son of God is born man, a Savior for us? Such treasure the angel gives not only to His mother, the Virgin Mary, but to all of us men; "unto you," he says, "is born a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." For the angel speaks to the shepherds; these were Jews, and well knew that the word CHRIST in their language meant a King and Lord. But herein the greater part of the Jews erred, in that they thought He would be a Lord and Savior in a temporal sense. This was not meant. The angel refers to something higher when he says: "Unto you is born a Savior." As though he would say: Hitherto you have been the prisoners of the devil; He has tormented you with water, fire, pestilence, the sword, and who can tell all the misfortunes? But the greatest of all was this eternal distress, sin and death. Here you poor men are lying under his tyranny. He leads the soul astray with lies, which are infinitely more hurtful to it than any pestilence can be to the body. Nor has the poor, weak, needy body any rest from him. And when He has tormented soul and body here on earth, eternal death comes in afterwards. Now unto you, says the angel, who lie as captives in the power of this destructive, wicked, venomous spirit, who is the

prince and god of this world, without salvation or help for either your bodies or souls, this Savior is born.

Yes, the words *unto you* should make us joyful. For to whom, or of whom, does He speak? Of course not to wood or stones; no, but to men; and not to one or two alone, but as He says, to "all people," that is, all who are men. For He says, *unto you*, not unto us angels, but "unto you" He is born, that is, He has become a man like unto you. Now whoever is born a man, may and should comfort himself with this Savior who is born. But what shall we make of this? Shall we still doubt God's grace and say: St. Peter or St. Paul may indeed rejoice in this Savior; but I am a poor sinner, I dare not do it, this noble precious treasure is not intended for me? My dear friend, if you will say it is not for me, to whom then does it belong? Did He come for the sake of geese, ducks or cows? For you must notice what He is. Had He wished to help another creature, He would have become that creature. Had He not become man for the sake of us poor, sinful, lost men, He would not be called our Savior. Now see, what are you? What am I? Are we not all men? Yes. Who then is to receive this Child, but just we men? The angels do not need Him; the devils do not want Him; but we need Him, and for our sake He became man. Therefore it becomes us men to receive Him with joy, as the angel here says: "Unto you is born a Savior;" and shortly before: "I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people." But is it not a great and glorious thing, that an angel from heaven brings this message to men? And afterwards so many thousand angels rejoice

about it, wish and announce that we men also should be joyful, and receive such grace with thanks, as we shall hear.

Therefore it is a very precious word which we hear: "Unto you is born the Savior." This birth, he would say, is not for us angels; I have no share in it, except that I am glad with you and for you, who are poor, depraved and lost men. This Child, the Son of God, is your Savior; you are to be helped from sin and death. Now it is in itself a great and glorious thing that God has become man. But this is far more, that He is to be our spiritual and eternal Savior. Whoever would rightly believe this, could tell what true joy is. Yes, if his heart were full of this faith, he could, for great joy, not live long; for his heart could not bear the joy, but must break; as we see that the heart of man cannot endure great sorrow, but many die of great terror and anxiety.

But, as was said in the beginning, here on earth we will not be able fully to comprehend or learn this sermon. For this life is too narrow and our hearts are too weak. Otherwise, if it were possible that a heart should take it in fully, it would never have any more sorrowful thoughts.

And, if we rightly believed these tidings, this fruit at least should follow, that we would be kind to each other, and leave off lying and deceiving and other vices. But here we see how feeble we are; this joy cannot find a proper entrance into our hearts; we soon forget the preaching both of the angel and of the Savior, and the majority of men still run after avarice and other like things, which is a sure indication that we do not regard

such preaching or that our faith is too weak; for we would be joyful and free from care, if we believed that we have such a Savior.

How would one rejoice in the danger and agony of death, if he knew a certain remedy against the pestilence? But in this Savior from sin and eternal death no one rejoices, or at best but few. The greater part seek other pleasures, that they may have peace, rest, luxury, &c. here; and yet they are not sure of this life for one moment. This is a sign that we hear this joyful proclamation like those who are in a sleep, remain wicked people who have the treasure before their eyes, but do not regard it.

Now, whoever hears this without experiencing any consolation or joy, may well regard himself as an unhappy man. For in what shall a heart rejoice, if not in that of which the angel here speaks and which He Himself calls great joy, so that it must indeed be a joy above all joys: "This day is born to you a Savior?" Whoever will not permit himself to be bettered or made more pious by this announcement, whoever can not relish this wine, nor feel the warmth of this fire in his heart, him let the hangman make more pious, for there is no other way to help him.

Therefore be alarmed on your own account, if you are thus cold and hardened, and earnestly call upon God for grace, that through His Holy Spirit He would change and warm your heart; then place before you this sermon of the angel, think and meditate upon the inexpressible benefit which God confers upon and announces to you through this birth; in order that thereby your heart may be awakened both to repentance and the fear of God,

and to faith which comforts itself in this Savior. For God is willing to work in us and give us His Holy Spirit through such preaching and contemplation of His Word.

When the angel further says that "this Savior is born in the city of David," and calls Him "the Lord," with these words he would direct us to the Scriptures. For thus it had been foretold by the prophet Micah that He should be born in Bethlehem.

But especially does the angel call the Child "Jesus, the Lord." We are not to understand this as though He should be a worldly king, who should show himself to be a tyrant, ruling with the rod of physical power; no, but as God says to Adam: "The seed of the woman shall crush the head of the serpent," so He is to appear before us the devil's enemy, but our Lord and Savior, who will claim you and me as His own, demand us of the devil, say to him: Give me this man whom you hold bound; he is not yours, but mine, and my creature, whom I not only created, but also purchased with my body and blood. Therefore let him go, give him to me again, for he does not belong to you. So that Christ is a Lord rich in consolation, with power breaking in upon the government of the devil and claiming His own, appearing before his very eyes and saying: Thou, accursed spirit, hast led them into sin and death, deceivest and beliest them, and yet they are not thine. *I* am the Lord, who am entitled not only by nature, but also by right, to govern men; not *you*; for they are my purchased property.

Yes, say you, but the Son of God has not redeemed the angels; how then are we to explain it thus when they call Him Lord? Answer: For us

the word has no other sense, and it is rightly and properly explained thus. But the fact that the angel speaks thus in a general way, and gives the child Jesus such a high title, is a sure indication that this child, born bodily of the Virgin Mary, is natural, true, eternal God; else of course the angel would not call Him Lord.

He is our Savior, not the Savior of the angels; as the angel here plainly says: "Unto you is born a Savior." But He is not only our Lord; He is also the angels' Lord. Now they are of the household of this Lord, with us, and we with them, and count themselves as being under this Lord just like us, so that we men, who where formerly the devil's servants, attain to such honor through this Child, that we are received into citizenship of the dear angels. These are now our dear friends, so that for the sake of this Child we can trust that we have one Lord with the dear angels and they with us, and that we are with them of the same household.

They, the dear angels, might well be proud that they are so much nobler than we men, in the first place as to their nature and being, and then also in that they are without sin. But we see in them no pride; they do not despise us men on account of our misery; nay, they regard us as being greatly ennobled and honored through this their Lord and our Savior, the Son of God. They are heartily sorry for our death, sin and distress. Therefore also they so heartily rejoice in this help which comes to us in this Child, are willing that we should have this blessedness as well as themselves, that on this day we have received this Child for our own, who is their Lord, and confers upon us the high honor, that we are to be their companions.

They do not say: I do not like this sinner, this stinking corpse, these condemned, unclean whoremongers and profligates. No, they do not say thus; but they rejoice heartily that they now have such sinners for friends and associates, and praise God for this, that we, being delivered from sin, come with them unto *one* house and under *one* Lord. They thank and praise God for such grace, which however they did not need for themselves, except that hereby their joy is made greater, and God has the more praise and honor, as they afterwards sing.

How much more is it not meet that we also should thank and praise God therefore, and love and help one another, even as the Son of God did us, who became our flesh and nearest Friend. But whoever will not regard this, and will not thus love and serve his neighbor, for Him, as said above, there is no help.

This is the first sermon about this Child after His birth, which will be continued even unto the end of the world; therefore you should diligently take heed to it. For here you see how the dear angels have become one with us, are our friends, come to us with this joyful message, and still continue to comfort us therewith and say: henceforth we ought no more to fear, since this Child is born unto us, and will be our Savior. This is the true, highest and best consolation, which can surely and truly prove to us God's grace and mercy, that God the almighty, eternal Father has had compassion upon us and given us His Son in such a friendly manner, through a tender virgin. He lays Him in her bosom, and lets the announcement be made to us that He is our Savior. What we want, we are to find in Him. He is to be our help and com-

fort, that henceforth all wrath between God and us is taken away, and only love and kindness reigns.

Now ask yourself, does God do injustice when He suffers those to be lost forever who hear this and do not accept of it, as the blind, hardened Papists do, who are not satisfied with this Savior, but run after other saviors on whom to depend? The sermon of this angel sounds differently; namely, that this Child alone is to be our Savior, in whom alone, as our highest treasure, we are to have all our comfort and joy. Where He is, thither look all the angels, and God Himself.

But He gives this treasure not only to His mother, but to you and me too, and says: He shall be your own, you shall enjoy Him, and everything that He has in heaven and earth, shall be your own. Now whoever hears this and yet derives no pleasure from it, or lets this Savior go and seeks another, deserves to be driven into the earth by a thunderbolt. Therefore we should thank God for His grace, and pray Him that He would write this sermon of the angel into our hearts, in order that we may find our consolation in this Savior, and through Him conquer death and the devil.

To this may our dear Lord and Savior, Christ, help us. Amen.

THIRD SERMON FOR CHRISTMAS.

THE COMFORT TO BE DERIVED FROM THE TIDINGS OF THE ANGEL, WITH AN ADMONITION.

NOW that we have heard the glad and glorious tidings of the angel, concerning the birth of the Lord our Savior, it behooves us to see to it that this proclamation may not have been heard by us as though it were a story of every day life, which when once heard satisfies us, since then we know all that need be known concerning it. Alas, the greater portion of mankind thus hears the Word of God, regarding it no more than human sayings, the mere hearing of which is sufficient. We ought rather to be such hearers and learners as the angel admonishes not only the shepherds to be, but all men, for whom the Savior is born, so that our hearts may with great joy accept and retain the message of this birth. Thus, indeed, we see the entire multitude of holy angels rejoicing, and gladly singing of this deed of God, although it did not happen on their account. Thus also the shepherds do; they are not content with having seen and heard the angels, but immediately, and yet by night, in order that they might so much the more rejoice at this story, go to seek and to find the little Child in the manger, whereby they receive consolation and happiness, and increase these to such a degree that, wherever they go, they repeat these tidings with much joy, and from their hearts give thanks unto God and praise Him for these things. Mary also, the mother of this little

Child, as the Evangelist tells us, with much joy "kept all these things" and pondered them in her heart.

Such hearers of these tidings God desires us to be. In no other way can they be advantageously or happily heard. Those persons must surely be unhappy and accursed, as has been stated above, who derive from these Christmas-tidings neither joy nor a desire to amend their lives, and who no more believe them nor derive benefit from them than does the devil with his angels, who also know these events full well, but only to their condemnation.

With these tidings the angel has given us so much, that the entire Church has enough in them to preach and to learn until the end of time. It is certainly proper, and also highly necessary for us, to study them with care, and by diligent contemplation so impress them upon our hearts and ponder them, that we will never forget them, thus making many a sermon from this one glorious sermon of the angel. It contains so much of fire and fuel that it is able, at all times, to ignite and warm afresh our cold hearts; yea, it is such a spring and fountain, that it can always assuage our panting and quench our thirst, as a living stream of water unto eternal life. In this we have both a sure comfort and defense against all affliction and fear, as well as the necessary admonition to shun a false security and to avoid forgetfulness of this great and divine blessing.

All this, however, is comprised in that saying of the angel which we have heard: "For unto you is born this day a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." This is the chief treasure which causes

joy, truly great and heartfelt, to all those who desire to be happy; that is, to possess the grace of God, peace of conscience, and the sure hope of eternal life. To such the angel speaks and says: Fear not. For to whom else could these words be said? or why should God through these tidings of a Savior born exhort to joyfulness, if they were not spoken to such hearts as are miserable, sad, without cheer or joy, and engulfed in tribulations, fears and despondency, as though God were still angry with them and about to hurl them into the abyss of hell, with which the saints and pious hearts are ever and anon troubled? For these feel their sin, their conscience accuses them, and they know that they cannot be acquitted before the judgment-seat of God.

Sin is the principal cause of all terror and fear of God; for if we were free from it we would not need to fear the wrath to come, nor death and hell; nor would we attempt to flee from God. With our timid, sad and wavering heart we confess ourselves guilty, as indeed we are, and are unable, on account of our sins, to approach God, from which fear no power on earth can free us. The wicked may perhaps, for the time being, not experience this feeling on account of the obduracy of their hearts, yet neither are they entirely free from it, and it will unexpectedly come upon them, to hurl them with the force of thunder and lightning into the abyss of hell. The pious, however, will constantly be burdened and troubled by it, and can find no relief in themselves; nor can anything on earth comfort them when this terror is upon them; for it arises from their own heart and conscience, which feel the wrath of God. Such a condition as

this will bring about despair, and death and hell will prevail if Christ, with His Word, bring not consolation and light into the cheerless heart. Hence no one can find relief in the pleasures of the world, nor in external, temporal possessions. For all these are, in themselves, not pure nor permanent, but always contain more gall than honey, the highest pleasure of this kind being mixed with discontent and ending at last in bitterness.

Another consolation must be sought; it is not found on earth among men, but cometh down from heaven and is revealed alone in this Child. This is pointed out to us by this heavenly preacher; not, however, as the Jews expected to hear the tidings of their Messiah, which would have been to this effect: "Unto you is born this day your King and Lord, who bringeth you much gold and worldly pleasures, as your heart desires." No, he declares: To those I do not preach, who find their happiness in these things, but otherwise are free from fear, who know and feel naught of the terror of the wrath of God, nor of the dread of hell. Unto you, humble shepherds and your kin, disconsolate in your wretched conscience, seeking aid in such distress, which none on earth, neither with money nor with wealth, nor aught else of this world, can grant, that you might be happy and rejoice in God,—unto you I preach. Yea, unto you I am sent to bring the tidings that now you have a Savior, that now your heart may be glad and leap for joy. Unto you He is born, and as the prophet Isaiah (chap. 9) saith, "Unto you He is given;" He shall and will be yours entirely; your Savior indeed, who will free you from all the

fear, terror and distress which have overwhelmed you.

Judge now for thyself from this announcement of the angel, how God in heaven, full of majesty, approached thee; how, through boundless love and compassion for thy great misery and woe, without any merit of thine own, while thou wast in sin, He sent down His only begotten Son, born of a virgin, telling thee: Behold, this is my beloved Son, born and given for thee, to be thy Savior, comfort, aid, defense and happiness. Judge, I say, from this as to the disposition of God toward thee. Ask thyself the question, whether thou or any other man (who are all unjust and sinful) wouldst or couldst wish within thy heart that death, or any injury, might befall the person to whom thou givest thine own and only child, with all his heritage. Surely not; he must be a person in whom thou wouldst have confidence and to whom thou wouldst feel thyself much attached; for a father would much rather confide to another his wealth and all that he possesses than his own child. We therefore see in the Son of God, born and given unto us, the unspeakable love and mercy of God toward us. He is born and given to those who will accept Him, and who desire to rejoice and be comforted in Him. Through this great benefaction and gift God manifests to us, in the clearest manner, that He will no longer chide, nor condemn us.

Yet, in view of all this, the timorous heart will say: But I am not good; if I examine my life and judge by that, then the law of God crushes me, and my conscience accuses me, saying: I must be damned because I am a sinner and have not kept

the law. To This objection the angel answered: Ah, it is well that thou seest and feelest this, for thus thou art well prepared to receive this consolation and joy which I proclaim. If thou wert no sinner, and didst not tremble, nor fear the wrath of God, thou wouldst not be in need of a Savior, and my tidings would benefit thee naught. Since thou hast opened thine eyes far enough to see who thou art, open now also thine ears and listen to what God through me announces to you. It is not necessary that He should now proclaim to thee that thou art full of sin and didst thereby merit hell, for this has been preached unto thee well nigh more than thou art able to bear; but He rather sends this message down from heaven, because from it alone thou canst learn how thy misery and agony may be removed. It behooves thee then to see another vision than that which thine own heart presents, and to hear another message than that which the law proclaims: That God by my Christmas-tidings points out to thee this Savior, His only begotten Son, clothed in thy flesh and blood and misery, adding this yet that He was born for thee. Hither then incline thine ears, thine eyes and thy heart; speak no longer of what thou art, for God sees and knows that much better than thou. Hear this; and heed well what I now proclaim to you in the name of God: Thou shalt not fear, but be glad.

But, thou will say further, How can I know that God has become reconciled with me? I know that His law must be fulfilled, or else His eternal wrath against my disobedience must be borne; this must surely be first appeased; how shall I ac-

complish this? Very well, what wilt thou do? Wilt thou run to the ends of the earth? Wilt thou become a strict Carthusian, (the most stringent order of monks) or an hermit? or wilt thou torment thyself to death with fastings and other extraordinary works? No, this would avail nothing! In spite of all these penances thou wouldst remain the same as before; yea, thou wouldst even become more miserable and more woe-begone. God's wrath can not be met nor appeased by any human works, since these are not able to expel or to remove the sin which is born in man.

Whither then shall I flee for comfort and assistance? Hither, says the angel; listen to what I tell thee. I bring thee these tidings which thou must eagerly and firmly grasp, and which will make thee glad. My message does not demand of thee good works, through which thou mightest obtain salvation, but simply tells thee that thy Savior is born. This word *Savior* gives thee what thou needest; for with it is joined that little word *your*, that is, a Savior for you and all mankind. Thou and thine are the accursed and the damned, who need a Savior. They, the holy angels, are pure, incorrupt, pious and happy spirits; hence the angel does not say: Our Savior is born, but *your* Savior, born *for you*, that is such as confess and say: I am lost.

These tidings, however, require faith which accepts them as true, and firmly holds, against all doubts, that the Savior is surely born. This faith quiets the heart, so that thou wilt not charge God with falsehood through thy unbelief, as they do who refuse to believe and thus lose their Savior. Where this faith is wanting, Christ, as the Son of

God, is denied by those who will not confess their sins, nor acknowledge Him as their Savior, as well as by those who feel their condemnation and confess their guilt, but do not faithfully receive the consolation that Christ is their Savior.

Consider well what thou dost in this regard. If thou wilt not have this Savior, but fanciest that thou canst be thine own savior, or that some one else can save thee, then go on: ere long thou wilt discover thy mistake. If thou, however, confessest that thou art in need of this Savior, but wilt not trust the declaration of the angel, preferring to torment thyself with thy sins, and to wait until thou canst free thyself from them, then thou doest greatly err and deprivest thyself of thy comfort and joy. If thou couldst help thyself, the angel would have to make another announcement, and would have to style thee, or other men, the Savior, not Christ.

The chief thing needed in this respect is a full and confident acceptance of this little Child, as it is shown unto us by these tidings, lying in the arms of the virgin or in the manger, and that a timid heart should thus forget its own sin and fear and weakness. Thus also saith St. Paul; Rom. 8: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

In these words St. Paul explains these tidings of the angel and derives great comfort from them. God delivers up for us His only begotten Son, that He should become a sacrifice for us, and bear the severe wrath of God which we had merited, yea, that He should pay our debt with His own person and life, that we might obtain grace and eternal

life. Now the Son of God is greater, more beautiful, nobler and worthier than the sun and the moon and all the world with its possessions, and is dearer to the Father than any living creature. If He then delivers up for us the Son, He surely giveth in Him everything that He can give, and accepts us in Christ as His children, regards us as His heirs, and bestows upon us salvation, dominion, and victory over sin, death and hell, which treasures the Son of God possesses in His person from all eternity, and now has merited and achieved for us through His death and resurrection. In a word, the name Son of God conveys to us everything that the Father has; for that which is the Father's pertains also to the Son. If we therefore credit these tidings of the angel, we surely have in Him and with Him the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life, and the grace and the mercy and paternal love of God are upon us.

If then thou shouldst feel terror on account of thy sin, if the devil should trouble and pain thee with sadness and depression of spirits, do but firmly cling to this message of the angel, and from it learn to say assuredly: I have now heard long enough what my distressed and guilty conscience according to the law of God tells me of my sins and of the wrath of God, and thou meddlesome devil, with thy charges, hast long enough made these errors so stupendous before me that I could see and hear nothing else, and hast caused me to have such fear and terror in my heart, as though I could have no hope at all and God were no longer gracious and merciful. Such thoughts cannot be of God. On the contrary, thanks be to God, I hear the declaration of this angel which God has sent by him for

the desponding and terrified hearts (as the words "Fear not" indicate): "Unto you a Savior is born," that is, God's wrath, damnation and eternal death shall no longer threaten you, but rather, through the obedience of the Son of God, who is born for you, there is prepared for you reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sins, and everlasting salvation and freedom from all that oppresses and saddens your hearts. To make this sure, the angel adds in full the words: "For behold I bring you good tidings of great joy," &c., by which he orders me, in the name of God, to dismiss all fear and mourning, and to resist the doubts of my flesh and blood. It is my duty faithfully to accept these tidings and to be comforted by them; for I know that they are God's word and will. Whatever else is told me, in opposition to this, I shall not believe, but will condemn it as a lie of the devil, who desires by means of my own heart and thoughts to frighten and seduce me away from my Savior, so that I also, like Satan, can have no joy nor comfort in this blessed birth.

From this follows, that all downcast hearts, which tremble at the wrath of God and are thus broken and crushed, and which torture themselves with their own thoughts, and seek relief from their suffering in themselves or in others, should learn to judge such thoughts and to ward them off, as poisonous and fiery darts of Satan, through that faith which accepts these tidings concerning Christ. The conclusion and confession will be: It is true, I know it well, that I am a poor sinner; but from this does not follow that Christ was not born for me and my salvation: that I should not be comforted and rejoice at this birth nor regard it as my

own treasure, or that I should remain in fear and trembling lest God should for ever chide and finally condemn me; this is thy story, thou doleful liar of hell. God Himself speaks to me otherwise, through this angel at the manger. He says: I shall no longer fear nor be sad, since my Savior is born, since God gives me His well-beloved Son, and invites me at this birth to hear naught but what brings joy and cheer, of which the angel and the heavenly host, with a loud and happy anthem, are heralds to me and to all people. It is indeed an unspeakable blessing of my Father in heaven, that He has caused this to be proclaimed to me, that I might thus recognize His love and purpose. It is therefore my duty firmly to believe this and to manifest my gratitude; for I know that such tidings can not be false, that there could be no greater contempt or blasphemy of God than to doubt their truthfulness, or to reject them. Such doubts of God's Word come from thee, thou accursed devil, and it is thy endeavor to make us poor human beings also guilty of such blasphemy.

Through these tidings of the angel the Holy Spirit desires to be efficacious in us, and surely if the heart accepts them there is a power in them to work consolation and such joy, that the insinuations of the devil, the fear of death, and shuddering and terror of conscience can be overcome, so that faith can joyfully boast with St. Paul: "If God has given me His own Son, how should He not with Him give me all things." If I possess the Son, who proceedeth from the Father, then I will have the Father also and all His blessings, nor can hell, nor the devil, nor death, nor any misfortune deprive me of such treasure, as St. Paul

continues to say, Rom. 8: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

That this consolation is true and sure we Christians do not doubt in the least, since we know that God sent His angels from heaven to preach it and to admonish us to rejoice in it. God has, furthermore, borne witness to this with many convincing testimonies, but principally through this greatest deed of all that He clothed His own Son in our nature. Christ our Savior Himself became a witness of this and ratified it by His sufferings and death. No one can be deprived of this comfort unless he fails to receive it in faith, and thus puts it from him; for this gift of grace and life in this new-born infant, the Son of God, is eternal, and endures as long as the Son of God, and His Father everlasting. Therefore whosoever has Him will also live in eternity. Although, on account of our weakness and natural infirmity, we may now and then lose sight of this truth, and be troubled with doubts and despondency, let us ever strive to lay hold of it again, and never follow the example of those who deny and blaspheme such divine grace and heavenly treasure.

How miserable is the condition of that man who cannot hear these tidings! yet how much more unhappy he who hears them without appropriating them to himself! That such conduct can not be pleasing in the sight of God, and that such gift can not be in the possession of him who disregards it, even human reason, when instructed as to the contents of these tidings, must acknowledge. We hear at the present time, all over the world, much and great lamentation on account of the

many fearful visitations upon countries and peoples; every one complains of "hard times," oppression, and other tribulations; but no one seems to be aware of the cause of all this. Is it, indeed, a wonder that such, yea, and even much greater punishments, come upon us when we bear in mind the prevailing blasphemous contempt and ingratitude towards God in return for the unspeakable kindness and mercy which He has manifested toward us in His glorious gospel? Surely it would be no wonder if God would permit the infidels and all other plagues to come upon us, or if He would hurl us back into the darkness and tyranny of popery and other forms of sectarianism. Let us suppose that thou hadst, with all possible self-denial and sacrifice of health and property, aided certain persons, rescuing them from certain death, and that they, in return, would have nothing to do with thee, even insulting thee in every possible manner, causing thee all kinds of vexations, wouldst thou commiserate them if they were visited by all sorts of punishment, if they with their families were cut to pieces by their enemies, if their wives and children were shamefully abused, if all their property were destroyed? Yet, we suppose that God must always be patient with us, and even dare to charge Him with wrong-doing if He visits us with punishments, thereby calling us to repentance, while we never think of acknowledging His beneficence and mercy, nor of being grateful to Him, but rather continue in our shameful disregard of Him and in our wicked, lawless life.

We rejoice if He gives us corn and wine, gold and riches, although we shamefully forget to thank Him even for these gifts, and the world abuses

them scandalously; but on account of the greatest of all gifts, His only begotten Son, born of a virgin for us and bringing us all grace and blessings, we will not rejoice, nor honor Him by giving the tidings a respectful hearing. What further kindnesses should we then expect of Him?

Surely, we have no reason to despise such a kind, faithful and beneficent Lord, but we ought rather to love Him as our dear Father with our whole heart, with all fidelity and obedience, and to be grateful to Him. Since we do not do this He has abundant reason to permit the devil and all calamities to torment us. I would sooner be pierced by the dagger of the Turk than to be compelled to observe, on all sides, such great neglect and terrible refusal of these divine gifts and treasures.

Even if the Son of God, born of a virgin, had not been given thee of God, and thou shouldst observe a Turkish or Herodian murderer ready to destroy this infant, thou oughtest to interfere and say: Pierce and cut me and all of us to pieces, only spare this Child. But what else is our rejection of this Savior, given and born for us, than piercing Him as with a sword and spear, as the epistle to the Hebrews clearly tells us, in the 6. chapter: "Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame"

In view of this we must confess: Righteous are the judgments of God, and well merited by the world are His punishments. It cannot be otherwise than that through neglecting and despising these happy tidings, and this greatest of all blessings, the Son of God, the world deprives itself of

its chief treasure, comfort, aid and happiness, and thereby, on the other hand, brings upon itself devils on every side, the despotism of wicked principalities, the pope, murder, war and the destruction of all good governments, as well as every kind of tribulation. What greater love could God show us than to send His Son into our flesh and blood, therewith giving us, and all creatures, the strongest guarantee and testimonial of His grace and love, thus smiling upon us as our best friend, yea, as our most kind Father; and what could more powerfully prompt us to become pious, obedient and grateful?

Let us therefore take heed, not to disregard nor lose this grace, but rather to make a salutary application of the happy birth of Christ in our lives, to be comforted by it, and to realize this blessing with gratitude toward God for having granted unto us, through His Word, such a blessed revelation. Let us earnestly implore Him so to strengthen and preserve us in our faith, that this bright light may not become dim nor be taken from us, and that we may not relapse into our former blindness.

These angelic tidings were not lost under the dominion of the pope, and throughout all Germany was sung and is sung still on Christmas-day that charming hymn: "A little child so glorious," &c.; but no one understood its meaning, simply because there were no true and faithful preachers. Where the pulpit lies prostrate and snores in laziness, so that the gospel is not presented nor explained, there all singing and reading will be in vain, because it is done in ignorance. Surely we must admit that the Papists also had Baptism, the

Sacrament, the text of the Gospel, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed and the Ten Commandments, as they have them even now, excepting that they changed the Lord's Supper and tampered with His Testament; but all this was dormant among them. They know not what they have, and derive no comfort from such treasures, as Christians should, but live on in utter indifference, without the slightest conception of the true meaning of Baptism, the Gospel, the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. Hence they know not what they say or sing, but busy themselves with their buffooneries and juggleries, with their ceremonies and rituals, carrying on an extensive trade with their masses, consecrating salt and water, fumigating their altars, filling their churches with vocal and instrumental music, by all of which nobody is either instructed, or comforted, or converted. From their pulpits nothing can be heard but a blasphemous perversion and condemnation of the pure, saving and comfortable doctrine of Christ our Savior.

Where lies the trouble? It is evident that the preachers are at fault, whose duty it is to arouse the people, to open their ears and purify their sight, to preach with care and diligence the pure doctrine, that they may understand what they hear, read or sing. He, however, who desires to arouse others must himself be awake and active, or else it may easily happen that a drowsy preacher will cause even an attentive hearer to become sleepy also. See, what happened to the Romish church! There they sat in a garden filled with roses, in all ease and sumptuousness; both preacher and hearer slept and snored, so that they understood naught of these tidings of the angel,

though, now and then, they sang and read concerning them.

In the Gospel they read how this Savior was born, and in their churches they sing: "If this Child had not been born, we would all have been forlorn," &c., and yet they go and call upon the Virgin Mary, fast, celebrate festivals in honor of the saints, do penance, order and hear mass, &c. Thus they make saviors unto themselves, perverting the Christmas-song by their deeds, substituting for this Child, our Savior, the Virgin Mary and other saints, yea, even their own poor, miserable, childish and foolish works.

The Jews, in a similar manner, also possessed the Holy Scripture, and read in their synagogues the declarations of the prophets concerning Christ, which speak plainly of His person and office, how He would not be an earthly king, but would become a sacrifice for the sins of men, having an eternal kingdom, in which all who should believe in Him would find through Him alone forgiveness of sin. Nevertheless, although this was plainly foretold, both priests and people retained their false opinion of the temporal kingdom of their Messiah, and imagined that they would become just in the sight of God by means of their Jewish ritualism and works of the law. Hence it is an urgent necessity to pray God with all earnestness that He may give unto us dutiful preachers who will, unceasingly, tell us of these tidings and explain them, that they may not only be heard and read, but also understood.

Where such preachers are wanting, it will not be otherwise than it is among the Papists, who have the Word and Sacraments, but merely as one

who has in his house a treasure hidden and unknown to him. The tidings of the angel are, moreover, sufficiently plain and intelligible in themselves; but for the pope and his followers they are a mystery, else they would not teach the people to call upon the saints, to depend upon and to purchase human works and merits, and to seek other saviors, but they would point to the true and only Savior.

Wherever there are, by the mercy of God, faithful and active preachers, who bring these words nigh unto the hearts of their hearers, there the precious gift to distinguish false teachers and spirits will not be wanting; and the Christian hearers will be enabled to recognize full well the devil in his various dealings, no matter how strangely he may disguise himself, or how cunning and deceitful he may be, as St. Paul says, 2. Cor. 2: "For we are not ignorant of his devices." If we compare the teachings of the Jews, the Turks, the pope, or any other false doctrine, with the tidings of the angel, we can easily learn that their teachings are untrue, their faith unfounded and their worship nugatory. The Papists clothe their service in great external splendor, adding many grand and imposing performances; but it is evident that all this is but idolatry, since they regard such services as possessing a saving power. Upon these they depend for their justification, and by them they hope to merit heaven, whereas the angel tells us that this Child alone, and no other, is our Savior. Hence we can with truth charge the pope and his bishops with false doctrine and life, for neither their conduct nor their preaching corresponds to this message of the angel.

He who firmly holds to the doctrine contained in the tidings of our text, can judge the truth for himself, and will not err. May we be duly grateful to God for such revelations, and pray that He may so keep us in this faith, that we do not lose sight of this Child and His glorious light, whereby we are protected against the wiles of Satan and the allurements of the world, and qualified to pass judgment against all doctrines opposed to these tidings. May we never forget what the angel has told us: Not my works, nor thine, nor those of any other created being can save us. He directs us plainly to that Child of whom he speaks in these words: "Unto you is born this day a Savior, which is Christ the Lord;" He has accomplished all that need be done for our salvation. This heavenly teacher I will believe, His tidings I will keep, and to no others conflicting with them will I hearken. Amen.

FOURTH SERMON FOR CHRISTMAS.

THE SONG OF PRAISE OF THE ANGELS.

IN the preceding sermons for this Festival, we considered first of all the Christmas-story itself, and saw how the Son of God was born of the Virgin Mary. This story was written, and is annually preached throughout the Christian Church, that we should become well acquainted with it, and be moved by it to give heartfelt thanks to God for His great mercy and condescension toward us, as manifested in the birth of His Son. We also considered the heavenly tidings of the angel proclaiming with great glory this birth to the shepherds upon the fields of Bethlehem, in which act God passed by the proud lords at Jerusalem and sent His glorious message down from heaven to the poor shepherds in the fields. Yea, the holy angel, following the example of Christ his Lord, became so lowly, and did not deem it an unbecoming task to preach to the poor shepherds the most glorious tidings, which we still possess, and which shall remain among Christians until the end of time.

From this story and example we learn what humble spirits the angels are, who are free from all pride. It would be well if all who think themselves to be wise and saintly people and mighty lords, would learn from this example not to be proud on account of their skill, wisdom, power and other gifts, nor to despise others as their inferiors. Surely, if great gifts and accomplishments ought

thus to be regarded, the holy angels would have had reason enough to look down with scorn upon the poor shepherds. But they do not act thus; and though the shepherds are simple and common people, yet the angels do not consider themselves too holy nor too exalted right willingly and gladly to bring them these tidings.

Thus should we also do, applying our talents, in all humility, to comfort and assist others, despising no one. This would be following the example of Christ, as we have seen in the first sermon. He despises no one, but as He came down from heaven, poor and needy into this world, so He is pleased to see poor and miserable persons coming unto Him for help. Hence He is very properly called a Helper, a Savior.

The haughty lords at Jerusalem thought of no such a Savior, they needed Him not; but the humble shepherds felt their need of Him, and hence the angel first proclaims to them, in a brief but glorious sermon, where this treasure can be found, showing us all that depends upon our rejoicing in this Savior who came to liberate us from sin, death, the devil and hell. For the import of the tidings is: "Unto you is born this day a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

These words are of no human origin; the wisest on earth know them not; but they are angelic words, spoken from heaven for us. Thanks be unto God for these tidings for ever and ever. If we this day read or hear these words, it is the same as though we heard them from the angel himself; the shepherds also did not see the angels, they merely saw the light and its splendor. But they heard the words, and thou likewise canst read

and hear them, if thou wouldst but open thine eyes and ears and learn properly to understand this message.

These tidings are far different from those which Moses heard of the angel on Mount Sinai. When these were given the people were much afraid, and their life was endangered by the lightning and thunder which shook the mountains, so that the whole people cried unto Moses: Would that God did not thus preach to us from heaven; but do thou come and preach to us; thee we would gladly hear. But here when the holy angels come from heaven, robed in light, the message has a different import. They begin their tidings as cheerfully as a heart full of agony could desire, proclaiming and singing that we must not be afraid, but rather rejoice with our whole heart, yea, even be proud and bold in our joy, on account of this Child, who is our Savior and is called of the angels by an especial name, "Christ the Lord."

This name contains the entire Scriptures; for everything written in them points to this Savior, the Christ. The law had no remedy against sin and death; good works and piety could not comfort nor make the heart glad; this could only be done by Christ. This fact the angels have in view when they proclaim: This is He who shall be a substitute for all, through whom it is possible to obtain forgiveness of sins and to inherit eternal life; for He alone is the true Redeemer and Savior. This truth expels, at once, every doctrine and religion which attempt without Christ to lead men to heaven. If Christ alone is the Savior, then neither His mother Mary, nor St. Peter, nor St. Paul can be such; nor can St. Augustine, Bernard,

Francis, Dominic, with all their regulations, avail anything in this respect, although the pope and his priests have thus far directed the people to the intercession of the saints, to monasticism and other vain ceremonies. Does this agree with the tidings of the angels? Does this correspond to the beautiful hymn: "A little Child so glorious," &c.? No, to the glory of our Savior Christ, and to the discomfiture of ourselves, the pope, and all self-righteous saints, we sing: "If this Child had not been born, we would all have been forlorn." If without Christ we are all lost, then will the monk with his observances and the priest with his masses also be lost; no one is excepted. Never, by means of their monkish rules, fastings and prayer, can they be saved; only through Christ is this possible, who alone is the Redeemer or Savior.

As these tidings of the angel contain a new revelation, and do not threaten the wrath of God and everlasting damnation, as the law does, but rather bring comfort and joy and salvation to those who are accursed by the law and fear and tremble, the song of the angels rings joyously in harmony with the message. Many thousands come from heaven to be present when these tidings are made known, and right willingly they form themselves into a company of singers, beginning a song so charming, that, as the tidings themselves were incomparably beyond all others, so was this song of praise exceedingly beautiful, divine; for never before did the world hear such a song as this: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

This song has a threefold meaning. In the first place, we must not understand it as teaching

us what we should do, but as showing that thanks and honor shall now be given to God because this Savior is born. The angels meant to say: Ere this Child was born there was naught in this world but blasphemy and idolatry; for all that is without Christ, no matter how grand and glorious it may be, is but blasphemy. If God is to be God indeed, that is, if people are to honor Him and worship Him as God, it must be done through this Child. Thus alone it is possible for us to know and to be certain that God is a kind, compassionate, and merciful God, who has even sent His own Son into our flesh and blood on our account. This great, unspeakable benefit prompts and moves the hearts to open themselves unto Him in true love, confidence and hope, praising and thanking Him for such mercy.

Of this result the angels sing, proclaiming that God shall now be honored "in the highest;" not with good works, which cannot rise to heaven, but with the heart, which lifts itself from the earth and in such thanksgiving and holy trust soars aloft to God, our merciful Father.

Where the Child Jesus is not known it is impossible to honor God aright. The entire world, even His chosen people, was full of idolatry before the birth of Christ. One went here, the other there to worship, erecting as many altars as there were beautiful trees in the forests, as the prophets tell us. They were so idolatrous that while they sought God earnestly they did this merely through sacrifices, fastings and penances, wherewith no one was benefited except the devil; he received the honor due unto God. This is the greatest dishonor and blasphemy which God meets in the world and

which arises from not knowing Christ. To this, thanks be to God, there shall now be an end, as the angels sing; the people shall now no longer honor the devil or themselves, but God "in the highest."

Another and even more gross dishonor is that men worship money, possessions, and the like. Verily, of such idolatry the world is full. Just see how kings and princes, tradesmen and farmers, do homage to this rough log and idol, this shameful mammon, this miserable make-shift, as though everything depended on him, while they neglect the true support, the Savior, the Child Jesus, even despising Him and becoming so mad and foolish that they reject and persecute Him. Thus God is blasphemed and dishonored on every side; on the one hand by a subtile idolatry, by self-righteousness and pretended holiness, on the other, by a more gross idolatry, which enthrones mammon in the heart instead of God.

The angels sing: This also shall be changed now that this light, the new-born Child, begins to shine. Henceforward people will look no longer to their own holiness and righteousness; they will care naught for father or mother, for gold or wealth, but will accept this only Savior and give themselves unto Him with their whole heart; then will God be truly honored and known and praised.

This devotion Adam lost, through sin, in Paradise; and now this accursed custom cleaves to us that we do not honor God nor seek our glory in Him and through Him, but rather in ourselves. Look at the pope and the bishops; money and riches they have plenty, but they will not honor God and spread His Word. How, forsooth, could

such big lords, so full of dignity and power, do this? Why, every boor who can play the bage-pipe wants to be praised! If this is the feeling in regard to matters which might be called dung and dirt, and for which men desire honor and distinction, of course this will be much more the case with those who busy themselves with more pretentious matters, such as righteousness, holiness, good works and public virtues. With such people the devil is so much master of the situation that he easily prevents their giving thanks to God; they desire the glory for themselves.

The whole human race is poisoned with this accursed vanity, from the time when the devil filled Adam and Eve with the desire to be like God: it adheres to us still. If God gives us skill, money, wealth and authority, yea, if a house-wife, miss or a servant-girl gets a new bonnet or dress, praise and admiration from others is expected.

Since the Child Jesus, the light that illumines the world, has come, the angels can sing that now the honor due unto Him is no longer neglected. All who will receive Him shall say: My righteousness, holiness, wisdom, wealth and authority are all naught, but the Child Jesus is all in all. Thus God receives the honor that belongs to Him; He becomes our strength, defense and joy: our true wealth, in whom we trust with all confidence, comfort and gladness, so that we can say to mammon, whom the whole world serves and worships as a God: Thou affordest me comfort only in this that when I have thee I can eat of thee and furnish the necessary raiment with thee, and that I can by thee feed and clothe others who are poor; otherwise I have no use for thee. To art and science I

will say: God has given me understanding and wisdom; these I will employ to His honor and to the welfare of my fellow-men; more they cannot do. My consolation, hope and joy I find neither in money nor in talents, but only in Christ Jesus the Lord, the Son of God.

Properly to honor God, and to acknowledge His majesty, we should say: Lord God, whatever we have is Thine; we did not create it, Thou gavest it unto us; but the chief gift of Thy mercy is our deliverance from sin and the devil, for which all honor and praise is due unto Thee. It pleases God when we wind such garlands of praise for Him, when we give unto Him all glory, claiming no honor for ourselves, but giving thanks unto Him for the greatest, as well as for the least of His blessings.

This lesson, then, is the first which is taught us in the song of the angels, in which they embrace everything we possess, but especially the spiritual gifts and true devotion, righteousness, holiness, wisdom and good works. We are taught to confine these not to this world, but to lift them heavenward, and give all glory to God; and this can now be done through this little Child, as the angels sing.

The world reverses this lesson, as is very evident: since they do not recognize nor respect this Child, they run and strive only after their own honor. No one is content with his position; the day-laborer wishes to be a merchant, the nobleman a prince, and the king an emperor. Such desires are a clear sign that those who harbor them are without Christ, and know Him not. Such persons pervert the song of the angels and sing: Hail,

here on earth, to the yellow gold and shining silver, to my authority, influence and skill! Sing on, poor fellows, sing lustily; but be assured that yours is a donkey's song, beginning high up in the scale, but ending miserably flat. Such a song honors man and mammon, yea, the arrant devil in hell, but not "God in the highest."

The second lesson of the song of the angels is contained in the words: "Peace upon earth." This lesson has a meaning similar to the first. It contains a wish and prophecy that, henceforward, prosperity and happiness on earth shall be with those who know and have accepted this Child. What is the world without Christ? What else but a perfect hell and kingdom of Satan, full of ignorance and contempt of God, yea, full of lies, cheating, avarice, gluttony, drunkenness, whoredom, strife and murder, &c. Thus the world acts; there is neither love nor confidence among men; one fears the other. Those who would escape deception and fraud, must understand "white" to mean "black." Even friends cannot be trusted and must sometimes be feared more than enemies. Thus the devil rules and guides the world, so that everything goes wrong, and no virtue, and no peace, can be found on earth.

As the angels sang that they who know and accept this Child shall give praise to God for all things, so they also sing, and promise and comfort with these words, that such tyranny of the devil will now have an end, that the Christians shall be peaceable with each other, and lead a quite life, willingly assisting and advising each other, avoiding all contention and discord, dwelling with each other in gentleness, having a peaceable government

and a forbearing spirit, each one striving to excel the other in doing good,—and all this because this Child is born.

Such a result will follow, say the angels, if God is once honored, and acknowledged as the Lord from whom we have all things. Then will the people be friendly toward each other; no one will hate, nor envy, nor despise the other, but each will rather consider the other better than himself, saying: Dear Brother, do thou pray to God in my behalf. Then there shall be peace and happiness in abundance, for *peace*, in the Hebrew language means everything good. Such a peaceable life ought to be among Christians, each one endeavoring to please the other and avoiding what might give offence. Those who do otherwise, do not heed the song of the angels, but listen to the howlings of the wolf, the devil, who sings them this song: Continue to steal, to commit adultery, to murder, &c. This is the devil's song which comes from hell.

Among Christians it must not be thus; they should do as the angels sing, who tell us so beautifully of the spirit of true devotion. First, that we should leave all glory in heaven, and praise and honor God alone. Secondly, that we should live in a brotherly spirit with each other on earth, and not listen to the wicked insinuations nor follow the tyrannical ways of the devil. Thus the angels teach us and all the world. But they already see that the greater portion of mankind will not thus acknowledge the Child Jesus, and that much confusion on this account will arise; wherefore they add the third lesson in these words: "Good will toward men." That is: We (the angels) fondly desire that the world would do as taught in the

other lessons; that men would honor God "in the highest," and have peace among themselves; but we know that many will be found who will not receive the gospel nor accept the Son, rather persecuting both. May God, then, grant to the believers a joyful and glad heart to exclaim: I have a Savior, heaven is mine, the Son of God is mine; therefore, although I am scorned and persecuted, and though I suffer all manner of evil on account of this my confession and faith, yet I will not become impatient nor angry, but will be content, and no sorrow, nor trouble, nor persecution, however great, shall deprive me of the pleasure and consolation which I have in this new-born Child. Such a disposition the angels wish to all believers, so that they can be glad in adversity and sing, when the devil rages; so that they may have peace and assurance in Christ to withstand all misfortune and even to mock the devil when he would injure them, hurling into his face the words: Foolish devil, if thou canst injure me only as to my body, life, possessions, &c., thou mightest just as well leave me, for thou canst really do me no harm; I have a heavenly Savior who will abundantly console me in eternity for any temporal loss which I may suffer.

This third lesson teaches us how we should have a joyful and bold spirit to meet all adversity, so that we can say to the devil: Thou shalt not succeed in thy evil attempt to rob me of my pleasure in this Child. Such a heart is happy, glad, joyful and courageous even in adversity; for its blessings are of God through faith in Christ. It says to the devil and the world: On your account I shall not

give up my joy, nor do I care for your anger; do as you please: Christ gives me more happiness than you can cause me sorrow. Such a heart the angels desire us to have, and of such an one they sing.

The world does not repeat this song of the angels, but tries to sing it after the tune of its god, the devil, thus: Glory to the devil in hell, strife upon earth, and ill-will toward men. Satan causes his bride, which is the world, to sing thus, to blaspheme God, and to persecute His Word; after which follows contention, divisions, war, murder, &c. to such an extent, that on account of fear and trembling no one can have a happy moment nor enjoy his bite of bread. In this the devil is mightily assisted by the sects; they are his mouthpiece, slandering and blaspheming God in heaven through their false doctrine.

The devil, with his song, resembling that of an owl, continues to arouse disturbances, setting princes and lords against each other, causing strife and deceitfulness, so that men become treacherous toward each other, doing the will of the devil and causing difficulties everywhere, so that people stand with trembling hearts and full of fear. Hence it happens that so many can be found who, in spite of all the bounteous blessings, which God has bestowed upon them, do not enjoy a single moment of their life. Although cellar and buttery are full, such persons will be sad and cheerless, finding no real pleasure in anything which they possess. Thus the devil's pleasure is fulfilled, who at all times envies man every enjoyment which comes from God and His gifts. The angels, on the other hand, sing us a different song; they wish us

a steadfast heart, which shall be bold and resolute amid the various trials and calamities of life.

This, then, beloved hearers, is the song of the holy angels, which no other teachings nor books contain. By it we are instructed as to the true service of God; how we should realize in this Child the mercy of God, and be prompted thereby to give ready thanks to Him who sent unto us and for us His Son, our Lord and Savior; also, how we should live peaceably with each other; and finally how we should in patience overcome all misfortune, and rejoice always through Christ in this little Child. The angels, indeed, composed their joyous, jubilant song with but few words, yet every one must readily perceive that it was not framed on earth, but that its home, from which it came, is heaven. May God, our Father, assist us through His Holy Spirit to retain this song, and to order our lives according to it; this we pray through Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord. Amen.

FIFTH SERMON FOR CHRISTMAS.

On the Gospel-Lesson—Luke 2, 15-20.

EXAMPLE OF THE VIRGIN MARY AND OF THE SHEPHERDS.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

THE preceding meditations on the Christmas tidings have taught us how God sent His angels, the princes of heaven, to the humble shepherds, who were poor and lowly people, to sing to them a cheerful song of the Child Jesus. After this song was ended the Christmas-Gospel continues thus: "And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord has made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And

all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."

From this we learn that the preaching and singing of the angels was not in vain. For though the shepherds watched over their flocks with much care and devotion, yet they do not hesitate to leave them now, and to hasten to see the Child which even the angels called Lord. Such was the effect of the angel's preaching.

Another effect was this: the shepherds themselves become preachers of the glad tidings; they make known to every one what they had heard concerning this Child, so that, as the Evangelist tells us: "All they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds." All wondered, yet we may suppose that with most of them this astonishment was but of short duration. Experience teaches us that the greater portion of mankind consist of people so wicked and corrupt that they immediately forget the visitations of God when they are past, no matter whether they brought gifts of mercy and grace, or inflicted severe trials and punishments. The human heart is full of heedlessness and culpable forgetfulness. Hence it is that God must ever send new miracles and punishments, else we would entirely forget Him and His mercies. No doubt the same was true with the people, of whom the Evangelist relates that all who heard these sayings wondered. No doubt there was, for some time, much excitement on account of this report of the Child at Bethlehem, at whose birth the angels came from heaven to preach and to sing of His glory,

and to adore whom there came wise men from the distant East. Ere two, three, or four years had passed, this occurrence was forgotten at Bethlehem, and no one, or, at the most, but very few, remembered or believed this story; yea, when thirty years afterwards the Lord began to preach and perform miracles, no one thought of His wonderful birth.

Such recklessness we find among ourselves even at the present day. Scarcely can you find one among a hundred, yea, among a thousand, who is yet mindful of the misery and wickedness which, both as to doctrine and life or the worship of God, prevailed under the pope, so that poor souls were burdened on every side, and no sufficient comfort could be found. All distress, labor, and expense, all oppression of the conscience are now forgotten; if it were not thus, we would surely much more love the precious Gospel which has freed us from such thralldom, and would manifest greater care and gratitude for it.

The Jews acted in the same spirit. While yet in Egypt there was no end to their complaining and lamentation. But how was it afterwards? Scarcely were they three days in the desert, when they expressed their desire to be back again in the land of their bondage. Such an unstable thing is the human heart that it soon tires of almost every thing, easily forgetting former great pains and sufferings, and much less bearing in mind the benefactions which it received, as the proverb truly says: *Nihil citius senescit quam gratia.* (Nothing becomes an old matter for us sooner than kindness.) If God manifests His displeasure and punishes with pestilence and divers diseases, one

plague following another, it is no more heeded than so many characters written in the water or in the air: as long as the punishment is upon us it pains, but as soon as it is past it is entirely forgotten.

The Evangelist tells us in our text that "the people wondered at these sayings;" but surely it was only a temporary emotion. Yet there were a few pious and attentive hearers who were not forgetful nor indifferent, as were the many; for the Evangelist says, "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."

It behooves us to study these words, and to learn from them how we ought to hear the Word of God. "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart;" that is, she meditated upon them. He who firmly retains the Word of God, and studies it, will discover in it, from day to day, new sources of wisdom and consolation, thereby becoming more firmly rooted in his faith; while the superficial and indifferent hearer will not be benefited at all, no matter how often you may preach to him. It is with him as when a blow is struck upon the water.

Mary gives us a better example. She is moved by the tidings; she retains them, inscribes them upon her heart, ponders them, speaks to herself about them and says: These indeed are wonderful tidings that I should be the mother of this Child, of whom the angels sing that He is the Savior of the world, and whom they call Christ the Lord. With such thoughts she enshrines "these things" in the depth of her heart, nor could she forget them. Yea, if the whole world had contradicted her, she nevertheless would stoutly have adhered

to her faith that her Child is the Son of God, the Savior of the whole world.

We ought to follow this example of the holy mother of Jesus, since for this very purpose it is presented to us, and keep the Word of God in our hearts with much zeal and earnestness, that it may be ours, as we read in the Song of Solomon 8, 6: "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm." Here God requires that His Word should not merely be upon our tongues, as foam upon the water, or as saliva in the mouth, which is ejected, but that it should be imprinted in our hearts, and remain there as an inscription which cannot be erased, as a plant which cannot be rooted up. The Virgin Mary had such an heart; she kept these things as though they were a part of herself. Those who have thus embraced the Word, have the true stamp of Christ upon them; the truth is sealed in them, nor will they permit evil spirits, nor the devil himself, to rob them of it; as they have heard it they retain it, and believe in it. Others, though they hear the Word and are astonished at it, will nevertheless soon lose and forget it again.

Here we must first mark well this lesson: If the Word of God is to be firmly rooted in our hearts, we must meditate upon it with much care. We all know how difficult it is to teach a lesson to young children, so that they will comprehend it; it must be repeated to them, with much patience, again and again. Why then should we suppose that the teachings of God's Word, which are of infinitely greater importance, could be comprehended without all exertion on our part? If we thought so we would be sadly mistaken. Most persons, in-

deed, when they have heard a sermon, go and attend to something else, thinking but little of what they have heard and learned from the Word of God. But it is all wrong to make that of chief importance which is but secondary. *First of all we must seek the kingdom of God;* to it our attention must chiefly be directed. But we treat this as subordinate, and think first and chiefly of our every day business, of what we shall eat and drink, of that which pertains to the body and its pleasures. Were it otherwise, we would at least busy ourselves as much with God's Word as we do with our temporal wants; but this is not the case. We need not wonder, therefore, if, as we see in times of tribulation, this Word is so soon forgotten. With the Christian it ought not to be thus; his chief treasure is the Word of God; it fills his heart. And though he must live and labor in this world, yet his heart will incline chiefly towards this Word, because he loves it most.

So much in regard to the example of the Virgin Mary, which the Evangelist, as was necessary, has presented so vividly. After this we are told: "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them."

After the shepherds had seen the Child Jesus, and had spread the report concerning Him, they return to their flocks, praising and glorifying God, as they had heard and were taught of the angels, who sang: "Glory to God in the highest," etc.

In this conduct of the shepherds we find a valuable and beautiful lesson. After they have obtained the revelation from heaven, and the true

knowledge of Christ, they do not run out into the desert, as the foolish monks and nuns run into cloisters, but remain in their calling, and are useful to their fellow men. True faith compels no one to forsake his calling and to enter upon an extraordinary mode of life, as the silly monks do, who suppose it impossible to be saved unless they are entirely different from other people. If they were to clothe themselves, to eat and drink, to wake and sleep, like other people, it would be too common, causing no especial notice; but they make a great boast of their adherence to their order and the observance of its rules, and even venture to call it a state of perfection and an angelic order; that is, as St. Paul mentions Col. 2, it is a devilish holiness, for the devil also is an angel and a spirit.

Christ did not come to change or to annul the regulations and duties in regard to outward things; therefore it is right to satisfy the wants of the body, to provide clothing, food, drink, and to labor for it, as it may be necessary. This is God's own institution and order, now as much in force as ever. Christ did not come to change this. It is for us to determine what we shall eat and what we shall wear, according to the condition in which we are; Christ gave us no laws in this regard; wherefore it is nonsense to attribute to certain changes in these externals any excellence of piety or of spirituality.

The true change which was to be the result of the coming of Christ is this, that man should become better, changed in his heart. Before I found the blessed Gospel I thought God had forsaken me, and that it depended upon my own exertions to be saved. I knew no better than that my good

works must accomplish all, that through them I would become free from sin and death. To carry out this notion I became a monk and underwent many privations. But neither cowl nor gown, neither eating of meat, nor fasting, nor any thing of this kind, will avail aught. By such means sin is not overcome, nor death conquered: but both sin and death are at home beneath a black or gray garment, just as much as beneath a coat of gayer colors. The heart must be changed; that is necessary; it must receive a new light, a new seal, which is faith in Christ, wrought by the Holy Ghost, so that the sinner can say: I know that God has not forsaken me, but that He is merciful, for He sent His Son into the world that I through Him might overcome death and obtain everlasting life.

Such a change as this is proper and necessary. Of this my heart knew nothing before, nor did it have faith; now, however, it has gained this knowledge and belief, and has become entirely changed. Our Lord and Savior Christ is He who accomplishes this, so that the heart and the soul obtain a new understanding, will, desire and love. If before, money and honors were sought by man, he will now, after having obtained a knowledge of Christ, regard Him as far more precious than all money and wealth, and would sooner lay down his life than to deny Christ and His Word. Before this the heart was unwilling to lose even one cent for the sake of true faith, but now it would not suffer itself to be deprived of Christ, no, not for a thousand worlds. In former days many reasoned thus: If I wish to make sure of my salvation I must assume the habit of a monk or nun. How is it now? If one should undertake to robe thee in

these monkish garments thou wouldst not comply, but rather escape to the end of the earth. Again, if thou wouldst have been asked to eat meat on Friday, thou wouldst have stubbornly refused, lest the earth would swallow thee up; now, however, thou sayest to the pope, to the bishops, yea, to the devil himself: Hush with your nonsense; why should I not eat meat, or fear that I would sin in doing so? God has not forbidden it; He gave it to man for the very purpose that it should be appropriately used. Thus a change within, a conversion of the heart, takes place when man acquires a new understanding and determination from God's Word, yet remaining what he was before as regards his temporal calling and relations, as the example of the shepherds teaches us.

The shepherds would, of themselves, never have thought that Christ the Savior was born; but when they hear it of the angels they hasten into the city and seek the Child. When they had found Him, and had spread the tidings concerning this Child, praising God for such mercy and revelation, they return to their flocks, wearing the same garments and carrying the same staff as before; they remain shepherds, and make no change in their calling. Thus Christians teach and live. Christ did not come to change the work of creation, which will be done at the end of time. Then, when the soul is made perfect, of which the Gospel lesson teaches but the beginning, the body will also be renewed, so that we shall no longer need warm rooms, clothing and the like, but will be like the angels, soaring through the air, bright as the beautiful stars. Then every thing which is created will be changed; but until that day comes

these external matters must remain as God has arranged them, and no change is to be made. Hence each one ought to regulate his mode of life according to his condition and calling; living in all propriety, modesty, honesty and piety, well knowing that the performance of such external duties cannot injure the Christian faith. In the sight of God it matters not whether thou art a man or a woman, an emperor or a servant, a mayor or a watchman; but this He asks of us, that we be obedient to Him, even unto death, no matter what our calling or position in life may be.

The shepherds praised and glorified God and were satisfied. They do not say: Henceforth we must serve God by dwelling in the desert, where we can devote all our time to meditation and devotion, free from the cares of every-day life. No, this would not be serving God, but would be an escape from duty, glorifying flesh and blood. If thou remainest in the position which God has assigned thee, thou canst serve God, the man as a man, the woman as a woman, the ruler as a ruler, the citizen as a citizen; each one fulfilling his duty in the fear of God, thus glorifying Him. If thou art faithful in thy calling, giving thanks unto Christ, then wilt thou serve God aright, without wearing the habit of a monk and without fastings.

Already in the time of the prophets God was much displeased with the people who thought themselves pious on account of their external works and worship, while the heart remained unconverted. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord, Isaiah 1. and Psalm 50. Go your ways and eat your meat your-

self, and have no blessing with it. If I need your victims I know where to find them, sooner than you can bring them for a sacrifice. Who has required this at your hand? But this I demand of you. that you shall obey my Word and give thanks unto me. Oxen, cows and sheep, I gave unto you to be eaten; now you bring them unto me, in a spirit of flattery, as if I begged them at your hands. The prophet insists, upon all occasions, that the heart should be changed, and that the people thus converted should give thanks unto God in the true spirit of obedience towards Him. With this God will be pleased, no matter what else we may be. Thus the shepherds, with joyfulness and alacrity, and full of gratitude to God, perform their labors as it became their calling and as they had done before.

We read the following story in the *vitis patrum*, which is applicable here: A certain man thought himself to be a great saint, and when he was very desirous of knowing what his place would be in heaven, thinking that it would be an exalted one, he was directed to sit down by the side of a piper as his equal. Astonished at this he asked the latter: My dear sir, is it possible that you did anything good? The piper answered: My business is to play for the peasants at their dances. On one occasion, however, I happened to be present when my companions were about to ravish a maiden; this I prevented, and rescued her from her despoilers. Some time afterwards he asked again what should be his rank. He was directed to ask two women, mothers of families, as to their works. As he had asked the piper, so he asked these women. They answered him: We know of no

especial good works performed by us: we carefully attend to our duties at home, and seek to live peaceably with each other, so that we never had any quarrel. After having heard this answer, the old hermit turned away saying to himself: I have now learned that no position in life ought to be despised, be it ever so lowly. It is possible to serve God, and to be pious, under all circumstances, if the heart but loves justice and fears God, who will despise no one.

This story about the hermit, the piper and the two women, is, as I suppose, fictitious, but evidently composed for the purpose of warning people against all monkish customs. To be a true Christian does not depend upon thy outward condition in the world, but it depends upon that organ of life found under the left breast, upon the heart. Thou must know and believe that Jesus is the true Savior; in Him thou must find consolation, and for this give heart-felt thanks to God. Then God will look favorably upon thee, whatever thy position in life may be. We must, therefore, be careful not to separate faith and life from the Word of God, and subject them, as did the pope, to outward ceremonies, to food, raiment, and particular localities, which is surely wrong, since thereby the Christian faith is renounced. Through faith alone God will justify the sinner and through no other means, no matter what their names may be. Yet it behooves each one so to live that also his outward life may correspond to the requirements of God in this respect. Thus it will continue to be until this life is ended, when a glorious change will ensue, even the body becoming beautiful, yea, brighter than the sun. May Christ our Savior bring us to this happy consummation. Amen.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

LUKE 2, 33–40. And Joseph and His mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also;) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser; she was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And when they had performed all things according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the Child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

IN this Gospel-lesson the principal subject is the prophecy of Simeon concerning Christ and His kingdom. He predicts that much opposition will be raised against Christ and much offense caused by the preaching of His Gospel, first among His own people, the Jews, then also among the Gentiles, as we have heard in the sermon for the third Sunday in Advent. But He is also "set for the rising again of many." This is the chief point in our text; but several others contained in it we shall briefly notice. The event narrated took place six weeks after the birth of the Child Jesus, when, according to the custom of the Law, He was brought into the temple to be presented unto the Lord with

an appropriate sacrifice, Leviticus 3, 12. Luke 2. On this occasion the aged Simeon, being also in the temple by the promptings of the Holy Ghost, took the Child Jesus upon his arms, and prophesied concerning Him, calling Him the Savior and the light of the world, which would shine, not merely within the narrow confines of Judea, but over all the heathen lands.

We are told that "Joseph and His mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him" by Simeon. We need not wonder that Joseph is here mentioned as if he were this Child's father. The Evangelist speaks thus of Joseph, according to the general custom, because he was honorably wedded to Mary, the mother of the Child. We repeatedly find in the Scriptures that not only natural parents are called father and mother, but also those who act instead of parents. Besides this, to avoid all misunderstanding in this regard, the Evangelist has told us above, clearly and distinctly, that this Child was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. Let us mark this well, so that we may not be offended when St. Luke in this place and the Scriptures in other passages speak of matters as the people are accustomed to speak of them. Here we stand in the presence of a divine mystery. Mary the Virgin, having no connection with a man, becomes the mother of this Child only through the Holy Ghost. Joseph himself knew and believed this, for thus was it revealed to him by an angel in a dream.

When Simeon, the aged sire, took the Child upon his arms, and spoke so eloquently, many of those who heard him, no doubt, judged his words to be but the utterings of an old, childish, insane

man. Yet his words were so full of wisdom and instruction that, as the Evangelist relates, "Joseph and His mother marvelled" at them; for even the angels had not told them so plainly, as Simeon now does, that the Child would be a light to lighten the Gentiles.

When we are told that "Joseph and His mother marvelled," we must not understand this as if they in the least doubted these sayings, but rather as a proof of their great faith and intelligent comprehension of what was told them. It is a peculiar characteristic of faith that the more it confides in God's Word, and the more it recognizes His works, so much the more is it astonished and moved to praise and thanksgiving. Where there is no faith, indifference prevails as to what is seen or heard, and there is neither joy nor pleasure there. During these festive days we have heard of the birth of Christ, how He as a little child came into our flesh and blood, to be our Savior from death, sin and hell. Surely, whoever has heard these tidings with a believing heart, and meditates upon this divine deed, must be filled with wonder. St. Luke describes the faith of Joseph and Mary when he speaks of their amazement at what they hear of the Child, how He should be a light unto the Gentiles, yea, such a light that all else in this world, no matter how brilliant it may seem, is but gloomy night compared with it. He and no one else, neither kings nor princes, can rescue from sin and death.

Such admiration of the glorious Gospel should be in us, that we can joyfully and proudly boast: I am a Christian, I am baptized, and doubt not that I, through Christ, shall conquer sin and death,

yea, that even heaven and earth are mine. If a king should present me with a cloak of the finest velvet, or with an entire city, I would be glad. But what would all this be compared with what I have in Christ! A whole empire of this world is naught compared with my heritage in Jesus, with whom I am to be and live through all eternity. Alas, where are they to be found who truly believe this, and retain it in their hearts? True, we all know this story and can repeat it; but that we do not sincerely believe it can easily be shown, for we do not "marvel" at it. Mere knowledge of these events can not be called faith, unless a faith that is cold and dead be meant. True faith causes joy and happy admiration of the works of God. A Christian is an independent, happy person; he cares naught for the devil nor misfortune, since he is convinced that, through Christ, he can overcome them all.

I venture to say that the Virgin Mary, while thus marvelling, was filled with a great and holy pride and assurance, relying not upon what she had done, but upon the mercy and grace of God, and upon this Child Jesus. "She marvelled," not because she had been chosen to be the mother of this Child, but "at those things which were spoken of Him." The true Christian will never be proud of what he is, but of what was given him; he praises not himself, but Him who, through His infinite goodness and mercy, gave him every thing that He has.

God bestows upon us abundant blessings, but we do not realize them; hence it is that we do not "marvel" nor rejoice at the unspeakable mercy and blessing bestowed in this Child. That we

poor sinners are assured of eternal life and justified in Christ, ought surely to enkindle within us at least a spark of courage to bear up against adversity and persecution, and to bid defiance to the devil and the world, telling them: Take my life if you will: it matters not as long as I have this Child. Take the shell and the hull, yet I will lose nothing; for the treasure, the kernel, is still mine; namely, the fact that through Christ I have been saved from sin and everlasting death, and have escaped the wrath of God. In this wise, we ought to express our astonishment. But who does it? Few indeed are they who marvel at the things spoken of Christ; yet in these very sayings there is food unto eternal life, and a never ending satisfaction which even angels desire, as St. Peter writes.

Let us now consider the prediction of Simeon. It refers, chiefly, to the Jews; for thus he says: "Behold this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." This foretells the fate of the Child, as to His reception in the world; many shall oppose Him and thereby fall; many again shall accept Him and thereby have a sure footing. He who wishes to be a Christian can now choose for himself; no one is forced in this respect. To employ force belongs, according to the order which God has established, to the governments of this world, to princes, governors, police-officers, and others who have executive authority; their duty is to compel men to obey the laws, and to punish those who will not desist from theft, murder, cheating, and the like. But in the kingdom of Christ another rule prevails; if thou wilt not believe thou art not forced to do so; but the time will come

when a mighty one will conquer thee, against whom resistance is in vain.

Very well, the wicked answer, we need then have no anxiety now, since we have yet time enough. Suppose this to be the case, what then? The fact still remains: If thou wilt be saved thou must accept this King who, as Simeon says, is not pleasing to the world. Some there are, however, though their number is small, who are not offended at this King, and whom He raises from their fallen estate.

The fact that Christ "is set for the fall" of the greater portion of mankind, should not disconcert us; we cannot make it otherwise. It will always be thus in the world, that wherever this King is with His Word and authority, there many will be offended at Him and fall. With this state of affairs thou must be content, if thou wouldst remain a Christian. Seek, however, to find and to belong to the little flock of those who faithfully accept this King, and unto whom He "is set" not for a "fall," but for a "rising."

The Papists malign our doctrine shamefully, and oppose it with all their might, not because they doubt it; for the greater part of them know it to be true; but because they are impelled by malice and obstinacy, that they may maintain their authority and glory. They are naught for Christ and His Word; the belly is their god. Hence we do not count them among those who are offended at Christ and fall. They, however, who are not open enemies and persecutors of the pure doctrine, who even hear it and confess that this Child is the Savior of the world, but who do not admit that through our own good works we can-

not obtain remission of sins nor justification before God, are the persons to whom Christ is "set for a fall." We cannot believe, they say, that those who for centuries have adhered to the customary faith and practice, should all be damned.

Wherever thou seest such opposition, thou mayest rest assured that there the Child, born of the Virgin Mary, "is set for a fall," not for those who know not God, but for "many in Israel," that is, for those who have the Word of God, &c. Unto these this little Child becomes a stumbling-block, over which the self-made saints and the wise of this world fall and break their necks. This, however, ought not to disturb us in our faith; it is but the necessary result of the obstinate refusal to accept the Child Jesus.

The Jews are an example of this. They were exceedingly wroth at the words of Christ, John 8: "You shall die in your sins." They thought: What meaneth this idiot? Have we not the prophets and Moses? Do we not know what is right and what God demands of us? Shall all this avail us nothing? Shall we be instructed as to our salvation by this apprentice of a carpenter? They went their way, struck their heads against Christ and fell.

Not otherwise act the priests of the pope at the present day. I mean the best of them, for the greater portion are but gluttons! They denounce our doctrine as devilish and heretical, saying: We pray, we fast much, we torture ourselves; shall all this be in vain? Will God not be pleased with it? Come on then, let us eat and drink and commit fornication, we still can enter heaven, since Christ did not come to save the just, but sinners, as these

Lutherans preach! You observe that these fellows are offended at the Child Jesus; they fall, no more to arise.

Be not disturbed at this; remember thy calling as a Christian, and know well that thy Lord, thou thyself, thy doctrine and thy life, all will cause dissatisfaction among men. We have heard how Christ became a stumbling-block even unto the people of God, so that many who are great and wise and holy in their own estimation, dash themselves against Him and fall. It cannot be otherwise than that all such will consider as fools and as heretics those who accept, with implicit faith, Christ as their king. Thus the true Christians, together with their Lord and Savior Christ, become an object of offense and are "set for the fall of many." This is a portion of the prophecy of Simeon.

The Gospel tells us further that this Child is set not merely for the fall, but also "for the rising of many in Israel." This we must not forget. They who accept this King, know that without Him they are weak and unable to stand; hence they would rather die than lose Him, their only support. They realize that He alone, whom the angels call a Savior, and of whom Simeon says that He is a "rising unto many," can help them in their great distress. They confess that they are wretched sinners, who have deeply fallen; they stretch forth their arms and with joy cling firmly to this precious rock, raising themselves again through faith in Him; nor shall they ever be confounded, 1 Pet. 2. But those who deem themselves beyond all danger are fools; they desire no help or mercy, but dash themselves headlong

against this rock with curses and with maledictions. Again I say, be not disturbed by this; remember how Simeon thus prophesied concerning this Child; look rather to the few unto whom He has become a "rising;" to those poor sinners who, as such, are afraid of the wrath and judgment of God, but who through this Child become holy and just. He makes the ignorant wise, and restores those who have gone astray; yea, He helps the miserable and degraded, and saves all who acknowledge their transgressions. Be comforted then through this Child, and let nothing separate you from Him.

For years I meditated, with much earnestness, upon this subject, whether it would not be possible to preach Christ without giving offense to any one; but now I am convinced that it cannot be done. Hence we learn what answer should be given to those who charge us with having brought disturbance and all sorts of misfortune, into the church of the pope, hitherto so peaceable and quiet. I tell all these wiseacres who bring such accusations that they ought to look carefully into our Gospel-lesson and hear the prediction of Simeon, who declares that wherever the pure doctrine is preached, there many will be offended at the truth and fall beneath it. But not all will fall; some will fondly cling to the truth, and thus will Christ be set "for the rising of many;" that is, of those who know that they are guilty sinners, whose conscience condemns them, all who now find joy and comfort in the pure doctrine of the Gospel.

Our opponents do not consider this, but look merely at the offense given and the "fall" caused by our preaching, which, however, can not be

avoided. The doctrine, which is pure and good, is not to be blamed for this, but the people who will not accept nor obey it are to blame. Consider this matter attentively and tell me frankly: Would it not have been better, during the time of popery, if there had been more commotion, more opposition, as there is at present, instead of that lifeless quiet, which the devil improved so well to spread idolatry and false doctrine, driving souls to hell in crowds? Who would not rather suffer a temporal loss than one which is eternal? The want of the pure doctrine, of the knowledge of God and of true devotion, so manifest among the Papists, was indeed an unspeakable, everlasting injury.

Many a Diet has been held in the past years for the purpose of devising some plan by which the Gospel could be preached to the satisfaction of all. This, surely, can never be done. Take away whatever may cause offense from your preaching and you will lose Christ Himself. The prophecy of Simeon is true, "He is set for the fall of many in Israel," of many among those who claim to be the church, the people of God.

Christ came to us again through His blessed Gospel ere we were aware of it, even as He formerly came to the Jews. We ought to have rejoiced at this with all our hearts, praising God for His great mercy. But what happened? The pope and the bishops became wroth; they act as though their permission should have been obtained before the preaching of the pure doctrine and the purification of the church was undertaken. Here, then, Christ is at once "set for the fall of many." He will not desist from the spreading of His Gospel; the pope

and the bishops will not accept it; the conflict immediately begins, and Simeon's prediction is being fulfilled: "This child is set for the fall of many."

Offenses must come, as Christ says Matt. 11; and St. Paul says, 1 Cor. 11: "For there must be also heresies among you." The Gospel must be persecuted; but Christ will remain in all His glory and will become "a rising unto many." They, indeed, who desire to change the Word and the effect of Christ's coming, will surely be dashed to pieces; to such He becomes a rock of destruction and not of support. Yet it is not the fault of the rock that people, foolishly and blindly, dash their heads against Him. God has placed Him there for a different purpose, for a support and "a rising" of all who believe in Him, who firmly cling to Him and earnestly desire to be saved through Him. Thus Isaiah already speaks of Him in the 28. chapter.

The Gospel of itself does not cause strife and dispute in the world, as the pope and bishops charge against it, forgetting the fact that they, by their sins and idolatry, have caused various punishments and misfortunes. If the pure doctrine were permitted to have free scope, contentions and other troubles would not occur. No wonder that God does not deal with the pope and his priests as they desire.

The Jews were also much offended at Christ without any cause. He desired them to be happy, yea, to believe in Him and be saved. That they would not do so was their fault, not His. They ought to have received Him as their Lord, who was promised to them and had now appeared; but instead of this, they were offended at His lowly appearance and spurned Him. Let us beware, lest in this time of offenses we also be led away from the

pure Gospel. He, however, who is offended and falls, must not blame the Gospel, but his own stubborn head and his unbelieving heart. This is the first lesson to be learned from the prophecy of Simeon.

Simeon continues his prediction and tells Mary: "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." This sounds harsh and unfriendly, and seemingly contradicts the statement made above, that Simeon blessed Mary. But let us not forget that this was written as a precept not only for that time, but also for our instruction. Surely, neither you nor I, nor even an apostle, would ever have supposed that so much wickedness as the Gospel has brought to light, could be found on earth. Formerly there were many excellent and pious people among the Papists, who lived an honest and decorous life. There were many wise and intelligent persons, of whom one could be assured that their intentions were perfectly upright. As long as the Gospel was not in vogue the world glittered brilliantly with her science, art, propriety and honesty. Brighter still was her appearance in the garb of spirituality which she subsequently assumed. She instituted various clerical orders, and arranged forms for public worship so imposing, as is seen among the Papists, that whoever saw it might easily be led to pronounce her holy and spotless. With this semblance of external and spiritual virtues, human reason was so captivated that if the Gospel had not come and exposed this deception, hypocrisy and idolatry, the world would surely have become a prey of the devil with all her apparent piety, wisdom, humility and holiness.

With the preaching of the Gospel a change is produced. This Child immediately "is set for the fall and rising of many, and for a sign which shall be spoken against." It becomes unmistakably evident that those who before were presumed to be model saints are, verily, the greatest sinners; that they who were regarded as wise are, really, the most stupendous fools; and that the gentle hearts, apparently full of mildness, are full of blood-thirstiness. Verily, the Gospel has no greater enemies than these very virtuous, wise and holy people; yea, the greater their self-righteous pride, the more acute and bitter is the enmity against the Gospel. This is an accursed and abominable state of affairs.

Simeon refers to this in his prediction. The world, says he, both in her temporal and in her spiritual relations, struts along with much dignity, performs many virtuous deeds, and shuns no trouble to make the impression that she is peopled with angels and children of God. In this deception she succeeds so well that it is almost impossible to convince men of the wickedness and poison that lurks under this cloak of hypocrisy. No power on earth could tear away this mask; the preaching of Christ and His Gospel alone can do it. This can pierce the poisonous tumor, and lay open the nauseous corruption. As soon as the preaching of the Gospel resounds through the world, these proud spirits become enraged; then these cunning saints burst the limits of their pretended holiness, so that all can clearly see their deception and knavery.

Many a ruler is gifted with intelligence and skill, desiring his people to be prosperous—is liberal, virtuous, just, attentive to the poor and the oppressed, diligent in the execution of the laws, a

faithful husband, in short, just such a person as we would select for a good, a virtuous and pious ruler, especially if judged, according to the standard of excellence in vogue under the pope, by prayers, fastings, devotions, dedications of chapels, altars, churches and the like; all of which calls forth admiration from the people. Preach the pure doctrine to such a virtuous and much-admired king, and even he who seemed a model ruler will show that all his excellence was but a pretense. He becomes indeed a murderer, a tyrant, a man regardless of justice, a persecutor of the Gospel, which he would crush to earth if he could. Did not Saul, Ahab and other kings, down to the present day, act thus? Who would ever have supposed that so much wickedness was concealed beneath the bright and saintly surface? The Gospel, and it alone, can bring to light such filth, and madness, and poison.

It would be natural to presume that the pope, the cardinals, the bishops and the priests would be the first to embrace the Gospel, as they are regarded as the most pious and most exalted among all the people. But the very reverse is true. The Gospel has no more violent and more frantic adversaries than the pope with his clergy, his schools, his teachers, monks and priests, who ought to be zealous in advancing its interests, since they are officials in the Church. The words of Simeon spoken to Mary are applicable here: This Child, to which thou didst give birth, will cause much noise in the world by bringing to shame those people who were venerated as saints upon earth.

Hereby "the thoughts of many hearts are revealed," so that many a man who is much revered on account of his wisdom and saintly piety, who

appears so holy that he seems qualified to be the guardian of the entrance to heaven, becomes exposed in all his wickedness, idolatry, envy, hatred, ignorance and many other faults, which cannot be enumerated. He will not hear nor endure the Word of God, defends idolatry and destroys people in its behalf; yea, if he could crush the truth of the Gospel by deluging the land with blood, he would do it without remorse. Such a wicked heart, full of the deadliest venom, ought not to be found in the world, least of all in the breast of those who are regarded and eulogized as pious, wise, honest, mild and virtuous. True it is: This Child will bring to light the secrets of the human heart.

I confess, when I began to preach the glorious Gospel I did not think that the world was so wicked as it is. I did expect that all would leap for joy when they should hear of their liberation from the thralldom of the pope, from the woe and anguish of an oppressed conscience, and when they should be assured of the mercy of God in Christ, which freely imparts the blessings for which they had labored long and unceasingly, but in vain. Especially did I expect the bishops and the schools of learning to accept the truth of the Gospel.

Ah, how I was mistaken! For this very truth which we bring we are buffeted, especially by those who are officers in the church. But this treatment shall not disconcert us; this madness of the world shall not impede the spreading of the Gospel; we shall boldly continue to preach it. In the light of the pure doctrine the devil and his fellows are clearly manifest as enemies of God, and the world becomes known, although she may pretend to be very pious and holy. I repeat, I never could have

believed that there is so much willful disregard of God's Word in the human heart as I now discover by preaching the Gospel to men who outwardly appear upright and pious. Why, the pope, the bishops, the noblemen, the citizens and peasants are all full of devils, else they would not reject and scorn, and maliciously persecute the glorious Gospel. Such infernal malice I did not see in men before the pure doctrine was brought to light. Then they acted as if filled with the Holy Ghost; but now, through the Gospel, Christ has exposed the secrets of their hearts; it is evident that they are possessed of the devil.

Why is this revelation made? To instruct us and to comfort us. We are taught that we should not be perplexed if we discover the saints to be devils, if we are compelled to exclaim: How is it that this noble prince, this refined citizen, this attentive husband, are all so blind, so malicious and so hostile to the Word of God? Our text gives the true answer: Ere this the thoughts of men were hidden, but now He has come who reveals the secrets of the hearts. He has kindled such a light, through His Word, that all concealment of the thoughts is of no avail; they are exposed in the light of day, and though never seen before, now they are manifest.

It is true, the devil always was a liar and a murderer, just as he is now; but he was so charmingly adorned that he was not recognized, but taken for an angel of light. But now, since the Gospel light shines in his face, his features can be distinguished; we see that he is a liar, a cheat and a murderer, as he has been from the beginning. The same characteristics we discover in his followers,

from the noblest lord down to the lowest menial; the higher their position in piety and saintliness seemed to be, so much the greater hypocrites, full of venom and blasphemy, are they. Such they always were; but thus far their true character was not known. God came, and with His Gospel opened the window of their hearts and immediately, as Simeon says, the thoughts of many became revealed. Concealment was no longer possible.

Again, this revelation contains much comfort for us, when the world opposes and persecutes the Word of God. She does this under the semblance of holiness, and might thereby deceive us; but now we know her and can conclude, without mistake: No matter how holy and sanctimonious she may appear, as long as she cannot bear the truth and persecutes the Word of God, she is the devil's own, and all her virtues and saintly actions are but a miserable sham. Of course, we do not mean to denounce her virtue, intelligence and wisdom; in themselves these are praiseworthy; but the mischief lies in this, that they are made the devil's mask under which to blaspheme God and to persecute His Word.

Chastity is lauded very much, as indeed it is a great and noble virtue; but, pray, what would you think of a modest and chaste virgin who had murdered her parents? Why this, to be sure: Though she may be a virgin, she is nevertheless a great criminal, who merits punishment for her crime in spite of her virginity. Thus we must apply the words of Simeon when he says: O Mary, thy Son will bring to light many a crime of people who now walk about as saints; in time they will prove themselves the most decided enemies of God. But

our reason will interfere and say: Are they not now honest and pious people; why then call them hypocrites and murderers? Go to, I say, with such honeyed intercession; thank God, ere long it will all be plain. Let Christ and His Gospel be preached and it will immediately be evident that the greater part of the so-called honorable and pious people in the world are the greatest knaves, murderers, and enemies of God. They will not endure the Gospel, but will endeavor, by all kinds of devices and tyranny, to destroy its power and influence.

I know that men consider it wrong to speak thus plainly of their conduct; but how can they hope to excuse themselves before God? Even before men these deceivers cannot always carry out their hypocrisy. If the heart is full of murderous intentions, it requires but little more to become a murderer in deed. Such wickedness is made manifest by the Gospel, else no one would know it or believe it.

Simeon, in his prophecy to Mary, continues: "And a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also." Mary saw and experienced such wickedness of the world, but not she alone; the entire Christian Church, at all times, had the same trials when the light of the Gospel was bright in her. Such experiences are sad and distressing for the Christian, as St. Peter writes of Lot, 2. Pet. 2: "For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds."

This is the sword that pierces the hearts of the Christians; they are sad, because the world is so wicked, so full of malice and tyranny against Christ,

so full of scorn and persecution against His Word and His disciples. This pain and sorrow of the Christian exceeds all his other sufferings, and awakens the saddened heart to earnest prayer. When it has come to this point, however, be assured that the punishment for the wicked world will not tarry much longer. So much in relation to the prophecy of Simeon.

Besides this prophecy of Simeon and the lessons contained in it, we have yet, in our Gospel, the story of "Anna the widow," who, also moved by the Holy Ghost, testified and spake of Christ. The Evangelist relates that she "served God with fastings and prayers night and day." Our opponents, the Papists, think that this furnishes them an argument against us, although we have never denied that we should serve God with true prayer and fastings. Whatever has been established of God is right; and inasmuch as fasting, which is temperance in eating and drinking, and also prayer, belong to the requirements of God, we regard them as an obedient fulfillment of His will. But this is not the view of the Papists; they claim that such a compliance with certain rules causes forgiveness of sins, and makes sure of eternal life. This view of fasting and prayer we emphatically oppose, holding with the angel that the Child Jesus is the only Savior, that He alone can save His people from their sins.

In conclusion, let us earnestly pray God for His grace and guidance, that no offense at Christ and the Gospel may cause us to fall, but that the pure doctrine may be our support in life and in death. May Christ our Savior grant us this prayer. Amen.

FIRST SERMON FOR NEW YEAR.

THE CIRCUMCISION.

LUKE 2, 21. And when eight days were accomplished for the circumciring of the Child, His name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

THE Gospel for this festival contains *two parts* which claim our attention: First, *the Circumcision*, and secondly *the Name of Jesus*, which was mentioned of the angel, as the Evangelist tells us, even before the conception of the Child. Hence this name must be of importance to us.

We will first notice the circumcision of the child and observe its peculiarity, not as to the ceremony itself, but in regard to the person circumcised. There is a vast difference between the circumcision of Christ and that of other Jewish children: for there is no similarity between the persons, as you shall presently hear.

The circumcision of the Jews had its origin in the Scriptures, as we may read in Genesis 17, 10, &c. The time of its duration is also plainly foretold, namely, until the coming of Christ. Abraham first began it, for God commanded him to circumcise himself and his entire household. After that all male children had to be circumcised on the eighth day after their birth. God promised to be with those who had the mark of circumcision on their body, and to regard them as His people.

God had a particular purpose when He ordained that not Abraham alone, but all male ser-

vants of his house should be circumcised, so that the Jews might not boast that they alone are the people of God. The servants of Abraham who were heathen, were thus counted of God among His people and children, as well as the natural children and heir of Abraham; yea, these Gentile slaves enjoyed the blessings of this ceremony even sooner than Isaac, though he was the child of promise. Hence the Jews have no reason whatever to boast; if they magnify the importance of circumcision ever so much, they can not deny that God, at the same time, called Gentiles also, who were not children of Abraham, but only purchased servants.

The circumcision has lost its practical value and is to be considered by us merely as to its meaning, and as a figure of faith. It serves us the same purpose as do other events, now past and accomplished, which set before us examples of faith and good works. We are not expected to do the same works, but to have the same obedience and faith which they had who lived at that time. We, accordingly, preach this day about circumcision; not that we should be circumcised, for that is no longer required, but that we may learn therefrom obedience to God, even as Abraham was obedient. If Christ had not come, we would, in order to be the people of God, have to be circumcised at the present day. The command is clear in this respect: "And the uncircumcised man-child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people." This command is abrogated through Christ. Circumcision was to be observed to the time of His coming, and no longer; to Him it pointed. Christ, however, forbids us to be circumcised, but commands us to be

baptized and to believe, if we would be His people and be saved.

From the ceremony of circumcision we learn how God oftentimes arranges His plans in a wonderful and mysterious manner, entirely inexplicable to our human reason. No doubt, the proud Gentiles regarded this ceremony as the most ridiculous and foolish ever heard of, and laughed at the thought that an all-wise God should have imposed such a silly ordinance upon men, even upon grown persons; for Abraham was already ninety-nine years old when he received this command. Hence came those scurrilous and derisive nicknames which the heathens applied to the Jews: *Recutitos*, *Apellas*, and the like. This, however, might have been expected, as you heard in the preceding sermon; for the ways of God are not the ways of man; His doings seek not the applause of the world, but rather become an object of ridicule and mockery. Man, on the other hand, does what he pleases, and would have the favor of God upon it; then he would be satisfied. Such willfulness God opposes, and hence it is that human reason becomes offended, as St. Paul says 1 Cor. 1, 21: "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

Is it not the height of folly for human reason to undertake to solve the mystery, how in the Lord's Supper we receive with the bread the body of Christ, and with the wine His blood, for the forgiveness of our sins? Reason asks, what can a little wine and a bite of bread avail? Nor can reason, blind as it is by nature, ask differently. But God does not, on that account, change His ordin-

ance. If reason will not believe nor accept the Word of God, why, she can let it alone. The same is true of Baptism. How is it possible that a child when put in the water, or when sprinkled with it according to the word of Christ, should be cleansed from sin and transferred from the dominion of the devil into the kingdom of God? Can you believe this if you put aside the Word, and attempt to explain and comprehend it with your reason? Yes, if sin were a black or red spot on the skin, then you might understand how water could take it away, but since it is deep down in the heart, pervading the very marrow and bones of the body, reason cannot comprehend how water can effect its removal.

When Abraham received the command to perform circumcision, he might have reasoned thus: Surely, this circumcision cannot avail me, an old man, anything unto salvation; or what will it benefit a child? or what change for the better is effected by it? If God had desired the body to be shaped otherwise, why, He would have formed it so, without the necessity of circumcising it. Reason would, undoubtedly, have argued thus: You may be assured, the devil has gained the victory so soon as the question is once asked, Why did God command this or that? Thus it was with Eve in Paradise. She had the direct command not to eat of the forbidden tree, but as soon as she listened to the insinuations of Satan, and began to ask herself, why should God have forbidden this? so soon she became indifferent as to the command, went her way and fell into that terrible disobedience, the awful results of which we all must bear. Hence the institution of circumcision must not seem

strange to us nor cause us offense: we must regard it simply as an ordinance of God. When God speaks and orders anything, it behooves man to keep silence, to worship Him, and with an obedient heart to do, without any further questions, what he is commanded. It is not for us to prescribe to God what He shall do; for we are by nature children of wrath, sinners and liars; His plans, words, and deeds are, therefore, too exalted to be understood by us. Yet it is a fact that we are so blind, so utterly foolish, as to imagine that we not only understand the ways of God, but are able even to improve them. In view of this foolishness Jeremiah well remarks: "The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Since this infirmity disables our judgment, we ought to eschew our own wisdom, and when we have spiritual matters and the commands of God before us we should say: They are inexplicable to us; and, on account of our ignorance and foolishness in divine matters, we cannot comprehend them.

Abraham and his servants were not perplexed at the command of God, but straightway fulfilled it, and made circumcision an example of faith. They did not reason thus: Why, this cannot be the meaning of God, that we grown up people should be circumcised; this would be a silly demand; He must have intended something else by His command; what good can the circumcision of the body do? Similar reasoning and contradiction of God's Word is indulged by the defamers of Holy Sacraments. Those men of old put aside such thoughts and resolved to do as they were instructed; they were obedient because God had so

commanded them; although the whole subject was strange to them, they did as they had been ordered. And thus it must be: If I would be saved I must follow the will of God, and do as He bids me. The circumcision of Abraham, his servants and his descendants, thus becomes a bright example of true faith, from which we ought to learn to be obedient unto God, and not to permit our own wisdom and reason to seduce us from His Word.

So much in regard to the circumcision of the ancient Jews, which, however, was ordained to continue only as long as the Law, that is, until the coming of Christ; for He fulfilled the Law. This was indicated by the rule of circumcising the children on the eighth day. The Scriptures establish this order that the seventh day shall be the Sabbath, and the day which follows the Sabbath is the eighth day, with which a new week begins. Thus did our Lord and Savior Christ, with this circumcision, begin the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning Him. This had foretold that He would be a Savior and light to the Gentiles, whose dominion would not be confined to the narrow limits of Judea, but that He would rule over all the world with His Gospel, to save all from their sins. With His circumcision the institution was abolished.

As I remarked in the beginning it is very necessary to distinguish carefully between the circumcision of Christ and that of the Jews, or else we cannot have a clear understanding of this occurrence. The ceremony is the same, but in the persons we see the difference. Circumcision, just as the Law, was ordained for those who were sinners and guilty of eternal death. Christ, however, was free from all sin, and Lord over the Law, so that it

had no authority over Him; for the Law deals only with sinners, but He is no sinner. According to the Law He was circumcised like other little children who were sinners, but in this the Law trespassed against Him and, therefore, received its due punishment, namely, its termination. Christ could have abolished the Law at once, and forcibly, if He had desired to do so; for He is master over the Law and in no wise subject to it, because He is free from sin. Not with force, however, but in love and humility He annulled the Law by fulfilling it, and that in our behalf and for our consolation.

Our Lord and Savior had no need of this ceremony, just as He, for His own sake, had no need of becoming man or of being crucified. He did all this for our benefit; we stood in need of one who was without sin and who therefore could fulfill the Law for us and appease the wrath of God. He became subject to the Law for the purpose of transferring to us His victory over the Law, so that we might continue to enjoy this triumph, and possess the same power over the Law which He possesses, namely, freedom from its condemnation. Whoever firmly adheres in true faith to Christ, is free from the curse of the Law.

Let us, therefore, mark well this difference; all our welfare depends upon it. Abraham must of necessity undergo circumcision, for he is a sinner and the Law has authority over him. Christ, being without sin, is free from the Law, but voluntarily He subjects Himself to its demands, so that all who would believe in Him might be exempt and free from its curse. Thus it is that this festival of the circumcision of Christ is one full of consolation, justly demanding of us praise and grati-

tude to God, inasmuch as we who, by reason of our sins, were under the dominion of the Law, are now, through Christ, free from its terrors, and assured of salvation; yea, to rescue us from the grasp of the Law He willingly bore its curse and became subject to it.

We learn from the words of St. Paul how necessary was this our deliverance from the Law; he says 1 Cor. 7, 19: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." The Jews could not endure this saying, since it boldly declares that no one who is circumcised thereby keeps or fulfills the Law. Hence it follows that they who were circumcised are nevertheless uncircumcised; or, to speak more plainly, no one fulfills the commandments of God by being circumcised; no one is thereby freed from sin. Though the Jews were circumcised, it was still necessary for them to observe that other command of God: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and with all thy strength." Now, show me the man who could boast that he has fulfilled, or that he can fulfill this commandment. Again, the Law demands 'Thou shalt not covet;' where now is the person who could claim that he has lived in accordance with this demand, or that he can do so? In short, take whatever commandment you please, and you will be compelled to confess that not one of them has been entirely kept by any man. What, now, is the punishment for those who, though circumcised, have not kept the commandments of God? St. Paul points it out when he refers to Deuteronomy, where we read: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of

this Law to do them." From this it follows that they who rely upon the works of the Law are under the curse, since they cannot fulfill it. If we could keep the Law, all would be well; but since we cannot do this, the result is that it accuses us and delivers us over to the devil.

We are, therefore, in need of a better and nobler declaration than the one which the Law announces; it can only ask and command: "Thou shalt love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself." This is demanded of us, even if our neighbor has injured us and we desire to take revenge. No, this command cannot be fulfilled. Human nature rebels against it; anger, discontent, impatience, hatred, envy, pride, &c., will be aroused against it. It is useless to attempt compliance with it; even if we do all we can, we will not be justified before God.

Here then we find the reason why a mightier and better than we had to come, namely Christ, the Son of God, who, though without sin, was circumcised as sinners were, and made Himself subject to the Law in all humility, that He might abrogate it, and liberate us who never could bear its burden, and consequently would have remained under the curse and wrath of God. Our own experience, as well as the testimony of the holy prophets, teaches us this. What else but this could have prompted the holy prophet David to say, in the 19. Psalm, verse 13: *Delicta quis intelligit?* "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults." Also, Psalm 143, 2: "And enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified."

Again, Psalm 130: "If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

These and other expressions plainly show the impossibility for man to say that he has satisfied the Law or that, by means of his works, he has escaped the wrath of God. Since, then, we are thus under the bondage of the Law, and cannot appear before God, nor have that trust in Him which we should have, it follows that we must have something more effective than the requirements of the Law, even the tidings of the holy Gospel, in which our Lord and Savior declares unto the Jews and unto us, that we are condemned by reason of our sins. Nor are the Jews benefited by their circumcision, for it does not free from sin, as the prophets state: They are circumcised as to their body, but their hearts are uncircumcised and unclean. Our redemption rests on the fact, declared by the Gospel, that our Lord and Savior, Christ, on whom the Law had no claims because of His holiness, put Himself under the Law, and even was circumcised, that He might find an occasion against it and be able to say: Listen, Law, thou didst treat me, the Master, as a servant; for this thou must serve me in turn and be my slave and prisoner.

This supremacy of Christ our Lord over the Law He renders ours, thus depriving it of its judgment against us poor sinners, and acquitting us. Not that we are to be indifferent about it, or may now live as we please; but our shortcomings are forgiven and cancelled to our souls' salvation.

Circumcision is, therefore, entirely done away with, and unnecessary for those who believe in Christ. They are exempt from this and other

burdens of the Law; they have forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life through Christ. Hence they can boast and say: The Law avails me naught, nor circumcision, but this avails that I believe Christ was circumcised for me, that I have Him for my surety who paid the debt which I owed the Law on account of my sins. In His innocence I find comfort and can say: The Law for a period ruled in heaven as a master, accusing us at the throne of God, nor could we prevent it; the charges against us were just, and we could but admit our guilt. Now this is changed, since by the circumcision of Christ we are redeemed from the circumcision of old and from the curse of the Law.

My circumcision, my love towards God and men, my obedience, are all naught; I will not trust in them. My entire confidence, comfort and courage rests upon the obedience, innocence and holiness of Christ. Such confidence and hope cannot fail me; they are sure and firm. Ere I knew this, I thought that I must go to work and fulfill the Law, or be damned. Now I know that neither I, nor any mortal, can carry such a load; it is simply impossible. Christ took this burden from me upon Himself by subjecting Himself to the Law. With the circumcision He manifested His readiness to fulfill the entire Law, in all its details, just as it had been demanded of us poor sinners. This then is my comfort and my happiness.

It is, indeed, my duty to control the old Adam within me, to direct him to do what is proper, else I would be a very disobedient child, which, alas, I am in spite of all watchfulness. We do much that we ought not to do, and we neglect many things

which we ought to do, oftentimes falling into gross and shameful sins. In view of this we have only one consolation: "Christ was made under the Law." In this we rejoice, knowing that He was obedient in all things for us. We never can do all that we should, as St. Paul says: "But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." That is: I must do what my flesh urges; and yet as to my faith I do it not, but am sorry for it and am not willingly thus a captive.

The Christian's righteousness consists in a knowledge of himself as a poor sinner, who can never fulfill the Law; yet he despairs not, seeing that his Lord came to his rescue by taking the Law upon Himself and rendering the required satisfaction. A heart having this faith can exclaim: In truth, has my God thus concerned Himself in my behalf? Ought I not then to love such a God who is so full of mercy? Should I not strive with all my faculties to do that which is pleasing in His sight? Thus the soul becomes glad and joyful before God and a true obedience to the Law ensues, not by constraint, but right willingly. Although such a fulfillment of His commandments will yet be very imperfect, on account of our flesh, yet will God be pleased with it, if we have but faith in Christ. Whatever is yet incomplete and impure, in this regard, becomes invisible under the cover and shield of the forgiveness of sins, for Christ's sake.

You have now heard of a two-fold circumcision. The former was ordained of God, and the Jews had to observe it obediently like any other commandment, until the coming of Christ. But

this did not secure their salvation, since no one ever satisfied the demands of the Law. Hence, although the circumcision was performed, the Law nevertheless accused and condemned all the Jews before God. Salvation is secured, however, through faith in Christ, who bore the burden of the Law and removed its curse from us. Unto those Jews who believed, and looked for their salvation in Christ, circumcision was an external sign of their justification before God, not, indeed, because of their circumcision, but because of their faith in Christ.

The festival of the Circumcision of Christ is, therefore, a gladsome day, on which we approach God with this heartfelt confession: O Lord, Thou didst ordain circumcision to the Jews; unto them and unto us Thou gavest also this command that we should love Thee with our whole heart, and our neighbor as ourselves. Now we confess that we alas! have not kept Thy Law, and that we cannot keep it as it should be kept; we are therefore guilty and well deserve to be lost and eternally damned. This, however, is our consolation and defense, in which we trust, that Thy well-beloved Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, was circumcised, even as sinners are, and willingly fulfilled the entire Law, else He would not have been circumcised on the eighth day as was the custom. This He did on our account; His person had no need of it. We faithfully accept the deed as wrought for us and pray Thee, heavenly Father, for His sake, be merciful unto us, and grant us the fruits of His obedience and holiness. Let us all learn to trust solely in the merits of our Lord and Savior, then will we be secure and be enabled to triumph over sin and death. May Christ, our Lord, grant it! Amen.

SECOND SERMON FOR NEW YEAR.

THE NAME OF JESUS.

LUKE 2, 21.

ONE part of the Gospel for this day we have already considered, namely, *the Circumcision* of Christ, in which it was made evident how He became subject to the Law, so that we might be free from its curse. This festival was instituted for the purpose of reminding us of this great blessing.

We now come to the other portion of the Gospel lesson, *the Name of Jesus.* The Evangelist mentions this name especially, since it is of the greatest importance to know it well as a name not invented of men, but brought down from heaven, and announced by the angel, before the Child "was conceived in the womb." From this we ought all to learn how well-pleasing this name is unto God, for He Himself thus named His Son.

The name Jesus, in our language, means a Savior, a Helper. Some would have it mean a benefactor, but this translation is not so appropriate. Savior is its true meaning. The angel Gabriel gives the reason why Christ should bear this name when he announces to Joseph, Matt. 1, 21: "Thou shalt call His name *Jesus:* for He shall save His people from their sins."

This name we must study with diligence, and carefully remember that this Child is called Jesus because He is a Savior who delivers from the severest and greatest misery, namely, from sin,

and not from the insignificant troubles and petty anxieties which this life has in store for this or that individual, and which can but affect our body, our possessions, or some other temporal matter. God has instituted other means by which such perplexities as these are solved or averted. He has given us rulers and authorities to protect and defend their subjects against lawlessness; He has appointed parents to support and to educate their children; He has given physicians to advise us and assist us in our bodily infirmities, &c. These, however, are all miserable helpers compared with Him who is a Savior and can save His people from sin.

He who would possess this Child as his Savior, as Jesus, must ever remember that He is a Helper, not chiefly in the concerns of this life, which are otherwise provided for, as we have stated, but above all a Savior from sin and death unto eternal life. For where sin no longer rules, there death must also yield up his power. Surely, we receive much more of God than we can ever expect to obtain from emperors, or any temporal authorities. If we do not believe that there is a future life, why then, of course, we need no other helpers than rulers, parents, or physicians, whose duty is to see to our temporal welfare. But if we believe that there is a life after this is ended, then, beyond all doubt, we need this our Savior. Neither king, nor father, nor mother, nor physician, nor any one else, yea. not even an angel, can give us that life. It is true, our Lord Jesus will also be with His people in the troubles of this life, and will assist them in their temporal distress, even if kings and parents and friends fail, or are not able to assist. Yet this is

not His chief nor highest office; hence we do not preach of it especially.

His special office is to save from sin, from eternal death and the dominion of the devil; hence He proclaims His name Jesus, to be known by all sinners, for they need a Savior. If there were no hell, no dominion of the devil, no eternal punishment or torment, men might live without Jesus the Lord; for then when one dies all would be at an end, as it is with a tree when it falls, or with a cow when she dies. Hence those who do not believe in God nor in a future life, become a wild, licentious brood. But he who believes in a God will immediately conclude that not all is ended with the close of this life, but there is, beyond this, another life, which is everlasting. That God does not principally concern Himself about the present life of man is evident from the fact that He permits so many wicked scoundrels to live, and to flourish here upon earth. But He has promised us an eternal life hereafter, and the Child Jesus came to be our Savior and our Guide to this future existence. If He brings us into that life, then has He assisted us indeed, no matter what trials we may in the meanwhile be called to endure here upon earth; yea, though they be so severe that it might seem as if God had forsaken us, it matters not, since we know that He saves unto eternal life. This must satisfy us, let the world wag as it will.

The pope, cardinals, bishops and persecutors of the Word of God, live in security and continue to perpetrate their maliciousness against the Gospel and the Christians. God looks on and permits all this, even as if He were not aware of it, so that

sometimes it seems as if He favored the heathens more than His own people. If we are Christians we will not be offended by this. He has vouchsafed to us, through His Son, sure help unto eternal life. He leaves us to ourselves in this our transitory existence, as if He cared not for us, but only to this end, that we should learn to know this Child and to believe in Him as the Savior, who is ready to help when no one else can help us, when our transgressions rise up against us and would deliver us into the pangs of eternal death.

Except in this hour of anguish, we, alas! care but little for our Savior. While we are in health, and have our coffers full of money, we think not of Jesus; our business claims our attention, and we rely upon our gold. The same is true in regard to other temporal endowments; reason, erudition, authority, are all thought sufficient in their proper sphere. A mother can furnish her children with nourishment and other necessaries of life; a physician can attend to his patient, and a lawyer to his client. But when this brief life of ours terminates, when conscience prompts the sinner to confess his guilt before the judgment-seat of God, when the soul writhes in anguish, and when the danger of eternal condemnation threatens, then is the time in which we must have this Jesus the Savior. Neither those in authority, nor father nor mother, nor physician nor jurist, yea, not even an angel, nor any other creature, can then, in that awful hour, bring us assistance. Where will you seek for help or counsel? Where else but with this Child? Yes, here alone, for Jesus is His name; so called because He can and will be present with His help wherever earnestly implored.

Be careful then, for all thy welfare is at stake, that this dear name is not changed for thee; let them not substitute for the Child Jesus a St. Francis, a Dominic, the order of Carthusians, the mass, vigils, indulgences, the giving of alms, fastings, and such like, as it was among the Papists, for this would be entirely false. Remember, once for all, from sin there is no other Savior to be found, neither in heaven nor upon earth, except this only Child of the Virgin Mary, who is named Jesus.

Whoever seeks another Savior, be it in the order of Carthusians or elsewhere, is surely lost. But he is safe who knows this Child, and can call Him by His own name Jesus. This name is all-sufficient. Let us, therefore, seek for help here alone, and nowhere else.

The devil is, indeed, ever busy to give this Child another name, so that men should fear Him as a Judge, and seek other saviors and redeemers. Nevertheless the fact remains: Jesus bears His name not for the purpose of bestowing upon you plenty of riches and of making you a great lord; all this you have already according to the command of God, Genesis 1, 28: "And have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." But our Savior is called Jesus because He is to help us when all things else fail, and when we must leave all our earthly possessions to go into the future world.

This name is not compatible with anything by which men endeavor, without Christ, to obtain forgiveness of sins and eternal life. If a monk supposes, by means of his order, to become recon-

cíled to God, it is the same as if he said: my order shall be called Jesus and shall accomplish whatever pertains to that name. When the pope and his preachers declare that faith alone does not justify, and that good works are needed to insure eternal life, they plainly make good works their Jesus. But this is all wrong. Not what I invent and do shall have this name; this Child alone shall be my Jesus. The pope and his clergy think otherwise, and, alas! we also when we permit our sins to frighten us so that we do not derive the consolation contained in this name, thinking: If we had not been guilty of this or that we might appear before God. The Holy Spirit cannot brook such thoughts, and is determined that this Child shall have His name entirely and alone, so that we must despair of all our own good works, and of those of others, if we would be rescued from sin and eternal death, relying in firm faith solely upon this Child who alone has the name Jesus. Nor have we a right to deny this. Whoever endeavors to rob this Child of His name, as the pope and the Turk have undertaken to do, will, to his sorrow, discover his great mistake.

On the other hand, he who firmly adheres to this name will be secure against the devil and the world. It is a name brought down from heaven by the angel and, by the mandate of God, bestowed upon this Child, even ere He was conceived in the womb. The persecutors of this name, who point to other saviors and helpers, charge the angel Gabriel with falsehood; but he will cry unto the Lord, saying: Lord, thou didst command me to name and call Thy Child Jesus. Rest assured, these defamers of this name will gain naught, but

will come to grief, perishing in their sins, without a God, without a Savior. But those who faithfully accept this name will be justified before God and be with Christ forevermore.

We must, therefore, bear in mind this name, and firmly believe that this Child is the only Savior from sin, death, and hell. If the world hates us for this faith, let it be so; she has her reward. If the wicked do not choose this Child for their Savior, it is their loss; for in the hour of death they will have no comfort; other men cannot help them with their works, nor will fasting, prayer, alms, the mass, the invocation of saints, &c. avail them aught. But let us derive all our comfort and security from the knowledge that God Himself gave this name to the Child, calling Him Jesus, which means Savior. Right gladly ought we then to accept and confess Him as the Redeemer, being assured that though sin and eternal death may stare us in the face, He can rescue us from their power. We know also that God delights in such a faith and is honored by it; whereas He will, surely, be angry with those who either do not accept this Savior or seek for another.

These two parts of our text to-day, the circumcision and the name Jesus, are in perfect harmony with each other. The child Jesus is circumcised like any other child; and why? He is without sin, and needs not the circumcision to become a child of God. But it is done that His name might be Jesus, that He might be a Savior who could free us from death and all the evils which are the wages of sin. He was circumcised and put under the Law to fulfill every demand of God upon man, so that if our uncircumcised hearts, and the terrible

disobedience within us, would cause us fear, we need not despair, but trust in Christ, saying: Alas! we are indeed great sinners and have rebelled against God, but yet we will not despair of His mercy, for whatever we have neglected to do, Christ did for us, and the Law cannot accuse Him of having left unfulfilled even its minutest requirement. Hence the law must acquit, and can neither accuse nor condemn me; I am not alone; Christ is with me; in Him I trust; He has paid my debt and imputes to me His innocence and righteousness, in spite of the Law and the devil, who desire to rob me of this consolation. This is the proper application of the circumcision of Christ and of His name.

If the time permitted, we might here cite the sweet consolations contained in the prophets concerning Christ and His kingdom; who should come to redeem, to justify, and to bestow upon us eternal life. All these prophecies the angel comprehends in the one declaration that Christ should be the Savior of the world, and should be called Jesus. The beautiful prediction of Isaiah, chap. 9, 16, is especially applicable here, where the prophet ascribes six names to Christ the Lord, calling Him "Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." All these appellations express the office of this Child who should save us from sin, death and the devil, and help us unto righteousness and eternal life.

Avaunt then pope, miserable Antichrist, with all thy devilish teachings, which would deprive Christ of this name and represent Him as a severe and angry Judge, whom we dare not approach, and from whom no pardon is obtained, unless it be through the intercession of the saints and many

good works! Such a doctrine is a double sin. In the first place, the name of Christ is denied; His office as Jesus, as a Savior, is not acknowledged. Again, this name is transferred to the saints and even to our own works, as if Christ were but His own Savior and delighted in our destruction.

Avaunt thou devil, with thy hellish attempt to make us believe that God is unmerciful, pleased with our despair, and heedless of our misery! Such insinuations are false, for by God's own command the angel names this Child *Jesus*. If this name is appropriate and true, it cannot be the will of God that we should perish, but rather that we should live and be saved.

So let this name be our dearest treasure, our firm reliance in every tribulation, and may we never forget that Christ, the Son of God, is our Lord, Jesus the Savior. In Paradise it was said of Him, "He shall crush the head of the serpent," by which was meant that He would help us against the devil and his forces. May God, the Father of consolation and mercy, increase within our hearts, from day to day, this faith and assurance, and retain us in the same for evermore, through Jesus Christ His Son, our Savior! Amen.

FESTIVAL OF THE EPIPHANY.

MATT. 2, 1-12. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, and thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search diligently for the young Child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshiped Him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

PART FIRST.—THE NARRATIVE.

THE name of the present festival disignates it as the festival of the manifestation of Christ. It is supposed that three manifestations occurred on this day, though not in the same year. The first

was when Christ was made manifest to the wise men from the East by the star; the second, when He was baptized of John in the Jordan; and the third, when He performed His first miracle at Cana in Galilee. Whether these manifestations took place on the same day or not matters little; the events themselves are glorious, especially the one we commemorate to-day, the manifestation of Christ to the wise men of the East. For here the Lord desires to reveal Himself to the Gentiles also, and not alone to the Jews, lest these should say that He had come in secret and unknown to men.

The fact that He should be a descendant of the Jews, not as a mighty King, but in such poverty that He should with difficulty find a place in which He might be born, makes His mission very offensive to the Jews even at the present day. It became necessary, therefore, that God should also make Him manifest to the Gentiles, so that His coming would be gladly heralded and proclaimed everywhere, notwithstanding His poverty and privation. Surely it was a momentous event that the wise men of the East came from their far off land, and made so much ado about this Child at Jerusalem, as did Simeon and Anna in the temple, the angels in the air, and the shepherds at Bethlehem. All are busy with this Child, all sing and speak of Him, so that His fame is gloriously proclaimed, to the end that the Jews should become aware of Him and welcome Him.

The Evangelist relates with care, in our present narrative, how the wise men first came to Jerusalem, there to seek Christ. They thought that since Jerusalem was the capital, and this Child was the King of the Jews, they must surely find Him there.

In this they greatly err; not in the majestic city of Jerusalem, but in the humble village of Bethlehem they find the Child.

Mark well this fact. If we would come to this Child and find Him, we must not be guided by our thoughts or by human reason, but must follow the Word of God, and not turn from it in the least. As soon as we lose sight of the Word we go astray. The Child has indeed a great and glorious name, but yet He is poor and lowly; hence He will not be found amidst the great and pompous rulers at Jerusalem. We must, therefore, follow the example of the wise men, believe the Word of God, and not be led astray by the gaudy show of this world. Whoever wanders from the Word, ignoring the testimony of the Scriptures concerning this Child and judging from external appearances, will certainly be mistaken and not find Christ.

The Papists are an example of this. They disregard the Word, and represent Christ as it pleases their fancy. It by no means pleases them to have Him only as a Savior; hence they add their own good works and devotions, regarding them as equally efficacious with Christ the Savior. Thus they call upon the Virgin Mary to intercede for them with her Son, regarding such prayer and intercession as a Savior. This is all vanity. Whoever gropes for Christ without the Word of God will grasp the devil, who then instills into the heart the thought that Christ is a judge and taskmaster, and that whosoever would appear before Him must have the intercession of the saints. The result is that the Papists have a greater confidence in the Virgin Mary and in the mediation of the saints than in Christ the Lord. This always must ensue

when the Word is neglected. No wonder then that the devil seeks with all his might to seduce us from the Word of God and to direct us to our own thoughts. He knows full well that this would be his gain and our loss.

The chief requisite for us is, therefore, to have implicit confidence in the Scriptures, and to judge divine matters only as they teach us. But it is a very difficult task to convince men of this necessity. It seems almost impossible for many, in regard to the Sacrament, to simply accept the Word; they insist on judging concerning it as would some irrational animal; they see but bread and wine, and straightway decide that the body and blood of Christ are not there, evidently observing merely that which is visible, while they wholly disregard the Word. The husk they regard as of the greatest importance, leaving out of sight the kernel, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The wise men at first indulged in similar thoughts concerning Christ. As soon as it was made manifest to them that the King of the Jews was born, they start directly towards Jerusalem, under the impression that He must, surely, be found there in a magnificent palace and a chamber of gold. And what other thoughts could they have had of a king? Yet such opinions, because they have no Word of God to rest upon, must prove fallacious. They were mistaken; they do not find this Child in Jerusalem, though this was the holy city and residence of God. To find the Child at all they had to obey the Scriptures; these are the proper star and radiant sun which direct us to Christ.

In this the wise men furnish us with an excellent example of a living, powerful faith. Imme-

diately on hearing the words of the prophet Micah concerning Christ, they follow them implicitly and put aside all other expectations which they had entertained. Nor are they offended when turned away from Jerusalem, the city of God, and from His holy temple, and are directed to the manger at Bethlehem. They might have been offended at this, for they had come to find the king of the Jews, and not a beggar. But they simply obey the words of the prophet Micah, disregarding everything else and putting aside all human reasoning in regard to their course.

Such an exhibition of faith may well be set before us as a bright example. I doubt not but that I myself, if I had been in their place, would have gone to the temple under the supposition that because it is the dwelling of God, the home of the priesthood, and the place of devotion, it must of course be the place where this Child should be found, if found at all in this world.

But the plan of God was otherwise. He will not manifest His Son among the great prelates at Jerusalem; just as at the present day the pope, with his multitude, has Him not. God desired utterly to abolish the Jewish priesthood, with its authority and everything pertaining to it, inasmuch as the Jews placed all their confidence in it and boasted of their temple, thinking it sufficient to be priests and Levites and the chosen people of God. Such pride could not be endured of God, and hence it happened that their priesthood, their temple and their ceremonies, of which they were so proud, had to be abolished. But the poor and lowly Bethlehem was to be honored as the first abode of the Son of God on earth.

This, then, is the first part of our narrative today. It teaches the important and necessary lesson that the wise men who sought Christ, did not find the new-born King in Jerusalem, as they had expected. On the contrary, to find Him at all they had to consult the prophet Micah. As soon as they became aware of His prediction they dismiss their own thoughts and, right willingly, leave the holy city Jerusalem, directing their course toward the humble village of Bethlehem. God immediately gives them new comfort again by sending them the star to guide them from the precincts of Jerusalem, with its brilliant light, even to the very door where the little Child was to be found. And they needed such comfort; for there they find naught but poverty and want. Joseph and Mary are strangers there; the Child lies in a manger; scarcely a drop of water is their own.

What a sorry situation for a king! If it had been the intention to mock these people, every thing would have been adapted to the end. But these pious men were not offended; they firmly believe the words of the prophet Micah, and trust in the star which has guided them hither. In spite of the poverty surrounding the Child, they fall upon their knees and worship Him, opening their treasures and giving Him presents. This is the narrative of our Gospel lesson.

In this connection we must remember, above all, the exceedingly great blessing bestowed upon the Gentiles. God calls them also into the kingdom of Christ, and accepts them as His people, although they are not circumcised nor subject to the Law, as were the Jews. In this we, who are of Gentile origin, have a sure declaration that we

need not despair, as if Christ had not come for us, but that we can have Him as our Savior as well as the Jews, though we are not of that people whom He called His own.

The wise men of the East were heathens. They had their own priests and manner of worship, which was not in accordance with the Word of God. They were also uncircumcised. Nevertheless they come, as strange and unknown persons, to the true light, to Christ, and faithfully accept Him. He also accepts them, and receives their adoration and their gifts. This is told us for our consolation, that we should praise God who has, in Christ, established a kingdom upon earth into which we also are called, not on account of our merits, but through the mercy of God, though we were not of His people.

Again, we ought to learn from this narrative how to conduct ourselves towards Christ our Lord; to avoid all offense, to seek Him with our whole heart, to adore Him as our Savior, and to confess Him before the world, even as did the wise men in our text. And, inasmuch as His kingdom upon earth has no outward power and glory, and is persecuted and oppressed on every side by the world and Satan, we ought cheerfully to give of our money and of our possessions to aid in its extension and increase. For, surely, we of the present day are as well able as were the wise men of old to open our treasures for Him. And, furthermore, the Gospel declares Matt. 25, 40: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Therefore, whoever with his money and property assists poor, indigent and forsaken persons, or

contributes liberally to the support of schools and institutions, in which young persons are educated in the Word of God and in the sciences to become useful in the service of the Church, gives in reality his offerings unto Jesus, who was born into this world poor and needy, yea, as a little Child, without even the necessaries of life, and who was persecuted by the tyrant Herod, so that He had to flee from His native land into Egypt.

For this flight and long journey God provided the necessary means by the wise men for the little Child, for Joseph His foster-father, and for the Virgin Mary. Their gifts were undoubtedly valuable, for we read that "they opened their treasures." Because they acknowledged this Child as the Son of God and the eternal King and Savior, they, beyond all doubt, gave Him rich and valuable gifts. Poor and needy Christians, who suffer persecution, ought from this to derive cheer and hope. Ere God will permit a poor Christian to suffer want, or to die of starvation, He would surely furnish assistance and consolation, even if He had to send the benefactor hundreds of miles. This comfort we derive from the example in our Gospel to-day.

PART SECOND.—THE PROPHECY OF MICAH.

Besides the narrative, we have in our Gospel lesson to notice especially the prophecy of Micah, which portrays Christ with inimitable beauty. The prophecy is this: "And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

God declared in this prophecy, as the Jews themselves testify, that the birth of Christ, the Lord, might be expected in Bethlehem. This was a most distinguished honor, making of humble Bethlehem a thousandfold more glorious city than Jerusalem ever was. Though the prophet declares that Bethlehem is small and of low estate before the world, the Evangelist changes this expression and says: "Thou art not the least," inasmuch as God conferred on this little Bethlehem the honor to become the birth-place of His Son. A greater honor than this never happened to any city in the whole world.

The words of the Evangelist with which he praises Bethlehem are most glorious: "For out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel." This is the joyful text which teaches us how to regard Christ, and who He is. Though poor before the world, though a despised and humble person, born in an insignificant hamlet, He is nevertheless "Prince and Governor" over Israel, over the people of God.

The nature of this principality we learned on Christmas from the tidings of the angel, who also called Christ a Lord, not a tyrant who would torment and oppress the people. The prophet intentionally says: "Bethlehem, though thou be little," because he means to say: If this Governor desired to be great and glorious before the world, He would surely have selected another place where He might be born. But He comes without pomp, without violence, without estate, without money, without sword and muskets. He disregards the great and mighty cities, Jerusalem the most holy, Rome the most powerful, and others of the kind,

and chooses for His birth-place the poor and lowly Bethlehem, so that one might judge, from the very place of His birth, what a Governor He would be: poor and mean before the world, but rich in spirit and all heavenly gifts.

Though His title is "Prince and Governor," yet neither the circumstances of His birth, nor the place where it occurred, nor anything that He possessed upon earth, exhibit a royal splendor or a princely glory. Yet He is endowed with majesty and glory far beyond that which the world possesses, and is rich in that, in which the world is poor indeed. He is the Just One, the world is full of sin; He is eternal, the world is transitory; He is Master over the devil, while the world is ruled and goaded by him; He is holy, the world is wicked; He has a merciful God, the world is under divine wrath; He is Lord of the life everlasting, the end of the world is death. Such is the dominion and glory of this Child to be enjoyed by His people. His aim is not to make you great in temporal matters; He Himself is poor and lowly; yet He will rescue from dire necessity, that you may be saved and His name may be glorified. Let no one, then, expect to obtain money, or the goods of this world, from Him. All these might be expected at the hands of the pope and his followers. The pope elevates his creatures to high positions, and distributes among them wealth and domains, as Daniel prophesied. But the sovereignty of this Child manifests itself in the forgiveness of our sins, in our justification and sanctification, in the gift of the Holy Ghost, in our redemption from the bondage of the devil and of death, and finally, in the transfer from this world into heaven.

To this end faith is necessary, and a firm adherence to the Word of God. If we forget the Word and follow our own thoughts in this, we shall lose Christ as a Savior entirely, and will have to regard Him as a stern Judge, who is to be shunned as we would the devil, by whom we are afraid of being seized on account of our wickedness. Our Lord and Savior Christ is no such ruler; He will not torment us, but is "the Governor and Ruler of His people Israel;" He rescues from sin and ensures the mercy of God. His people are the poor, miserable sinners, who fear and tremble on account of their sins, and long to be at peace with God. The prophet describes Him in a most appropriate manner as a prince not of this earth, and yet, though of heaven, full of mercy towards all who believe in Him, whom He shall free from sin, the devil, death and hell. Well may we rejoice in such a Lord.

The scribes quote the prophecy of Micah thus far only, being, in all probability, afraid that this was too much already; for they could see well enough, that it was the determination of Herod to destroy this King of the Jews; hence they are silent as to the remainder of the prediction of Micah. Their intention was to say: We know of no other king of the Jews but Herod. They are satisfied with the mere statement that a prince of the Jews would be born in Bethlehem. But the prophet, though now dead, says more than this when he describes what kind of a ruler and king this Child would be, as to His person, namely: "Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

This declaration of the prophet was not mentioned by the scribes to king Herod, because very

likely they did not comprehend it themselves. And, in fact, it is somewhat difficult, and not so easily understood as the other portion of the prophecy that Christ should be born in Bethlehem and be a Ruler over His people Israel. This can easily be understood, for it states distinctly that He would be of the human race. But the prophet adds: "His going forth is from eternity, before time was;" that is, He is also from eternity, and does not begin to exist at the time of His birth in Bethlehem. In Bethlehem He was born, it is true, and there began His earthly existence; but He had another going forth which is thus stated: "From of old, from everlasting." The words of the prophet dare not be altered. He says: *ex te egredietur*, "of thee shall He come forth." The chief priests and the scribes explain the term "come forth" correctly in this connection as being equivalent to *being born;* just as we say in English He comes from here, or from there, meaning thereby that he was born there. Now these words must have the same meaning when the prophet, immediately afterwards, says: *Cujus egressus ab ante a diebus mundi*, that is: "His going forth is from eternity, before the beginning or the division of time."

If, therefore, we would know whence this Child is, we must attentively listen to the prophet Micah, who says: He is of Bethlehem. But is this all? is He not also from elsewhere? Yes, He was begotten before the world, or the heavens, or the sun and moon were. This cannot be expressed in words, and means that He has no beginning. It was not intended that Herod or the Jews should understand this, nor were they worthy of it.

This, then, is the King and Ruler born in

Bethlehem, true man in reality. Yet He is more than this, for He comes forth and is born before the world began; that is, He is the true eternal God, also true man, of our human nature.

At these facts the world is perfectly amazed. It cannot harmonize these two births, nor can it believe that this Child had His "coming forth," or birth, ere the sun or moon were created. The Jews never could endure this, and many abominable heresies arose against this article of faith. But let us, who have the Word of God, carefully meditate upon it. If Christ was born before the world was, of whom could He be born? Of whom else but of God? Even reason must admit this, if she admits that God created the heavens and the earth. For God, and nothing else, existed before the world was. If this Child, then, was born and went forth ere heaven or earth were in existence, He must be born of God, yea, must be God Himself, for besides God and the creation there is nothing that exists.

A correct understanding of these words of the prophet is of paramount importance. If Christ had been merely human, death would have overcome Him, as it does every human being. The fact that He was born of a virgin would have availed Him nothing, for the creation of Eve by God from a rib is a greater miracle than that a virgin should give birth. A virgin is a female, created for the very purpose of bearing children; hence, neither the devil nor death would have cared a whit for the birth of Christ, though He was born of the Virgin Mary. But the efficacy of His birth consists in the fact that the Virgin Mary brought forth not only a son, but a son who was born before the world was. Thus it happened that the devil, and

death, and the whole realm of hell, were subdued when they foolishly ventured to attack One who had His going forth and birth long before the world was. If it were otherwise, if His going forth had first begun at Bethlehem, surely death would have swallowed Him up as he does you and me, or as he did the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist, and other great saints. But His "goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting;" hence death, who thus far had devoured all men, was put to shame when he approached this Child. Christ was God, He could not sin, nor could He be accused by the Law, and therefore death could not consume nor the devil condemn Him. Yet because He also was born in time, in Bethlehem, and came into this world like any other child, He had to die. But the devil and death were caught in their own trap, for they looked but to His birth at Bethlehem. On account of this going forth, as a child in this world, He suffers Himself to be slain; but as soon as He is buried He exclaims: I am from everlasting, and bursts with force the bonds of sin, death, hell and the grave, which could not hold Him.

This message the prophet brings unto us, and tells us plainly of this Ruler that He has two goings forth, that is, two natures; that He is one Person and not two, and yet in that one Person, at the same time, true God and true man. Hence we must say; Christ is the Son of the Virgin Mary, and from her breasts He drew His nourishment, increasing in body like any other child; but He was also born of the eternal Father, the ever-living God, ere the world began. These two natures, the human and the divine, are so inseparably united

that they constitute one Christ, who is true God and true man. The chief priests did not speak of this to Herod, for they knew nothing of it, nor would that miserable tyrant have been worthy of such an announcement.

If we desire to become well acquainted with this most wonderful birth, we must begin our contemplation of it as it occurred at Bethlehem. The prophet also observes this order when he first speaks of the incarnation of Christ, and dwells upon it more minutely than upon His birth from eternity. For if we wish to know the disposition of God toward us, we must first learn what He did for us here upon earth, and how He manifested Himself among men; after that we will also learn, as the text further teaches us, how this Child is from eternity. Such a revelation will then be free from all terror to us, full of joy and comfort.

Here, however, a most unfortunate obstacle presents itself, since, through idle and impious curiosity, we first direct our attention to the providence of God. The question is asked: If God foreknew all things, why did He not prevent the fall of man? Why does He permit the world to continue in its sinful course unto damnation, if He has the power to convert it and to make it pious? etc. Whoever begins his study of God with such questions will surely come to grief. Lucifer fell because he exalted himself beyond his sphere. This course must be shunned.

If we desire to proceed with safety, and to become advised as to the nature of God, we must begin our investigation here below, as does the prophet when he first looks towards Bethlehem, and then towards heaven, into eternity. Christ

also instructs us in this regard: "I am the way, the truth and the life. Philip, he that has seen me hath seen the Father." John 14. He who refuses this advice and begins with soaring speculations as to how God governs the world, how He punishes and consumes, will fare badly, and that deservedly. The wise man, Proverbs 25, says: "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing."

True wisdom, in learning of this Child, will first direct its course to Bethlehem, there to hear what office He shall have in this world, that He shall be, as Micah says, a Governor, who will redeem His people from sin and death. If this truth is well learned, if the Child in the manger has been found, and seen, and accepted, then it will follow, of itself, that He will be known not merely as the Son of Mary, but also as the Son of God, born of the Father before anything was created. This knowledge will give joy and safety, since through this Child we become the recipients of the mercy of God, whom we otherwise never could regard as a gracious God. This then is the lesson concerning the Child Jesus at Bethlehem.

Here we must also observe the shameful conduct of Herod and the scribes toward this Child. Herod persecutes and the scribes scorn Him. It pertains to the mysterious dealings of God with men to exhibit clearly to them divine texts, so that they preach of them, and sing of them, and converse about them, and yet do not understand one word of them. So here. The scribes explain this text; Herod, following its directions, sends the wise men to Bethlehem, yea, the hypocrite even adds: "Go and search diligently for the young Child; and when ye have found Him, bring

me word again, that I may come and worship Him also." Yet neither Herod nor the scribes understood one word of what they said; they had the shell, but missed the kernel.

In like manner God deals in our day with the wicked, ungrateful Christians: not merely with the Papists, who also have, and read, and know the Word of God, but even with our people, who have the Gospel and speak of it, but do not comprehend one word of it. If they did, they would prove it in their lives. The scribes and Herod take the words of the prophet upon their lips, but think you they, if they understood them, would lazily remain at home, and neither seek nor worship the young Child? That they themselves disregard the sayings of the prophet is a sure sign that they understand nothing of what they preach to other people.

The true believers have a great advantage over the unbelievers in this, that they not only hear these words, but also understand them, deriving much happiness and consolation from them. Thus we are convinced that the world, the pope, the proud citizens and land-holders, though excelling us in wealth, power and honor, are far beneath us in this respect, inasmuch as they do not understand the Word of God, though they may hear and even teach it. Their life shows plainly, as was the case with the hardened Jews, that having ears they hear not, nor do they see with their eyes.

May God in mercy guide us, as He did the wise men of the East, by the star of His holy Word, to find His Son Jesus Christ, and may He keep us in the true faith for ever and ever! Amen.

SECOND SERMON FOR EPIPHANY.

THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST.

MATT. 3, 13–17. Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade Him, saying, I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him: Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered Him. And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and, lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

WE have already learned, my hearers, how the Festival of the Epiphany derived its name from the manifestation of Christ, not only by the star, but also by His baptism in the Jordan. And since this latter manifestation is by far the most important and comforting, it would not be amiss if we would call this day the Festival of the Baptism of Christ and of His manifestation in the Jordan, when He was thirty years of age.

The Evangelist relates this occurrence with much care. We are told that Christ, who thus far had lived in retirement, not yet having entered upon His office, departed from Galilee, coming to the Jordan unto John to be baptized, as did the sinners who confessed their sins and desired forgiveness. At this John was greatly astonished, deeming himself unworthy to baptize Christ. But Jesus said: "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness;" that is: If

poor sinners are to be made righteous and to be saved, thou must baptize me. I became a sinner in behalf of all sinners, and must therefore do what God demands of them, so that they may be made righteous through me.

The Son of God, who had no sin, was baptized, and did what He was not obliged to do, for our consolation and as an example for us. We indeed, poor, miserable and corrupt as we are, not only neglect to do what we ought to do, but are even guilty of open rebellion against God; and to speak of any work of supererogation, on our part, is sheer nonsense. Let us then bear in mind this fact that Christ, the Son of God, who instituted holy Baptism, was Himself baptized, and enjoins that the ordinance of Baptism be retained in the Church, and that all who desire to be saved shall be baptized.

Surely, they who do not appreciate the occurrence in our text, but despise Baptism, or speak of it in an unbecoming manner, must be accursed people whom the devil has polluted and blinded. Why should you hesitate to have yourself or your children baptized, if even the Son of God was baptized? Why should you be so proud, yea, so blind and foolish, as to despise this holy and saving ordinance? Even if Baptism were useless and would benefit us nothing, ought we not to be ready, nevertheless, to be baptized from mere reverence for the Son of God, who also was baptized?

Besides this we learn, from the occurrence before us, what the benefits of Baptism are. We see how God in heaven manifests His mercy at the Baptism of His Son. The heavens, firmly closed before, now open, as the Evangelist relates, and an

aperture is formed through which we can look in and see how, henceforth, there is no barrier between God and us. He, God the Father Himself, is present and says: "This is my beloved Son," etc. Tell me, is not this a most glorious revelation and a sure sign that God is pleased with Baptism, which His beloved Son sanctified with His own body, and that He is present in it?

If we wish to keep a festival of the manifestation of Christ, why should it not be this manifestation, in which God reveals Himself so potently as Father, Son and Holy Ghost? Yea, God the Holy Ghost is also present, and that too in a pleasing shape, as an innocent little dove, which is the most gentle of all birds, without malice and bitterness. This is a token that God will not be angry with us, but will rather assist us, through Christ, to become pious and happy.

Here, then, we have a twofold manifestation: First, of God the Father omnipotent and eternal; secondly, of the Holy Spirit. These manifestations occur at the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan, who was baptized for us, not only to give us an example, but also to exhibit the mercy of God, so that we should have faith in this Baptism and use it, knowing that God is merciful unto us if we follow this example and are baptized, as Christ has ordained.

The Father, however, does not manifest Himself merely by opening the heavens, but He is also heard speaking from heaven with a voice which ere this no one ever heard, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Truly, this is a different sound from that heard on Mount Sinai, where God also spoke from heaven, but in

such a manner that the earth trembled, and the mountains quaked, and all the people were filled with fear of death.

It is no such awful voice of God which we hear now; He speaks full of love, and grace, and mercy. He says, as it were: Turn hither your eyes, ye sons of men, and see what takes place. You observe that John now baptizes a man in the water of the Jordan, just as he baptizes other persons. If you wish to know what manner of man this is, listen to me: "He is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." You need not be afraid of Him. He stands there naked like other men, without sword or any temporal power. Nor need you be afraid of me; for I do not now come with thunder, with lightning, nor with the sound of trumpets, as I came on Mount Sinai, but with a friendly token and with an emblem of grace.

All this is done in the most affectionate manner. The Son of God, innocent and wholly without sin, stands in the Jordan and is baptized; the Holy Spirit like a dove comes upon Him in the presence of John, and God the Father speaks with us very affectionately, telling us that He does not send to us an apostle, nor a prophet, nor an angel, but His only Son, in whom He is well pleased. By this we are directed to have all confidence in the Son, for God Himself condescends to announce to us all, at the time of His Baptism, that He is His well-beloved Son, as though He should say: If you desire to have a gracious Father, your wish can now be realized; only cling to my Son whom I love, and I will love you also, for His sake, if you hear His voice. Hear Him, therefore, and do His bidding. As to His person He had no

need of Baptism, just as little as of circumcision; He is without sin. The Baptism of John I indeed ordained on account of sinners, so that all who would confess their sins, and repent of them, and desire to be freed from them, might come to this Baptism in the sure faith that I would be merciful unto them. Why then is my Son baptized who is no sinner? Not for His own, but for your sake, who are sinners. He took upon Himself your sins, and of these He desires to be freed, so that you might be saved and your sins no longer stand on record against you.

The Evangelist relates all this very beautifully when he says: Christ answered John, who opposed Him, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." That is: The righteousness of the whole world depends upon this Baptism. Since I have taken upon me and bear the sins of the world, I must, in order to redeem the world, do what God demands of sinners, namely, to be baptized of thee. Do not, therefore, prevent this labor of love, but as I willingly present myself for Baptism, in behalf of a sinful world, so do thou cheerfully assist, and baptize me, that the wrath of God may be appeased and sin subdued. With this thy Father Everlasting is pleased; He speaks with us from heaven, directing us to His Son in these words: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." This He said for our consolation, that we might appropriate this Baptism and fully believe that the wrath of God is now appeased, that our sin is removed through the Baptism of Christ, and that God will henceforth be merciful unto us for the sake of His Son.

This voice from heaven ought to be listened to

with the most profound attention, and this glorious manifestation, in which God opened the heavens and sent down His Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, ought to be treasured up in our hearts, and should always be present before our eyes. Yea, we ought ever to hear that gladsome voice: Here you have Him, my Son, my heart, my richest treasure, my all, even myself. And the Son—what of Him? He appears like a poor, needy sinner, and comes to be baptized of John in the Jordan. Thus we see God manifesting Himself, most graciously and affectionately, in a threefold manner, in correspondence with the three persons of the Godhead; and this for the purpose of enabling every one to understand how God would no longer chide nor be angry with those who would accept Christ as the Lord, relying upon His word and work. God here declares that He will be well pleased with all that the Son desires, says and does.

O, how happy we would be if we listened to the voice of Christ and would rely upon it with our whole heart! Accursed and miserable people are they who heed not this voice, but go on as though it had not spoken. The wretched minions of the pope even blaspheme and rebel against this voice, when they assert that the Father is well pleased not only with Christ, but also with the monks, the priests, the mass, with pilgrimages and the like. Surely, whoever thinks upon this as he should, would much prefer death to living with such blasphemous and miserable people, who do not honor nor prize the mercy and kindness of God any more than these Papists do.

Therefore, beloved children, heed this voice while you hear it. But a few years ago we knew

naught of it; the heavens were closed and we were compelled, by the devil, to hear the monks preach of purgatory, of apparitions, and other lies. Now, thanks be unto God, the pure doctrine is again proclaimed, and we need but to hear it and to heed it. The world will not do this; but we ought, upon this day, to give heartfelt thanks to God for His great kindness, for the manifestation of His heart and treasure, of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, of His Son in Baptism in the Jordan, and of Himself in a voice so glorious and so pleasing.

He who refuses to accept with his whole heart the Son, who stands in the Jordan to be baptized like a sinner, and upon whom the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove, is indeed worthy of damnation; for he refuses to hear the voice of the Father which resounds in his immediate presence. No doubt, a host of holy angels was also there, for where the Father, Son and Holy Spirit manifest themselves, there the heavenly multitude must also be.

Let us, therefore, learn to appreciate highly this festival. The manifestation of Christ to the wise men from the East, by means of a star, is indeed wonderful; but this manifestation is far more important; for These are the true Kings, three in number, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, manifesting themselves together at the Baptism of Christ. If He had so willed it this revelation might have occurred in the wilderness, or in the temple at Jerusalem, but it was to be at His Baptism, for our instruction, that we should ever prize Baptism, not otherwise than as real and new-created saints.

The blasphemous Anabaptists, at the present

day, teach that Baptism is mere water. May the devil take such calumniations. For a dog, or a swine, or a cow, it would be well enough to judge thus, since these have but the taste of water; a Christian, however, will not judge according to the senses, but according to the Word. Here is not mere water, but also the word and power of God; as we see at the Baptism of Christ, where God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are present. It is not water alone, but that water in which the Son of God laves, over which the Holy Spirit hovers, and of which God the Father speaks. Baptism is not mere water, but water full of grace and a laver of regeneration, ordained and sanctified of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Accordingly Christ ordained that Baptism should be administered in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

God the Son, with His Body, God the Holy Ghost with His Presence, and God the Father with His Word sanctify Baptism, and are really present, whenever a child is baptized among us. Since, therefore, the entire Godhead is connected with it, Baptism is not mere water, and no invention of men; for although man baptizes he does not do it in his name, but in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, who are there in the act, otherwise Baptism would be of no avail.

Who dares to despise this ordinance, with which the Father, Son and Holy Ghost unite? Who would venture to call such water mere water? Do we not plainly see what spices God has thrown into this water? If we mix sugar with water it is no longer mere water, but becomes claret, or something similar: why then should we endeavor to

separate the Word from the water and say it is mere water, as if neither the Word of God nor He Himself were united with it? Such a supposition is false; God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are in and with the baptismal water, as Christ, at the Jordan, was in the water, the Holy Ghost over it, and God the Father revealing Himself in the voice from heaven.

Baptism is therefore a peculiar water which taketh away death and every evil, helping us into heaven and to a life everlasting. It is a precious, sweet water, full of aroma, a healing power, for God is united with it. God is a God of life, and therefore this water which He has blessed must be the true *aqua vitæ*, which conquers death and hell and brings eternal life.

It behooves us, indeed, to learn the importance of baptism and to value it highly. We do not baptize in the name of an angel, or of a human being, but in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; or, as it is expressed in the Acts of of the Apostles, in the name of Jesus, which is the same. Whoever confesses Jesus Christ, must also confess God the Father and the Holy Ghost, for Christ distinctly says that He proceedeth from the Father, and that He will send the Holy Spirit. If we then in truth confess Christ, we will also believe that the Son exists not alone, but in communion with the Father and the Holy Ghost, though the Father and the Holy Spirit may not be mentioned by name.

We must therefore be exceedingly careful not to separate in Holy Baptism the Word from the water wherewith we baptize, but we must confess and believe that God so instituted this ordinance

that for Christ's sake we are thereby, through the Holy Ghost, cleansed from our sins and rescued from eternal death. Or why else should the Holy Trinity be present with it? If we then firmly believe that our little children are born in sin, let us be quick to baptize them, that God may accomplish His work in them, according to His declaration that we must be born again of water and the Spirit, and that he who believes and is baptized shall be saved. If we know our infants to be under the dominion of death, let us not be slow to wash them, according to the command of Christ, in this bath of Baptism, that death may be overcome. And thou, my hearer, who art baptized, remember well that thy Baptism is unto thee a seal and guarantée of the forgiveness of thy sins and of the promise of eternal life through Christ. Yea, Baptism has a divine power to destroy death and to purify from sin; wherefore we are baptized with such hope into the death of Christ.

Baptism with its blessings and promises remains efficacious, though we may have fallen into sin and guilt, if we return from our error and do not continue in our wickedness. It will never do to seek forgiveness of sins and yet persistently to abide in them; we must repent and in true faith say: My Lord God has assured me of all mercy, when I was baptized in the Baptism of His Son, and now I will turn back to this grace of God, being convinced that my sins are removed, not, indeed, for my own sake or that of any other creature, but solely for Christ's sake; who has instituted and ordained Baptism, and who was Himself baptized, as though He had been a sinner.

Tell me, my hearers, is not this manifestation

far more glorious than that of the star in the East? The latter was enjoyed by only a few heathens, whilst of the former all Christians are partakers. Therefore this festival ought to be known as that of the Baptism of Christ; then we would have an appropriate occasion to preach of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism against all sectarians and against the devil, who allows us, right willingly, the enjoyment of all things, except of the treasure which has real value for us, of which he is ever busy to deprive us, as he successfully did in the Church of the pope, in which nothing, or but very little, of this manifestation in the Jordan was ever preached.

Learn well, then, and heed with care that upon this day God manifested Himself with a glorious declaration concerning His Son, which assures us that whatever He says or does in regard to us, or we in regard to Him, shall be pleasing unto the Father. Whoever is obedient unto the Son and keeps His Word, will be a beloved child of God, and will have the Holy Spirit, who also manifested Himself at this Baptism in so beautiful, cheering and pleasing a manner. The voice of the Father also is heard speaking in the most winsome way: Here I give unto you not an angel, nor a prophet, nor an apostle, but My own Son and Myself. Could God have manifested Himself in any other way more gloriously? And how could we serve Him better and please Him more than by accepting His Son, our Savior, whom we ought to hear and obey? They who will not listen to Christ unto salvation, fully deserve to follow the apostles of the devil unto eternal damnation. May God bestow upon us the grace of faith in Christ, and retain us in the same unto life everlasting! Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

LUKE, 2, 41–52. Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the Child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and His mother knew not of it. But they, supposing Him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found Him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking Him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. And when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said unto Him: Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing. And He said unto them: How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which He spake unto them. And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them; but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

THIS Gospel is very expressive, especially if we closely consider how we lose this Child Jesus from our hearts. This consideration we will, however, pass by for the present, and dwell upon that which the common man can understand most fully and easily, and which is of the greatest benefit for him.

On the festival of Epiphany you heard that it was so called on account of the manifestation of Christ, which occurred that the new-born Babe

might not be unknown, but revealed; for if we had not heard of His birth, it would have been of no avail. Hence it is that during these days we preach also upon other Gospel lessons which refer to the manifestation of Christ. Thus we use the one relating to Christ's Baptism in the Jordan by John, and also the one which speaks of His first miracle, performed at the marriage at Cana, where He manifested Himself as Lord over all. These manifestations took place not only that Jesus should be known among men, but also that He might be acknowledged and praised as One who is more than human, born to have dominion over everything; and also that we should recognize Him as our Savior, upon whom we can depend in every distress and anxiety, and from whom we can obtain our help.

The Gospel for this day serves the same purpose. In it we have another manifestation of Christ. We learn from it how Jesus was not a common, but a peculiar Child, inasmuch as He secretly absents Himself from His parents and oversteps that obedience which other children, according to the command of God, owe to their parents. The Evangelist tells us how this occurred. His parents had to go every year to Jerusalem at the Feast of the Passover, as was required of all the Jews. They took with them the Child Jesus, and when they returned, He tarried behind in Jerusalem. The parents at first do not take especial notice of this; perhaps, because they knew that He often went with their friends. Christ did not spend His youth as a prodigy or in exclusiveness, but conducted Himself like other children; He played with His companions at times; but yet, as

the text records, He increased in wisdom and favor with God and man more than other children. His mother Mary, and Joseph, relying on this and supposing Him to be with their company, permit Him to tarry behind. But towards evening, when they had reached the first station for the night, they begin to inquire for Him. When they do not find Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances, they were greatly disturbed; for the Child had been especially entrusted to the mother, and Joseph had been ordered to foster Him with care. Mary, being His mother, was filled with great sorrow and much fear, when He was missing. We may well suppose that they did not sleep, nor eat, nor rest on account of their lamentation, but that they went back those four miles yet by night. The Child however was lost.

Consider what they must have thought and suffered! The first day they find Him not; on the next day they repeat their search, but in vain. On the third day, and no sooner, they find Him. During those three nights they probably slept but little, and were affrighted with many sad and anxious thoughts. Mary must have been especially troubled, and no doubt she thought: God has taken thy Son from thee; He will not have thee any longer as the mother, because thou didst not attend to Him as thou shouldst have done. Joseph also must have come to the conclusion: I am no longer wanted of God as the foster-parent of this Child, since I was negligent in the performance of my duties towards Him, and did not guard the only Child.

Here we must learn that the Child Jesus, our Lord and God, desires to make manifest that His

subordination to His mother was not one of necessity, nor of duty merely, but of His own choice, and as an example. He was not only His mother's Son, but also her God and Lord. Hence He occasionally did not observe towards His mother the relation of Son, as we shall hear next Sunday, when He says to her: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" Thus in our text; He declares by His conduct that He is not obliged to be obedient to father and mother, but that He has another Father who is greater and more to be obeyed than either Mary or Joseph. He says: "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" With these words He means to say: I am indeed your Son, yet I am far more the Son of my Father who is in heaven.

Christ manifests Himself thus on our account that we might know Him aright, and believe Him to be not only true man, but also true God. When the mother asks Him: "Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us?" He defends Himself and says: I did not disobey you, nor did I disregard your will, as you seem to think. He claims to have acted aright and to deserve no reprimand of His mother. Mary and Joseph had to learn that their sorrow and anxiety were wrong. They should have remembered what the angels, the shepherds, the old man Simeon, and others had spoken concerning this Child, then would they have known that, although He tarried behind, it was no act of disobedience, since He owed greater obedience to His Father in heaven than to His mother upon earth.

The import of this example of the Child Jesus is to show us how we, on account of our ignorance and blindness, are ever inclined to obey man rather

than God. Whenever the question must be answered: Shall we disobey God or our parents and rulers? we must learn of Christ to say: I must be about my Father's business; otherwise I will gladly obey father and mother, rulers and governors, masters and matrons. In the case referred to, however, we must say: Dear father, dear mother, I have another Father, and His will must be done rather than yours. Mary and Joseph had forgotten this; hence they were reminded of it and instructed at this time.

All this occurred for our benefit. It is our custom oftentimes, when called to serve and obey God, to refuse, and to excuse ourselves by referring to the command of God that we should be obedient to our temporal authorities. This we hear and see at the present day. The adversaries of the Gospel have learned of us to be obedient to the powers that be, and now they make a great ado about this duty, and say: We know well that it is not wrong, according to the Scriptures, to receive the Sacrament under bread and wine, but we must obey the wishes of our superiors. Father and mother and the rulers of our country forbid it, therefore we dare not do it.

But who is the authority to be obeyed? Is it the ruler of the land? Is it father or mother? We answer yes. But have you no authority over you beside these? Whom do you consider Him to be who says in the first commandment: "I am the Lord thy God?" Whenever He declares Himself pleased with anything, or commands this or that, ought we not to say with Christ, in spite of princes, kings, emperors, rulers, father and mother: *Oportet me esse in his, quae sunt patris mei*, "I must

be about my Father's business?" Yea, God's Word and will must have precedence; when we have complied with that, then we ought to do what father and mother, what our superiors demand, else we would surely hitch the wagon before the horses.

As Christ was made manifest by the star and at the Jordan for our consolation, as our Savior, as we have already and repeatedly heard, so He manifests Himself again in our Gospel to-day for our instruction, that we might learn, in all matters pertaining to God, to disregard every one else, whether parents or rulers, or whoever it may be. For in these things we look to another master, to a higher authority, to God; Him we must obey, and do whatever He desires. When we have accomplished His will, then we may heed the will of our parents and superiors, if they demand nothing contrary to our obedience towards God; for this, as has been stated, comes first and must be fulfilled.

I will not mention here the great tribulation, felt by but few, which surely follows the separation from Christ, but will confine myself, in all simplicity, to the Child Jesus, who manifests Himself to-day in His authority over others, so that He even compels His mother to follow Him, instead of following her as might be expected of a child. This happened that the words of the angel might be fulfilled: "He shall be called the Son of the Highest." Mary was now reminded of these words, that she might not forget them. This manifestation is in perfect harmony with the others, and we plainly learn from it that Christ was more than mere man, as the shepherds and

Simeon had already testified concerning Him. The difference between Him and other children He wished to be observed, although He occasionally mingled with them and took part in their plays.

The Evangelist describes in a happy manner what Christ did in the temple. We observe that He did not inquire as to the price of grain, nor how the stock-market ranged, nor what the latest fashions were, but He conversed with the doctors concerning the Word of God; He listened to their explanations of the Scriptures and corrected them, yet in a manner becoming a youth. Let us suppose that they had under consideration the fifth commandment, and that they explained it as having reference merely to actual murders with the hand: we can then imagine how Jesus interposed and told the doctors that this commandment meant much more; that it also forbade anger, wrath, evil thoughts and injurious reports concerning others; that it demanded a friendly disposition towards our fellow men, as He afterwards explains in the Sermon on the Mount.

In such a way as this He manifested Himself here, to the great astonishment of the scribes and doctors; for that a child so young should ask how this or that had to be understood, was something new to them, and undoubtedly caused them to wonder whence came the wisdom and knowledge of this Youth. We must presume that He did not permit any erroneous explanation to pass uncorrected, and beyond all doubt He asked the doctors what they thought of the Messiah, whence He should come, and what His office would be. Of course He preserved through the entire conversa-

tion the proper decorum, making upon all the impression that He had obtained His knowledge either from His mother or from some other aged and pious people. Every one who heard Him must have come to the conclusion that this Lad was destined, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for great achievements. It is not unusual that at His age indications are given in children of their character and future development.

This is, briefly, the narrative of the manifestation of the Child Jesus, before His mother and Joseph, of His superiority over other children. He acts without their permission and claims impunity for so doing.

St. Luke concludes the story of our text by telling us: "And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." This Child then, who on account of His Father in heaven removed Himself for a time from the authority of His mother, now became, of His own free will, again subject unto her and Joseph; for we are distinctly told by St. Luke: "He was subject unto them." This He did voluntarily, although He was God and the Lord of Mary and of Joseph. In obedience to His Father in heaven He was subject unto them, and also from true love towards His parents, setting for all men an example of dutiful and humble obedience. I doubt not that the Child Jesus did everything in the house of His parents that He was ordered to do, that He went for wood and chips, that He brought in provisions and water, and that He did all this right willingly.

Let our youths mark well this example; let them ever remember that our Lord and Savior, when He was a Child upon earth, did gladly per-

form the labor imposed upon Him, even if it was small and very insignificant. Let them learn to do likewise, and to imitate this obedience and humility. This is pleasing to God, for He requires in the fourth commandment that all children shall be devoted and obedient to their parents.

The monks in olden times often in their cloisters asked themselves this question: What did Christ do during His youth? Hence they fabricated a book with the title: *De infantia Christi*, which contains many unbecoming drolleries. It is related of a certain bishop, who also desired to know all about the infancy of Christ, that he dreamt of seeing a carpenter hewing a beam, with a little boy at his side who collected chips, and that shortly after a virgin in a blue dress, and carrying a dish, approached, calling the workman and the lad to their meal. The bishop further dreamt that he, overcome with a desire to see what the party was eating, crept secretly up to them, placing himself behind the door, that he then saw how the mother prepared for the child a mess in a little pan, after which the child said: But, mother, what shall that man there behind the door eat? At this the bishop became frightened and awoke. We will not condemn this fiction; it seems to be the intention of its author to teach how needless it is to endeavor to know, as did the story-telling monks, what peculiar deeds Christ performed when a Child, since He undoubtedly lived with His parents in child-like obedience, conducting Himself as any other pious child would have done.

If we desire to know what Christ did in His youth let us listen to the Evangelist in our text. He tells us: "He was subject unto them," that is,

He obeyed father and mother without complaint. Children and servants, when reading this account of Christ's obedience, ought to be heartily ashamed of themselves, because they are so often disrespectful and disobedient to their parents and employers. It will not do for us to say, as many often do: If I knew what the Child Jesus did I would imitate Him. The monks say: St. Francis did thus, and thus he clothed himself, at this time he arose, &c., I will follow his example. But does any one know how Christ lived? I answer: This reasoning is false. We are told by the Evangelist: "He was subject unto them." In these words we have a description of the infancy and youth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What is meant by the words: "He was subject unto them?" Simply that He did such deeds as the fourth commandment contemplates. He assisted His parents in their daily work; He performed all kinds of errands for them, as it became a dutiful child, and did it right willingly. In view of this, all pious and good children should exclaim and say: Alas, we are not worthy of this great honor to imitate the Child Jesus and to do what He did. He gathered chips for His parents, and performed other menial labors, as ordered; what well-behaved children we would be if we followed His example and were quick to do the bidding of our parents, no matter how trifling the task assigned us may be. Thus we see that no volumes narrating the doings of Christ while a Child are needed; He performed His filial duties, such as they are in every well regulated family. He did not run into a cloister, nor did He become a monk, but He went down with them into Nazareth, where He was

among other people, where He exercised obedience towards father and mother, and where He suffered Himself to be brought up with care as other children are.

The uncouth and whimsical monks write that Jesus, when a Child, made little birds and other small animals. Such deeds, however, do not pertain to the obedience demanded by the fourth commandment, nor did His parents require them. Filial obedience includes other tasks which must be performed in a household and which, as we often see, are not willingly rendered. When the Evangelist speaks of His being subject to His parents, he has reference to the fulfillment of such tasks. We ought ever to remember that the Child Jesus blessed such works, and we should be glad of the opportunity to do them. But the world will not be instructed; hence people deserted such works and obedience and, in the devil's name, ran into monasteries, to St. James and other retreats. Every one wished to excel in his works our Lord and Savior, forgetting that these domestic labors, and the obedience of children to parents, were sanctified by the Holy One, the Son of God, who, while a Child on earth, carried fuel, made fire, went after water, and performed other similar household duties, so that we are unworthy to imitate Him.

Hence we ought to learn this story well and deem ourselves happy in the exercise of such obedience and works, for we see that Christ Himself performed them with readiness. Such works are a thousand times better and holier than those which the monks accomplish in their cloisters. The Child Jesus went to no cloister, but remained at

home working for Joseph and His mother. In this He set us an example that we might learn how valuable, how noble, and how blessed these labors are which even Christ our Lord performed.

These truths then are contained in our Gospel to-day: Christ is Lord over all, yet, as an example for us, He was obedient to father and mother, that we might learn, first of all, to obey God, and then, in the second place, to be faithfully subject to our parents and superiors. If we perform both of these duties we can say that we have acted aright, and prosperity and great blessing will be our reward. May Christ our Lord grant us this. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

JOHN 2, 1–11. And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: and both Jesus was called, and His disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto Him: They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And He saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was, (but the servants which drew the water knew,) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him.

THIS is the first miracle which the Lord Jesus performed upon earth, thereby manifesting His glory unto His disciples, that they, as John distinctly relates, might thus learn to recognize Him as the Son of God and as the true Messiah; for He does here what no other human being can do: He changes that which is created, and makes wine from water. Such a deed can only be performed by God who is Lord over all creation; men cannot do it.

This miracle chiefly serves to teach us who Christ the Lord is, so that with full confidence we may in time of need and trouble hasten to Him to seek from Him help and blessing, which we shall surely obtain at the proper time. This is the chief lesson of our Gospel to-day.

But inasmuch as we derive this same truth and comfort from all the miracles of Christ, we will on this occasion dwell principally upon the fact that this miracle was done at a marriage; and we do this to the end that the doctrine concerning matrimony may be well known among Christians. This is a matter of great importance.

The consideration of this subject becomes very necessary since the Papists, as you are aware, look with contempt upon the state of matrimony and highly extol perpetual virginity. We also know, beyond all dispute, how God has rewarded and punished the unmarried clergy, so that they have not only lost all desire and inclination for matrimony, but that the pure love for woman has become nearly extinct in their hearts. Yea, it is astonishing that this wicked, sodomitical crowd in the convents and monasteries of the pope has not long since, on account of the lewdness which followed from their contempt of a married life, been burned with infernal fire and engulfed in the abyss of hell.

This Gospel serves to arouse in us other thoughts in regard to matrimony than are entertained by the pope, so that we do not shun nor hate it. We see how the Lord performed His first miracle at a marriage in Cana of Galilee, in a poor, insignificant hamlet; and that too when He was thirty years of age, when He had been bap-

tized by John, and when He had already begun to preach. This act of Christ is in conflict with the holiness and wisdom of the pope; for according to his notion it was unbecoming for Christ thus to attend a marriage after He had already entered His office, and had been called and ordained of the Holy Ghost to the preaching of the Gospel.

We find here a most excellent and useful example, not merely against the false practice of the papacy which, thank God, is for us dead and gone, but also against all sects which deem it a mark of great holiness to avoid marriage and other civil duties, and to run into deserts and solitudes where one can live with more ease and more quietness than in the state of matrimony; for it will happen in married life that difficulties arise with wife, children, servants and wicked neighbors. It is true, indeed, if we leave out of sight the divine institution of marriage and the blessings which God connected with it, it becomes a most undesirable and burdensome state. Over against this the monks considered their mode of life holy and perfect, but in reality it was, as everybody knows, an easy, lazy, voluptuous, epicurean way of living. They had everything they wished. They deserted the poor in the world, who had to toil wearily for their daily bread, without even having the consolation that their condition in life was pleasing to God.

Although this example of our Lord, given in the Gospel to-day, is so valuable and appropriate, it is not heeded by these miserable people. It was read in the churches, but no one understood it clearly enough to ask: Why did Christ go to a marriage, if it is so advantageous to go into the

desert or cloister? If it is wrong to live in the world and to be married, how comes it that Christ honored a marriage with His presence and glorious miracle?

If this life in solitude and in convents had been arranged for one or two weeks, or for a few years, there might have been some sense in it; but to forswear matrimony forever was a most flagrant contempt of its institution, a desertion of a sacred duty for the enjoyment of ease and quietness entirely opposed to God's command and ordinance.

Learn from this how God, our Lord, Himself honors the fourth commandment. Where there is a marriage there will be, as a consequence, a family, father and mother, wife and child, man-servant and maid-servant, fields, cattle, trades, and labor for daily bread. Christ desires to teach us that such a state of life is one which is blessed, happy, and ordained of God, so that no one should despise, but rather all should esteem and honor it, even as did Christ.

This Gospel is, therefore, an impressive sermon for our young people, since they can learn from it how to serve God at home, and how needless it is to undertake some extraordinary feat, as the besmeared and shorn monkish rabble does. The man of the house who governs his family with piety, who rears his children and servants in the fear and knowledge of God, and in all that is decent and honorable, lives in a blessed and holy state. Thus also the woman who attends to the wants of her children, who gives them meat and drink, who washes and combs them, needs no other employment more pleasing in the sight of God. The servants in the house, man or maid,

serve God, if they are obedient to their employers; yea, if they believe in Christ, God is better pleased with them when they sweep the room or clean shoes than with all the praying and fasting and masses, and all the other so-called meritorious works of the monks.

Let no one, therefore, regard with contempt the domestic life, which is the result of matrimony, nor condemn it, as did the senseless monks, who looked upon marriage as a worldly and unhappy state. Christ Himself is present on a marriage occasion, and thereby blessed the act and everything connected with domestic life. God also manifested by the fourth commandment, which is the most important of the second table, His approval of it, yea, He demands of men that they should honor and respect the family relations.

If thou art a father or a mother, rejoice in thy condition and gladly fulfill its duties, knowing that this is the will and order of God. If thou art a servant, whether male or female, remember that God is pleased with thy services. God Himself instituted and blessed matrimony, and now honors the marriage festival by His own presence and by the performance of His first miracle, after He had already begun to preach the Gospel. Christ could have excused Himself from being present by saying: I cannot come, I must attend to my calling of preaching; the transaction to which I am invited is of a worldly kind, but my office deals with spiritual matters, and hence I must refuse to come. But He who is the Bishop over all does not permit His office and especial calling to interfere with His attendance at the

wedding, with which domestic life begins, but by His presence honors and sanctions this deed, so that every one ought now to say: Since my God has so ordained it that I should serve in the state of matrimony and in the performance of domestic duties, whether it be as a servant, as a child, as a husband or as a wife, I will do this right willingly and serve my God with gladness in this condition of life. For I see that Jesus Christ, my Lord and God, the Highest of all preachers, comes to the marriage, thereby not only blessing this ordinance, but also giving the assurance of its continuance and support.

This truth had to be brought to light again in opposition to the pope and the heretics, but it must also be applied again in our day against fanatical factions, such as the Anabaptists and others, who declare that marriage and domestic ties are burdens; that troubles with faithless servants never end; that quarrels with neighbors will arise; that wife and children and relatives may meet with accidents; and that amidst the continual disturbance and perplexities of married life there is no time nor opportunity to think of God or to serve Him. Therefore, to avoid all these experiences and to escape these burdens, in the name of the devil, they run into convents and secluded spots, and seek ease in the various clerical orders.

Let us understand this, that we may be able to ward off these frantic fellows with their teachings. Here we distinctly see how Christ, when He had come to the marriage, did not separate groom and bride, but suffered them to be joined together, yea, He even assisted that the wedding feast might take its proper course. By this beauti-

ful example He taught how becoming it is to perform diligently the household duties; and again how, if privation ever should come, we need not be frightened, but should see to it that we have faith in Christ; then will we find help from Him who made wine from water, and who so blessed our condition in life that we will ever have enough, though it may seem, now and then, as if we would have to suffer want.

Our daily experience teaches this. If man and wife live together in piety, the Lord their God will abundantly bless their industry, so that they earn much more than they imagine. I venture to say that a pious and industrious mechanic would scarcely undertake to support himself and family with the money which he earns in one year, if that amount were counted out to him in a heap at the beginning of the year. But there is a secret blessing of God connected with all this: we earn a penny to-day and one to-morrow, and economize accordingly, so that the blessing of God is experienced in this quiet economy. In this way Christ, our Lord, still continues to change water into wine in my house and in thine, if we are but faithful and pious. By His blessing He causes one loaf of bread to supply the place of ten, and one coat to wear longer than otherwise three. If we would but open our eyes, our experience would compel us to exclaim: Lord, in Thee do we trust in the performance of our domestic labors; they also are of Thy institution; Thou didst honor and bless them and still continuest to bless them. Therefore will I cherish my calling and be industrious in it.

The Evangelist mentions particularly that the mother of Jesus was also there. Perhaps she acted

as mother of the bride, for she concerns herself much about the marriage affairs, especially when the wine gives out. There seems to have been nothing wanting at this wedding feast but bread and wine. Surely, if matrimony were not pleasing in the sight of God, Jesus would have told His mother: Woman, thou art too highly honored, and too glorious, to be here and to busy thyself with these marriage affairs; thou, who alone among women art a virgin and at the same time the mother of the Son of God, shouldst be engaged in the churches and in spiritual services only. And, in truth, it is astonishing that the blessed mother of Jesus should perform such menial work and serve as a handmaid at this wedding with cooking and attending to the wants of the guests. All this happened however, as I have repeatedly stated, that we should learn to highly value the state of matrimony, which was so greatly honored by Christ and the Virgin Mary.

Yet this example was of no effect among the Papists, nor is it at all regarded by the disobedient and faithless servants. No one will believe that it is serving God to perform diligently and well the domestic duties, else would the servants and the children zealously and merrily do their work in the house, determined to make a paradise of it by gladly doing the will of their superiors. They should say: No matter if I am now and then reprimanded, since I well know that my calling and position is also a service of my God. Christ my Savior went to a marriage, and exalted it by His presence and the services of His mother Mary; why then should I not esteem this estate and be

ready to labor and even to suffer in it? Alas, such servants are scarce; the greater number, though they hear and know this story, are not convinced of the fact that they can serve God in their station at home much better than if they were monks and nuns in the convents. No one takes this lesson to heart nor believes it. The result is that all labor is performed with reluctance and aversion, nor can blessings and success accompany such forced fulfillment of duties. Ought not every maid-servant who is God-fearing and pious, when ordered to cook, and the like, be cheered by the example of the mother of Christ, so that she will say: My duties are like those which the Virgin Mary performed at the marriage, where she gave heed that everything was well done, and even applied herself to the work. Though my task is but an inferior one, and insignificant, yet I will execute it to the honor of God, who has ordered such obedience, and I know that my labor thus performed will be pleasing to Him. The world may ridicule such compliance with the demands of duty, but he who wishes to be a Christian will regard it as necessary and as a proper service of God. Thus can all servants in the house, whether male or female, take pleasure in the work of their several stations; yea, they can truly exclaim: We praise Thee, O God, for the labor which Thou hast assigned to us, inasmuch as we are thus enabled to serve Thee much better than do the monks and nuns who have no divine command. We however have the command of God in the fourth commandment to honor father and mother, and to serve our masters with zeal and fidelity in the maintenance

of their household affairs; hence we will do our work with alacrity and love.

They who are thus content in their position will do their work with cheerfulness and pleasure, and have an Eden upon earth, while God and His holy angels will rejoice at it. Likewise will the master and the mistress of such servants richly reward them for their faithful and willing services. Trustworthy and pious servants are highly valued everywhere.

It is a fact, however, that people do not act thus, but prefer to go into cloisters, under the supposition that by so doing they can serve God better than if they would faithfully perform domestic duties. Since the fourth commandment has been thus violated by so many who despise the state of matrimony, God justly lets them become monks and nuns, in which condition they torture themselves in utter disobedience of God's will and regulation; for He never sent them there, nor did He ordain any such life as that. We should therefore heed the example in our Gospel, and learn to perform willingly our duties in that station of life which God especially ordained and honored as the fountain and source of all other estates upon earth.

Matrimony and the family relation sustain kings and rulers, not merely because they give birth to these, but because the population and the necessary means for the support of government are dependent upon the continuance of marriage. The householder has to produce the means wherewith all ranks and conditions of men, from the highest to the lowest, are supported.

It then becomes our duty, willingly and obediently, to respect and promote this estate, so that

every married person, and every servant, can sincerely say: Lord, thou hast thus ordained it; Thou wast present at the marriage in Cana, and Thy mother, the blessed among women, did upon that occasion what we have to do at home and in the family. Yes, if she did not deem herself above such work, but even undertook it of her own free will, why should we poor mortals, who are certainly not better than the Virgin Mary, be too proud to perform household labor?

Let all pious and God-fearing married people learn from this that God will not forsake them with His blessing, but that He will be with them and ward off all want as He did here. Still, it must be remembered that married life brings with it many difficulties, and that days of adversity will come. But if Christ is invited to the marriage, that is, if man and wife are pious, and if they faithfully and prayerfully cast their cares upon Jesus, they will be happy and blessed. This lesson you must learn to-day, that you may ever remain willingly in that station of life which is connected with matrimony, nor be seduced from the performance of your duties by those who falsely say that marriage and house-keeping are of the world only, and in conflict with a true service of God, which can take place only when all domestic pleasures are renounced.

Such notions are entertained in our day by the Anabaptists. Deluded people! They desert wife and child, and boast that the suffering which they thus bring upon themselves augments their holiness. Ah, it is all villainy and hypocrisy; for the burdens which are self-imposed give no pain. They shun domestic duties and cares, which are

indeed often painful and trying. These rogues are afraid of difficulties, and run away from them, that they may lead a life of indolence and pleasure. A great penance this, indeed! No, true self-denial can be practiced best by a willing obedience to God's command, which binds us to our family, to our government, to our neighbors, and to our servants; so that we have our hands more than full with the exercise of Christian charity and patience. We must hear and see and endure many things which are very unpleasant; yet we dare not run away, but must say: We will patiently endure all this, for we know that, after all, the blessing of God rests upon a married life. Yes, let us thank God that He instituted for us this happy and blessed state; and if troubles arise He will be our Helper, as He proved Himself to be at the marriage in Cana.

Let us heed the instructions of the Gospel today, and may God give us grace to retain them, so that we may perform the duties of our calling with Christian zeal and alacrity. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

MATT. 8, 1–13. When He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshiped Him, saying, Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth His hand, and touched him saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto Him a centurion, beseeching Him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour.

OUR Gospel to-day relates two occurrences: The cleansing of the leper, and the healing of the servant of the centurion. Christ performed these miracles soon after the delivery of the sermon on the mount, for it was thus ordered that He

should first preach, then confirm His preaching by miracles, that every one who heard Him might know the truthfulness of His teachings, and might believe them readily.

Thanks be to God that we have no longer any need of miracles; the Gospel doctrine has been established by signs and wonders sufficient, so that no one has any cause to doubt them. It is however not enough that those who have received the Gospel profess to be Christians; they must also prove by their actions and life that they have true faith. St. Paul says: The kingdom of God is not merely in words, but in power. Where faith and work correspond, the result will be much fruit. On the other hand it will cause great offence if the life is wicked and does not agree with the doctrine professed.

The two miracles in our text are, however, more than mere witnesses of the truth which had been taught; they are rather examples of faith and of love; for reason even must conclude that these deeds are far beyond all human ability, and will be compelled to say with Nicodemus, John 3: "No man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with Him." We observe at the first glance the compassionate and friendly heart of our Lord and Savior; it needs but one prayer and He is ready to help where all earthly power is of no avail. This evinces His kindness and grace towards the poor, the distressed and the suffering; else He would have done as we are prone to do when out of humor and displeased, turning away with unkind words those who ask a favor. Not so Christ. Scarcely has the leper made known his request when Christ touches him and declares His

willingness to grant his prayer. He immediately cleanses him of his disease.

Such kindness must prompt us in all our troubles to come unto Him for help, and to place our entire confidence in Him. But more than this: it ought to prompt us to exercise similar kindness and love towards our fellow-men, with the sole intention to do the will of God and to promote the welfare of our neighbor. Christ seeks neither honor nor reward in rendering assistance; He has but this in view, that man may be relieved from woe and suffering, that the glory of God may be enhanced and His will accomplished.

We do not serve God if we are kind to others merely because we expect a similar return from them. Such a spirit would be selfish. If we wish to serve God and our brother aright, we must not look to our own interest, but only to the existing want. We must bear in mind that it is God's will and command to assist our fellow-man in his time of need, though we are aware that we gain not even a farthing by it, or perhaps naught but ingratitude; as Christ Himself experienced when He cleansed ten lepers, nine of whom forgot to thank Him, and only one returned with a grateful heart. Christ foresaw this base ingratitude, and yet He helps them when they ask, committing the rest to God in heaven.

Thus also the miracle performed for the centurion proves the love of Christ. He desires to glorify by His deed the love and mercy of God, and to relieve the suffering ones from their pain. This is love, true and pure, having the Word and will of God in view, and nothing else.

The faith which the leper manifests is also

beautiful beyond measure. According to the law he was forbidden to appear among men, nor dared he to speak with others; yet he ventured to come unto Christ without fear, falling upon his knees with the prayer: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." In this he expresses his conviction that Christ will be merciful beyond all doubt, and also that He possesses the ability to help where all human power fails. His confidence was not shaken by the fact that Christ passed by in humble array, destitute of all outward glory and splendor. Another praiseworthy trait he manifests: he is not impudent with his petition, but leaves the decision entirely to Christ. If He should deem it best not to fulfill the request, if it should be the will of God, and for his own benefit, that the disease should remain upon him, he is ready to bear the pain and to suffer the agony still longer.

This is not only true faith, but also the proper way to pray. He who believes aright will also pray aright, while he who lacks sure faith will not know how to pray. Prayer must rest upon faith; the heart must be convinced that He is ready to help us from all our misery.

Especially must our faith be firm in those matters that pertain to the glory of God and to our souls' salvation: in the forgiveness of sins, the redemption from the power of the devil and of death, the promise that God will pour out His Holy Spirit into our hearts and preserve us in His Word, so that no tribulation can overwhelm us, and that our faith and love may increase every day, &c. Such truths pertain especially to the glory of God and our salvation, wherefore the heart, when it prays, must never doubt that God is willing to be-

stow upon us these favors; for of these we stand in need, and He has vouchsafed them unto us in His Word.

It would be wrong to pray for these blessings as the leper prays: "Lord if Thou wilt," forgive me my sins, save, &c.; for we ought not to doubt that it is God's will to do this, since He has in His Word revealed unto us His will in this respect. He desires our salvation, and gave His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice upon the cross for the whole world, that all who accept Him and believe in Him might be saved.

Why then does the leper add to his petition these words: "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean?" We must here distinguish between the objects of prayer. If we pray for that which pertains to the glory of God and to our salvation, our prayer must be unconditional. The will of God is evident as to these; He desires His glory and our salvation. But it is otherwise when we come to pray for temporal matters. We may be poor, sick, distressed, despised, as all Christians are, and yet be saved. Because such temporal privations do not condition our salvation, but may rather profit us, it behooves us, when we pray for their removal, to do it in the faith that God can and will help; but we should leave it entirely to Him whether He will do so or not. If granting help promotes neither the glory of God nor our salvation, we ought to be willing to bear our afflictions still longer.

If we wish to pray aright, as regards our temporal necessities, we must have an implicit confidence in the power of God, without prescribing to

Him the time or the manner of His help. Frequently we lack the knowledge of that which we need, and know not how to pray for it, as St. Paul says, Rom. 8. God, however, knows what will redound to His honor and to our salvation. Consequently we must subject our will unto the will of God, in no wise doubting that He will surely hear us if our prayer will be conducive to His glory and to our salvation.

The example of the leper is worthy of imitation. We must learn to pray with an unwavering heart, trusting in the willingness of God to alleviate our misery in the manner which is best for us. This we must firmly believe, while we at the same time humbly exclaim: Lord, Thou knowest the proper time and place, in Thee we confide, do unto us according to Thy good will. The leper does not doubt that Christ can help him, nor does he question His willingness, else he would not have importuned Him as he did; but at the same time he admits that it is not for him to say when and how the remedy should be applied.

Such a faith and submission is well pleasing to Christ, wherefore He helps the poor man in the self-same hour and place, yea, beyond all expectation.

In this connection we are reminded of the beautiful sayings of the prophets, Psalm 27, 14: "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." Psalm 130, 5. 6: "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His Word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning." Habakkuk 2: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end

it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." All the Gospel narratives agree in this that help will be granted in the end, though it may tarry for a long time. God does thus intentionally; He tarries for a time with His assistance, that He might then bestow it upon us in rich abundance, as St. Paul writes, Eph. 3.

But why does the Lord send the leper, after he is cleansed, to the priest, there to offer the gift that Moses commanded? We might answer that the Lord desired to exhibit therein an example of benignity. He might have disregarded the priests and the functions which God had assigned them; but this He did not do, that we should learn not to interfere with the rights and privileges of others.

But the principal reason was that Christ wished to make the miracle public, even before His enemies. The priest, by accepting the offering of the leper now cleansed, and by giving him a certificate as to his cure, really testified that Christ is the true Messiah, in whom he and all others should believe. The prophets had foretold such miracles of Christ when He should come into the world. When Jesus orders the leper to show himself to the priest, and "to offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them," He means to say: They will have to admit that thou art cleansed and entirely cured, but their unbelief will prevent them from accepting me as their Messiah, for which perverse obstinacy they shall surely be punished. This testimony, however, shall strengthen the faith of others, that they may accept me.

The pope has endeavored to use this command as a proof of his auricular confession. Since sin

may be likened to leprosy, it was argued that the sinner, to be freed from his guilt, must present himself to the priest. Such reasoning is folly. What do the laws of the Jews concerning leprosy concern us! We have no such priests, and even if we had, it is certain that the lepers were never cleansed by the priests, and that these merely testified as to the fact of the cure.

How then can this establish auricular confession, which is claimed as necessary for the forgiveness of sins, when the lepers had to exhibit to the priest, with their offering, a purified and cleansed body, and not their leprosy?

But we need not spend our time in the confutation of such groundless assumptions; we have upon other occasions sufficiently considered auricular confession. We know of but one necessary confession, when the heart discloses itself before God and confesses its sins. This is a true confession, and does not prevaricate in the manner of auricular and lip-confessions. Even this confession of the heart in the presence of God, does not justify; how then could auricular confession do this? True faith in Christ Jesus our Lord, and full confidence in His Word which assures forgiveness of sins to those who believe in Him, this justifies and nothing else. So much in relation to the first example.

The *other miracle*, performed upon the sick servant of the centurion, is also a demonstration of the purity and truthfulness and of the authority of the teaching of Christ. It proves Him to be the true Messiah and Christ. But it also exhibits a bright example of firm and implicit faith; yea, the Lord Himself declares that the centurion mani-

fests a faith, the like of which He had not found in Israel.

The centurion is a heathen, nevertheless he sends to Christ in the full conviction that He will not refuse to hear his petition, but that Jesus will help him in his affliction, though he is not of the house of Israel; and in this his faith is manifest. Had it been otherwise he would not, as St. Luke relates, have sent the elders of the Jews to Christ to intercede for him. The sending of these is a proof of the centurion's hope that his prayer would be heard.

Intimately connected with this confidence and faith was a child-like humility. He deems himself unworthy to go in person to Christ, and therefore sends the elders of the synagogue with his request. And when he hears of the approach of Christ, he sends other messengers with the prayer that the Lord should not trouble Himself to come into his house, since he was not worthy of such a visit. He states his belief that Jesus could fulfill his desire simply through His Word, without being personally present. The centurion is so fully convinced of this power of Christ that he adduces his own authority as an example. He says: "For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say unto this man, Go, and he goeth: and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." He means to say: I am but a man, yet my commands are thus respected; how much more effective must then Thy Word be, O Lord. This was not only a living faith, but also a glorious manifestation of the same. It would be well for us if we had a similar faith in

Christ, who dwelleth with us in His Word so abundantly, though we do not see His person.

The example of this man is excellent, because he depends entirely upon the Word of Christ. He believes that the Lord will grant his request, and that it can be done simply by a word. Upon this word he depends with confidence and joy; he feels assured that if this word is once spoken, his servant will arise in health and vigor.

Let us, who have the Word, learn to imitate the centurion. In it we have the comfortable assurance that God is merciful in Christ, and that through faith in Him we shall obtain the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The great want with us is the faithful heart which the centurion possesses. He is sure that with the Word all other blessings will come. We doubt this, and hence do not appreciate the Word as we should, and turn to other things; yet, the Word is omnipotent and true, as the centurion believed and confessed. Whatever it promises to us we can rely upon with certainty.

This faith of the centurion is so much the more praiseworthy because he was a heathen, and had none of the promises and honors of which the Jews, as the people of God, could boast. It is indeed a peculiarity of faith to make humble hearts, which are not proud nor self-righteous; it satisfies them fully to have the mercy and favor of God.

Let us therefore be comforted whenever we remember and must confess that we are poor, miserable sinners, without any worthiness or merit of our own. We need not despair, if we but firmly cling to the promises of God and have faith in His mercy. Such an assurance is pleasing to God, and

He requires it of us. If we deserved His gracious promises, and were not entirely unworthy of them, we could no longer speak of the grace and mercy of God. The centurion could boast of no claims upon God, as did the Jews; he therefore does not come himself, but sends those whom he supposes to have some claim upon the mercy of Christ; still he continues to believe that the Lord, on account of His great kindness and grace, will surely help him.

True faith and true humility are equally free from presumption and from despair. It is the will of God that we should fear Him with an humble spirit, but also without despair; that we should trust in His grace with an unwavering faith, as the 147. Psalm says: "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy."

The Jews greatly erred when they imagined that God loved and favored them on account of their piety and good works. They became proud and bold, and indifferent towards their Lord. Hence it is that Christ pronounced such a severe sentence upon them when He says: "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Their pride and recklessness came from their wicked unbelief. As little as it avails the Jews to be Abraham's seed, so little does it interfere with the welfare of the Gentiles not to be of the seed of Abraham, if they but have firm faith in Christ, and an earnest longing after the mercy and grace

of God. It is the pleasure of God to leave those who are filled to themselves, while He satisfies those who are hungry, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Before God there is neither Jew nor Gentile: "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." This should prompt us to become humble, and to rely entirely on divine grace.

Thus we see how this Gospel teaches of love, and more especially of faith. We learn the nature of faith, how it humbly relies entirely upon the Word and compassion of God. Whoever has such faith will enjoy its fruits, as did the leper and the centurion. Where faith in the mercy and love of God rules the heart, there will He also be with His help and blessings. God grant us His Holy Spirit, to awaken in our hearts such confidence and faith in Christ Jesus our Lord, unto our eternal salvation. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

MATT. 8, 23–27. And when He was entered into a ship, His disciples followed Him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but He was asleep. And His disciples came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And He saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!

THE narrative in our Gospel to-day does not teach us what we should do, since it does not at all treat of works and deeds, but it instructs us what we should believe and how we should be comforted in every affliction and adversity. Hence we have here one of those glorious sermons on faith which people think they understand enough, as if it were a small and common matter.

We will divide our subject into three parts, and speak first of affliction and sorrows; then, in the second place, of Christ our Lord and faith in Him, which is the one and only sure consolation and help; finally, we will consider the fruits and benefits which come from such afflictions and faith. These considerations will teach us that the Evangelist here in few words relates to us an incident so comfortable that we would not wish to do without it.

First, then, we observe that the Lord Jesus enters into a ship with His disciples. There was no storm then; the weather was fair and the sea

calm, else would the disciples not have entered the ship. But as soon as Christ had embarked with His disciples and they had set sail, a great tempest arose upon the sea, and the ship was covered with the waves as though it would be wrecked.

From this occurrence we can deduce the general statement: Thus it will ever be; when Christ enters the ship it will not remain calm, but a storm and tempest must follow. It will certainly happen as Christ Himself says, Luke 11, 21: "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils."

Thus we see in the Gospel how everything is quiet and at rest until Christ begins with His preaching and His miracles, then arises the tumult on every side. The Pharisees, the Scribes, and the High Priests conspire to kill Christ, and the devil rages with all his might. Such a state of affairs was predicted by Christ, Matt. 10: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."

This must prompt us to consider well whether we are prepared to be Christians or not. If we are resolved to be Christians we must be ready to meet this tempest and this strife; it cannot be otherwise. St. Paul says: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

For the same reason Sirach, chap. 2, admonishes all the believers and says: "My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation, set thy heart aright and constantly endure, and make not haste in time of trouble." That is: Go thy way, if thou dost not desire to serve God, the devil will not trouble thee until the end. Again, if thou art resolved to be a Christian and to serve God, thou must be resigned to what will happen; the tempests and the persecutions will not be wanting. Take courage, therefore, and be not frightened when they come. Fear not such tempests; fear God and keep His Word though the world rages. Set not out to gain the favor of the world, and hence never yield on account of its spite and opposition. This lesson we learn from the statement of the Evangelist, that the tempest arose as soon as Christ had entered the ship and had set sail upon the sea.

Further, we learn from this how to answer the wicked and vile traducers, who revile the Gospel and say: Formerly, before this doctrine was preached, everything was quiet, and plenty prevailed; now there are misfortunes innumerable, parties, wars, seditions, famine, the infidels, and every other affliction. Ask these miserable slanderers of the Gospel, if you wish to shut their mouths: have you never read that as soon as Christ had entered the ship, and had set sail, a tempest arose?

This, however, was not the fault of Christ, but of the devil, His enemy, who cannot endure Him. Thus the devil still opposes the Gospel, and for the purpose of destroying its influence he causes all manner of disturbances and misery upon earth.

Alas, the blind and hardened people will not perceive nor understand this. They look but to the present trouble and want, and denounce the Gospel as its cause. The benefits derived from the knowledge of God, the forgiveness of sins and salvation, people will not see nor realize.

Not otherwise did the ungrateful, stubborn and wayward Jews act when they were in the desert. While yet in Egypt and oppressed by severe labor, they called upon God to release them from their bondage and woe, promising to be pious. But what happened? After God had freed them from their misery, and when they were in the desert, they forgot it all. They remembered not what they had suffered in Egypt, and thought no more of all their sorrows there, but only of the flesh-pots and the bread in Egypt. They were skilled in the popish method of praising what was good and pleasing, but remaining silent about all their former misery. Hence it happened, when God gave them bread from heaven, that they despised it as inferior to the meat of Egypt. Our nature is so corrupt by sin that we are never satisfied with the providence of God. Surely, great and divine patience alone can tolerate this behavior, and permit such wicked people to live.

If we had been asked, twenty years ago, what we preferred: a year of famine, or the perpetual oppression and exaction of the monks and priests, as it was at that time, I am sure we all would have gladly chosen famine, to escape the heavy, intolerable, and endless torment of the priesthood. For what one year would refuse to yield the other might bring forth; but of this hope we were devoid in regard to that spiritual oppression which seemed

eternal and which was augmented from day to day. All such grief and tribulation we have forgotten, and praise the quietude of former days, regardless of the precipice over which we were suspended, while during that peaceful period we were deprived not only of money and estate, but also of our body and soul by means of false doctrine and idolatry. Besides this, other misfortunes occurred. There were then also, as now, famine, pestilence, war and other torments. Why then blame the Gospel if these plagues occur in our times?

The greatest treasure is the Word of God, and He could not have bestowed upon us a blessing more valuable than His Gospel, whereby we are freed from sin and death. Think then how God must be displeased with the horrible blasphemy which imputes to this Gospel every misfortune at present prevailing! What punishment will have to follow such an accusation? Surely this, that God will close the eyes and hearts of these blasphemers to such an extent that they will be totally unable to observe the glorious deeds of God, that they will become hardened against divine love and mercy, as were the Jews, so that they in the end cannot but resist God, and become the devil's own. Such an end awaits them beyond all doubt, and they fully deserve it. We must suffer wrong and much enmity even where the Gospel is not in vogue; thus also had Rome to suffer war and other evils, long before the Gospel was brought to light.

The devil and our ingratitude are to blame for all this, and not the Gospel. It is the plan of Satan to crush the Gospel, and for this purpose he instigates all kinds of evils; yea, the mightier the

Gospel proves itself the more he raves and rages. If we are so very ungrateful for such a great gift, and refuse to accept and use it, nay, even persecute and hate it, God will certainly visit upon us various punishments and afflictions to stay this ungrateful course.

This is the first lesson that we must learn if we wish to be Christians, to prepare for the tempests which will arise. If we are not willing to do this, we will find out to our great sorrow, when death approaches, what a great mistake we have made.

The second lesson teaches us the nature of true faith, how it braves the battle and the storm and comes to Christ, relying upon His help. This fact we must well remember. Our opponents, the Papists, consider faith an inferior matter, whilst they value highly the free will of man. I wish they too were in the ship, that they might learn of what avail our free will is in the midst of dangers and afflictions.

The apostles are an example of this in our text. However weak their faith may have been, had it not been for this faith, they would have had to despair in spite of all their free will, and the sea would have devoured them. But they have a remedy in their faith, little as it was, as Christ Himself declares: "O ye of little faith;" they despair not, but hasten to arouse Christ and to obtain His help.

If little faith can accomplish this, what ought not a strong faith to perform? The example of the leper and of the centurion in out last sermon tells us. Hence we say: The free will of man, and his natural ability, are naught; they do not stand the

test, nor are they prepared for the storms and battles of life. All that we, from our own resources, can do for ourselves, in such times of trial, is to cry aloud for help, and to wish ourselves a hundred miles away. Our free will cannot comfort the heart, but makes it more and more disconsolate and tremulous, so that every falling leaf will terrify it.

Faith, however, though but little, will not turn away, nor will it be affrighted, as we see in the example of the disciples. Instant death threatened them; the billows were hurled with might from every side against the little boat until it was covered with water. Who would not tremble in such danger and in the presence of death? But faith, no matter how weak it may be, dares to withstand danger, as formerly little David withstood Goliath, nor does it fear sin or death, for it seeks help where it can be found; it comes to Christ and appeals to Him with the earnest cry: "Lord, save us: we perish."

Faith begets a sure hope of help, though destruction is imminent; it speaks with the psalmist: "I believed, therefore have I spoken." One thing is sure: No one can pray unless he has faith. Man's free will cannot do it, since it sees but the present danger and misery; but Him who can rescue from danger and death it does not see, so that man with his free will, and on account of it, must die in his sins. Faith, however small and weak, trusts in Christ and obtains help from Him.

If the faith of the disciples had been strong and firm like that of the prophet Jonah, who was in the whale's belly until the third day, they would have said to the sea and waves: Beat against us

as you may, your forces are not strong enough to overthrow our boat, for Christ our Lord is on board with us; and even if you succeed, an arch of refuge will arise above us in the middle of the sea, whereon we can sit secure from drowning. We have a God who is able to protect us, not only upon the sea, but also beneath it waters.

Faith deals not merely with what is visible and present, as does the free will; hence it does not tremble nor despond, but looks forward to something better. He who has faith takes courage, even in the very jaws of death; he clings to the comfort that there must be some escape, as did the disciples, though of little faith. Faith is therefore no small matter, nor a common art; it is a divine power which does not originate in our free will, but is produced in us by the Holy Ghost through the Word of God.

Of this our opponents, the Papists, have no knowledge, else they would not so violently attack us when we preach: Faith alone justifies; that is, faith alone finds consolation when sin, death, and hell threaten to destroy us. No wonder that they are bold and proud as long as the sea is calm and the weather fair, but discouraged and hopeless as soon as the storm arises and adversities come. They have no faith—nothing but their weak, comfortless, free will, which forgets God and His Word, and is utterly helpless.

The peculiar misfortune in the incident of our Gospel, as it seemed, was that Christ, in the midst of the imminent danger, was in a deep, quiet sleep, caused perhaps by weariness from the labors of the day during which He had preached much, or by passing the night in prayer and in enduring afflic-

tion. For I think our Lord was much troubled during the night by the vexations of the devil, as He laments in the 89. Psalm: *Pauper sum ego, et in laboribus a juventute mea.* "I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer Thy terrors I am distracted." Hence He was but seldom glad, being weighed down with burdensome thoughts, and full of lamentation and sorrow, as we read in the same Psalm: "For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave." Nevertheless this sleep of Christ, real and natural as it was, had to serve, as did all His actions, to awaken faith in His disciples.

Christ still pursues this course towards His people; it seems, oftentimes, as though He had forgotten them entirely, just as He there, calmly and quietly sleeping in the boat, was unmindful of the storm and cared not for the disciples or the ship. But He is with them in the ship, although He sleepeth.

Our Lord permits tribulations to dash against us, as upon the sea He permitted the waves to fall upon the ship. He suffers the world and the devil to rage against the Christians, so that it seems, as it does in our times, as if all were lost. The pope and his rabble oppose with great enmity the Gospel; he stirs up the mighty potentates against us. The devil, on the other hand, sets the infidels upon us. Thus we sit in our ship with sea and wind unfavorable, while the Lord shows no signs of help; He sleeps in the ship. We must, however, arouse ourselves and takes courage in the belief that we are not lost, for the Lord is with us in the boat. If He seems to know us not, let us not seem as

though we knew Him not, but let us firmly adhere to the faith that He can calm the sea, no matter how it tosses and rages.

The same faith we should apply *in privatis tentationibus*, in our own private dangers and afflictions. When the devil comes and holds before our eyes our sins, and threatens us with the wrath of God and eternal condemnation, then let us say with faith in Christ: Our Lord is not far from us, but He sleeps. Therefore we must repair to Him in earnest prayer and awaken Him, as the disciples do. These deem their safety more urgent than the slumber of the Lord, and think: Surely, we must have Christ awake or else we perish; hence they come and cease not with their cry, until they have aroused Him from His sleep. Let us learn to do likewise. If we enter the ship with Christ, tempests will arise, and He will be asleep, that we may deeply feel the burden of trial. Otherwise, if He would not sleep and would immediately calm the storm, we would never know what a true Christian is, and might even think that we were successful by our own skill. Trials, on the other hand, strengthen faith, so that we must confess: No human power could have helped us here; God and His Word alone could do it.

In the occurrence in our Gospel we find not only these beautiful and comfortable lessons, but we also see Christ as a real, natural man, who has body and soul, and who is in need of food and drink, of sleep and other requirements of our nature, so far as they are free from sin. Thus we see how Christ is like unto us, and that we must not commit the error of the Manicheans, who regard Him as a Spirit merely, and not as a real, true man.

But while the natural sleep of Jesus is a sure sign of His real, human nature, He at the same time proves Himself also the true omnipotent God, inasmuch as He with one word calms the wind and the sea. This was a mightier deed than man could do. To quiet the tempest with a word requires divine power.

Hence we ought to dwell upon this occurrence with delight, since it exhibits to us Christ as true God and true man in one person. Wherefore He is able to help us in every distress and danger, if we but come to Him for assistance. If we must now and then suffer something, what matters it? The wicked must also endure misery and sorrow, and have yet, in addition, an accusing conscience, while in the end eternal damnation awaits them.

Finally, the third lesson teaches us the fruit of such faith. Others also who witness this wonderful deed are astonished, become converted and exclaim: "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!" These same persons had thus far, perhaps, regarded Christ merely as a human being, and did not know nor believe that He could rescue from death, and that men should seek to obtain help from Him. Now they learn to comprehend that He is the mightiest and best Helper, affording aid where all human help fails.

Thus it will always be: The greater and the heavier afflictions are, the greater will also be their fruits and benefits. The world now persecutes us most violently so that we often think that all is lost, that the waves and the tempest will surely overwhelm and destroy us. But let us not despair; let us firmly adhere to the Word and

faith. We may be assured that a glorious and happy result will follow, at which we will rejoice and be glad. The bitter hatred of the pope and the Turk against the Church causes us pain and anguish like that of a woman in travail, but even this will, under God, be productive of good to us. So we as individuals, when we are afflicted, ought ever to be assured that such visitations have their benefits.

Thus it is apparent that this Gospel is full of consolation and rich instruction. We are taught as Christians to begin our journey in life with Jesus, and to be prepared to meet with Him the tempests and the threatening billows. When adversity is upon us, we must in faith hold fast to His Word, convinced that at the proper time we shall be rescued from danger and tribulation, yea, that we shall even derive some benefit from it. Hence we should rather wish to encounter this trial, that we may learn by our own experience what force there is in the Word and in faith. Who then would desire to escape the cross, when such a certain help and reward is at hand? True, our old Adam is much displeased with such trials; they are bitter to him, and he would much rather avoid them; hence it is necessary to study such examples often and well, to read and to hear the Word of God diligently, so that when difficulties and tribulations come, we may be ready to meet them. May we then with earnest prayer seek help and safety of Christ, who is with us on the voyage, though He may sleep and seem to have forgotten us.

May our Heavenly Father, for Christ's sake, grant us this through His Holy Spirit. Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

MATT. 13, 24–30. Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.

THIS Gospel is apparently plain and easy to be understood, for the Lord Himself tells us what is meant by the field, by the good seed and by the tares. Nevertheless the learned do not agree in the explanation of this parable, wherefore it is of great importance to ascertain its true meaning.

Some interpret the tares as heresies, and conclude from this Gospel that secular governments have no right to punish heretics, since we read here that they are not to be rooted out. Augustine himself confesses to have held this view, until he was forced by examples and irrefutable arguments to recede from this opinion. Some again make no distinction between secular authorities and the servants of this householder, and come to the conclusion, by interpreting the tares to mean public

offenses, that Christian governments ought not to execute capital punishment. Others again, such as the pope and his tribe, regardless of the fact that the Lord forbids the rooting out of the tares, are not satisfied therewith, but since they hold the doctrine of the holy Gospel to be tares and condemn it, fume and rage against it with murder and all manner of cruel tyranny.

Since there are so many interpretations we will first endeavor to find the correct one, and then we will express our opinion in regard to the question, what ought to be done with the heretics.

Christ does not speak here especially of the heretics, but represents in this parable the kingdom of God, that is, the entire Christian Church as she now is upon earth, and as she will remain until the end of time. The Christian Church is as a field planted with good seed, but during the night comes the devil and secretly sows the tares. Hence the good seed and the tares will ever grow together in the Church; the good and the evil will intermingle; nor can this be prevented in this world. In the future world it will be otherwise; then will the good be separated from the wicked; for the Lord says, that at the harvest time His servants, the reapers, will perform this task according to His commands.

We see therefore how this Gospel condemns the Donatists, Novatians, Anabaptists, and other heretics, who zealously endeavored to establish a church free from all blemishes and composed of perfect saints. If therefore any Christian happened, through weakness, to commit some wrong, they excommunicated him on the spot, and considered him no longer as a brother. This procedure

was in direct conflict with the demands of Christ, who desires that the sinner should be brought to repentance, and that to this end the ministers of the Church should seek, with all care and diligence, to assist the people to mend their ways and to repent of their sins.

In evidence of this we have many examples. David was guilty of a great and horrible crime, but when he repented and asked for a pardon he obtained forgiveness. Peter also fell deeply into sin, but is restored to grace, because he acknowledged his wrong and asked for mercy with many burning tears. Shortly before his fall the Lord told him: "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not," &c.; and Matt. 18, when Peter asked whether it would be enough seven times to forgive his brother who sinned against him, Christ answered: "I say not unto thee until seven times: but, until seventy times seven.

These instances show plainly how the Christians upon earth will not be so perfect as not occasionally to waver and to fall. Whoever then attempts to organize a church in which there shall be no sin nor weakness, must condemn and excommunicate all such feeble Christians, and even the strong, since there is none who will not sometimes err.

The Christian Church contains not only hypocrites, and such as are Christians only in name, but also true Christians who are yet weak and who have to combat continually the old Adam within them, by whom they are sometimes brought to a fall. If it were not thus the Christians would have no need of these petitions in the Lord's Prayer, which they must daily pray: "Forgive us our tres-

passes as we forgive those who trespass against us;" and again: "Lead us not into temptation." This last petition clearly shows that even believing Christians can at all times fall into temptation. If we would expel all such, and refuse to acknowledge them as Christians, we would soon have no Christian Church at all, and would have to look in vain for Christians.

But this is not the proper course to pursue. True Christians, as we have stated, are yet liable to be weak and fail in manifold ways; but through repentance and faith in Christ they arise again from their sins when they have fallen. Among such Christians who, though yet in weakness, are the good seed, we find the baneful tares, the false Christians, who pride themselves in the name and boast of being the good ground. We have to permit and suffer this, since we know that the tares cannot be gathered up, nor can the Church be entirely cleansed of them.

Christ furthermore teaches us whence these tares come, and why it is that in the Church, where the good seed is sown, where the Word of God is preached in its purity, there are nevertheless so many tares, so many hypocrites and false Christians. This is taught us that we might be cautioned against the offense which the world takes on this account, so that it even declares: The preaching of the Gospel produces no good, &c. We must be careful to avoid all such wrong and wicked thoughts in which the world indulges.

God be praised that we have again the pure Gospel, and that we are prepared to prove to our adversaries that their doctrine is false and unfounded! Yet there are among us also tares in

plenty, so that much offense is given; avarice, usury, lasciviousness, revelling, profane swearing, lying and cheating predominate even more than formerly under the pope. Such scandalous conduct causes the Gospel and its ministers many aspersions, and it is a common saying: People would be better without this doctrine.

In the parable Christ exculpates both the doctrine and its teachers when He says, that in the congregation, which has the pure doctrine and which is the good field, there are also many tares and lawless fellows. The doctrine is not to blame for this, for that is pure and effective; nor is it the fault of the preachers, who would surely much prefer to have the people more virtuous and pious, and who labor earnestly to this end; but the enemy, the devil, is the mischief-maker; he, as a malicious neighbor might do, goes forth by night, when others unsuspectingly sleep, and sows the tares amidst the wheat. He takes possession of the hearts so that they do not heed the Word, becoming more and more estranged from it day by day, being led or driven by the devil, according to his own pleasure, from sin to sin and from shame to shame.

It is then a hellish falsehood, and a horrible blasphemy, to accuse Christ and His Gospel of producing this demoralization, when in fact the devil is the sole cause of it! And yet, such blasphemy is prevalent to-day throughout the world. No matter what misfortune may visit the land, men will denounce the Gospel, the pure doctrine and the good seed, as if these had caused it all. And yet every one must know that the good seed, from its very nature, can produce nothing but good

fruit; where this is not the result the blame must be attached to the bad ground, to the sterile and accursed soil.

Let therefore every Christian, particularly every minister of the Gospel, learn from this parable to desist from the vain endeavor to have the Church composed of perfect saints. The devil prevents this by scattering his seed over the field; and he does this so clandestinely that it is not observed until the blades spring forth and grow. The apostles Paul, John and others experienced this; when they thought they had about them pious Christians and faithful co-laborers in the Gospel, they often found them to be its most violent and dangerous enemies, and consummate hypocrites. Our experience is the same; many whom we judged to be pious and honest, while we feel secure and expect no misfortune, do us the greatest harm and give the most offense.

Our only consolation under such circumstances is the declaration of Christ that it would happen thus. St. John consoles himself, in his epistle, on account of such evils when he says: "They went out from us, but they were not of us." It frequently happens that what is expected to terminate most favorably, results most disastrously. Angels often turn into devils. One of the apostles betrayed Christ. Christians become heretics. The people of God degenerated into a set of villians who nailed Christ to the cross. Thus it happens and not otherwise. If we therefore see the tares springing up among the wheat, we must not be dismayed nor relinquish our office, but must steadily labor on, admonishing the people also not to be offended. The tares will and can grow, not only in

a wretched soil, but also amidst the wheat upon a fertile field.

The devil, as the Gospel tells us, is not content with desert and sterile places, but longs to rule in heaven. He is a gormand and loves to eat choice morsels in comely places; he intrudes his filthy presence in clean places, and thinks his stench sweet as musk and balsam. He would dwell among the roses, that is, he desires to be in the Church, and there to rule. This we cannot prevent, and it must be endured until that day when all will be changed.

Though it pains severely to be compelled to endure the wicked, and even to suffer at their hands, yet we may console ourselves with the knowledge that we are not to blame for this. Nor will God permit it to harm us; if we but firmly adhere to the Word, eternal blessings will be the result. The wicked, on the contrary, who cause all this offense, and who refuse to live as Christians, will find their punishment in this world and in eternity, as the Lord declares: "All they that do iniquity shall be cast into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." This issue should be kept in mind by the true Christians, and the offense which they cannot prevent ought not to disconcert them. If the multitude will persist in wrong-doing, so let it be. We will thank God that there are some who accept and obey His Word and amend their lives.

This then is the sum and substance of the Gospel to-day. Even among the true Christians where there is the good seed, the Word of God, in a good

and fruitful field, there will always be wicked men and unbelievers, nor should any one presume to change this state of affairs. For Christ says that the evil shall remain intermixed with the good until the last day, when the angels will bring about the separation, which we mortals must not attempt. If we would undertake this task we would only make bad worse, inasmuch as we would be very apt to root out, or to trample under foot, the good wheat with the tares.

Two questions now arise. First: Ought the Church to exercise her authority and exclude from her pale such persons as are guilty of public offense? Secondly: Ought secular governments to suppress heresies by force?

The answer to the first question must be: This Gospel does not deprive the Church of her right to excommunicate evil-doers, for the Lord speaks here of a rooting out by force, with the sword, where the transgressors are deprived of life. The Church, however, and the office of the ministry do not wield the sword, but what they do is done through the Word alone. If, therefore, sinners are excommunicated, or put under discipline, they are received again into the Church as soon as they repent and ask for the forgiveness of their sins. The ancient church-fathers rightly remark in this connection: If Matthew, while he was yet a publican, or Paul, while he was a persecutor of the Christians, or the thief upon the cross, had been condemned and executed soon after their nefarious deeds were done, surely the good seed, which after their conversion manifested itself in them, would also have been rooted out. It is not the province of the Church to visit capital punishment upon offenders. Her

office is to exclude the impenitent, that they may be brought to a knowledge of their sin and be converted, and also that they may be an example, warning them to be cautious and to guard against sin.

Perhaps you will say: Why then do we hand over to the executioner robbers, murderers and other malefactors? Would it not be enough to excommunicate them? Might not thus many a one be saved who now dies in his sins? We answer: Mark well that the Lord speaks here of the kingdom of God. In this kingdom the sword shall not prevail, lest the good seed be torn up with the tares. To the governments of this world, however, God did entrust the sword and gave the command: "Whosoever taketh the sword shall perish by the sword." Christ does not here speak of this secular government, hence we must not confound its functions with the duties to be performed in the kingdom of God; in both, however, we must let matters take their proper course. Still, it is the duty of our temporal governments to see to it that the condemned malefactors receive appropriate spiritual advice and consolation, in order that while the body suffers its penalty the spirit may be saved, until the former, which is here executed in shame, shall also in the life to come arise in glory.

From this we can deduce an answer to the query whether civil governments ought to suppress heresies with the sword, since Christ commands not to weed out the tares, but to let them grow until the day of judgment. Our Gospel asserts only this, that the servants of the man who sowed the good seed shall not root up the tares. Now these servants, as has been stated, belong to the

kingdom of God, and not to the kingdoms of this world, and it is not their office to wield the sword, for God did not give it to them. If they do resort to force, as did the pope, they will only do mischief and nothing good whatever. But to the civil government the sword is committed, with the command to suppress all offenses, that they may not spread and do harm. Now there is surely no more pernicious and hideous offense than that which is caused by the prevalence of false doctrine and improper worship. Hence every Christian government ought to guard most diligently against such offenses, since these are always accompanied by seditions and all manner of evils and calamities, as the history of the world clearly exhibits.

We are therefore of the opinion that St. Augustine was right in his remarks *ad Vincentium: Serviant reges Christo, leges ferendo pro Christo*, kings should serve the Lord by framing laws to the promotion of His honor: and *ad Parmenionem: Non dormiat severitas disciplinæ, quando crimen cujusque notum, et omnibus execrabile apparet*, that is, severe penalty must be applied when the crime becomes manifest and is seen by all in its detestable character He further remarks that the crime ought always to be perfectly manifest, that the application of the punishment might not be hasty, but follow only upon a careful investigation of all the attending circumstances. For it might easily occur that something might at first be regarded as a heresy, which, however, after a careful investigation with the Word of God in hand, proves itself to be the pure truth. The Papists are therefore execrable, shameful tyrants, whom no one can induce to enter into a conversation or debate, but who simply con-

tinue to slay and to practice all kinds of oppression. The judgment must precede the punishment; but if any one desires to judge a heresy, he must derive this judgment from the Scriptures, and from no other source.

We therefore conclude that the civil government, as soon as it discovers abominable heresies by which the glory of Christ is diminished and the salvation of souls prevented, is in duty bound, yea that it has the office, to wield the sword and to exercise its full authority against those errors which bring divisions among the people and other great calamities, as we have experienced more than once. And if the teachers of false doctrines will not be convinced of their error, nor desist from their preaching, let the government use its power and compel them to refrain from their mischievous work, so that the true doctrine, and the proper worship of God, may be retained pure and unadulterated, that peace and harmony may prevail. Thus both powers must assist each other to keep the people united in the pure faith and to ward off every offense and shame; this will be done if the authorities of the Church use the Word and discipline, while the government of the State cooperates with the sword. If matters are conducted thus, God will grant His blessing upon both governments. Those wicked persons, however, who care naught for the Word, and who escape the punishment due them from the government of the State, will hear their sentence on the day of judgment. May God in mercy protect us from such an end, and keep us faithful in His Word until our life is past and we are saved in heaven! Amen.

SEPTUAGESIMA.

MATT. 20, 1–16. For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them: Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

THIS Gospel is intricate, and very difficult for the young and the simple; but since it is set apart for this Sunday, we will say a few words concerning it.

You hear from this parable how the householder goes out early in the morning and hires laborers into his vineyard, who labor there twelve hours. Afterwards he hires others who labor but nine hours; then again some who labor six, and some but three hours; finally he hires those who perform merely one hour's labor. The work done by these laborers is evidently very unequal, and yet they have all the same reward. The householder had entered into no agreement as to the wages, except with the first, and now when paytime comes he gives to the last, who labored but one hour, exactly as much as to the first, with whom he had agreed upon a penny a day. This transaction meets with severe condemnation before the world, where labor and wages are fixed by definite rules, he who labors much receiving greater pay than he who works but little. And this is right; it must be thus. Nevertheless it would be very unbecoming if a laborer, who had agreed with his employer to work for a certain stipulated price, would undertake to find fault with his master because he, from mere charity, bestows gifts upon others. We of course admit that it is not right to pay equal wages where the labor is unequal.

Christ employs this parable to teach us the difference between His kingdom and the kingdom of this world. Affairs in the former differ entirely from those in the latter, in which there is an inequality among persons. Our Gospel has nothing to do with this existing inequality in the world, where the master has many possessions and the servant who labors for him none, or but few; the

parable simply refers to the kingdom of God, and teaches us that in it all inequality is abolished, that everything is common property there, and that one shall have as much, and be esteemed as much, as the other. In our daily life, however, there will always be a marked distinction among men on account of their various pursuits. The peasant will have a mode of life different from that of the citizen, and the prince from that of the nobleman. In these matters there is inequality everywhere, and so it must remain. But in the kingdom of Christ it is otherwise; there is no distinction there among believers; they are all alike, whether they be kings, princes, governors, masters or servants. All have the same Baptism, Gospel, Faith, Sacrament, the same Christ and God. They all attend divine worship in perfect equality; the servant, the mechanic and the peasant hear the same Word as the mightiest lord. The Baptism wherewith I was baptized belongs to every other child, whether rich or poor. Magdalene and the malefactor on the cross have the same faith which St. Peter and St. Paul had; yea, the selfsame faith which you or I have, if we are Christians. All sinners, if converted, have the same God and Christ whom John the Baptist had. There is no difference here, though one may by far excel the other in his station in life, in his calling, or in his talents.

The comfortable knowledge that we Christians are all alike in Christ, is to be obtained first of all from our Gospel to-day. In our earthly relations a distinction must remain; the father will be above the son, the master above the servant, the king and ruler above his subjects. This is according to

God's arrangement, who ordained the various offices and callings among men. If we would undertake to introduce innovations in this regard, so that the man-servant would be on an equality with his master, or that the maid should have equal authority with her mistress, or the citizen as much as the rulers, we would surely have a sorry time of it, as we experienced during the rebellious days of the peasant-war in Germany.

Whatever the diversities of position in this world may be, we will not be troubled thereby if we remember that for all, whether they be of high or of low degree, there is but *one* Christ, *one* Baptism, *one* Gospel and *one* Spirit. No one can claim a better Christ, Baptism or Gospel than belongs to the most humble servant. Others may have more money, possessions, or other gifts than we, but they have no other or better God.

This should be well known and remembered, so that every one might be content with his calling and ready to serve God in it. Let each one say: Though I am no emperor, nor a king, though I own no cities nor castles, as do the princes, still I have with them the same Baptism, the same Christ, who died for me and achieved salvation for me. These magnificent gifts which we possess in Christ should make us so well satisfied that we scorn all earthly glory and derive our courage and comfort solely from the fact that we are baptized in the name of Jesus, that He died for us and ascended into heaven, where He sitteth at the right hand of God as our Mediator, and as our Savior from sin, death and all evil.

Whoever is aware of this, and believes that we are all one in Christ, will gladly perform his labor,

whatever it may be, and will not be annoyed by the inferior position which, for this short life, may perchance be his destiny. For thus it is in the present world; various will be the positions of men; the one will have much, the other but little; one will be the master while the other is the servant. This state of affairs will not disturb the Christian; he knows that it is God's will, and can calmly exclaim: Though my duties are heavier than those of others, though I have no authority over others, yet I will not complain, but remain cheerfully in my position until it pleases God to elevate me to another. Meanwhile my consolation shall be that neither emperors nor kings have another Christ, or more of Him, than I have. If these would have more, they cannot be of this kingdom, for in it full parity exists, inasmuch as we all can come unto God and be pleasing unto Him only in Christ Jesus, who suffered for us and achieved salvation with His blood for one and all. This treasure is mine entirely; why therefore should I be distressed on account of any temporal privation, when in spiritual things I am thus equal to the saints?

This assurance that there is no inequality in the kingdom of Christ is our comfort and reliance, so that every Christian can with alacrity perform his respective duties in whatever station of life he may be placed. Contentment will surely crown a Christian's life, if he with conscious satisfaction exclaims: Why should I complain of my condition in life, it is good and pleasing in the sight of God! Though the sphere of my labors is lowly and arduous, it matters not; if royal honors fall not to my lot, I take the Christian's rank and that is

more; yea, what dignity more exalted could I desire or expect!

Those hired first manifest no such disposition; they murmur and complain because their wages are not higher than those of the others. Just so do our priests. They demand of God that He should reward them according to their works, and imagine that they have performed much more than others, so that their seat in heaven ought to be above the rest; they want a greater and a better Christ. They openly taught that if a priest reads the mass at the altar he performs a precious and holy work, the merits of which he can transfer to others, helping them to heaven thereby; and that, consequently, the rank of the priest is by far higher and better in the kingdom of Christ than that of the laity. Hence they murmur against the equality in the kingdom of Christ, and would fain produce therein the same inequality which prevails in the world.

Furthermore they taught that a virgin in a convent is much better in regard to her faith, than a married woman; and they still condemn those who teach otherwise as heretics. In this they resemble the first in our Gospel, who murmur and claim to be better and to have earned more than others. They recount before the Lord their God how long they have labored and how difficult their work has been. But He answers them: In your earthly labors there may have existed diversities among you; some may have worked longer and more diligently than others, but not one of you has a better Baptism or a better Christ than the other, and you all hear the same Gospel preached.

When monks and nuns declare married people

to possess only the common Gospel and Ten Commandments, while they enjoy the higher Gospel and do much more than those in the ordinary station of life are required to do, they lie most infamously and renounce the Gospel. With such assertions they attempt to establish a diversity of rank in the realm of the Gospel, where Christ has ordained perfect equality, as our text to-day clearly teaches; for from it we learn that in the kingdom of God one is worth just as much as the other. If a virgin has the inclination and chooses to remain in her virginity, it is right enough that she should do so, and no one will object, but it is foolish to boast of it and to think that such a condition in life makes her better before God than others are. Because we condemn this offensive and foolish notion the pope accuses us of forbidding good works. But in this he slanders us; we do not forbid good works; but this we say, that all are alike in the kingdom of Christ, for there God deals with us all not according to our merits, but solely in grace and mercy for the sake of Jesus Christ, His Son.

If we share in this equality in Christ through faith, then it matters not what we are otherwise, and whatever our duties may be, we ought to perform them gladly and zealously: whether we are teachers or preachers, masters or mistresses, manservants or maid-servants, it is all the same; for in Christ we are one. The world takes great offense at this, and the Jews become well nigh frantic when they hear that we, who were heathens, shall also be saved as well as they, though we are uncircumcised and do not keep the Sabbath, nor carry other burdens of the law, under which they sigh

and sweat. Christ refers to this in the parable when He says: "But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more, and they likewise received every man a penny"—the first as well as those who had labored but one hour.

The Lord of the vineyard does not know of any distinction. He says: "Friend, I do thee no wrong; take that thine is, and go thy way;" that is to say: You have received your reward in times gone by, viz. the land of Canaan; now I will establish a new kingdom, in which perfect equality shall reign. The vineyard is mine, so that I can do with it what I please, and it is not your concern how I deal with my servants.

The Jews begrudge us the life eternal, and will have nothing in common with the Gentiles; they even accuse God our Lord of wrong-doing, who has to tell them: The land is mine, not yours; it is therefore not your business how I arrange it. The pope and his followers act like the Jews; they are also opposed to this equality in the kingdom of God, and insist upon especial privileges before they will enter; but these they will not get. It behooves us, therefore to make a clear distinction between the affairs of the world and those of the kingdom of Christ. In the latter there is no difference in rank, since we all have but one God, one Christ, one Holy Ghost, one Gospel, one Baptism, one Sacrament and one Faith. In this respect, one is as good, as pious and as holy, as the other.

For these gifts we ought to thank God with all our heart; and we should use them properly, so that we can exclaim: Regard me as you please, think much of me or little, I will still be glad; for

I have as much as emperors and kings, yea, as much as the saints and angels in heaven have. How so? Through Christ! Therefore, according to the will of God, I will ply with a joyous heart, with energy and love, my task, and will do right gladly what my calling demands of me, be I father or mother, master or servant; this will I do since I have such a glorious treasure in Christ.

The Gospel to-day thus instructs us that there is, and ever will be, an inequality upon earth in regard to the persons of men. A prince is a different person from a preacher, a maid-servant from her mistress, a school-teacher different from a mayor, and hence there will be various customs and modes of living, which will ever remain. In Christ's kingdom however another rule prevails: the one shall receive as much as the other; for salvation, redemption from death and sin, are no merits of men, nor are they due to them, but they are free gifts of grace to all who earnestly seek them. Such mercy of God we ought to recognize with a joyful heart, and not complain nor murmur on account of its universality, as do the false saints, who claim eternal life as a well-deserved reward and not as a free gift of grace. Let us praise God for this equality in His kingdom, and from it derive such consolation that we can easily endure all outward diversities of rank and station in life.

From the last words of our Gospel: "For many be called, but few chosen," foolish and wicked thoughts have been drawn by idle fellows, who say the meaning of this sentence is that God has chosen some unto salvation, and these will be saved without a doubt, while on the other hand those who are not thus chosen will be damned, no

matter how piously or how faithfully they may live; for it is the will of God that such shall fall and not be saved. Hence they conclude that it is a matter of indifference how they live; for if I am to be saved, it will take place without my concern about it, and if I am not to be saved, all my concern about it will avail nothing. What reckless, secure people such ungodly thoughts will produce every one can judge.

When we considered the Gospel for Epiphany, and pondered the saying of the prophet Micah, we learned that all such thoughts as imprudently meddle with the incomprehensible providence of God are of the devil, and that it behooves us to pursue another method of contemplation in regard to the will of God. For such thoughts are sure to bring man into despair, or to render him reckless and regardless of consequences.

The proper course to know the will of God aright, and to avoid offense in this regard, is to trust implicitly in Christ, as He Himself declares: "No man cometh to the Father but by me." Whoever wishes to know the Father and to come unto Him, must first come unto Christ and learn to know Him as the Son of God, as the omnipotent, eternal God. And what did the Son of God achieve? He becomes man for us; He submits Himself to the law to free us from the law; He is crucified and dies upon the cross to pay the ransom for our sins; He arises from the dead to open for us through His resurrection the entrance into heaven, and to defend us against everlasting death; He sitteth at the right hand of God as our Mediator, and through His Holy Spirit He rules and guides

His people and protects them against the wiles and persecutions of the devil. To know Christ thus is to know Him aright.

If this knowledge is fully and firmly fixed in your heart, then look towards heaven and meditate upon this subject thus: If the Son of God has performed all this for us at the command and according to the will of the Father, what then must be the disposition of God towards us? Surely, your own heart will constrain you to exclaim: God loves us, for He even gave His only Son unto us and for us. He desires not our death, for He employs the noblest and most precious remedy to give us life. In this way we are truly brought to God, as Christ says, John 3: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Compare these truths with the above mentioned thoughts, and you will discover that the latter come from the devil, and that they must cause offense, either hurling men into hopeless despair, or making them reckless; for they can hope nothing good from God.

A few, again, interpret these words: "Many be called but few chosen," to mean that God offers His grace unto many, but permits only few to accept it. Such an explanation is viciously wrong, for it follows from it, as a necessary consequence, that God is to be blamed if we are not all saved; and to believe this would be utter and satanic blasphemy, as every one can see who will but look at Christ as the Son of God and our Savior.

This expression, "Many be called," &c. must therefore be understood in a far different sense. The Gospel is preached publicly, and universally,

unto all who wish to hear and to accept it; yea, God has it thus proclaimed, so that every one can hear and believe it and be saved. But what is the result? It is as the Gospel states, that "few are chosen," because there are but few who so receive the Gospel that God can be pleased with them. Some hear it, but heed it not; others hear it and at first accept it, but do not retain it in times of adversity; others again hear it, but value it less than money and worldly pleasures. This is not pleasing to God, nor does He delight in such people. This Christ calls not being chosen; that is, not conducting themselves so that God could have pleasure in them. The chosen ones of God are those who love to hear His Gospel, who believe in Christ and manifest their faith by good works, being prepared to suffer for it if need be.

This is the true sense of the words, and this will not offend people, but cause them to amend, so that they will think: If I am to please God and be among the chosen ones, it will not do for me to live with a bad conscience, to sin against the commandments of God, and not to resist sin; but I must hear the Word preached, pray for the Holy Spirit, not suffer the Word to be removed from the heart, contend against Satan and his suggestions, and pray for protection, patience, and assistance. This will make good Christians. On the other hand, those who think that God does not wish all to have salvation, either fall into despair or become reckless, ungodly people who live like brutes, thinking: If it is ordained beforehand whether I shall be saved or not, why should I put myself to any inconvenience about it? No, this is wrong; we have the command to hear the Word of God

and to believe that Christ is our Savior, who has paid the ransom for our sins. Remember that command and obey it. Should your faith fail or you prove weak, pray God for His Holy Spirit, and do not doubt that Christ is your Savior, and you shall be saved through Him, if you believe in Him, that is, comfort yourself with His merits. May Christ Jesus, our dear Lord, grant this to all of us. Amen.

SEXAGESIMA.

LUKE 8, 4–15. And when much people were gathered together, and were come to Him out of every city, He spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way-side: and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit a hundred-fold. And when He had said these things, He cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And His disciples asked Him, saying, What might this parable be? And He said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the Word of God. Those by the way-side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the Word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the Word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

MY Beloved: You learn from this Gospel that there are many kinds of hearers of the pure Word of God, but only a few who retain it and bring forth good fruit. This must be diligently presented to the people, so that all may examine themselves and discover to what class of hearers they belong, and make haste to be numbered

among those who are called the good ground, in whom the Word brings forth fruit.

The first class of hearers are those with whom the Word fares as "the seed by the way-side." It does not yield fruit because it is either trodden down or devoured by the fowls of the air. The second class are they "who hear and receive the Word with joy." They not only speak of it but believe in it, and it grows finely, as the seed upon a rocky soil, but when the first hot day of summer comes it begins to wither, because it has neither root nor moisture. When persecution and tribulation come, such people fall away before the good fruit of faith with patience follows. The third class are easily discernible. They are Christians who are as seed among thorns; it grows, but brings no fruit and is choked; the thorns grow too densely around it. The fourth class of hearers, finally, are they who faithfully receive and retain the Word in an honest and good heart until it brings forth fruit with patience. They do not endeavor to avoid persecution for the sake of the Word, are ready in faith and love towards God to endure all that may happen, and bring forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, and some thirty-fold.

These are the four classes of hearers. Now let each one examine his own heart, and see to which class he belongs. The first three are of no account; the worst of all are the first, who hear the Word, but are immediately robbed of it by the devil, so that they do not believe unto salvation. Mark this well.

I would not have ventured to presume the hearts which hear the Word, but heed it not and forget it, to be possessed of the devil. We regard

the heedless hearing of the Word of God as of no especial danger. Those who act thus we suppose to be simple, inattentive persons, with whom it is natural to hear and then forget the Gospel. But Christ judges differently in our text. He says: "The devil taketh away the Word out of their hearts."

This tells us plainly what we must think of persons, of children and domestics, who hear the preaching of the Word with inattention, and then go on their way as though they had never heard it, with no inclination to think of it. All such can not say that the Holy Ghost is their guide; for the devil is so near them that he reaches into their hearts and plucks out the Word. From this other evil habits must result; they become disobedient, dishonest, stubborn, selfish, proud and vindictive; whereas if they would retain the Word in their hearts and ponder it with care, they would become well-behaved, obedient, diligent, honest, humble and tractable people.

These are the first and most reckless class, and the Lord is very wroth at their depravity, so that He pronounces a severer judgment upon them than upon others. He says: The devils, who dwell in the air, take the Word from their hearts, so that they disregard it and think themselves beyond all danger, even if they let the preaching of the Word enter into one ear and escape by the other. But listen to what imminent danger you expose yourselves by such conduct. Christ, whose judgment is reliable, says: "The devil doeth this."

Wherever you meet any one who permits himself to be talked to and preached to as though he were a log, as our stingy city-folks and farmers do,

and as is the case especially with our opponents, the Papists, you may at once conclude that the devil has his nest there, and tears out from the hearts the Word of God, the good seed, so that all preaching and singing and admonition has as little effect upon them as a stroke with a rod has upon the water; they believe not, nor will they be saved. This is the devil's work; for if this forgetfulness were merely natural and innate, as some persons are more docile than others, there would at least be a desire to learn, which would cause one to exclaim: O God, why am I so stupid! Give me grace, and enable my heart to be attentive and to retain what I hear in church! The devil finds no room nor abode with those persons who have an earnest longing for the Word and who exert themselves to keep it, else they would not have such a desire. But the former care not for the Word, and deem it a great loss if they must miss the earning of a dime, or of a penny, on account of attending church and hearing a sermon. You may depend upon it, such persons are under the devil's thumb.

This class of hearers, who have the Word but heed it not, since the devil plucks it from their hearts, is by far the most numerous.

The following two classes are not quite so bad. They are weak and faltering; they do not object to the Word and begin to believe; therefore the Lord does not give them over to the devil, as He did the first, although they are also deficient in bringing forth fruit. They are those who in time of temptation do not resist nor persevere, but fall away as the wormy fruit falls in heaps from the tree in stormy weather. "For a while they believe," says the Lord, but when troubles come they are fright-

ened, and not resolved nor ready to endure suffering. The fruit of life everlasting will not be theirs, nor any other good fruits which come from the Word and from faith.

The third class consists of those who neglect the Word on account of avarice, cares and pleasures of this life. Whoever indulges in the cares of this world, and thinks of nothing else but how, by toiling and moiling, to become rich, burdens his heart, as Christ says, Luke 21, so that the good fruit is choked, as is the seed among the thorns. To labor is right, and every one ought to be busy and industrious in his calling. This is not forbidden, but rather commended when God tells us, Gen. 3: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," etc. But the sordid and niggardly drudgery, in which the world now engages for the purpose of augmenting the heap of dollars and cents, so as to become rich and honored, chokes the Word of God in many a heart, so that it cannot grow nor bring forth fruit. These temporal concerns fill the heart, and to them it cleaves to the exclusion of everything else.

With these three classes the Word is of no effect. This, however, is a great and terrible privation and injury which we cannot adequately comprehend. Hence the Lord admonishes us all with great ardor in the words: "Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." Evidently these words do not refer to common matters, nor ought they to be treated lightly. It will not do for one to think: Well, if I have time hereafter, when I have gathered together what I

need, I will go and hear the Word of God and believe in it, but just now I have other business on hand which profits me more, and to this I must first attend.

Take care, my friend, that you do not deceive yourself. Who knows how long you may yet live, or how long you can hear God's Word, or what trials God may send you? You may succeed in deceiving yourself, but Christ you cannot delude; He exhorts you earnestly when He exclaims: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." It is His desire that you should not procrastinate in these matters as men commonly do. He says, now, when you hear, is the time to heed, else it may be too late.

It behooves us therefore to make sure of our belonging to the small fourth class. To this end we ought to implore earnestly our Father in heaven that we may have good hearts, that they may accept and retain His Word, and bring forth good fruit.

This little company consists of saints; not of such as the pope has, "all shaven and shorn," who read mass, fast and wear strange garments, but of such as hear the Word of God, which the pope and his followers persecute with bitter hatred. "They who hear the Word and keep it bring forth fruit an hundred-fold;" that is, in such abundance that it is beyond all estimation. Or as St. Matthew classifies: "Some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold;" for just as the external offices and duties differ, thus will there also be a variety in the fruit. A minister of the Gospel serves the Church more than a mechanic does, who attends only to his own domestic affairs; yet both are

Christians, redeemed by Christ from sin and death; both are heirs of eternal life. Let us strive to be counted among this company, though it is the smallest of them all.

The first requisite to accomplish this is to have "an honest and good heart." Such a heart is attentive to the Word of God and cherishes it with fidelity, otherwise the devil will surely come and pluck the Word away. Again, the heart must be sure and firm, regardless of the favor or hatred of men, not wavering nor yielding to the allurements of evil; for if we do not fear and love God above all things we cannot keep the Word, which the world and the devil ever attempt to steal away, since they are not able to endure it. Satan is a restless task-master, who does not suffer his servants to be at ease, but urges them on continually, as we see in the Papists, and we shall experience still more in the future.

The heart must also be cleansed and freed from thorns: we dare not love money, fame among men, and worldly pleasures, more than the Word of God and the life to come. We must furthermore regard all other temporal concerns as of inferior importance compared with God's Word, as Christ says: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," &c. Where the heart is thus attentive, faithful and untrammeled by thorns, there we find "an honest and good heart" which will bring forth fruit. It will do this in patience, for it cannot escape sorrows and temptations. Afflictions and oppositions will come, as St. Paul writes: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." We must be prepared to meet these trials and, as Christ says, "possess our souls

in patience," always resorting to prayer; for we all must confess that we fall far short of our calling in our relation to the affairs of this life. The devil is ever watchful of our weaknesses and tempts us in various ways, so that he may take from the heart the Word and burden it instead with cares, avarice, pride, anger and other evil affections. We all know sufficiently well that sordidness, ambition, lasciviousness and the like, draw people away from the Word and make them corrupt.

It becomes therefore an urgent necessity to keep a steady eye upon our defects, and to guard against the infirmities of our nature, that we may not continue in a false security. We have the comfortable assurance, Luke 11: "The Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him," hence we should earnestly supplicate God for the Holy Ghost, that He may remove from our hearts all obstructions to the Word, freeing them from thorns and thistles, so that we can hear and retain it and bring forth good fruit, true faith in Christ; through which faith we will become not only obedient unto God, but also His children and heirs. Then will the seed accomplish the purpose for which it was sown; the holy Gospel which is preached in all the world will thus bring forth fruit in us which remaineth to eternity.

The parable also teaches us not to be amazed when we observe that the Word does not everywhere bring forth fruit; for the Lord Himself divides the hearers into four distinct classes, of which only one, and that the smallest, is "honest and good." The remaining three classes are of no account; they must be left to themselves, nor ought they to cause us offense. Wherever the Gospel is

preached there will also be these three kinds of unworthy hearers. Yet the Word is not at fault, nor does the blame attach to him who preaches it, as the blind Papists in their raving frenzy attempt to charge against us. They point with malicious satisfaction to all the offenses which the devil has stirred up since the Gospel has again been preached, and thus endeavor, in their folly, to bring discredit upon us and our preaching.

But pray, tell me, how was it when Christ Himself preached, and John, and His apostles? Were there not great offenses then, and did not great sins become manifest? When John the Baptist began to preach, all people went out to hear him, and were convinced that he was a holy man, yet he was charged with being possessed of the devil; and finally king Herod, who often and willingly listened to him, as the evangelist tells us, had him beheaded. Yea, though they heard Christ, the Son of God, and saw Him raise the dead and perform other great miracles, they nevertheless nailed Him to the cross. Does it follow from this that John, that Christ, and that the apostles were not true preachers, because the people remained wicked and would not be converted, as the pure doctrine required of them? To this question they must remain silent, lest they might be exposed as enemies and blasphemers of Christ: but us and our doctrine they revile, because they think it can be done with impunity.

We do not propose to enter at this time into a defense of our doctrine, and to show why we are ready to adhere to it unto death, but will merely call attention to the words of Jesus when He says: "The seed is the Word." We presume that there

is no Papist insane enough to assert that the Word, of which Christ speaks in this connection, is an evil word or false doctrine; and yet, what does Christ say of this good seed? Does it grow? Ah, merely a fourth part of it remains in the ground and brings fruit! Who then can deny that the world remains wicked, though the Word and its preaching is good and pure, and in itself productive of good fruit?

As stated above, we will not at this time dwell upon our doctrine nor explain it, but this the Papists must confess, whether they will or not, that the world is wicked and will not receive the Word, no matter how pure is the preaching or how pious the preacher. For Christ tells us plainly that only the fourth part of the seed brings fruit; and His own experience, as also that of John and the apostles, exhibits the fact that but few heed the preaching of the Word. The great majority of mankind is and remains wicked and fruitless; but the smallest portion believe and are converted.

If this was the experience of Christ, the Son of God, the preacher without a blemish, what else could John the Baptist, or the apostles, or we expect? Shall therefore the doctrine be blamed as wrong? If so, we must also denounce the seed which fell by the way, upon a rock, or amid thorns. But no, this would be blasphemy. The Word of God is the seed which is sown; this Word is good and salutary: it must, according to its nature, bring forth good fruit. That it does not everywhere produce fruit is the fault of the barren land upon which it falls, and in which the seed is destroyed; God and His Word must not be held accountable for this.

Hence the Papists have no reason to condemn our doctrine, and to pronounce it wrong because it creates offense here and there; they ought rather to reproach themselves and others, for their hearts are neither honest nor good. The Word which we preach is faultless, but their hearts are impure and wicked. To such the devil comes, and incites them to oppose the Word, as Christ says in that other parable, Matt. 13, where the field was fertile and the seed good, but intermixed with tares. Whence came the tares? Christ answers: "The devil came and sowed them among the wheat;" he hates to see a clean and fruitful field, and is ever busy to make it unproductive. And since he cannot root up the good seed entirely he sows the tares among it. Who then would dare to say that the Word of God is at fault and causes the growth of the tares?

Let every one learn from this parable that the Gospel will always meet with opposition; that some will be converted by it, while the greater portion of its hearers, yea even three-fourths of them, will take offense and disregard it. The result is that many are called, as Christ says in another Gospel, but only few are chosen. The many are of an impure and dishonest heart; they heed the devil more than the Gospel. Hence not only great and glaring sins ensue, but, as the Lord says in our text, such misconduct will be punished with blindness, "that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand."

Let no one therefore be offended at the Gospel, though it encounters much opposition: the cause of this are the wicked and malicious hearts, in which the devil rules. It is not the fault of the

seed if it does not grow by the way-side, or upon the rock, or among the thorns. Be not troubled at such failures, but let each one diligently see to it that he possesses this seed; yea, let us all implore God's mercy that the heart may be prepared to receive and to retain the Word in patience, so that we may be saved through faith in Christ, which the Holy Spirit implants in us by means of the Word and the Holy Sacraments. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ grant this unto all of us! Amen.

FIRST SERMON FOR THE FESTIVAL OF THE PURIFICATION OF MARY.

LUKE 2, 22–32. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought Him to Jerusalem, to present Him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons. And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he Him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.

WE learn from to-day's Gospel lesson how the Infant Jesus was brought into the temple when He was six weeks old. According to the law these six weeks were termed "the days of purification." Moses calls them so, and also the Evangelist in our text. This ordinance was not based on natural grounds and was therefore not observed by pagan nations. God had ordained this law for His people, so that every mother who had given birth had to present herself with a sacrifice and with the child in the temple. The law required that this

should be done at the end of six weeks if the child was a son, and at the end of twelve weeks if it was a daughter.

The pope has imposed a similar ordinance upon our women who have given birth. He requires them, after convalescence, to receive in public the blessing of the Church, and forbids them to attend worship before this is done, as though they were unclean. This is wrong; for the impurity which the law imputed to those in childbed was not a natural one, and had its existence only by the old ceremonial law; therefore it has no validity where the law is abolished, and cannot rightly be imposed upon any one.

One especial provision of the Law was this: The first born son shall be presented to the Lord after six weeks have elapsed; for thus we read in Leviticus, chap. 12: "Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;" and this had reference not only to mankind, but equally so to cattle, sheep, &c.; all firstborn male beings were to be dedicated to the Lord. Hence it was that the firstborn son enjoyed especial dignity and honor in the family, and had authority over the other brothers. But inasmuch as among so fruitful a people as Israel was, the number of the firstborn would be by far too great for service in the temple, God gave permission to the parents to ransom their child by paying a certain sum of money, or by offering a one year old lamb or a pair of turtledoves, according as they were rich or poor. Yet the son thus released by his parents from the demands of the Law was nevertheless called a son of God the Lord.

It seems that the Virgin Mary was in want of

the goods of this world, for she brought the offering which poor people were wont to bring, a pair of turtledoves. With such an offering she releases her son and thus acknowledges that, though she is His true mother, He is not her own, but that, being the firstborn, He is the Son of God.

The Lord had ordained this custom of presenting to Him all firstborn males, that the Jews might remember how He, their God, rescued them from Egypt and there in one night slew all the firstborn throughout the whole land. As a memorial of that deliverance He demanded of them to present and to offer to Him in the temple all their firstborn males. This requirement exists no more, and we Christians are free from the observance of this custom, just as we are exempt from all other ceremonial laws of the Jews.

What we are to learn from this occurrence in our Gospel is simply this: Christ voluntarily fulfills the Law, although it has no claims upon Him. How consoling this is for us we heard on the festival of the circumcision. We will therefore at this time consider such obedience as an example for us in the performance of our duties and good works in our daily life. For the obedience of the Child Jesus and of His mother stand forth in great glory in this connection, and put us to shame. We are never ready to do even half of what we ought to do, although God demands it of us, under pain of damnation and eternal burning.

Such disobedience on our part corresponds ill to this example, where the Child Jesus, the Lord over the Law and Moses and everything else, so humbles Himself that He fulfills all that Moses, His servant, required of other children, who are

all impure and sinners. Likewise does the Virgin Mary. She knew well enough that she was still a virgin, and consequently exempt from the demands of the Law; for Moses with his regulation in this regard has reference only to women who become pregnant in the usual way. Yet Mary is not willing to make use of this exemption, since others, who were ignorant of the facts in the case, might be offended; she therefore readily fulfills what it behooved other women to do according to the Law.

These two examples, of the Child Jesus and of Mary His mother, must cause us to blush when we think how derelict we are in the performance of our duties, which the Lord, from whom we have everything, has prescribed to us, whilst we see Him voluntarily do that which His servant Moses demands, though He could not justly be asked to do it, since the Law had no claims upon Him. O, that we could sufficiently blush at our wickedness! We would have to spit upon ourselves and exclaim: We are not worthy that the sun should shine upon us. Our Lord and Savior subjects Himself to the Law, and with His obedience condemns our disobedience in the most severe and effective manner. He thus condemns disobedience to our God, who can either hurl us into hell or admit us to heaven.

Christ's obedience exhibits and rebukes our disobedience so thoroughly that we must be ashamed of ourselves from the crown of our head to the soles of our feet; yea, we must cry out: What are we doing, we miserable worms of the dust! Will we not also become obedient unto the Lord who became man on our account, who lay in the manger for us, who suffered Himself to be carried to Jerusalem in our behalf, there to do what His servant Moses

demanded, who had no right to ask anything of Him! He Himself is the Lord, and Moses does not even deserve to be His servant; yet we see Him do what He was not bound to perform. But we do not perform what we are bound to do under pain of eternal damnation. To be ashamed of our disobedience and obstinacy, is the first simple lesson taught us to-day by the glorious example of Jesus Christ our Lord.

The second lesson presents the dignity of the firstborn son, whom God so greatly honors that He calls him His own, yea, even His son. This was indeed a great glory and preference, which the Jews were not slow to claim when they looked down with haughtiness upon their kindred, as though God cared only for the firstborn. We have plenty of examples which show but too plainly that the firstborn in a family frequently proved themselves the most degenerate and wicked; they became overbearing and proud, so that they treated others with scorn, whilst they regarded themselves as the chosen ones of God. If this Law still prevailed we would all eagerly desire to be such proud striplings, as is evident in the behavior of the monks. If these fellows could yet boast of being God's holy children by virtue of their birth, just think how intolerably insolent and overbearing they would be; for in truth they are haughty enough already with their lousy cowl.

This arrogance has proved fatal to the firstborn, as it did to Lucifer the archangel. Cain was a firstborn son, and was considered so important that his mother Eve gave him the name which should indicate him as the man who would crush the head of the serpent, for she says: "I have

gotten a man from the Lord." But as pride changed Lucifer from an angel into a devil, it also made of Cain a villain and a fratricide.

Ishmael was also a firstborn son and is called in the Scripture "a mocker," Gen. 21, who looked with contempt upon his younger brother Isaac, and conducted himself as if he were the heir instead of Isaac. Thus pride and arrogance had led many firstborn sons astray, deeming themselves alone the well-beloved of God, and from this presumption they were often punished with deep humiliation. Esau depended upon his birth, and in such vain trust became the oppressor of his brother; but God punished his haughtiness and caused him to be deprived of the blessing, as were Cain and Ishmael.

The Jews met with the same fate. They were indeed the firstborn son in the kingdom of God and in the Church of Christ, while we, of heathen lineage, were the second. But when they became proud and reckless God said to them: Your glory has departed; I have not chosen you as my peculiar people that you in insolence should treat others with contempt, but that you might be grateful unto me and do my will with readiness. Since you have refused to comply with my will, you must now make room for the heathens; they shall have precedence; your place is in the rear, if you are not excluded entirely.

David was compelled to make a similar decision; he took their birthright from his elder sons and placed Solomon, who was the youngest, upon the throne. Thus it was God's will, that pride might be restrained.

The selection of David himself is another ex-

ample. The Lord sent to the prophet Samuel to anoint as king the son of Jesse. The oldest one presented himself first; he was a bold, imperious youth, as we learn from 1. Samuel 17, where we hear him speak to David in the camp, as if the youth were his servant. But the Lord refused him and all the seven sons of Jesse, so that the prophet had to inquire: "Are here all thy children?" Jesse answered: "There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep." It never entered the mind of Jesse that God would make anything important of the youngest son. But after all it was he with whom God was pleased. The eldest and firstborn was not acceptable to God, as He Himself says to Samuel: "The Lord seeth not as man seeth: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

Why does God overstep His own regulation in making David king, who was the youngest of the sons, whereas after the Word and ordinance of God it would have behooved the eldest to be king? He did this to show us that He does not desire to have any one elated with pride, and that His ordinances and blessing were not given to us that we should be puffed up by them. He will not have haughty children, but the humble are pleasing to Him. It is an easy matter for the Lord to make an end to the lofty aspirations of the proud and to humble them into the dust. Hence it was that Cain, Ishmael, Esau, the Jews and the angels lost their high estate; they became proud and abused their privileges, and were in the end, in spite of their primogeniture, lodged with the devil in the abyss of hell, as we read in the 113. Psalm: "Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on

high, who humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth! He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;" and Mary in her thanksgiving exclaims: "He has put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree."

It is the way of God to overthrow the proud in heart; for He will not endure pride or presumption, nor does He bestow His gifts upon us that we should think ourselves to have deserved them. Hence the Lord frequently prefers and elevates the child of a common man, while He divests a king of royalty and hurls him into ruin.

Seniority by birth was highly esteemed among the Jews; the Word of God assigned to it supremacy in temporal and spiritual matters; but when its privileges were abused through pride and insolence, God annulled the regulations pertaining to it. Reuben was a firstborn son, but by the curse of Jacob he was deprived of that authority and priesthood which his birth by right would have conferred upon him. It is presumed that Abraham was the youngest son; yet God invests him with the dignity and power which belonged to the eldest and firstborn.

The fact is well established that the eldest sons are but seldom of a modest behavior, for they generally think themselves masters in the family. They are proud and overbearing towards their brothers, whom they regard as inferior to themselves in the sight of God. But God cannot permit such presumption to prevail, and resists the haughty; He puts down the proud in spirit, but exalts the lowly in heart.

Let therefore no one boast of his gifts and

talents. If we have wisdom and erudition, let us employ them to the honor of God and to the welfare of our fellow-men. If we are puffed up, the displeasure of God will be our lot. If we are comely in person, virtuous or wealthy, in short, if we are blessed with any unusual endowments, let us beware of pride on account of them; God has ever manifested His displeasure at such insolent conduct, and has made an example of the first and most prominent patriarchs, which should caution us in this regard. Christ, of course, sustained well the honor and beauty of His birthright, for He was free from sin.

Other firstborn sons have frequently perverted their great honor and high position to the gratification of pride and selfishness, until in the end all glory vanished from the Jews, so that the heathens, whom they regarded with utter contempt, have now superseded them. The Christian Church is now the well-beloved and the firstborn child of God. She is this, not with external splendor and glory, as the pope would have it, but on account of the Word and the Holy Sacraments. Though we differ from each other in our various stations in life, we are still all one by reason of our Baptism. The Christian Church is the mother of us all; she is a pure virgin in a spiritual sense; having the pure Word of God and the Holy Sacraments, she continually gives birth to children, to Christians. These are in truth the firstborn sons, the heirs of God, and thus we observe the realization of that which was formerly but typical and figurative.

If God had made various and extraordinary arrangements for us, if He had instituted a separate

Baptism for you or for me, if He had given to you or to me an especial Gospel or sacrament, we would surely have become a prey of the devil by reason of our vanity. But since God makes no distinction among us, since we all have but one Baptism, one mother, the Church of Christ, one Faith, one Word and Sacrament, no one has a right to despise his brother; we must admit that our brethren as well as we are firstborn sons and heirs. There can be no doubt that we are, one and all, kings and priests in the dominion of Christ, notwithstanding that in temporal affairs distinctions still must exist.

Hence it is evident that the pope has no right whatever to deem himself far superior to others in the government of the Church; no one gave him such authority, unless it be the devil himself. Among Christians, as such, there exists no difference in rank; no one is more exalted than his brother; the rights and privileges are the same for all. Preachers, pastors and other servants of the Church are not children of God by virtue of their office, but they are such by reason of their Baptism; this, and the Word and faith in the Word, make us children of God, His firstborn sons and heirs.

Those eldest sons in the Old Testament are thus an example for us, from which we should learn that the Lord our God will never endure pride and arrogance, and that He will put down those who exalt themselves. Let each one therefore humble himself of his own accord. The world objects to this, and greatly abuses in her vanity even the inferior gifts which she possesses. God therefore puts down the mighty ones in quick succession, so that

they tumble headlong, as Lucifer and his angels fell from heaven.

This is the first part of the narrative in our Gospel, as far as it relates to the offering in the temple. The Evangelist further recounts what occurred when the Child Jesus was presented to the Lord in the temple as a firstborn son, with the offering required by the Law. We shall speak of this more fully in the following sermon, while we now invoke the mercy of God that we may shun all pride, that our hearts may be prepared by His Holy Spirit for a true and earnest obedience, and that through His grace we may continue in the same unto our end. Amen.

SECOND SERMON FOR THE FESTIVAL OF THE PURIFICATION OF MARY.

THE OLD MAN SIMEON.

LUKE 2, 22–32.

THIS is an excellent narrative and contains a delightful discourse and prophecy of the patriarch Simeon concerning the Child Jesus. The incident here mentioned is another of those manifestations by which this Child was made known in the world, especially to His people Israel.

The first manifestation occurred to the Virgin Mary through the angel Gabriel, Luke 1; the second, also through the angel, to Joseph, Matt. 1; the third, through Elisabeth, the mother of St. John the Baptist, Luke 1, when the Child leaped in her womb at the coming of the holy Virgin Mary, the mother of the Lord. The fourth manifestation was made by Zacharias, the father of John, Luke 1, when he showed, though he did not point out the person, that Christ had come and that God had remembered and fulfilled His covenant.

Upon these manifestations which took place before the birth of Christ, others followed. First, that of the angel to the shepherds upon the field, who went forth announcing everywhere the tidings of the angel, Luke 2. Then came the manifestation to the Gentiles by means of a star, Matt. 2; and finally, the two by Simeon and the prophetess

Anna, who publicly and plainly spoke in the temple concerning the Child Jesus, declaring that He is the consolation of Israel, and the Redeemer of the world from sin and death.

The statements made about this old man Simeon are wonderful. We are told by the Evangelist that "He was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel." That means: Simeon firmly believed that God would soon fulfill His promise and send Christ the Lord, and that this would happen before his death, so that he could yet see with his bodily eyes Christ his Savior. This was not a mere notion, such as men sometimes entertain of events before they occur, but Simeon was prompted to this opinion by the Holy Ghost through the Word of God, where he had undoubtedly read the prophecy of the holy patriarch Jacob, Gen. 49, that Christ would come when the sceptre had departed from Judea, and when a foreign nation would rule the land. He had, no doubt, also perused the calculation of Daniel concerning the seventy-two weeks. Such predictions led the aged and pious man to believe that the time of the birth of Christ must be nigh at hand; yea, the Holy Ghost had revealed it to him that he should not die before he had seen and borne upon his arms Christ the Lord.

Thus it came to pass when Mary and Joseph, according to the custom of the law, came into the temple to present the Child to the Lord and to offer the prescribed sacrifices, that at that very hour the old man Simeon also entered the temple. This was not accidental nor after his usual custom; but by a revelation of the Holy Ghost he knew in his heart: Now the moment has arrived with

which God has often comforted me; now I shall find in the temple what I never before have seen there,—Him whose coming I have so anxiously awaited. Therefore, as soon as he had come where the Child was, he took Him with a rejoicing heart from the arms of Mary, and, while holding the Infant in a caressing embrace, he declares in few but impressive words what he thinks of Christ.

No doubt the people were astonished at these wonderful sayings, especially the priests who may have thought that the old man Simeon had suddenly become childish. For here was only a little Child, six weeks old, in appearance like other children of that age, and besides all this His parents were poor and insignificant people. But these circumstances do not perplex Simeon; he plainly states the fact: This is the Child whom we must have if we wish to be saved: we Jews, the heathens and the entire world. Precious old man, where did you learn this truth? What is there in this Child that reveals unto you His dignity? Surely it is a Child like other children who are brought in great numbers into the temple during the year, some of whom are children of great lords surrounded with every luxury,—how is it then that you say that this very Child is the Savior?

Mary and Joseph are amazed at this revelation and miracle of the Holy Ghost. They cannot doubt that the old man was moved by the Holy Ghost, for how else would it have been possible for him to know what had been revealed only to them by the angel?

From this we learn the nature of the Church in those times, and how the Holy Ghost directed and ruled it. The High-priests, Herod, the Scribes,

the Levites and the Pharisees were in Jerusalem, but they did not concern themselves about the Scriptures nor about the Messiah; their endeavor was to obtain honor, power and riches. Then there was also a little company, poor and unknown: Mary, Joseph, Zacharias, Elisabeth, the shepherds, Simeon and Anna the prophetess. The hope and comfort of these was the prophecy concerning Christ, and fondly did they await its fulfillment; hence they enjoyed its blessings, while the high-priests were deprived of them.

The same holds true to-day. The pure Church is but a small, despised and suffering company, which has however the comfort of God's Word; this it studies, and concerns itself but little about other matters. The pope and his followers, on the other hand, arrogate to themselves the name of the Church, while in fact they are totally ignorant of God, of Christ and of His Gospel; nor can it be otherwise, since they seek but that which is of this world, and claim the name of Christians because they have more power, honor, temporal authority, money and goods than others.

At this we must not be offended. The high-priests have their office and hold it; yet they are not the true Church. Thus in our day the pope, his bishops and their tribe call themselves the Church, exercise authority and boast of their office and dignity, to which God called them, while in truth they are neither the Church nor even Christians; for if they were they would not persecute the Gospel, but would accept it and assist in spreading it. Compared with them Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna are common and simple people whom no one respects, yet they alone know

and possess Christ; with them the Holy Spirit dwells, who leads them into all truth, so that they are saved.

Let therefore no one suppose that the pope and his crowd must certainly be God's people because they exercise much authority and power. No, those who had office and power were not the true Israel when Christ was born. Again the unpretending little assembly ought not to be despised; God rules on earth in such a manner that the wise and proud do not desire Him, while He is the comfort of the poor and distressed. These know of no other consolation, while the former depend upon their authority, power and wealth. This may suffice in regard to the first portion of the narrative, showing how the aged Simeon, through the Holy Ghost, recognizes in the little Child Jesus the true Christ.

We will now consider Simeon's sermon, in which he teaches what comfort and enjoyment this Child brings. Then also what the effects of His coming will be throughout the world, that we may thus also learn to know Christ and be saved through Him.

The Evangelist relates, in the first place, that it was revealed to Simeon "that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ." When this was fulfilled in the temple, he having seen the Child Jesus and taken Him upon his arms, he was filled with joy, so that he exclaimed with cheerful satisfaction: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word." That is: I will now die without fear or trembling, yea with joy. Such words are wonderful and peculiar. We all know how men generally

act when death approaches. There is no rejoicing then; nothing but unrest, fear, sorrow, pain, anguish and trembling. Nor is this unnatural; even the brute creation acts thus when death approaches.

Our death however is the result of sin; for through sin death came; and that sin makes the heart fearful is a common experience. Hence our death is harder and more terrible than that of other creatures, for we have to fear the wrath and judgment of God, which endure after death and continue eternally. If it were not thus, men would not mind death so much. It is true that the separation from wife, children, kindred, friends and earthly possessions, which are all dear to us, is painful; still this is nothing compared with that agony which the conviction that we are sinners and that we must appear before the judgment-seat of God produces. Yet death will come; we cannot escape it.

The world, therefore, cannot join in with Simeon in his song of cheerfulness, but will cry out when death is near: O God, we have not been Thy servants and must now depart full of uncertainty, sorrow and fear, so that we know not what to do. We know, indeed, what we leave behind us on earth, but what is in store for us beyond the grave we know not, and we must tremble in view of God's wrath and eternal damnation. Such thoughts will possess the hearts of men when the final hour of departure from this world arrives, nor can reason give us any consolation; fear and anguish of soul will overwhelm all our natural faculties.

It is therefore a most superior science and art

of which this old man Simeon is master, and which we ought to learn, that we may have different thoughts of death. Simeon is very aged and death stares him in the face; yea, he feels it in all the members of his body, as aged persons do, that his dissolution is drawing nearer and nearer; yet this does not distress him; no, he prays that it may come soon. He is fearless and cares not for death, but rather welcomes it, since he has seen his Savior. Where this consolation is wanting, there, alas! can be no peace in the dying hour.

How did Simeon obtain this fearless confidence? He was a man, and as such imperfect, so that he had to plead guilty before God. But what can sin and peace have in common? Sin and restlessness, coming from an accusing conscience, agree well enough, but peace of mind cannot harmonize with sin. Nevertheless we see that Simeon does not permit sin to rob him of his peaceful assurance, as little as he permits death to terrify him. Such a disposition of the heart is wonderful, and we ought all to endeavor to obtain it, since we all must sooner or latter pass through this trial. Kind old Simeon is not selfish, and gladly teaches us how to learn this art and whence to obtain a peaceful heart; he says "For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." He speaks of the Child Jesus and calls Him by a glorious name — Savior. Whether he first asked the mother, which is very probable, or not, what the name of the Child was, one thing is sure, he uses the proper name and speaks of the Child as the angel has spoken, who also called Him a Savior, ordained of God Himself to be a Savior. Of this glorious name we have spoken on the festival of Christmas and New Year.

Long before this occurred God ordained in temporal affairs helpers and saviors: rulers of the state, the parental authority of father and mother, physicians for times of sickness, jurists for matters at law. The Child Jesus, however, was not such a savior as these, else Simeon would not have derived from Him the necessary support against sin and death.

From the declaration of Simeon, that he can now depart in peace because he has seen the salvation of God, it follows that this Child is a Savior from sin, death and hell, otherwise he would not have found consolation in Him. These words are few, but of the utmost importance. Simeon gives this name only to this Child, so that other children, no matter who they are and what their names may be, cannot be considered saviors from sin and death, and whoever would think so would deceive himself and remain in misery.

With this name Savior, which Simeon bestows upon the Child, he extracts the fang from the mouth of the law and the priesthood, and other ceremonial observances, and cautions every one against regarding such institutions as saviors, and plainly asserts that he who has nothing to depend on but the Law and good works, will surely go to the devil. This he intends to say when he calls the Child Jesus a Savior, for besides Him there is no salvation. When the Jews look upon their sacrifices and ten commandments as a savior, or when the pitiable pope and his crowd make the mass, and pilgrimages and indulgences, together with other works, their saviors, they commit a fatal error; for it is an eternal truth that this Child

alone is the Savior, and nothing else in heaven or on earth can perform the work of salvation.

Simeon means exactly what he says: "My eyes have seen Thy salvation," the salvation which God in heaven has ordained. The world will persist in the creation of other fancied saviors from sin and death. The Jew expects to obtain mercy from God if he refrains from eating pork, if he keeps the Sabbath and is circumcised, &c. The monk regards his monastic life as a guarantee of heaven for him. Each one selects a separate saint to intercede for him, and thus to be his savior. There is no end to the absurd penances and idolatrous ceremonies in the pope's church. Faithful Simeon wished to warn all against such grievous mistakes, and to teach us to accept the only true Savior of whom we stand in need, and whom God Himself ordained to be our Helper. If we have Him we are safe; for God the Father in heaven, did send this Child Jesus to be a Savior and to bring us salvation.

Whoever possesses this salvation of God can be content and happy; no matter how terrible death may seem, or how sin and death may glare at us, we shall not be terrified, for we have an omnipotent, divine Savior, abundantly able to rescue us from the dominion of sin and death, and to transfer us into the kingdom of God.

It is necessary that we look to this Child, that we take Him upon our arms and caress Him with fond embraces, as Simeon did; and this we will do if we make Him the only joy, comfort and consolation of our heart. If our hearts are once firm in the conviction that this Child is the salvation of God for us, it must follow that we become con-

tented and fearless in the presence of sin and death; for against these very foes we have this Helper.

How does this Child save us? John the Baptist answers this question when he calls Christ the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world, yea, even a victim for us upon the cross. Thus the Child Jesus is the only true Savior, who redeems us from sin and death through His death and resurrection, without any assistance on our part. We can never merit eternal life, though we fulfill our Christian obligations, and by no obedience of our own can we be justified before God. We are never free from sin, nor can we completely fulfill the Law. We are acceptable to God only through our Savior and Mediator Christ, whom we must receive with a faithful heart.

This lesson then must be well learned: Whoever wishes to escape death and to be freed from sin must trust in this Savior, whom God Himself has appointed to carry our sins and to purchase our redemption by His blood. He who has this confidence can under all circumstances, even amid dangers and death, exclaim with Simeon: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace," while he who places his hope on something else will ever be devoid of peace and full of fear; he has no Savior, and remains in death and condemnation.

Nor ought we to suppose that Simeon enjoyed an advantage which we do not possess, since he was permitted to see the Child Jesus with his mortal eyes, and to take Him upon his arms; for indeed this outward meeting was of no avail to him. Other Jews were present then, and likewise saw the

Child; yet they went to hell. Simeon was benefited by the sight because he believed that the Child was his Savior, although the eyes saw only a little infant six weeks old. Faith and not sight was necessary here.

If we do thus, Simeon will surely have but a small, or rather no advantage at all over us. Though he was permitted to see what we cannot see with our eyes, he had to exercise the same faith that we must employ if any benefit is expected against sin and death. What more could we desire? Hence Simeon, being unselfish and desiring others to enjoy this Child together with himself, speaks of Him thus: "Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people."

This Child is a Savior from sin and death, and Simeon is comforted in Him. He says: Not for me alone did God do this; there are many others who belong to the happy number thus blessed of God. This Savior is prepared before the face of all people, and for the entire world.

In this declaration Simeon makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, although there was a great difference in their mode of worship and of living. Simeon does not think of this at all in this connection, for he knows that where sin and eternal death come into consideration there exists no difference among men. Jews are sinners as well as the Gentiles; they are all guilty of eternal condemnation, and circumcision cannot save them, nor will the name "people of God" do it, or the fact that they had the law. These privileges can not rescue them from sin and death; this Savior alone can do it. This fact is expressed by Simeon in one sentence: God has prepared salvation before

the face of all people. This corresponds with the prophecy given to Abraham that through his seed all the generations upon earth should be blessed. When all generations on earth are mentioned or, as Simeon says, "all people," then neither Jews nor Gentiles are excluded, for they are all under the curse. If this Savior comes for all people, it follows that all the nations who have Him not are without assistance and without a Savior.

This is the first lesson which we learn from these words of Simeon; he calls Jews and Gentiles damnable sinners, who can be saved only through this Savior.

Again, by a careful meditation upon these words we find much consolation in them. Our uneasiness, sorrow and tribulation, comes from the consciousness of our wickedness. We fear that if we had to die to-day or to-morrow God would deal with us according to our deserts and would condemn us for our sins. We cannot believe that He is merciful, that He forgives sins, and will save us without any merit of our own. Our hearts represent God as a stern ruler and implacable judge, who is ever ready to exercise the greatest severity. By entertaining such thoughts concerning God we become timid, full of fear, and finally we despair, because we know not how to stand before the judgment-seat of God. But what says Simeon? He portrays God far otherwise. If it were His intention to refuse mercy to sinners and to destroy them, why should He give us Christ as our Savior? But according to the words of Simeon, God has prepared and ordained such a Savior before the face of all people, that they should possess Him.

It must therefore be God's will and intention

to rescue us, as St. Paul says, 1 Tim. 2: "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth,"—to be saved not from temporal ills, but from sin and death. To do this a Savior is necessary, and Him God prepared before the face of all people. Why then should we be afraid of God, who Himself desires our welfare for time and eternity, yea, who has also prepared the means whereby this can be accomplished?

That many, even the greater portion of men, are damned, does not take place according to God's will and purpose, but because people will not conduct themselves according to the gracious will of God, and refuse to accept this Savior whom God has given for the salvation of all. If a wealthy person summoned to him all the beggars in a city to relieve their wants, but the call remained unheeded by many, whose fault is it then if these beggars remain in their poverty? Surely their own. If they had not been such lazy fellows they would have come when called, and would have been made rich. Thus it is with the world. Simeon, the pious patriarch, does not lie. God gave this Savior unto all people, that they might have Him and be saved by Him.

If the Jews are so reckless as to despise Him, if the pope, the Turks and the heathens disregard Him, who is to blame? Let them go their way and make their own saviors; they will in the end meet the fate which they have prepared for themselves. Think not that God will make especial arrangements for your salvation; if you desire to be saved you must embrace this Child. If you believe that God is merciful unto you for Christ's sake, that He will forgive you your sins and will

bring you into heaven, you will surely be saved, for Christ is the Savior from sin and death. But if you refuse Him and presume to do without His help, it is your lookout, and if you are damned you need not blame any one else; you yourself, and your shameful, horrible and wicked unbelief and obstinacy did it.

God has "prepared salvation," which fact clearly indicates that He is merciful and does not desire our death; yea, He has prepared this salvation "before all people," that every one might enjoy its blessings. Simeon, Mary, Peter and Paul were not the only ones to have a savior, but all the nations of the earth shall own Him. He who desires to obtain help against sin and death shall find it, for thus God has ordained it as a kind and indulgent Father. Let us therefore take heed that we do not exclude ourselves by our unbelief from the salvation which God has prepared, and which He faithfully extends unto us, as Simeon here declares. For to make the meaning of these words perfectly plain, he adds to the former expression this saying concerning Christ: "A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." Here we have the reason why God gave this Savior, namely, that He should be a Redeemer for all nations, for Jews and for Gentiles. The Gentiles are enveloped in deepest ignorance, for they have no Word of God; hence they know nothing of Him. They are equally afraid of God and of the devil, and frequently seek help from the latter before they turn to God for assistance. Where there is no knowledge of God, all kinds of sin will be indulged: idolatry, blasphemy, and every lawlessness. Such is the condition of the Gentiles.

For these also God has prepared a Savior, as these words clearly state. Why did He do this? Surely not that they should remain in their deplorable ignorance and condemnation; but He gave this light unto the Gentiles that they should thereby come to a knowledge of God and be saved. It was the will of God that Christ should thus become a Savior also for the heathens, the great and desperate offenders.

God, who thus manifests His kindness and mercy, His love and tenderness, without anger and austerity, must indeed be a gracious God, as Christ Himself says, John 3: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Hence we cannot bring greater indignity upon God than by asserting that He is our enemy because we are sinners, and that He desires us to perish in our wickedness. Yet such erring thoughts of God are deeply rooted in our hearts, else we would have more assurance and a happier state of mind; we would not tremble nor be filled with torturing fears.

We see in this connection also how the old man Simeon was a diligent student of the prophets. His knowledge in these matters was not born in him, but he derived it from the Word of God. We have already shown that he applied the prophecies of Jacob and of Daniel, and also those of Abraham, in regard to the coming Savior of the world, to the Child which he now held upon his arms. As he had learned from Daniel and Jacob the time in which Christ would come, and from Abraham that He would be a universal Savior, so he had also studied the prophet Isaiah, and had there found

the declaration that the Child would be a light unto the Gentiles; for thus says Isaiah, 49. chapter: "It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." Simeon must have been well acquainted with this saying, else he could not have made such appropriate use of it in his declaration concerning the Child Jesus. The Gentiles are thus called to enjoy the blessings of Christ; He is to be their light, and through His Gospel they are to obtain a knowledge of God and everlasting life.

The Jews did not grope along in such utter darkness as the heathens, for they possessed the Word of God and were called His people; hence they had a glorious light which did not shine unto the Gentiles. Why then did Christ come to the Jews, or for what purpose did God send Him unto Israel? Simeon answers: "He is to be the glory of Thy people Israel." Although this people was abundantly blessed of God with His Word, sacrifices and other gifts, they were still submerged in the filth of sin and prostrated under the power of death; nor could they release themselves. This disgrace was far greater than that external honor. Hence Simeon means to say: The Jews have thus far held a more honorable position in the world than the Gentiles, but all this pre-eminence has but little value when the disorder under which they labor is taken into consideration. Now, however, their true glory is at hand, because through this Savior they shall be God's people, not only for a short period here on earth, but also in heaven for

ever. Isaiah proclaims the same truth when he says: "Christ shall raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved of Israel."

This then is the happy and glorious declaration concerning Christ—what He shall accomplish, how we shall enjoy Him, and how we shall be rescued by Him as our Savior from death, that we can be content and cheerful in every misfortune and tribulation. Of this we must preach to-day, since the history of this festival and the pious patriarch Simeon with his declarations require it of us.

But is this done? The pope has too much else to do to-day. He must consecrate wax and candles —surely an important work; for how could a Christian die unless a sacred candle was kept burning near his death-bed? And then the poor women in child-bed,—what would become of them if they were not enabled to make little crosses of these consecrated tapers and fix them on the wall? Why, the devil would run away with them, no doubt! O, you shameless and forlorn Papists! Instead of taking this Child Jesus upon your arms as Simeon did, and instead of directing the dying and the sick to Him as their only comfort and support, you substitute for Him a miserable little taper to ward off Satan and death!

Then they form a procession, in which every one carries a burning candle. Such custom prevails upon this day in the church of the pope, and the carrying of lighted tapers in a procession is intended to represent the going of Joseph and Mary with the Child into the temple. There are however other explanations of this use of the candles.

If we inquire whence this mode of worship

is derived, the Papists will tell us that the old heathens were accustomed to march in procession through cities and villages on the first day of February, and that pope Sergius accepted this practice and adapted it to the true worship of God. Strange fellows indeed, this pope and all the Papists, who learned from heathens how to arrange divine worship in the Christian Church! They came by such stupidity quite naturally, however, because they refused to consider the glorious sayings concerning the Child Jesus, and cared nothing for them.

Let us be duly grateful to God that we are freed from such blindness, and that the radiant light, of which Simeon speaks, shines upon us. May our Father in heaven in mercy preserve unto us this light, so that it may illumine, comfort and make us eternally happy! Amen.

QUINQUAGESIMA.

LUKE 18, 31–43. Then He took unto Him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death; and the third day He shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. And it came to pass, that as He was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: and hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto Him: and when he was come near, He asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

THE Gospel for this day comprises two parts. In the first we have the prediction which Christ makes to His apostles concerning His passion. To these words the angels refer, when they, on Easter morning, tell the women at the tomb, Luke 24: "Remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee, saying, the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise

again." For these words were spoken by Christ on His last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, where He was crucified. The second part of our Gospel relates the wonderful cure of the blind man.

The Evangelist states three times that the disciples did not comprehend this prediction. They regarded His words as having some unusual and hidden meaning. They understood not a single word of these sayings, for they reasoned thus: This man performs so many miracles, He raises the dead, He gives the blind their sight, etc., from all of which it is evident that He will yet become a person of high position, for it is plain that God is with Him. Besides this, the Scriptures declare of Him that He shall have a glorious kingdom and exercise dominion over kings and princes on earth, while we, His servants, will also become princes and great lords. For who could in the least injure such a Person, who controls death and cures all infirmities with a single word? If He so desires, He can make the heathens His subjects and put beneath His feet all His enemies. Hence they came to the conclusion that God loves Him too much to suffer any harm to befall Him; His sayings in regard to His sufferings and death must surely have another meaning. Thus reasoned the apostles in their simplicity.

God's works are indeed incomprehensible, if they are considered before they are accomplished, but as soon as they are finished they are perfectly plain and intelligible. St. John states repeatedly that the disciples did oftentimes not understand the words of Christ, until the acts to which they referred had been accomplished. It is therefore necessary to have faith in the Word of God, for

when He speaks He refers to matters far beyond the power of our comprehension; hence it behooves us to believe what He says, and then we shall fully experience and understand the true meaning of His words.

I will show this by an example. The Word of God tells us of the resurrection of the dead; our reason cannot conceive of it. Hence we see that those skilled in the wisdom of this world, the learned who adore reason and by it wish to interpret the Word of God, laugh at us and deem us fools, because we believe that there is another life after the present is ended. Again, reason will never comprehend how it is that God became man and was born of a virgin. The fact must be accepted in faith until we come into that other life, where we shall see it all and say: Now I understand and see that it is really true what I have believed. Reason also makes light of the fact that through Baptism with water the mercy and grace of God is conferred upon us without our merits, and that we have the forgiveness of our sins in holy absolution. She cannot understand how this is possible, and regards those who believe it as fools and simpletons. She argues thus: If God is to be appeased, something more is needed than this; good works and penances must do it. The pope thinks so too; he always urges people to depend on their good works.

Reason obstinately refuses to believe that through Baptism and faith in Christ we obtain salvation; she regards the Word as an inferior matter and him who proclaims it as a poor, infirm sinner. She considers it folly for man to entrust his body and soul to such a faith. No matter how

often and plainly the Word of God is proclaimed to men, reason cannot and will not accept it: she has no faith. The world will therefore ever regard the holy Gospel as a heresy and devilish doctrine, which allures people away from the truth and prevents them from doing good works. This is the judgment of reason.

Let us therefore learn to have faith in all simplicity, so that we can say from our heart: What God says is true, whether my senses corroborate it or not. He is omnipotent and can fulfil His Word, and though I do not fully comprehend it while on earth, I shall know it all in the life to come.

The Scriptures exhibit the same truth in other examples. Before David enters upon the combat with Goliath, he has the faith that he shall conquer and slay his enemy, as he says to Saul: "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." 1 Sam. 17. He says: This uncircumcised Philistine shall fare like the lion and the bear, for he has blasphemed the Lord's anointed. To the Philistine he says: "This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee." David spoke these words publicly, so that all could hear them, and they who heard them laughed at them and regarded them as idle boasting. Nor would they have been anything else if they had been merely the words of David; but they were the declarations of God, and David believed them before they were fulfilled. The result justified his faith, and it mattered not whether others laughed at his confidence or not, whether

they believed or doubted his assertions; what he said came to pass and was true nevertheless. Reason thought it absurd that little David should undertake the contest with Goliath, that he with no weapon but a sling and pebble should think of conquering the giant. David however believed, and went and accomplished it. Then it was evident to all that he had spoken the truth.

As long as David had simply said: "This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand," the matter seemed incredible and impossible. Reason went to work and calculated with Saul, 1 Sam. 17: David is but a lad, a rustic shepherd, who has never been in battle, and goes into the conflict with staff and sling as if to drive away a dog, so that Goliath mockingly asks him: "Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?" The giant comes up with his heavy armor and ponderous spear. Is this not an unequal equipment, and is it not foolhardy for the little slinger David to undertake what the boldest warrior in the camp did not venture to attempt? David could not understand how it would be done, but he believed firmly that God would be his help, and would punish the blasphemy of the Philistine. His faith was not put to shame.

Thus it will ever be. God's word and will are not believed before they are accomplished. Yet, what He wills is carried out quickly and easily. Our duty is to believe His Word implicitly, even before it is fulfilled. Reason can never understand how Baptism is a laver of regeneration, nor how the bodies of the dead will arise on the day of resurrection. The bodies of many pious persons even are eaten by birds of prey, by dogs and

wolves; some are burned to ashes and these cast into rivers, as it happened to John Huss at the Council of Constance. Reason asks: How can God gather these particles again into a body? It seems indeed incredible and impossible, but God declares that it shall be done. He is almighty and can bring forth something out of nothing; therefore we believe that He can do this also, and it will surely be done.

What were we a hundred years ago? Just what the child is which shall be born twenty, thirty or forty years after we have ceased to live. Since God knoweth how to create all things out of nothing, He will surely be able to make something again out of that which once was. Therefore we need not inquire whether a thing be possible, but whether God has said that it shall be done; if He has made such declaration, it will be done, though it may seem otherwise entirely impossible. My inability to comprehend how something is done, does not make its execution impossible for the Lord, who is omnipotent and can make something of nothing.

Hence those people who would measure God and His works by the standard of their reason are, beyond all endurance, provoking idiots. Because I cannot restore to life the dead, shall it therefore be impossible for God to do it? Take care then, and do not judge God's word and power by your own imagination and ability. If your reason were capable of understanding everything, God might have kept His revelation to Himself. But His declarations are a proof that our human reason is imperfect and knows but little. God's Word is far

above the limits of our reason, as our experience teaches us.

I proclaim to you the forgiveness of your sins, and absolve you according to the command of Christ. You hear the word of absolution, and when you have heard it and are absolved from sin, you may still not feel that God and His angels smile on you benignly. You know nothing of that joy of which the Lord speaks when He says: The angels in heaven shall rejoice over a sinner that repenteth.

If you are baptized, you will have after Baptism the same skin and flesh which you had before. Shall therefore Absolution and Baptism be of no effect? Never! Learn rather to say: God has baptized me, God has absolved me by His Word; I firmly believe that He is gracious unto me, and has received me as His child, that Christ is my Lord and Brother, and that the holy angels rejoice on my account. This I believe, though I have no especial feelings about it. I care not whether the pope and the sects believe this also or not; I will believe it, for God is true and His Word does not lie.

The disciples did not know this art, nor did they exercise this faith, else they would not have disputed about the words of Christ, nor would they have been perplexed at them, but they would have simply believed them. They should have known that what He says is true and will be accomplished. The blind man mentioned in our Gospel understood this art of believing much better. His eyes are totally blind, yet as soon as he heard the word: "Receive thy sight," he believed it, and obtained what he wished and believed. The simple word in his case referred also to some-

thing not yet accomplished, for the eyes of the blind were yet shut; but he believed the word, and the deed of restoration to sight immediately followed according to his faith. Thus ought the disciples also to have believed. Though they could not comprehend how the sayings of Christ could be accomplished, they should have believed them at His Word. The Word simply requires faith.

To trust implicitly the Word of God and to waver not at all in regard to its statements, is taught us in the first part of our Gospel to-day. The pope knows nothing of such faith, nor does he teach it. But you have learned it; keep it well fixed in your mind that a Christian heart is one which hears the Word of God concerning the forgiveness of sins and believes it without doubting, though it neither sees nor feels it. This will afterwards follow of itself. First true faith, then the experience and effects of faith with all its blessings. The others, the pope, Turks, Jews and all unbelievers, will then cry out until they are hoarse, but all in vain: Would that we had believed; who could have thought that this was true! They would now believe, but it is too late; they have postponed their faith too long.

Let us therefore never be offended at the Word of God, even if it seems strange, improbable or impossible; if God has spoken it, it must be fulfilled. Let us never look to the possibility of its execution, but only to the fact that God has so spoken. He is potent enough to bring His declarations to a fulfillment under all circumstances. Whoever doubts this, blasphemes God most wickedly. We must earnestly endeavor to avoid this sin of incredulity when God's Word speaks to us, even though

we do not comprehend its meaning; for it will surely happen even as the Word declares. Thus we have the Word of God in Baptism, in the Lord's Supper, in the absolution and in the preaching; here God Himself speaks to us and pronounces us free from sin. This we must believe as an eternal truth, and never doubt it in the least.

In the second part of our Gospel, concerning the blind man by the wayside, the Evangelist teaches us the necessary art of begging in the presence of God; how we ought never to be afraid or ashamed to ask Him unceasingly for everything that we need. He who is bashful is a poor beggar. We must here lay aside false timidity, remembering that God loves to be importuned by us in prayer. He delights to bestow upon us blessings, and is pleased if we trust in Him and ask much at His hands. And we are surely much in need of His gifts; therefore we should ask of Him as readily as He is willing to give. If we would wait with our petitions until we are worthy of the blessings of God, we would never have an opportunity to ask anything of Him. Hence all shamefacedness should be laid aside, and we should open our mouth boldly in prayer, and say: Lord, here I am in great trouble of body and of soul; I need Thy assistance and comfort; refuse it not, but let me enjoy it according to Thy gracious promises.

The beggars by the wayside and in the alleys are well acquainted with the art of asking; necessity was their teacher. Yet people do not like to be importuned in this manner, and frequently turn away such supplicants with angry words. God however loves such incessant suitors and importunate beggars, as we see one in our text.

The blind man heard the noise of the company passing by and inquired what it meant. When he learnt that Jesus was there he immediately began to cry out: "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those who went before endeavored to silence him, but in vain; he persisted in his cry. Yea, the more they rebuke him the louder he calls.

He was a regular beggar, importunate and persevering, just such an one as God is pleased with. We ought therefore to imitate this example and come to Christ with our prayer, earnestly and perseveringly, saying: O Lord, we are poor, miserable sinners; forgive us our trespasses and bring us into Thy kingdom. Help us here and help us there, yea, help us everywhere! He who thus asks and unceasingly persists in his prayer does well; God is delighted with it, for he is not so easily annoyed as we men are. We are soon wearied by urgent prayers and become angry at him who persists in them; but He loves to be importuned and to be regarded as willing to give. Therefore we ought to pray to Him repeatedly and say: Lord, I come as a beggar before Thee to spread Thy honor abroad. Thou hast commanded us to call upon Thee, and hast promised to hear us and to grant us our prayer, for thus Thou art honored. Therefore, O Lord, take not into account my unworthiness, but the fact that I am in want of Thy help, and that Thou art the Helper of all sinners. I call upon Thee for Thy honor's sake, and Thou wilt not turn Thine ear away from me, &c.

Such a prayer, persevering and bold, is pleasing to God. As soon as the blind man begins with his prayer, the Lord calls him to His side,

and all others had to make way. The blind man, on the other hand, is in no wise timid or ashamed, nor is he reluctant to pray on account of his unworthiness. The Lord asked him: "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" that He might manifest His readiness to help. He meant to say by this question: Ask what thou wilt and it shall be done unto thee. The blind man is not slow with his petition; he answers: "Lord, that I may receive my sight." Christ replied: "Receive thy sight." Short but earnest and effective was the prayer, and graciously was it answered. We must learn from this man how to pray, namely, boldly and faithfully, presenting all our troubles to Christ in the same faith that He will hear us and grant us our request.

In the papacy we had no confidence in our own prayer, and imagined that if others would not intercede for us we would not obtain anything. Never ought a Christian to think thus. As soon as afflictions come, hasten to the closet and fall upon thy knees and say: Lord, here I come in my distress; I must have Thy succor, though I am unworthy of it. Thou hast said: Call upon me in the time of trouble, therefore I pray; look down upon my suffering and misery and rescue me for Thy honor's sake. Thus we ought to importune God with our prayer, and doubt not in the least that He will hear us for Christ's sake, and give us what we need and is good for us. The promise in this is plain and sure: "Whatever ye shall ask in My name that shall be given unto you." Only we must not desist from our asking, but continue in it. The more we pray, the more will God be pleased with us; our begging does not weary Him. Yea,

if our prayer is sufficiently earnest and confident He will give us in the self-same hour what we ask, though He might have otherwise postponed the fulfillment of our request; He heeds our anxious prayer. Thus I hope that the day of judgment is near at hand, and that it will not tarry long, because of the anxious prayers of the Christians who long for it with many sighs. The Lord Himself gives an instance of the effect of importunate prayer, Luke 18, where the widow urges her request so vehemently that the judge, who feared neither God nor man, could not withstand her any more, but said: I will help her that she may cease from troubling me. "And shall not God," continues Christ, "avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." That is: Prayer causes God to hasten what otherwise would be delayed.

The prayers of the Christians, if persisted in, have the effect to bring to pass what otherwise would be deferred, or would even not take place at all. This example must therefore teach us to become impudent beggars, who persist in their request and urgently press their cause, saying: Lord, it cannot be denied, I am a poor degraded sinner; I know full well that I have deserved, by my great and glaring disobedience, much greater penalty and suffering, but because I am full of sin and misery I come unto Thee, and according to Thy command and promises I pray that Thou wouldst be merciful unto me, and forgive me my sins and rescue me from my distress. Guide me by Thy Holy Spirit, and bestow upon me what I need to continue in the truth. Be also the defense of Thy

Church and continue unto us Thy Word. I cannot argue here that I am pious; the fact that I am needy suffices; Thou art kind and ready to give what is beneficial to me for soul and body.

If we pray thus, and continue in our supplication, God will surely answer us as Christ did the blind man in our Gospel: "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee." To pray and not to have faith in prayer, would be mocking God. Faith, however, rests entirely upon this one truth that God, for Christ's sake, is merciful unto us, that He will hear, and protect and save us. May Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, thus assist us! Amen.

INVOCAVIT

MATT. 4, 1–11. Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward a hungered. And when the tempter came to Him, He said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning Thee: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord Thy God. Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them: and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord Thy God, and Him only shalt Thou serve. Then the devil leaveth Him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him.

WE learn from this Gospel how the Lord Jesus subsequently to His Baptism was tempted in a threefold manner, after having been without food forty days and forty nights in the wilderness. According to the account given of this occurrence by St. Luke, these temptations continued throughout the forty days, so that He was molested by each one for several days, and perhaps not in the same order in which Matthew mentions them.

This Gospel is exceedingly comprehensive,

especially when applied to the entire Christian Church, which is also tried by hunger and persecution, by heresies and the kingdoms of the world, as can be plainly seen in all her history. We will however at this time not enter into such an extensive consideration of the text, but simply learn from it a few practical lessons. The experience of Christ after His Baptism shall teach us, in the first place, how every Christian after he is baptized is enrolled in the army fighting against the crafty devil, who makes frequent attacks, and stirs up persecutions all the days of our life. If this bitter enemy does not succeed with his afflictions and temptations, to overcome Christians, he seeks to hang them upon the cross and to murder them as he did Christ.

This peril threatens all Christians. Nor ought we to expect anything else. If he did not spare Christ, but attacked Him so persistently, he will much less spare us, whom he knows to be weak and unprepared. We should therefore be ready to meet this danger when it comes, and learn of Christ how to repel the enemy. This however can only be done through faith in God and His Word. If we put on this armor and use it properly, we are secure against the devil and his attacks; but if we have it not, or are ignorant of its use, we are hopelessly lost, and will become a prey to our deadly enemy.

Every Christian should therefore earnestly read the Word of God and hear it preached, so that he may become well acquainted with it. Besides, we ought to pray incessantly to God to let His kingdom come unto us, to lead us not into temptation, but to deliver us from all evil.

We read in our Gospel that "Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness," that is, the Holy Ghost brought Him thither. This record is made by the Evangelist to caution against all self-imposed service; for Christ did not go into the desert by His own will, nor for the purpose of spending His time there in worship and in a conflict with the devil, as many now attempt to do without any divine command whatever. This ought not to be done. No one should undertake to serve God in a peculiar way, unless he is convinced that God has called him to do so, either by His Word, or by means of men who have, according to God's will, authority over us. He who does this without a proper call, as the monks and nuns do who run into convents, does not only not serve God, but acts in direct opposition to His will.

That Christ did not go into the wilderness of His own accord, but was led up by the Spirit, is a fact of the greatest importance and should be well remembered. We should imitate this example, and never do anything through an impulse of our own feelings; but what we do must ever be done in obedience to the Word and command of God. Let us always first ascertain whether God orders us to do a thing, and when we are assured of this, then let us diligently do it, and do nothing without His Word.

The general duties and works of love need no new command; they are already laid down and ordered in the Ten Commandments. We are all enjoined of God to hear His Word, to love Him, to pray to Him, to be obedient to our parents, to love our neighbor, to shun all lasciviousness and to hold matrimony in high esteem. All this is God's

will and institution; therefore no especial call of the Holy Spirit to enter matrimony, to become father or mother, is needed. Such matters have all been arranged and commanded of God. But we nowhere find a command or word of God, which would demand of us to run into cloisters for the purpose of serving God, or to avoid eating meat, eggs or butter during the lenten season, or to sing no Hallelujah in that time; and therefore all such observances are no true service of God.

We will now consider the temptations in their order. The first one takes place when the devil, seeing that Christ was an hungered, tells Him: "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." This would seem to be no severe temptation. How could it have been wrong for Christ to make bread out of stones? Did He not often perform greater miracles? True; but Christ did not comply with the will of the devil, because He knew well what the meaning of such language was. The devil did not care to have a miracle performed, but, as Christ indicates in His answer, he desired to rob the Lord of His faith and confidence in the mercy of God, and to implant into His heart the thought: God has forgotten and forsaken Thee; He will not even give Thee a piece of bread, and will let Thee die of hunger. Hence the Lord replies: Nonsense, devil! it is written: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

The purport of the devil's insinuation is, to make the care for daily bread the chief concern in life, to the utter neglect of the Word of God. This perverseness prevails in our day, and the devil is

ever busy putting into the hearts of men such thoughts as these: If we are children of God He cannot be offended at us. Let us therefore keep on hoarding up our treasures, and engage with our whole energy in worldly pursuits; let us give nobody anything of what we have, but keep all for ourselves; this cannot be amiss nor a sin. God would be an unmerciful and unkind Father, if He would not allow us to enjoy our bread and to gather it. Such reasoning causes many a farmer and tradesman and mechanic to become miserly hypocrites; they continue in their avaricious dealings, supposing that God will not be displeased with their conduct, since they are engaged in securing their daily bread and support. Each one excuses himself with the thought that he must provide for his wife and children, &c.

The devil attempts to cover the wrong with the statement: "Thou art the Son of God." He means to say: It is impossible for Thee to sin or to make a mistake. The world is everywhere so disposed that it does not care for the Word, if it only has bread and raiment. Hence this temptation to make the Word of no account, and to urge people to strive after their bread with such avidity that everything else is forgotten, is the most common and the most successful.

One must therefore be ready to withstand such temptation and to say: Devil, thou shalt not deceive me nor steal the Word of God away from me. I would rather lose my bread, and die of hunger, than to be in want of the Word of God. For it is better that the body, which is nourished by the bread, should perish, than that the soul should be eternally lost. The devil earnestly endeavors to

prevent such determination; waylays us with his afflictions and strenuously labors to make us forgetful of the Word of God, and careful only for our bellies, under the specious pretense that God our Father desires us to have and to enjoy food and raiment.

An effective weapon against this temptation is the knowledge of the fact, which Christ here mentions, that there are two kinds of bread. The first and best bread, which comes from heaven, is the Word of God. The other and inferior is our daily bread; this grows for us on earth. If I am well supplied with the former, with the good bread of heaven, and firmly adhere to it, my daily bread shall not be wanting as long as I am in need of it; sooner would stones turn into bread. They, however, who have discarded the heavenly food and busy themselves only for temporal supplies, when they have their fill lie down and die. Their money and farms and goods they cannot eat, but must leave them all behind, while they will endure everlasting hunger. It should not be thus. If therefore the devil torments us with persecutions and want, with hunger and sorrow, we should suffer patiently and fast as Christ did, because it is God's will; but never should we lose our confidence and faith in Him. Then will the blessed angels come to set the tables for us, as we read in the conclusion of our Gospel.

Thus we learn from this first temptation to esteem the Word of God most highly, to believe in it, and to rely on it in times of want and adversity, when thoughts are apt to arise as if God were offended and determined to help us no more. Amid such trials we can find no consolation except

in the Word of God. There we have the true bread and nourishment. "He who eateth of this bread," that is, whoever believeth the Word, "has eternal life in Him." Let us never forget this. On the other hand, the food which this world gives, and after which men are so greedy, is of short duration, and vanishes with death. Eternal hunger will follow if man does not while in this world provide himself through faith with that imperishable food, the Word of God.

The other temptation was this: "The devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto Him: If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee." That is, because Thou art the Son of God no evil can befall Thee, for the angels will be sent forth to prevent it.

This is a severe and spiritual temptation of faith, which is here assaulted from another direction than the one already considered. If the devil cannot produce despondency by presenting to us our sins and the wrath of God, he tries his seductive arts in making us reckless, proud and presumptuous. The devil comes here with the challenge: If Thou desirest to dispute with me from the Word of God, well and good, I am ready! I will show Thee a declaration from this Word, hear it: "He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee;" they must construct a ladder for Thee, "and bear Thee up in their hands." Leap down then; let us see whether Thou hast confidence in this promise of God!

We must regard Christ in this connection as a

man, who has His divinity concealed in His humanity. As He hangs upon the cross, a man in reality, full of infirmity, sorrowing and crying for help and release, so we also see Him here, a real man with the infirmities attending the human nature. Hence the devil thought he could persuade Christ to tempt God by the performance of a useless miracle. For this purpose he cites the 91. Psalm, as a proof of the propriety of his demand; but he omits the most important expression, "*in viis tuis*, the Lord shall keep Thee in all Thy ways." The knave thought he could with this quotation perplex Christ, and induce Him to do what He was not commanded. For Christ is now in the wilderness not to perform miracles, but in a state of humiliation, as a man destined to suffer. The devil, in view of this fact, proposes to seduce Christ from His path of duty, to the performance of an unnecessary miracle. But Christ understands the scheme and says: "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." He tells him: Here are steps and stairways, wherefore it is entirely unnecessary that I should leap down. Since I can descend by means of the stairs, it would be wrong to put myself in danger, without necessity and without the command of God.

We must here heed this important lesson, that he who departs from the ordinary way of his calling and attempts to do something new and peculiar, without having the command of God to do so tempts God. Monks and nuns act thus when they, of their own accord, select for themselves a peculiar mode of living, saying that Christ had ordered them to do so when He says: "Leave all and follow me." Thus it would appear that they

had Scripture in their favor; but we see in our Gospel that the devil is also versed in the Scriptures, and thus deceives people. The great defect in his quotations is that he does not give them entire, but only so much as suits his purpose; as to the remainder, he is silent and rejects it.

The Anabaptists do the same thing; they quote much Scripture to prove that we ought not to rely upon anything created. Baptism, they say, is a created thing, for it is water merely; therefore we dare not have faith in it nor any confidence whatever. They will not believe that the grace of God is in Baptism, unless they can touch it with their fists. They have the Scriptures, but the mischief is that they do not use them properly. If the Word of God did not state distinctly: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," it would of course be false to look for the grace of God in Baptism. The Word of God is explicit in this when it declares: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Faith and Baptism, the word and the water, belong together and dare not be separated. This, however, these blind people cannot perceive.

Christ answers the devil in regard to his quotation from the Scriptures: I am well aware that the angels of God will be my companions and that they will defend and protect me as long as I follow the way which God has marked out for me. When parents fulfill their duties, when man-servants or maid-servants perform their prescribed labors, God will defend them all from threatening danger through His holy angels. But if they go astray there will be no angels there to protect them; the

devil can then easily break their necks any hour of the day, as the providence of God often permits; and it is just right for them, too; why did they tempt God and go upon their own, self-chosen pathway?

No one can understand this temptation who has not experienced it. As the first tends to desperation, so this leads to fool-hardiness and to deeds which have no word or command of God in their favor. A Christian must endeavor to avoid these two extremes; he ought not to despair, nor should he be recklessly venturesome, but should cling under all circumstances, in full confidence and faith, to the Word and promises of God. The holy angels will then be with us, otherwise not.

The third temptation is a mere *traditio humana*, exceedingly gross and palpable. The devil attempts to lead into idolatry by offering honor and temporal power. This temptation gains much strength from the fact that external holiness is so much admired by our reason, and glitters much more enchantingly than simply obedience to the Word of God. The pope regards matrimony as unholy; also the bringing up of children and their instruction in the duties of obedience and industry; whilst he is very much delighted, and considers it a most saintly and meritorious deed, if one puts on a gray old coat and hood, if he lives different from other people and refrains from eating meat on Friday, if he fasts and makes pilgrimages, etc. These practices throw a halo of sanctity around one's head, so that kings and emperors bow before it with reverence.

Such forced piety and self-made sanctity are the glory of the pope. He and his followers wish

to be peculiar; to be like other people would be too common for them. Therefore they greatly praise him who runs into a cloister to become a monk and, as they say, an especial servant of God, seeking neither gold nor possessions in his absolute seclusion from the world. Such praises are bestowed upon a monkish life, although they are entirely undeserved, as everybody knows.

In short, this is a most fiendish temptation; it is a false holiness, and does in no wise serve God, whom only, as Christ here says, we ought to serve. If we do not serve God alone we certainly serve the devil, who may indeed often reward, in the manner proposed by him to Christ, with luxury and ease, with rich incomes and great dominion.

If we desire to serve God we must do His will as revealed in His Word. If we are children we must honor father and mother; if servants, we must be obedient and faithful to our masters; if master or mistress, we ought not to offend our domestics in word or deed, but should endeavor to do what is comely and promotive of piety. Thus will we serve God and not men. His Word demands all this of us; and if the world should call this a service of masters, of parents or of children, of neighbors or of friends, it matters not; it is nevertheless a true service of God. He Himself has said: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

The devil has taught the pope to disregard this command and to attribute special holiness to a gray coat, to the abstinence from butter and meat, and to the eating of oil and herrings during the season of Lent. God has given no such ordinances. Such things have nothing to do with true

piety, just as little as a play-house of children could be called a palace. We cannot serve God except by obedience to His Word. Where this is wanting with its demands, we do that which is our own invention, and oppose the will of God. Hence we cannot hope for a reward from God. He says unto us: I did not tell you to do these things; some devil must have incited you, let him reward you. I the Lord have commanded you to love and obey your parents and superiors and to do good to your neighbors; instead of that you do what I have not ordained, and thus rebel against my regulations. This I will not regard as serving me.

The pope and his followers are therefore simply idolaters and servants of the devil. They not only despise the Word, but also persecute it, while they claim to be holy on account of their observances, their hoods and tonsures, their fastings and masses, and similar arrangements. Nor will they be corrected in this. The devil has shown and promised them the kingdom of this world, therefore they mock at us and our worship. We are regarded as beggars and outcasts, while they greatly exalt themselves and their church-customs, from which they derive much honor, wealth and power, so that the pope has become a mightier lord than kings and emperors. From this it is evident how the devil has taken hold of him with this temptation.

We ought always to meet the devil's temptations as Christ did, with the ready and firm response: "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." That is, we should look only to God's Word for instruction, and obeying it

we will institute no other worship than that which it teaches. Since we may at all times meet with these three temptations, we should learn from the Word of God how to defend ourselves against them. We must see to it that the care for our daily bread does not rob us of our faith; that we do not become indifferent to our safety by a false hope of security; and finally, that neither money nor wealth may seduce us from the true worship of God, but that we may remain firm in our faith and in the fear of the Lord. May Christ our Savior, who in our behalf endured these temptations and prevailed against them, give us also strength and ability through Him to overcome them, and to obtain eternal life. Amen.

REMINISCERE.

MATT. 15, 21-28. Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshiped Him, saying, Lord, help me. But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

THIS is a precious Gospel. It has been assigned to this Sunday, as others were, because it contains an account of the casting out of a devil. The intention was thus to admonish people to become pious, and to confess their sins. But it is popish piety, poor and false, that is put off all the year until this Sunday is reached, and that consists in miserable fastings and forced confessions which are not commanded.

This Gospel means no such farce and child's play. It contains an important and difficult lesson, showing how faith, in agony and adversity, pleads its cause before God, from which we should learn not to be deterred by any obstacle from coming to Him with our cries and petitions, even if He Himself should at first say nay. This struggle

we experience particularly in the perils of death, the devil being busy to stir up within us terrible thoughts, as if God our Lord had rejected and forsaken us. Dark and lowering clouds then hang over us, so that the bright sun with its rays is totally obscured, and awful night overwhelms us with multiplied distress.

This struggle is portrayed in the woman of our text. The person and all attending circumstances are of the most unpromising kind. The first unfavorable circumstance is the fact that the woman is of heathen birth, no child of Abraham, nor of his lineage; and therefore, being a stranger, she has no right to ask any favors here. This she knew, and it would have been no wonder if this fact had prevented her coming. She might easily have been led to think: Why shall I go, and what shall I ask? It is all in vain. I am a heathen and foreign woman; He is a Jew, and one sent unto the Jews.

I very much doubt whether we would overcome such obstacles as this; we would succumb to them, and give up our prayer. It is no trifling matter when conscience appears with its charges and tells us: What are you about? You have not the right to pray, as you are not Christ's disciple; let Peter and Paul pray to God; these He will hear, but not you. You have no faith; perhaps you are not one of the elect, and surely unworthy to come before God with your petitions. With thoughts like these the devil can bring us to despair; for indeed the obstacles are great.

When thus perplexed let us look for encouragement upon this woman, and learn to conduct

ourselves as she did. The difficulties in the way do not appall her; she keeps only in view the object of her coming, and forgets that she is a heathen and He a Jew. Her confidence and hope in Christ are so great that she never doubts His condescension. Her faith cancels the fact that she is a heathen. One without faith would never have acted thus, but would have concluded: It is of no use to present my request before Him; I am in the clutches of the devil beyond all hope; let His own people come to Him; them will He hear, but not me. Whoever has no faith is utterly unable to pray. The woman is not vexed with doubts as to her privilege of coming to Christ: she does not spend the time in debating the question, whether she dare come or not; she simply starts upon her way and comes.

It is surely a severe and dangerous affliction when the devil prompts the heart to despair of the mercy of God, to refuse to pray to Him, yea, rather to be ready to curse Him, and to think that all is lost and damnation sure. Such wicked thoughts deter an inexperienced heart from prayer and throw it into despondency.

This story is therefore of great value for us, and written on our account, so that we might know how to meet the enemy when he comes and says: "You are no Christian, your prayer is in vain. Mind not such insinuations, but answer boldly: I care not who I am. I know that I am a sinner, but I also know that Christ my Lord is holy, ever just and merciful. Therefore I will call unto Him without hesitation and think of nothing besides; I have no time to debate whether I am one of the chosen or not. This much I know: I

need help, and on that account I come, humbly seeking it.

If we are thus disposed in mind, we follow the example of our Gospel aright. The woman was a heathen, and, aware of that, she had to conclude that she did not belong to the chosen people; she swallows, however, contentedly this big and bitter morsel, still praying unto Christ with much earnestness. Go and do likewise; say: O Lord, here I come, in want of everything. Give me what I need through Thy Son, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Such a struggle of faith, and wonderful exhibition of its nature, is manifested in this heathen woman.

We are told that she cried out: "O Lord, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." This was an humble and reverential appeal, full of earnestness and faith. She confesses in these words her faith in Christ as the Savior of the world, whom God has sent. She reminds Him of His office and relates to Him her sorrow: "My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." Christ heard her complaint, but answered not a word. This was the second rebuff for her, which was plainly intended to remind her that she was a Gentile and not entitled to a portion of the heritage of the people of God. She follows Christ with her request, but He is silent and pays no attention to her. Surely, a reception well calculated to shake the strongest confidence. Why should she not have thought: I was mistaken; He does not help, nor is He merciful unto all, as I supposed? I see now that He hears but a favored few, and looks not to the existing misery of the suppliants com-

ing to Him. But the poor woman is not yet hopeless of success. See what happened next.

The disciples, weary of her entreaties, are inclined to mercy sooner than Christ. They regard His behavior as harsh and relentless, wherefore they begin to interfere in behalf of the woman: O Lord, Thou seest how meekly and earnestly she supplicates Thee; hear her, and grant her prayer, else she will not desist from it. Indeed, a valuable example to show us how we ought to be instant in prayer.

Taulerus in his writings remarks that we should desist from our prayer. By this he means that when we have prayed often and earnestly we may, for a time, leave off with our petitions, having full faith however that God has heard our prayer and will in the proper season grant it. But it would certainly be wrong to teach people to refrain from prayer; this neglect comes of itself too soon and too often. This example also instructs us not to leave off with our prayer, but to continue in it, without considering whether we are good or bad, deserving or not. We need help and cannot postpone our petition. Every obstacle thrown in the way of our supplication should only prove an incentive to a still more earnest and incessant continuance in it.

Now comes the third trial for the woman, when Christ says: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." With these words He also rebukes the disciples; for He will neither hear them nor the woman. She might now have thought: He is indeed inexorable, and listens neither to those in want nor to those who intercede in their behalf. And, in fact, we no-

where else find Christ resisting so persistently as here. But the woman is not dismayed; she clings to Him with pertinacity, and is not checked in her prayer even by this third repulse.

When her clamor and the intercession of others seem to be of no avail, she even comes into the house, as St. Mark relates. An impudent woman, forsooth! She runs after Christ in the streets with her cry, and when He enters the house to escape her notice, she follows Him and casts herself at His feet. But all this is written for our instruction and consolation, that we should know that Christ is well pleased with such obstinate persistence in prayer.

Still, the Lord is not yet ready to yield, as she desires. He answers the woman: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." If Christ had spoken such words to me, I would have turned and left Him, thinking it useless to ask Him any more, since He seems determined not to grant the request. For, indeed, it was a most severe saying, and enough to crush the poor woman. He tells her that she is a heathen and therefore no heir, and then in addition calls her a dog. This is worse than if He had simply called her a heathen, and is equivalent to the declaration: Thou art a child of the devil in every respect; begone, I will have nothing to do with thee. Indeed, a most appalling trial! If St. Peter or St. Paul spake such a word to me, I would be frightened to death. What can it mean, that Christ Himself thus speaks to the woman?

Just here we notice the beauty and excellence of this example; for we learn from it the mighty strength of faith. Faith takes hold of Christ's

words, even when they sound harshly, and changes them into soothing expressions of consolation. The woman replies to this harsh saying: Thou callest me a dog; I will not gainsay it; take me as a dog, and treat me as one, if it so pleases Thee. Give the bread to the children, and seat them at the table; I ask no such favor; only permit me to pick up under the table the crumbs which the children have dropped, and which they do not miss, and I will be content. She thus overcomes Christ with His own words, and by accepting the position of a dog she obtains the privileges of a child. What can He now saw, the merciful, compassionate Jesus? Forced by His own words, He yields. O, that we would force Him in a similar way; He is ever willing that it should be done!

This most glorious and peculiar struggle of faith is narrated to us that it might be a bright example for all. Never should we turn from the Lord, though He calls us dogs or heathens. Dogs must have masters and food, and the heathens must have a God.

The Lord is overcome by this untiring supplication and unwavering faith. He answers: O woman, all these refusals and rebuffs thou hast successfully sustained and repelled; it shall now be unto thee as thou desirest. Christ is Himself astonished at this example of faith. He had seen how easily the Jews were offended, when He told them they must partake of His flesh; but this woman, in her faith, clings to the hope that He is the Savior and Helper, in whom she firmly trusts.

Here we find the reason why Christ assumed the appearance of harshness towards the woman. His repulsive treatment of her did not proceed

from an unfriendly disposition towards the Gentiles, but it was His purpose to test and make manifest the faith of this woman, so that the Jews, who were the children of His kingdom, might learn from her, a heathen, how to believe in Him, and what confidence they should have in Him. He is so well pleased with the whole conduct of the woman that He can no longer withhold His mercy and kindness, but tells her: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." She asked but the favors extended to dogs; He gives her much more. He not only cures her daughter, but offers to grant unto her whatever she may ask, and thus ranks her among the seed of Abraham. Her faith is the source of all her blessings; through faith she is no more a dog or a heathen, but a holy woman and a beloved child. Such example teaches us that we should continue steadfast in our supplication, though God may for a long time defer His acquiescence in our demands, firmly believing that at the proper time, and in the proper manner, He will pronounce His yea to our prayer. All that is required is not to become weary nor hopeless in our petitions, but to trust faithfully in Him and His providence. Other examples teach us the same lesson. Joseph continued in his prayer to God for help thirteen entire years; yet, the more he prayed the worse his condition seemed to become. Christians have the same experience in our times. They come unto God with their prayer for assistance, yet, after a long time has elapsed, there is still no change for the better. On the contrary, they experience with Joseph that affairs become worse and worse. If Joseph had obtained an immediate

response to his prayer, Jacob his father would have been saved much anxiety, but Joseph himself would have remained a simple shepherd. By the long continued delay of the fulfillment of Joseph's prayer it came to pass that God made him ruler over all Egypt, so that he became a great blessing, not only during the seven years of famine, but also in the government of the State and the Church. Egypt and the surrounding countries were thus benefited.

God pursues the same course with us. He may for a long time refuse to hear our prayer, or may answer with a nay; but if we faithfully persist in our request He will finally drop the no and make it yes. His word cannot lie: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you."

Our reason cannot understand such a delay and is offended at it; it expects an immediate fulfillment of the request. But it is wrong to be thus offended. We must not be dismayed if God answers not according to our wishes, even if one year, or two or three years pass by ere they are fulfilled. Above all things we must see to it that hope and faith in His promises are not lost from our hearts; in the end He gives us much more than we had ever dared to ask. This was the experience of the woman; yea, if she had asked for still more than she did, He would also in the end have granted it.

God teaches us that it is not well, at all times, immediately to grant us our request. He does this in times of imminent peril. If we fall into the water, or are in battle, He does not tarry with His help, but straightway comes to our relief. But wherever a delay is practicable, it is the will of

God that we should learn to wait and to exercise our faith in prayer, as the prophet Habakkuk says: "Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

Thus the Lord tarries at the present day, and permits the pope and the infidels to rage against us. We cry unto Him and lament, but He heeds not our prayer and permits us to be down-trodden as though we had no God. But it will not always be thus. Let us therefore entertain no doubts; Christ our Lord, and God His Father in heaven, mean to say yes to our prayer in the end. This we believe most assuredly, in spite of all delay and the devil's maliciousness.

God will surely be merciful unto His Church, and rescue her from her enemies when she crieth unto Him. He has already determined upon this, for He says: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you." Why then should we doubt or fear? We ought firmly to believe that God will answer our prayer favorably, in spite of our unworthiness, if we but faithfully continue to implore Him.

Thus we see that this narrative presents a most excellent example of true faith, how it must be applied and how it will finally triumph over all adversities. The woman does not permit even Christ Himself to deprive her of the belief that He would hear and help her.

This occurrence is also a source of great consolation to us when we are disturbed by the thought of our wickedness and unworthiness, which indeed will trouble us during our whole life, often to the detriment of our faith. If Christ had looked

more upon unworthiness and merit than upon the great misery of the woman, He would not have helped her; but His compassion prompted Him to afford relief. He will be merciful and ready to help us if we but come unto Him with our sorrows, and trust in Him with a believing heart. May God in mercy strengthen us, that we may be able to do this,—that we may depend entirely upon His word and promises, and thus through faith in Christ be saved for evermore! Amen.

OCULI.

LUKE 11, 14–28. And He was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils. And others, tempting Him, sought of Him a sign from heaven. But He, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. And it came to pass, as He spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto Him, Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked. But He said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it.

AGAIN we have presented for our consideration a Gospel which treats of the casting out of a devil. The same motive which led to the selection of the Gospel for last Sunday, is apparent

in selecting that for to-day; namely, to exhort people in this season of Lent to cast out the devil through sorrow, penitence and confession of sins, so that thus an amendment of life may be wrought. But it matters not whether we read this Gospel to-day or to-morrow, in summer or during Lent; it will ever be exceedingly valuable, because it exhibits to us a deed of our Lord and Savior, which not only occurred at that time, but the effects of which shall continue to the end of the world, as long as His kingdom is on earth. A similar deed was presented to our notice by the Gospel of last Sunday. To-day we are also told what people thought of it, and this affords us an occasion to learn a very important lesson. First, however, we will dwell upon the deed itself.

We are to learn from this report of the casting out of a devil the most consoling truth that Christ is the Lord over the devil and his realm; and, further, that this work, then begun in the body, did not terminate, but still continues in the Church of Christ, and will continue until the judgment day. For the accomplishment of this work Christ has instituted the necessary means; namely, Holy Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Word and Absolution, also other offices pertaining to the ministry, whereby the devil is to be cast out from the people, so that they may become free from his thralldom and that his kingdom may be destroyed. For it is plainly written in this respect: *Verbum meum non redibit vacuum*—My Word shall not return void. As the rain which falls upon dry land produces vegetation and blossoms, thus does the Word of God, most assuredly, produce fruit in some hearts. The Holy Spirit is connected with the Word to

illumine, incite and purify the hearts, that they may be set free from the tyranny and oppression of the devil.

This transaction is not visible to the outward eyes, as it was when Christ cast out the devil; it may be entirely imperceptible to the world, which is indeed not worthy to see the least spark of divine light and power, and which is blind, reviles, abuses and defames that which is good, as it did even here in the presence of Christ. We, however, who have and believe the Word, ought to perceive and know this truth which is so full of comfort, that God has ordained among us the means whereby we can and must continually cast out devils.

Every little child born into the world belongs to the kingdom of the devil, where he is lord and exercises his authority on account of sin. Therefore we must bring the little ones to holy Baptism, according to Christ's command, that they may be regenerated into the kingdom of God, as the Lord Himself says, John 3.; then will the devil be cast out and leave them. When the child is baptized into the death of Christ, God bestows upon it His mercy. Thus, also, when a poor distressed conscience, which the devil has caught in his meshes unawares, comes to me for consolation and instruction, I and all Christians have the authority, by Christ's command, to console and cheer the sorrowing brother, by assuring him of the mercy of God through the death of Christ. Then the devil must withdraw; not, indeed, because I a poor miserable sinner have ordered him to do so, but on account of the word of absolution, which Christ has given us upon earth. Again, when our conscience is terrified and timid, so that doubts arise whether God

will be merciful and forgive us our sins, we have the Lord's Supper, which Christ Himself instituted as a consolation most sure; because if we partake of His body and blood, we can have no longer any ground to doubt that He gave His body into death for our sins and that His blood was shed for their remission. Where there is such faith and assurance the devil must clear the field; his occupation there is gone.

Thus must the Church of Christ continually engage in the work of expelling the devil. Her warfare with the wicked old serpent, who shows his fangs with a bitter determination to establish his dominion, is a perpetual one. Of these deeds Christ speaks when He says, John 14: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father."

The reason of this is that the Christian Church extends her offices much farther than Christ did. He labored within the narrow limits of a portion of Judea, and converted but few, since He preached only a little over three years. The Church, however, under the guidance and protection of her Head and Master, Jesus Christ, who sitteth at the right hand of God, continually pursues the work of evangelizing the world. She preaches the Gospel, administers the sacraments, rebukes the devil unceasingly on account of his wickedness, and casts him out in various places, even from her own domain; for we are not yet entirely rid of him, and must be very vigilant against his wily movements.

Such treatment chagrins the devil very much.

And as we cast him out by preaching and the holy sacraments, if he does not succeed in regaining his position he excites persecutions to drive us from the field. Thus it has ever been, and ever will be until the end of time. Christ Himself experienced this; He could not endure the devil, and drove him out wherever He was asked to do so. Hence the devil had a terrible grudge against Jesus, and by means of the Jews nailed Him on the cross and drove Him out of the world. But the devil was routed after all.

Christ did not only cast the devil out of this poor man in our Gospel, but, as we read in the first epistle of St. John, chap. 3: "He came to destroy the works of the devil," that is, to take away from Satan the power over those who believe in Christ. They, however, who do not accept Jesus, remain under the dominion of the devil, and must finally perish as did the Jews; there is no escape from this fate. The faithful, on the other hand, shall be secure; yea they cast the devil out through the Word, and will on the day of judgment sit with Christ as judges over the devil and all the wicked.

You all know that in the papacy the devil has been very successful in exalting his power to a high degree, so that the Word and Sacraments, which were yet spared them through the mercy of God, were not correctly understood. No one can deny this. Yet even in the popish church the devil had to yield to the Word, and was cast out by holy Baptism; for the promises of God cannot be annulled. The Holy Ghost does not refuse to convey blessings by the Word, on account of the

faithlessness and wickedness of those who preach it or administer the Sacraments.

We have sufficient reason, then, heartily to thank God for such abundant grace, and should not complain if now and then the devil annoys us. He is very much out of sorts that we poor sinners should have the ability, by means of the Word, to compel him to move his quarters; for he is a very proud and self-important spirit. He proposes therefore to take full vengeance upon us, and besets us with persecutions and afflictions. These we should endure patiently, since we know that we can not only cast him out, but that we shall also be his judges to condemn him for ever into the abyss of hell.

From such deeds we should learn to esteem highly the Word of God and the holy Sacraments, and not speak of them so disrespectfully as the philosophers commonly do. If we judge the sacraments merely by our sight, it is true, we can see in them only external signs. Thus the Word is also an external thing, which we hear with our ears and read in the Scriptures; and the Christians are bodily, visible men, but on that account they are not to be despised. If a Christian uses the Word according to the command of Christ, he has the power to drive the devil before him on every occasion.

The humble appearance of the Word and Sacraments ought not to offend us, but should be for us a source of thanksgiving to God for His merciful condescension in giving us by such humble means the greatest of divine blessings. We men are in the conflict with Satan weak as a straw, so that, if he could bring all his power to bear upon

us, we would surely have to perish. But what does God do in our behalf? He lights up this wavering little straw by means of His Word, the fire divine, and prepares such a bright light and lustre in the world that the devil is confounded and affrighted; he is compelled to leave his hiding-places and to remove his habitation. Hence the apostle Paul calls the Gospel a divine power, through which men are saved; a power of God which rescues from sin and death, giving in return justification and life, bringing us from hell into heaven, from the kingdom of the devil into the kingdom of God.

We Christians should be well acquainted with this fact and praise God for it; we should esteem His Word and Sacraments as our highest treasure and blessing. The unbelievers however are not worthy to perceive such glorious majesty and power of the Word of God, as it is well said; *Tollatur impius, ne videat gloriam Dei*, "The wicked man must be removed that he cannot see the glory of God;" or as Isaiah says concerning the Jews: "Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not." We have indeed great reason to thank God for the knowledge and experience of the glory and majesty of His Word, and should heartily rejoice and be comforted that we poor beggars and sinners have such a power at our command, before which the devil cannot stand.

Thus the work of casting out the devil still continues among the Christians; the deaf hear and the dumb begin to speak, though not in an external manner. For surely, it is a mightier work to drive the devil from the heart than merely to

expel him from the body. The heart of man is his strongest fortress. Christ however drives him also out of the body, that we may realize His power, seeing it with our eyes, and that we might firmly believe that He will also, by the Word and Absolution, by Baptism and the Lord's Supper, though they be humble means, drive out the devil effectually from the heart, no matter how well he may have fortified himself there.

Such gracious gifts God has bestowed upon us. We ought to use them earnestly and well, with gratitude and assurance, against the devil, that we may drive him from his stronghold in the hearts of men. He may persecute us as to the body on this account, but that matters not; when the day of judgment comes he will be expelled from his power forever. This is the first lesson of the text, for which, rejoicing in the comfort, we ought to be duly thankful to God.

The Gospel continues to relate what that saintly virgin, the world, thought of this deed of Christ. There were three kinds of spectators there. The first class, consisting of the common people, was the most devout. They are astonished at this deed of Christ, and, undoubtedly, praised God for what they saw. But the number of those whose eyes are opened, who perceive the glory and might of the Word, is very small; they regard its effect as wonderful, and do not cease to praise the Word of God, which converts the people and deprives the devil of his power. They, therefore, never weary of hearing the Word preached to them.

The other two classes of beholders have their hearts hardened. With open eyes they do not perceive that it must be a divine power which quickly

healed the man who had been deaf and dumb, so that he could hear and speak like other men, yea, a power which made the man who had been raving and mad, peaceable and quiet. These people are so blind, foolish and wicked that they ascribe this merciful deed of Christ, which they had witnessed, to the devil.

They might have been amazed and could have said: He casteth out the devils, therefore it may be that He possesses some especial influence, or a peculiar gift of God. This, however, they do not say, but with effrontery assert that God could have nothing to do with this deed, that the devil must be in Christ, and that the whole occurrence was only trickery and deception. They denied that it was a miracle of God; if it was one at all, they think, the devil must have wrought it. So blind and covered were there eyes, so hardened were their hearts, that they do not see the finger of God in this deed, and even venture to say that it is the work of the devil, such as conjurers may perform.

In this their wicked assertion and horrible blasphemy, they are so bold that they call the devil by a very disreputable name, Beelzebub, which means a bumblebee or a fly. They speak scornfully of the devil, as if they were great saints, full of the Holy Ghost, and the devil, compared with them, were like a bumblebee. Paul, the mighty apostle, does not thus disdainfully speak of him, but calls him a prince, the god of this world. But these big saints imagine that if they speak contemptuously of the devil they represent his casting out by Christ as an insignificant performance. They mean to say: This deed is not worthy

of astonishment, for the devil can easily cast out another devil.

They cannot deny the deed itself, so they intentionally disparage it, and forget that they themselves are possessed of a thousand devils, since they are blasphemers, murderers, liars, seducers and in every way the most pliant tools of the devil, and all this because they act as though they had nothing to fear of him.

It is not otherwise in our day. The blessed Gospel, God be praised, is again preached, pure and true, in all decency and order. We rejoice that some pious souls receive this Gospel with alacrity and gladness, and are amazed at the mercy and compassion of God, giving thanks unto Him with all their hearts. Again, there are many who exert themselves to the utmost to persecute and overthrow it. Our opponents confess that our preaching rests upon the Holy Scriptures, that the Sacrament of the Altar should be received in both forms, bread and wine; also that Christ did not forbid to marry, nor to eat certain food; and yet they condemn our teachings as a damnable heresy. It would be no wonder if on account of such wickedness the sun would lose its light, and if these blasphemers were swallowed up by an earthquake. But they are totally indifferent, reckless and secure, as if they were the especial favorites of God; much less do they fear the devil, as do the Christians. We learn from experience that the devil may lead even the just into sin, and retard the work of God. Hence the Christians do not call him Beelzebub, a bumblebee, but, with St. Paul, a prince and god of this world.

We know well enough how strong he is, and

how he holds with a tenacious grasp a person once given to error and heresy, so that it requires repeated instruction and exhortation to rescue such an one from the captivity of the devil. Thus also when he has allured a person into fornication or adultery, into avarice, wrath, hatred, envy and other crimes, I am sure he holds his victims as in a vice. If one cord or chain does not suffice he takes a hundred more, so that there is no possibility of escape by one's own strength.

Hence the Christians will never despise the devil, as the self-righteous saints do who call him a bumblebee, but they know him as "a mighty lord and prince and god of this world," who can lead people into sin and shame, into despair and anguish, into sorrow and every kind of distress, yea, who would slay us if God permitted it. The pope and his crowd neither understand nor believe this, although they see and experience it repeatedly.

The Pharisees, who blaspheme Christ and His deed so vilely, are seven times more violently and dangerously possessed of the devil than this poor man, since they, like our Papists, not only misapprehend the Word, but also defame and persecute it in the most devilish manner. And yet they are as unconcerned as if their actions were all well and good.

It must so happen, if the devil is to be cast out from among us, and the Gospel is to be preached, that some will "wonder," while others will regard our doctrine as false and dangerous. and therefore abuse it as a heresy and doctrine of the devil. But this shall not offend us nor stay our work. We will not deny that it is painful when the Papists self-conceitedly slander and blas-

pheme, as if the devil were to be feared no more than a bumblebee. The Lord Himself met with the same reproach when He performed this great miracle and cast out the devil "with the finger of God;" they talked as though it were as easy to cast out devils as it is to drive off a bumblebee which flies about our head; and asserted that Satan himself assisted in the work. This is one class of the unbelieving witnesses of the work of God, who, instead of praising, blaspheme Him.

The third kind of spectators consists of those who make it a condition of their faith to see a sign from heaven. They are not far removed from the others in their wickedness, only they are not so bold in their assertions. They seek a sign while they have one already; they see it too, but they do not regard it as a true heavenly sign, and would have the Lord to show them one in the heavens; perhaps, that He should make for them a new moon, new stars and the like.

Sapient fellows indeed, who desire to instruct the Lord our God as to the signs which He should show! It would tickle them amazingly if the Lord would assume the character of a juggler, and would exhibit to them some extraordinary feats of magic, as if the Lord our God had nothing else to do but to satisfy their curiosity.

Such men are plenty in our day, especially among the great and honored ones of this world. It is a common saying with the learned and the mighty: What, shall we credit the preaching of these poor beggars—of these recusant monks and perfidious priests? If the pope, the emperor, the king or princes would promulgate or accept this doctrine, then would we listen to it. These men

would also prescribe to God the routine of His duties, how His affairs might be managed much more prudently than they now are, and how He ought to send them such preachers as they would like to have. Lay your plans, noble lords—and God will do as He pleases.

Nor is it much better among us, who claim to be adherents of the Gospel, evangelical Christians. In cities and in the country people undertake to dictate to their preachers what they should preach and what would be acceptable to the hearers. And when a preacher, true to his office, rebukes the prevailing vices, plainly and fearlessly, so that every one can understand what and whom he means, though no names are mentioned, they scream with all their might that such preaching is improper and seditious, and ought to be suppressed by the government; that the Gospel ought to be preached without rebuking and publicly disgracing people. As if it were a defamation or abuse of those in authority when they are told the truth! What think you of such pious souls? Do you not think that they belong to the same family with those who in our Gospel witness the glorious miracle, but do not regard it as such, and ask for another sign which would please their fancy? Such people wish to rule in the land and community where they are, but also in the Church and over the Word of God. Such children will be pleasing to God—very!

But it is nowhere said that, because we should honor the authorities of the State, and raise no injurious reports concerning them, we ought to place such human authority above God and His Word. No, our rulers are also subject to this Word and to

God, just as we are, and Him they must obey. If they act otherwise, we are in duty bound to reprove them without reserve, and to tell them what they do not like to hear, without considering whether they will frown at us or whether they will smile. The Gospel spares no one, be he of high or low estate; it rebukes what is wrong in every one.

To do this, God gave pastors and preachers; their duties are grave, and they must fulfill their office, so that they can give an account thereof on the day of judgment. If they do not rebuke you when you ought to be rebuked, God will demand your blood at their hands. Why then should we preachers put a still heavier load upon ourselves on your account, by preaching whatever pleases you? Remember that the Word is not our own, and that we are not here at your bidding to preach and to do according to your prescription. Faithful preachers dare not and will not shape their preaching to suit the notions of men. The church-doors are open; let him therefore who will not hear the truth go out, for it is not his business to regulate the office of the ministry.

These are the three kinds of persons present at the wonderful deed of Christ. The first are astonished and pleased, and praise it very much; the others are hostile to the Lord and abuse Him; the third, finally, desire Him to carry out their own whims. The Gospel will always have such different hearers.

The ministers of the Gospel will ever have to contend with such people; they must defend the honor of their Lord by preaching His Word fearlessly; nor will they be prompted either by the favor or by the ill-will of the hearers. If people do

not wish to be converted it is not our fault; we have done our duty in presenting to them the truth and in rebuking them for their abuse of the Gospel. If they persist in not accepting our preaching, well and good; let them go to that place where they will comprehend the folly of their ways, and where they will see whom they have despised, abused and blasphemed.

The Lord answers those first, who had accused Him of casting out the devil through Beelzebub, and gives them a simple and easy reply: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? Because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub." This is a comparison which our understanding can easily comprehend. Where man and wife quarrel in their home, when he smashes the pots and the kettles, their house-keeping must come to a speedy end. Our experience teaches us that variance and contention lay waste entire countries, and break up whole families. What the Pharisees and Scribes said is therefore against all common sense, and they talk like fools and madmen. The same is the case with our opponents, the Papists. Their practices and doctrine can be exposed as silly and groundless, and ours can be shown to be reasonable and proper, even without referring to the Scriptures. But it is of no use: all labor in that direction is lost.

We should not forget, in this connection, that Christ says that the devil has a kingdom, one that is well united and compact. If we offend one devil

we offend the whole batch of them; if we attack one we attack all. If these devils did not work together in such close harmony, we would have gained more of the pope's followers. But since the realm of the devil is strong and united, it comes to pass that many people will not accept or believe the truth.

If we hear the Word, or are baptized, or receive the Sacrament of the Altar, we make an inroad upon the domain of Satan, and the reason that the devil with all his assistants does not prevail against us, is that the kingdom of Christ is also strong and united. As soon as the devil pounces upon you he attacks also Him who sitteth at the right hand of God, as He says to Paul: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" This is our consolation; but at the same time we should realize the fact that to be a Christian means more than child's play, since a mighty power is opposed to us, so that we would be in constant danger if God did not cover us with His grace.

Perhaps you will ask here: How does it happen that the conjurers, who are openly vicious and wicked men, can cast out devils? Remember this, that God does not work through them, but the devil himself. I myself saw a man full of devils, yet the priest who exorcised him was so certain in his work that he placed his hand in the mad man's mouth. Do we not see then that one devil casteth out another? I answer: St. Paul says that in the last times the devil will also perform signs, but they will be "lying wonders." He does not do them to promote the cause of the Gospel, but to lead people away from the faith into idolatry. I know that St. Cyriax, St. Anstet and

other saints cast out devils, and that many thus possessed were brought to them, but the whole performance was the devil's own work; he left the sick, not because he was compelled, but of his own accord, that he might thus strengthen the superstition of the people. Likewise he often pretended that he was afraid of a consecrated candle, of a little salt, of holy water and the like. He did this for the sole purpose of strengthening people in their superstition, so that they might not come to the true faith, nor have confidence in God and His Word. These signs were therefore *mendacia signa*, false and "lying wonders," as St. Paul calls them; they were mere pretenses.

Let us look to the real and true signs; let us see how Christ and His apostles cast out the devil through the Word, so that he had to leave, whether he chose to do so or not. We will then discover how different the circumstances were. Here the devil had to come out, to testify thereby to the strength and glory of the Word of God and of the Christian faith. He does not do this voluntarily; hence neither the cross, nor holy water, nor other tricks will be of any avail.

Where it is to the advantage of the devil, for the purpose of spreading his lies and estranging an ungrateful world from Christ, by plunging them deeper and deeper into superstition, so that they will call upon the devil rather than upon Christ, he may indeed suffer himself to be cast out by some wicked conjurers. The whole transaction takes place to oppose the Gospel, to spread error and falsehood, to lead people to have faith in monkery, in the intercession of saints, in vigils, in masses and other so-called holy observances.

Where this can be gained the devil is very ready to be cast out. But where the finger of God is to be made manifest, and Christ's kingdom to be established, the devil is very tenacious, and refuses to be cast out as long as he possibly can; as Jesus shows us in the parable of the strong man armed, who keepeth his palace.

Let us then thank God for the mercy shown unto us in sending His Son as a Savior from the power of Satan, and also for the Word which He has left us, whereby the devil is to be cast out continually, to the establishment and extension of the kingdom of God. May God continue unto us such mercy, through His Son and the Holy Ghost! Amen.

LÆTARE.

JOHN 6, 1–15. After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His miracles which He did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this He said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto Him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when He had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, He said unto His disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone.

THIS is one of the Gospels in which our Lord teaches His Christians to trust in Him, since He will not permit them to die of hunger, but will by His blessing give them a sufficiency of every-

thing they need. Hence those penurious souls who are ever intent upon their own interest, are not worthy to hear nor to heed this glorious lesson of our text. They hear how Christ, by His blessing, performed this great miracle, but they care not to have the same experience. They are, therefore, greedy and act as if Christ could not, or would not, perform a similar miracle for them; so they must provide for themselves, else they might be entirely overlooked and forgotten. Christ has nothing to do with such people.

The others, however, who faithfully confide in His Word, are here assured, not merely in words but in deed, that He will provide for them their daily food. Hence we ought not to doubt, nor be disturbed by the thought as to how we shall support ourselves, but we should place our whole trust and confidence in Christ. Such faith will not deceive us. Our Lord will be present with His blessing, so that the five loaves, if there are no more, will be sufficient to satisfy five thousand men, besides the women and children; yea, that the remainder will be more than the first supply. At first, before they eat, there was scarcely half a basket full of bread, afterwards there were twelve baskets full of fragments.

We learn this important lesson from this occurrence: That we should love God and diligently hear and believe His Word, as these people in our text did; that then God will provide us with our daily bread. It may be that not all of the people then fed were truly pious; but since there were those among them who feared God with all their heart, and cared more about hearing His Gospel than about eating, the Lord provided also for their

bodily wants and gave them food before they expected it. By this deed He intended to tell them that man should first seek the kingdom of God, hear His Word and believe in Him; but also that each one should do with diligence what His calling bids him do, and that, as to the rest, He would provide. Though we are not rich and cannot count our dollars by the thousand, we shall have what we need. We cannot eat money, nor gold and silver, neither stones and the like; we must have bread, the produce of the ground. If we are so situated that we cannot thus gather the food from the fields; if we have neither house nor garner, neither farm nor garden, we will nevertheless obtain enough bread, if we have but faith and trust in God.

Such providential care is witnessed every day. Of a penniless scholar, who is diligent and pious, God often makes a great doctor; to a poor maid-servant, who fears God and is faithful in the performance of her duties, He gives a good husband and home. Similar examples, of daily occurrence, teach us how God assists the poor, while they who do not fear Him nor love His Word, or are otherwise dishonest and indolent, remain miserable beggars and thriftless all the days of their life.

Thus will God also permit an unruly boy, who hates to go to school and is wicked and dishonest, to go on in his vicious course, to become a hireling in some army, where he is stabbed to death or killed in some way, or to become a disreputable character. And the maid who is not pious nor virtuous, who is dishonest and lazy, will surely fall into sin and shame, so that she will be disgraced for her whole life. Such an end is well

merited. If such persons would live uprightly and in the faith of Christ, He would be their protector and friend, and raise them to honor and wealth.

This Gospel plainly teaches us to trust in Christ, convinced that He will preserve us and give us what we need, if we but believe His Word and love to hear it, though this may cause us some inconvenience, as it did at first the people in our text. The deed which Christ here performs is as good as a sermon. He exhorts us thereby to be faithful and pious and to love His Word, and teaches us that then He will be with us to give us food and raiment and make something of us in the world, while, on the other hand, if we are faithless and disregard His Word, we will remain beggars, and that deservedly: even if we are rich our opulence cannot make us happy, we being still the devil's own. It remains a fixed fact that God will not grant the desires of those who are faithless and disregard His Word.

This lesson we learn from our Gospel, where Christ with five loaves of bread satisfies the hunger of five thousand men together with their women and children, who numbered perhaps five thousand more, so that they all had enough, with plenty of fragments remaining. Christ says, Matt. 6: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you;" here He preaches the same truth, but by His deed, not in words alone. He says by this miracle: I am rich and can easily satisfy your wants; be pious and look to me for help; I can and will provide for you. Thus much in regard to faith, as connected with the miracle of the Gospel to-day.

The Evangelist narrates two other items for our instruction and comfort. The first contains the question of Christ to the disciples, and their response; the other, His command to gather up the fragments, that nothing might be lost.

Philip and Andrew are examples set before us to show that true faith is so often wanting, although the Lord, through His wonderful blessings, invites us to exercise our confidence in Him. We all make the same mistake which the disciples made; that is, we look but to our wants and calculate how much we need; that Christ with His blessing can give us everything, we are apt to forget.

Philip counts rapidly and correctly. He says: Two hundred penny worth of bread is needed, if every one in the crowd is to have but a little. If this sum is compared with the five thousand men, besides the women and children, of whom there were also many, as Matthew relates, it was insignificant indeed, and each one would have obtained but a slice of bread. Surely not much for a hungry stomach! We see that Philip made a close and correct estimate of the amount of bread needed for these hungry people in the desert. We indulge in similar calculations of what we need to support our families for a month, or for a whole year; and if we discover that the supply is not at hand, we are dejected and sad, as though we had to leave our house and home, or even die of hunger.

Andrew entertained similar thoughts. He observes that Christ desires to provide for the poor people who were suffering with hunger, and makes the announcement that there was a limited supply of food at hand, five loaves and two fishes.

But when he considered the great multitude, the many hungry mouths and stomachs, his hope failed him, so that he exclaims: "But what are they among so many?" His arithmetic proves itself stronger than his faith; he despairs of all relief for the multitude.

This is the great and common mistake, of which we men are always guilty. We understand very well how to reckon and calculate in regard to our wants; we know that we need counsel and assistance in the difficulties of this life. But if we do not see immediately the desired supply and help, we are sad and disturbed in mind. It would be far better if we would not calculate at all in these matters, leaving them in the hands of God. Then want and privation and cares, which we cannot avert with all our anxiety, would not trouble us before they really come.

Now we often busy and torment ourselves with plans and calculations which are all in vain, for we can never make ourselves rich by our own thoughts and cares. But it may easily happen that these excessive cares and meditations in behalf of our worldly fortunes will bring upon us disease and insanity, as we learn from many examples.

Since our natural reason will but look to our wants, and can only calculate concerning them in direct opposition to faith, the evangelist would here, by the example of the disciples, show us that such anxious calculations are entirely unnecessary, if we are Christians and have Christ with us. Philip and Andrew reckon correctly according to their understanding of the circumstances, but we as Christians have not only our reason, but also the Word of God. Therefore it

behooves us, at all times, to exercise our faith, and whenever our calculations prove unsatisfactory we should not be perplexed, but faithfully place our whole confidence in the Word.

The Christian should realize what a trustworthy Father and Provider his Lord is. Men, even when most liberal, can only give as long as they themselves have something; but here it is said of Christ: He distributed of the loaves and of the fishes as much they desire, not as much as was on hand. And what He did there He can and will still do for His Christians; this we must never forget. His blessings we experience every day; He gives to the pious poor and needy their daily bread, and assists them in every trouble in a wonderful and unexpected way. He is omnipotent, and has promised us His help and salvation.

The chief thing necessary then, whenever our human calculations fail, is earnest faith and prayer. We should be comforted by the knowledge that we have a God, who can not only multiply by His blessing the provisions which we have, as He did for the widow of Sarepta, but who can also make something from nothing. This consolation ought never to escape our memory, so that we do as Christ says, Matt. 6: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and leave the rest to our Father in heaven, who careth for His people even while they sleep; that is, they shall receive blessings without knowing when or how they came, as it was here when the miracle was performed. For the bread and the fishes visibly increased and multiplied in the hands of Christ; when He broke one loaf into two parts, giving one away, then the other one was as large as before.

Christ desires us to have this deed clearly before our eyes, in order that we may learn from it to trust in Him, and to give up this reckoning with human figures merely, and this dependence upon the supply which we can see or touch.

We see in our days how much misery there is everywhere in the world. The infidels increase in strength and are ready to give us battle. We, on the other hand, are decreasing in power, on account of our dissensions, and lack of confidence in each other. The pope also is not at rest, but is as hostile to the Gospel as are the infidels. He and his followers do not yet desist from their base warfare to suppress the truth and to reinstate their former idolatries. When we observe this state of affairs it may happen that we are offended; our reason begins to calculate and to find ways and means by which these matters might be changed and amended. If these means are not readily at hand, if the reckonings result in a great deficit, the heart becomes sad, and almost despairs, because it seems as though everything were going awry. Since such tribulations are sure to come, because our flesh and blood is prone to bring them on, we should as Christians know that, though our reckoning furnishes no hope, we have yet the Word with its assurances, and in that we should ever trust.

What says the Word, and what shall we believe in such distress? This we must believe: Christ has conquered the world, and "the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church," Matt. 16. "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy," Ps. 33. "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous,

and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil," 1 Pet. 3. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished," 2 Pet. 2. Peter still further exhibits this truth by the example of the pious Lot.

Whoever accepts the Word of God and His promises, relying upon them entirely, will not be distressed nor fearful if his reckonings fall far short of his expectations. He knows that he has a Lord who rules in the midst of His enemies, and who is ready to manifest the glory and power of His name, wherever the adversaries of His kingdom disturb His Christians, yea, that He will crush all His enemies, as He did Pharaoh and the Egyptian hosts. Thus through faith in the Word, and by means of it, hope is produced where everything would seem dark and gloomy, and where our reason would despair. The Word of God points to a certain, happy issue from all troubles, if we but firmly cling to it and devoutly pray to God. The wicked, however, who continue in their lawless course, can find no consolation in these promises of God, with which the pious are comforted.

The disciples made a great mistake when they counted merely with figures and forgot to have faith and confidence in Christ their Lord. Philip should have said: Two hundred penny worth of bread is not enough, even if each one present would take but the smallest morsel, but fortunately Thou, our blessed Lord, art with us, and by Thy help we shall have plenty of bread, though we have no money and are in the desert. Thou hast unlimited power. Andrew should also have

said: There is a lad here with five barley loaves and two fishes, which would not suffice for even ten of the hungry ones if I had to distribute these provisions; but if Thy hands will deal them out, they will be so multiplied that we shall all have enough, and plenty of fragments besides. Such assurance and faith they ought to have had from a knowledge of the Word. But through their minute calculations they displaced this knowledge, and we see how little confidence in the power of Christ they manifest on this occasion. From this it follows that, if we desire to act as Christians and to avoid this faithless reckoning and calculation as to our present and future wants, we must take the Word of God in hand and believe it, else there is no remedy for us.

When Christ has bestowed upon us His merciful gifts, we must also bear in mind that other lesson which he teaches the apostles on this occasion: "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." Just as our natural man, in times of suffering and want, can only reckon and not believe, so when by God's blessing seasons of plenty come, we are entirely unfit to use these gifts aright. Many abuse these abundant blessings of God, as we can see wherever we turn our eyes. If the year is fertile with food and wine, people begin to think they may now eat and drink and waste the provisions given, to their hearts content. But this would be wrong. We should diligently gather in the harvest which God has granted us, and use it properly, also laying aside what may remain for future necessity. Joseph instructed the king of Egypt in this economy, and ordered him so to use what the seven fat years yielded that he would

have food for himself and the people during the seven years of famine.

Thus also the tradesman and the mechanic should do; if God gives them a successful and profitable year, they should husband well such blessings; they ought never to think that now they may use and spend much more than formerly. No, the gifts of God must at all times be considered as of the greatest value, and should be kept for future emergency. No doubt, God is often prompted by our great ingratitude and inconsiderate wastefulness and sinful abuse of His bounties, to send two or three years of sterility and failure to one year of fertility and success. How else could He put a restraint upon the criminal abuse of His gifts by the wicked and reckless world?

Others again abuse the bounties of God in a different way. They lay aside and store away when the years are fertile and the markets low, in order that they may gain large profits during the years of scarcity, by oppressing the poor and ruling the market prices as they choose. Such fellows are detestable oppressors, nor need they expect any mercy of God, unless they repent in time. Such dealings arouse the wrath of God. When the Lord orders the remaining fragments to be gathered up, He is not parsimonious, but teaches us how to value His blessings, and to be prepared in time of necessity to assist the poor; this we can do so much the easier if we are not wasteful. A far different thing would it be, if we bought up at the lowest prices wheat, corn, wine, and the like, storing away great quantities until the times become pressing and provisions scarce, so that we might then sell at the highest rate, thereby oppressing others, especially

the poor. This would be a criminal and filthy practice. God does not send a prosperous year that we alone should enjoy it at the expense of other people, or that we should pamper our greedy avarice.

God will surely punish such transactions. The man who trusts in God and His Word will always have enough, even in times of the greatest scarcity; God will bless for him the little that he has, so that it will become much, even to the leaving of fragments. On the other hand, he who abuses the gifts of God by being mean and niggardly will not enjoy the blessings of God, though he toils and scrapes from morning till night; his wealth will be of no benefit, and in the midst of plenty he will be unhappier than the most destitute beggar. It is a well known fact that misers and usurers are poor, miserable and unhappy people. They toil and sweat until they have collected their treasure, and then they toil and sweat still more to take care of it and to increase it. If an accident befalls them, as it often will; if the grain moulds in the field; if the wine runs into the cellar; or if any other misfortune happens, they weary themselves nearly to death with anxiety and lamentation, so that they cannot enjoy what they possess. Misfortune, care, toil and disease is their reward.

Who would not a thousand times rather have but a little, and enjoy it in peace and with a happy heart, especially if we remember how the devil is closely watching these stingy souls, to make them insane and crazy when they suffer losses in their money and goods, until finally in their misery they go and hang themselves, or commit suicide

in some other way, while God richly provides for the poor. Then follows a misery much more terrible than that which they would escape on earth —eternal damnation. This is the result if man abuses the gifts of God and with them feeds his avarice. Nor ought they to be carelessly wasted, but they should be properly used and taken care of, so that in time of want we may be able to assist others who have less than we. God does not give to this or to that person more than to another that he should abuse this abundance in luxury and pleasures, but that he should use it right gladly to the support and assistance of the poor and the needy.

To trust in Christ our Lord and, under all circumstances, to believe in His Word and to wait for blessings from Him, is the pleasing and comfortable lesson taught us in our Gospel. God grant that we may grow in faith from day to day, so that we may in our own life experience His blessings, through Christ Jesus our Lord! Amen.

JUDICA.

JOHN 8, 46–59. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. Then answered the Jews, and said unto Him, Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honor my Father, and ye do dishonor me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. Then said the Jews unto Him, Now we know that Thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and Thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste death. Art Thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest Thou Thyself? Jesus answered, If I honor myself, my honor is nothing: it is my Father that honoreth me; of whom ye say, that He is your God: and ye have not known Him; but I know Him: and if I should say, I know Him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know Him, and keep His saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto Him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at Him: but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

THIS is a precious and comprehensive Gospel, concerning which much might be said. It is however too full of import and truth to be wholly considered at one time; we shall therefore confine our attention to the most prominent declaration contained therein, which is that of Christ: "He that is of God heareth God's words,

ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."

These are very plain words, so that no one, at first glance, would judge them to contain so deep a meaning. But when we look at these words closely, and carefully meditate upon them, when we ask what it means to be or not to be of God, we will discover how important a subject is here mentioned by Christ. For we cannot pronounce a severer judgment upon any one, or reproach him more decisively, than by saying that he is not of God. To be called a knave or a villain, or to be murdered in cold blood, is nothing compared with the horrible misery which the Lord describes in few words, when he says to the Jews: "Ye are not of God." It is therefore the chief thing necessary gladly to hear and diligently to retain the Word of God.

In the narrative of our Gospel we can clearly see that all those who do not wish to hear the Word of God, but speak evil of it, follow the devil whithersoever he leads them, until they are finally wholly his own; they sink lower and lower in their degradation from day to day. The Jews at first, when Christ begins to preach, are angry; afterwards they rail upon Him, calling Him a Samaritan and one "who has a devil." Here we see how rapidly they fell, sinking ten fathoms deeper into hell than before. Soon after they become still more foolish and ask: "Whom makest Thou Thyself?" In short, they become worse and worse in their denunciations, until they come to an open assault, and like murderers pick up stones to throw at Christ for the purpose of killing Him. They committed this awful crime because they

had despised the Word of God, and would not hear the preaching of Christ, but blasphemed Him. All this was an evident indication, according to the statement of the Lord, that the Jews were of the devil; for if they had been of God, they would have conducted themselves differently towards His Word, which Christ preached.

The reason why children in our day are so frequently disobedient and disrespectful towards their parents, will be found in their disregard of the Word of God. They are unwilling to hear it; or if they do hear it they neither learn nor retain it. If they have once begun, in opposition to the will of God, to despise their parents, they will not stop here in their career of sin, but will soon begin to curse their father and their mother, and though they do not strike or slay them with the hand, they still wish them dead; or they will lead such an abominable life of infamy and crime, that their parents will grieve themselves to death.

Thus it is everywhere. He who will not hear the Word of God, nor follow its precepts, becomes a liar, a slanderer and a persecutor. The Papists are a living example of this fact; day after day they grow madder and more raging, nor will they desist from their blasphemy and persecution, until they become murderers and instigators of great bloodshed.

Such conduct is the most criminal. If a man is given to other sins it is possible to convince him of his wrong, so that he desist from his wickedness. But it is utterly in vain to attempt to convince the Papists, and also many among us, that they do a great wrong if they are unwilling to hear the Word of God, and even despise and defame it. They are

so corrupt as to imagine that they do this rightfully and meritoriously. The cause of this is that they deny this word to be God's Word; they regard it as the devil's doctrine and sheer falsehood; and the preachers of it are in their eyes the most despicable heretics and seducers from the truth. The Jews did the same when they called Christ a Samaritan. With this assertion they made manifest their thoughts, in regard to teaching, thus claiming for the most abominable sin an appearance of great sanctity.

The very devil himself is loose among the people, when they fall into the sin of disregarding the Word of God, so that they will neither hear nor heed it. The result is that they will openly persecute Christ, as did the Jews, who hurled stones at Him, and finally nailed Him to the cross, claiming impunity for such a horrible crime. Be careful then that you do not follow their example.

It is therefore a sharp and severe word which Christ says to the Jews: "Ye hear not the Word of God, because ye are not of God." For he who is not of God is of the devil, and has corruption and pestilence, and every other hellish plague upon his back; we could not invoke greater evils upon him. Alas, that this great and horrible sin is so prevalent among all classes of men! How many will you find, among rich and poor, who will lay it to heart as an awful announcement when you tell them: My friends, it is not well that you do not hear the preaching of God's Word, or if you hear it that you do not heed it; it must be that you are not of God! The greater part of these people would answer: What do I care for the Church; I know well enough what I have to do! And if you should still

further tell them: Stop and consider; if you desire to be saved you must amend in this respect,—then will you discover that these people will only become more enraged by your admonition, turning you off with harsh and vulgar words, demanding of you to let them alone, or they will teach you your business with their fists.

Such stubbornness and wrath is terrible, so that a Christian heart trembles at the thought of it, especially when it is borne in mind what Christ says: "He that heareth not the words of God is not of God, but is the devil's child." The most deplorable circumstance in this connection is the infatuation, in which these defamers of God's Word live, so that they do not perceive the error of their ways, but defend their conduct with bitter resolution. Thus did the Jews; they answered Christ: "Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? A self-righteous devil, who thinks that he is always right, is the worst of all devils; and such an one was prompting the Jews.

This is the first lesson taught in our Gospel, that they who will not hear the Word of God are not of Him, but of the devil. This, of course, does not mean that the devil created such persons with their body, mind and all they possess. No, God bestowed upon them these gifts, wherefore we must distinguish between the abilities of man and their use. The man who lies and cheats has a good tongue given to him by God, but the use which he makes of it is of the devil in whose service he abuses it against God. Thus also God may give to man beautiful and charming eyes, but their employment for lustfulness is of the devil. If the heart yearns after lewdness, falsehood and deceit, it

is wicked and of the devil, in respect to its use, though it be good and of God as to its essence.

On the other hand, "to be of God" means to employ willingly and gladly the ears in hearing the Word of God, and to accept rebuke for that which is wrong. Thus we should also use the tongue to pray, to preach, to instruct and to give consolation. Ears and tongues thus engaged are of God and good; they accomplish the purpose for which they were given. The heart also, if it meditates upon that which is comely, upon what is beneficial for our fellow men, and does not give offense, is a creature of God as well as the ears and the tongue. It is "of God," because it strives to follow the precepts of God, and loves to hear His Word, and shuns everything opposed to it. It may happen, alas! that we are overtaken unaware by our weakness; that we curse where we ought to pray, and give way to anger where we ought to manifest kindliness; but if we see our wrong and confess it, asking for mercy, we may then indeed have wavered, or even fallen, but we are not yet of the devil. If a man repents of his sins, and turns to God with the firm resolution to avoid that which is wrong, he will obtain mercy, and the devil is not his master.

The children of the devil are they who are obstinate in their wickedness, who care naught for instruction and admonition, but steadily pursue their sinful course. Such persons are "of the devil," and will become worse and worse, since he continually urges them onward in their crime. At first they disregard the Word, then they blaspheme and scorn and curse it. Finally they are filled with murderous desires, as the Jews were

when they took up stones. The devil can easily be detected by his promptings to disrespect the Word of God, to defame and curse it, to do evil unto others, and to seek the death of the preachers of the Gospel. Such manifestations point out the devil and his offspring beyond all doubt; he is a liar and a murderer, an enemy of God and His Word.

Let us therefore be vigilant, that we may avoid the sin of disregarding the Word of God, but let us hear it right gladly. If we thus hear and retain it, conforming our lives to its precepts, we can be assured that we are of God and are His children. The others can also know beforehand their doom; they are children of the devil. Since they reject the Word, they lose all hope of righteousness and life, but wallow, if I may be permitted the expression, in the filthy excrements of the devil. Nor does their wealth, or high position in the world, suffice to cover their sin. The pope with the entire crowd of his followers is guilty of this sin, for he will not permit the Word of God to rule, and persecutes and slays the Christians. This is the devil's true calling.

To hear God's Word with a willing heart indicates, on the other hand, that such people are of God. God is no murderer, but a Creator of life; the devil however has never created nor infused life into any one. As God is the God of life, so shall they, who are of Him and hear His Word, also have life, according to the declaration of Christ: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death."

What is meant by "keeping the Word of God?" To believe what Christ in His Gospel tells us con-

cerning the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and firmly to retain such faith and hope. He who does this has eternal life, nor will sin, hell and judgment terrify him, since grace and mercy prevail. Death will indeed overcome him, but not with those terrible feelings, which they experience who die without faith and in the presence of the devil. These die unwillingly, with violent convulsions and with bellowings similar to those of cattle; they obstinately resist death, but still must die. If they could, they would put walls of adamant between themselves and death.

Christ declares that it shall not be thus with His disciples who hear and keep His Word. They will be exempt from such terror and suffering upon their death-bed. They trust in their God and are content, falling asleep in death, in the sure hope of a better life. Peaceably, and without trembling, they bid farewell to this world. For death, though he executes his power also upon the bodies of the believers, will for them lose his sting, so that they will meet him as a harbinger inviting to rest.

Thus it often occurs that the poor convicts, who are publicly put to death, die with resignation, and without such mad ravings as people indulge in who are without the consolation of the Word of God.

Consider therefore, my dear children, what great advantage you have, if you willingly hear and learn the Word of God. Learn, first of all, that you are of God, having conquered the devil and hell, so that neither sin nor the judgment of God can terrify. You will also be enabled to en-

dure calmly other annoyances which, though they be ever so trifling, make the world impatient and hopeless.

It is true, the Christians must suffer much from the devil and the world, their bitter enemies. Their body and life, their possession and honor are often in great danger. How shall they endure all this with patience? In no other way than by clinging to the promises of God, so that they can exclaim: Let the world wag and do as it pleases; I am not of her, but of God, else would the world be my friend; but I prefer that she should hate and harass me on every side, to having her good will and then to be not of God. If the heart is thus minded, all tribulation and adversity will pass by as do the clouds in the sky or the birds in the air; we see them for a time and then no more.

Our only comfort in this life must be the possession of the Word and its power, especially when the last hour comes, when death approaches. If we believe the Word with a childlike faith, death will be as a sleep to us. Yea, it will be as when one who journeys along in a dense mist is attacked and slain before he is aware of the presence of the murderer. The devil is indeed a murderer, who has determined upon our death; we know that well. But this his threat and sure attack shall not alarm us. We have the Word, to it we cling; that causes resignation, joy and courage in the presence of dire visitations, even of death. The confidence that through Christ we have in heaven a Father, kind and merciful, will give us strength and patience to endure with true fortitude all the trials of life to the end. This consolation we find in the Word, and nowhere else.

Tell me then, should this not be the chief endeavor of man, to obtain amid the various trials and sorrows of life this consolation, thus to be happy and contented? Yet all these adverse experiences in our daily life are insignificant, compared with the last and greatest evil, death. No physician, skillful though he be, nor advice or assistance of any mortal being can aid and rescue us from the terror of this our foe; Christ alone, our Lord and Savior, must be our help. He gives us a remedy, so sure and so effective, that everything else which we possess is valueless compared with it.

How is this truth observed among us? When God offers this remedy, even at our own hearthstones, we reject it. Hence it happens that we are not of God and fall from one sin into the other, and become more wicked day after day, as has been shown above. If then the dying hour comes, we have no hope, nor consolation, so that we wind and twist ourselves in agony upon our bed, lamenting and crying, yea, even bellowing as an ox before the slaughter.

The chief lesson of our Gospel to-day is the exhortation to learn the Word of God with a ready heart, and to keep it in faith. If we do this, we shall be conquerors over sin, death and hell. Let death devour us as he may, we shall not feel the piercing of his fangs. The Word of Christ is our armor, through which we shall obtain a peaceable death and life eternal.

The wicked and the lawless, who despise the Word, have already the severest punishment possible; since they heed not the Word of God they are not of Him. What more terrific judgment

could be pronounced upon a wicked child, which despises the command of God and disobeys its parents, than to call it the child of the devil? Truly, this is no light matter. I for my part would rather be in the hands of the executioner or the cannibals, than to be a victim of the devil, who is a liar and murderer, and thrusts into everlasting damnation.

Be careful to avoid such calamity. Learn, I beg you, learn with all diligence, to appreciate the treasure which is yours in the word of your Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that outside of the Word there are no means of escape from the devil, sin and eternal death; hence it must be accepted in confidence and firm faith.

When Christ says: "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death," He has no reference to the Law given by Moses to the Jews, which is indeed proper, good and holy, but cannot be fully observed by us, because we are sinners by nature and children of wrath. Hence the Law is a savor unto death; it points out our transgressions and their well-merited punishment. We need then another Word which takes away our sins and justifies us before God. Such a Word we have in the Gospel of Christ, where He gives us the comfortable assurance: "If a man believeth in me, he shall never see death."

This saying requires faith; we must not doubt in the least that what Christ here declares is true. If we would leave the Word out of view, and would judge according to our own knowledge and perception, we would see nothing but death. We must therefore in our great affliction of sin never judge by what we see or feel, but by the Word, so

that we can say: I perceive that I must die, but I also have the assurance of Christ and His Word that I shall live again through Him. He has paid my ransom from death, which was caused by my sins; God is merciful unto me and will give eternal life on account of His death and resurrection. He who has such faith keeps the Word; but it is not easily done, since flesh and blood are averse to faith and would always rather judge according to what they see and feel. We should never entertain such faithlessness, but pray to God for His Holy Spirit to strengthen our hearts in the Word, and to keep us in the true faith evermore.

The Lord tells us also, in conclusion, the reason why His Word is so effective and powerful; at which assertion the Jews became so enraged that they took up stones to kill Him. They could not understand the declaration of Christ that His Word would save from eternal death, since they knew that Moses, Abraham and other holy men of whom the Scriptures make mention, had died; men whom they regarded as superiors of Christ. Hence they concluded that it was a vain boast to speak of His Word as He did. But Christ answered: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad." That is, if Abraham had not believed in my Word he would have died an eternal death, for "I am before Abraham was." I am the eternal and omnipotent God, whoever wishes to escape death and live forever must be saved by me. This neither Moses nor any other prophet could say of themselves, for they were all human; Christ however is God and man, therefore He and none other is able to give life and salvation.

This declaration is very consoling, and a sure testimony of our faith that Christ is the Son of God, true man and true God from eternity. Similar proofs of this truth we find in other parts of the Gospel. We should therefore place our whole confidence in Him alone, and trust firmly in His Word, for it is the Word of God and cannot lie. Whatever He says is true, and must be true in all eternity. Through this Word God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. I repeat, therefore, learn with diligence this important truth, and praise God for such instruction, and pray that He may, through His Holy Spirit, retain us in the Word and save us for evermore through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.