

MARTIN LUTHER

EPISTLE SERMONS, VOL.
3: TRINITY SUNDAY TO
ADVENT

Martin Luther

**Epistle Sermons, Vol. 3:
Trinity Sunday to Advent**

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Luther M.

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Содержание

Dedication	5
Foreword	6
Trinity Sunday	8
THE ARTICLE OF FAITH ON THE TRINITY	9
DIVINE MYSTERIES INEXPLICABLE TO REASON	13
THREE CLASSES OF PEOPLE	16
EVERYTHING IS OF GOD	18
Trinity Sunday	19
THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.1	20
SCRIPTURE PROOF THAT CHRIST IS GOD	21
PAUL AND MOSES AGREE IN TESTIMONY	22
PHYSICAL LIFE INEXPLICABLE TO REASON	24
THE THIRD PERSON OF THE TRINITY	25
First Sunday After Trinity	29
GOD IS LOVE	30
Second Sunday After Trinity	31
EXHORTATION TO BROTHERLY LOVE	32
THE WORLD'S HATRED	33
CAIN THE WORLD, ABEL THE CHURCH	35
LOVE MOVES CHRISTIANS	38
HATRED NATURAL TO HUMAN REASON	40
Third Sunday After Trinity	42
HUMILITY, TRUST, WATCHFULNESS, SUFFERING	43
PRIDE OPPOSED TO THE FIRST TABLE	45
PRIDE OPPOSED TO THE SECOND TABLE	46
THE BEAUTY OF HUMILITY	47
THE CONSEQUENCE OF PRIDE	48
THE REWARD OF HUMILITY	50
WATCHFULNESS ENJOINED	55
SOBERNESS ESSENTIAL	56
FAITH, NOT WORLDLY WISDOM, ESSENTIAL	58
GOD'S WORD THE CHRISTIAN'S GUIDE	59
CONDUCT IN SUFFERING	62
OF TEMPTATION	64
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	65

Martin Luther

Epistle Sermons, Vol. 3:

Trinity Sunday to Advent

Dedication

To all Laymen of Evangelical Christendom interested in developing a deeper Christian Life, on the basis of the spiritual classics of our Protestant Church Fathers, this volume of sermons that apply the pure doctrine of God's Word to everyday life, is prayerfully dedicated.

Foreword

Here comes the English Luther in his twelfth visit to your home. In peasant boots, decorated by no star of worldliness nor even by the cross of churchliness, but by the Book from heaven pressed to his heart in a firm attitude of earnest prayer, he comes as the man of prayer and of the one Book, a familiar friend, to help you to live the simple Christian life.

This volume of twenty-four practical sermons from Trinity Sunday to Advent marks an epoch in that it completes in an unabridged form one branch of Luther's writings, the eight volumes of his Gospel and Epistle Postil. They are bound in uniform size, numbered as in the Erlangen edition from the seventh to the fourteenth volume inclusive, paragraphed for convenient reference according to the Walch edition with summaries of the Gospel sermons by Bugenhagen. The few subheads inserted in the text are a new feature for American readers.

These eight volumes of 175 sermons and 3,110 pages are the classic devotional literature of Protestantism. They were preached by its founder to the mother congregation of Evangelical Christendom in the birth-period of the greatest factor in modern civilization. No collection of Evangelical sermons has passed through more editions and been printed in more languages, none more loved and praised, none more read and prayed. They will be a valuable addition to the meager sermon literature on the Epistle texts in the English language. English Protestants will hereafter have no excuse for unacquaintance with Luther's spiritual writings.

What Luther's two Catechisms were in the school room to teach the Christian faith to the youth, that these sermons were in the homes to develop the same faith in adults. They have maintained their good name wherever translated until the present and their contents are above the reach of critics. These Epistle sermons especially apply the Christian truth to everyday life. The order in developing the Christian life with the best help from the prince of the Teutonic church fathers, should be from the Small to the Large Catechism and then to his Epistle sermons. Blessed the pastor and congregation who can lead the youth to "Church Postil Reading"—to read in harmony with their church-going. Blessed is the immigrant or diaspora missionary who finds his people reading them in the new settlements he visits.

Next to the Bible and Catechisms no books did more to awaken and sustain the great Evangelical religious movements under Spener in Germany, Rosenius in Sweden, and Hauge in Norway, than these sermon books devoutly and regularly read in the homes of church members.

The transition of a people and church from a weak language into a stronger, is easy and accompanied by gain; while the opposite course from a strong into a weaker tongue is difficult; and accompanied by loss. While in our land the Germans and Scandinavians lose much in the transition ordeal, all is not lost; they have something to give.

It is a good sign that two-tongued congregations are growing in favor. Familiar thought in a strange language is not so strange as when both language and thought are foreign. A church whose constituency is many-tongued should avoid becoming one-tongued. Church divisions are often more ethnological than theological. If exclusively English pastors learned one-tenth as much German and Scandinavian as these people do English, unity would be greatly promoted. As Protestantism is far more divided in the English language than in German or Scandinavian, the enthusiasm over the unifying influence of English is misleading. The hope is rather in the oneness of teaching and of spirit. This treasure, given first in Hebrew, Greek and German, can be translated into all languages. Who equals Luther as a translator? May his followers be inspired by his example and translate the Evangelical classics of this prophet of the Gentiles into all their dialects! That these volumes may contribute to this end is our prayer.

The history of the writing of these sermons is found in volumes 10, 11, 12 and 13 of the Gospel sermons of the "Standard Edition of Luther's Works in English."

The German text will be readily found in the 12th volume of the Walch and of the St. Louis Walch editions, and in the 9th volume of the Erlangen edition of Luther's works.

Grateful acknowledgment is hereby made for translations to the following: To Pastor H. L. Burry, the first sermon for Trinity Sunday; Pastor W. E. Tressel, Third Sunday after Trinity; Prof. A. G. Voigt, D. D., the Fifth and Twenty-fourth Sundays; Dr. Joseph Stump, Sixth, Eighth and Thirteenth Sundays; Prof. A. W. Meyer, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Sundays; and to Pastor C. B. Gohdes for revising the Second Sermon for Trinity Sunday and the sermons for the Second, Tenth, Twelfth and Sixteenth Sundays after Trinity.

Next volumes to appear will be Genesis Vol. II, Psalms Vol. II and Galatians.

Heartily do we thank all parts of the church for their complimentary, suggestive and helpful coöperation and earnestly hope our work may be worthy of its continuance.

J. N. LENKER.

Home for Young Women,
Minneapolis, Minn., Pentecost, 1909.

Trinity Sunday

Text: Romans 11, 33-36

33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? 35 or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? 36 For of him and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen.

THE ARTICLE OF FAITH ON THE TRINITY

1. This epistle is read today because the festival of Holy Trinity, or of the three persons of the Godhead—which is the prime, great, incomprehensible and chief article of faith—is observed on this day. The object of its observance is that, by the Word of God, this truth of the Godhead may be preserved among Christians, enabling them to know God as he would be known. For although Paul does not treat of that article in this epistle, but touches on it only in a few words in the conclusion, nevertheless he would teach that in our attempts to comprehend God we must not speculate and judge according to human wisdom, but in the light of the Word of God alone. For these divine truths are too far above the reach of reason ever to be comprehended and explored by the understanding of man.

2. And although I have, on other occasions, taught and written on this article fully and frequently enough, still I must say a few words in general concerning it here. True, it is not choice German, nor has it a pleasing sound, when we designate God by the word "Dreifaltigkeit" (nor is the Latin, Trinitas, more elegant); but since we have no better term, we must employ these. For, as I have said, this article is so far above the power of the human mind to grasp, or the tongue to express, that God, as the Father of his children, will pardon us when we stammer and lisp as best we can, if only our faith be pure and right. By this term, however, we would say that we believe the divine majesty to be three distinct persons of one true essence.

3. This is the revelation and knowledge Christians have of God: they not only know him to be one true God, who is independent of and over all creatures, and that there can be no more than this one true God, but they know also what this one true God in his essential, inscrutable essence is.

4. The reason and wisdom of man may go so far as to reach the conclusion, although feebly, that there must be one eternal divine being, who has created and who preserves and governs all things. Man sees such a beautiful and wonderful creation in the heavens and on the earth, one so wonderfully, regularly and securely preserved and ordered, that he must say: It is impossible that this came into existence by mere chance, or that it originated and controls itself; there must have been a Creator and Lord from whom all these things proceed and by whom they are governed. Thus God may be known by his creatures, as St. Paul says: "For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity." Rom 1, 20. This is (a posteriori) the knowledge that we have when we contemplate God from without, in his works and government; as one, looking upon a castle or house from without, would draw conclusions as to its lord or keeper.

5. But from within (a priori) no human wisdom has been able to conceive what God is in himself, or in his internal essence. Neither can anyone know or give information of it except it be revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. For no one knoweth, as Paul says (1 Cor 2, 11), the things of man save the spirit of man which is in him; even so the things of God none knoweth save the Spirit of God. From without, I may see what you do, but what your intentions are and what you think, I cannot see. Again, neither can you know what I think except I enable you to understand it by word or sign. Much less can we know what God, in his own inner and secret essence is, until the Holy Spirit, who searcheth and knoweth all things, yea, the deep things of God—as Paul says above—reveals it to us: as he does in the declaration of this article, in which he teaches us the existence in the divine majesty of the one undivided essence, but in such manner that there is, first, the person which is called the Father; and of him exists the second person called the Son, born from eternity; and proceeding from both these is the third, namely, the Holy Spirit. These three persons are not distinct from each other, as individual brothers or sisters are, but they have being in one and the same eternal, undivided and indivisible essence.

6. This, I say, is not discovered or attained to by human reason. It is revealed from heaven above. Therefore, only Christians can intelligently speak of what the Godhead essentially is, and of

his outward manifestation to his creatures, and his will toward men concerning their salvation. For all this is imparted to them by the Holy Spirit, who reveals and proclaims it through the Word.

7. Those who have no such revelation, and who judge according to their own wisdom, such as the Jews, Turks and heathen, must consider the Christian's declaration the greatest error and rankest heresy; they must say that we Christians are mad and foolish in imagining that there are three Gods, when, according to all reason—yea, even according to the Word of God—there can be but one God. It would not be reasonable, they will say, that there should be more than one householder over the same house, more than one lord or sovereign over the same government; much less reasonably should more than one God reign over heaven and earth. They imagine that thus with their wisdom they have completely overthrown our faith and exposed it to the derision and scorn of all the world. As if we were all blockheads and egregious fools and could not see their logic as well as they! But, thank God, we have understanding equal to theirs, and can argue as convincingly, or more so, than they with their Alkoran and Talmud, that there is but the one God.

8. Further, we know, from the testimony of Holy Writ, that we cannot expound the mystery of these divine things by the speculations of reason and a pretense of great wisdom. To explain this, as well as all the articles of our faith, we must have a knowledge higher than any to which the understanding of man can attain. That knowledge of God which the heathen can perceive by reason or deduce from rational premises is but a small part of the knowledge that we should possess. The heathen Aristotle in his best book concludes from a passage in the wisest pagan poet, Homer: There can be no good government in which there is more than one lord; it results as where more than one master or mistress attempts to direct the household servants. So must there be but one lord and regent in every government. This is all rightly true. God has implanted such light and understanding in human nature for the purpose of giving a conception and an illustration of his divine office, the only Lord and Maker of all creatures. But, even knowing this, we have not yet searched out or fathomed the exalted, eternal, divine Godhead essence. For even though I have learned that there is an only divine majesty, who governs all things, I do not thereby know the inner workings of this divine essence himself; this no one can tell me, except, as we have said, in so far as God himself reveals it in his Word.

9. Now we Christians have the Scriptures, which we know to be the Word of God. The Jews also have them, from whose fathers they have descended to us. From these, and from no other source, we have obtained all that is known of God and divine works, from the beginning of the world. Even among the Turks and the heathen, all their knowledge of God—excepting what is manifestly fable and fiction—came from the Scriptures. And our knowledge is confirmed and proven by great miracles, even to the present day. These Scriptures declare, concerning this article, that there is no God or divine being save this one alone. They not only manifest him to us from without, but they lead us into his inner essence, and show us that in him there are three persons; not three Gods or three different kinds of divinity, but the same undivided, divine essence.

10. Such a revelation is radiantly shed forth from the greatest of God's works, the declaration of his divine counsel and will. In that counsel and will it was decreed from all eternity, and, accordingly, was proclaimed in his promises, that his Son should become man and die to reconcile man to God. For in our dreadful fall into sin and death eternal, there was no way to save us excepting through an eternal person who had power over sin and death to destroy them, and to give us righteousness and everlasting life instead. This no angel or other creature could do; it must needs be done of God himself. Now, it could not be done by the person of the Father, who was to be reconciled, but it must be done by a second person, with whom this counsel was determined and through whom and for whose sake the reconciliation was to be brought about.

11. Here there are, therefore, two distinct persons, one of whom becomes reconciled, and the other is sent to reconcile and becomes man. The former is called the Father, being first in that he did not have his origin in any other; the latter is called the Son, being born of the Father from eternity. To this the Scriptures attest, for they make mention of God's Son; as, for instance, in Psalm 2, 7: "Thou

art my son; this day have I begotten thee;" and again, Galatians 4, 4: "But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son," etc. From this it necessarily follows that the Son, who is spoken of as a person, must be distinct from the person of the Father.

12. Again, in the same manner, the Spirit of God is specifically and distinctively mentioned as a person sent or proceeding from God the Father and the Son: for instance, God says in Joel 2, 28: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh," etc. Here a spirit is poured out who is God's, or a divine spirit, and who must be of the same essence, otherwise he could not say, "my Spirit;" and yet he must be a person other than he who sent him or who pours out. Again, because when he was sent he manifested himself, and appeared in his descent in a visible form, like that of a dove or tongues of fire, he must be distinct in person from both the Father and the Son.

13. But in this article of faith, in which we say that the Son of God became man and that he was of the same nature as we ourselves are, in order that he might redeem us from sin and death and give us eternal life without any merit or worthiness of our own, we give Jews and Turks no less occasion for laughter and mockery than when we speak of the three persons. For this is a more absurd assertion by far, in the estimation of human reason, which speculates in its Jewish and Turkish—yea, heathenish—teachings, on this wise: God is an only, almighty Lord of all, who has created all men and given them the law according to which they are to live; accordingly it follows that he will be merciful to the good and obedient, but will condemn and punish the disobedient. Therefore, he who does good works and guards himself against sin, God will reward. These are nothing but heathenish conclusions drawn from earthly, worldly experience and observation, as if God's government must be conducted on the same principles as that of a father among his children and domestics; for those are considered good rulers and masters who make a distinction with regard to their own interests.

14. Such heathen ideas of wisdom, holiness and service of God are taught and practiced by the Pope. And so we believed, myself and others, while we were under him, not knowing any better; otherwise we would have done and taught differently. And, in fact, he who has not this revelation and Word of God, can neither believe nor teach other than pagan doctrine. With such a faith, how much better were we than the heathen and Turks? Yea, how could we guard ourselves against any deception and lying nonsense that might be offered as good works and as service of God? Then we had to follow every impostor who came with his cowl and cord, as if Christ were represented in him; and we thought that in the observance of these things we would be saved. So the whole world was filled with naught but false service of God—which the Scriptures properly call idolatry—the product of human wisdom, which is so easily deceived by that which pretends to be a good work and to be obedience to God. For human wisdom knows no better; and how could it know better without the revelation? Even when the revelation was proclaimed, human wisdom would not heed it, but despised it and followed its own fancies. Hence it continued to be hidden and incomprehensible to such wisdom, as Saint Paul says: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord?"

15. But to us this counsel and mind of God in giving his Son to take upon himself our flesh, is revealed and declared. For from the Word of God we have the knowledge that no man of himself can be righteous before God; that our whole life and all our deeds are under wrath and condemnation, because we are wholly born in sin and by nature are disobedient to God; but if we would be delivered from sin and be saved, we must believe on this mediator, the Son of God, who has taken our sin and death upon himself, by his own blood and death rendering satisfaction, and has by his resurrection, delivered us. In this truth we will abide, regardless of the ridicule heaped upon us because of such faith, by heathen wisdom, which teaches that God rewards the pious. We understand that quite as well, if not better, than heathenism does. But in these mysteries we need a higher wisdom than our own minds have devised or can devise, a wisdom given to us by grace alone, through divine revelation.

16. For it is not our intention thus to pry into the counsel, thoughts and ways of God with our understanding and opinions, and to be his counselors, as they do who meddle in the affairs that are the prerogative of the Godhead, and who even dare, in the face of this passage of Saint Paul, to

refuse to receive or learn of God, but would impart to him that for which he must recompense again. And thus they make gods after their own fancy, as many gods as they have thoughts; so that every shabby monastic cowl or self-appointed work, in their estimation, accomplishes as much and passes for as much as God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in their eternal divine counsel, determine and accomplish. And they continue to be nothing but wearers of cowls and instructors in works, which works even they can do who know nothing of God and are manifestly scoundrels. And even though they have long been occupied with these things, they still do not know how matters stand between themselves and God. And it will ever be true as Saint Paul says: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counselor?"

17. For your own theories—which are no more than what anyone can arrive at, conjecture or conceive in his own mind, without divine revelation—are not a knowledge of the mind of God. And what does it avail if you are not able to say more than that God is merciful to the good and will punish the wicked? Who will assure you that you are good and that you are pleasing to God with your papistic, Turkish monkery and holiness? Is it all that is necessary to assert: God will reward with heaven such as are faithful to the order? No, dear brother, mere presumption, or an expression of your opinion, will not suffice here. I could do that as well as you. Indeed, each may devise his own peculiar idea; one a black, and another a gray monk's cowl. But we should hear and know what God's counsel is, what is his will and mind. This none can tell you by his own understanding, and no book on earth can teach it except the Scriptures. These God himself has given, and they make known to us that he has sent his Son into the world to redeem us from sin and the wrath of God, and that whosoever believes in him should have everlasting life.

DIVINE MYSTERIES INEXPLICABLE TO REASON

18. Behold, Paul's purpose in this epistle is to show Christians that these sublime and divine mysteries—that is, God's actual divine essence and his will, administration and works—are absolutely beyond all human thought, human understanding or wisdom; in short, that they are and ever will be incomprehensible, inscrutable and altogether hidden to human reason. When reason presumptuously undertakes to solve, to teach and explain these matters, the result is worthless, yea, utter darkness and deception. If anything is to be ascertained, it must be through revelation alone; that is, the Word of God, which was sent from heaven.

19. We do not apply these words of Paul to the question of divine predestination for every human being—who will be saved and who not. For into these things God would not have us curiously inquire. He has not given us any special revelation in regard to them, but refers all men here to the words of the Gospel. By them they are to be guided. He would have them hear and learn the Gospel, and believing in it they shall be saved. Therein have all the saints found comfort and assurance in regard to their election to eternal life; not in any special revelation in regard to their predestination, but in faith in Christ. Therefore, where Saint Paul treats of election, in the three chapters preceding this text, he would not have any to inquire or search out whether he has been predestinated or not; but he holds forth the Gospel and faith to all men. So he taught before, that we are saved through faith in Christ. He says (Rom 10, 8): "The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart," and he explains himself by saying that this word should be proclaimed to all men, that they may believe what he says in verses 12 and 13: "For the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon him: for, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

20. But he speaks of the marvelous ruling of God in the Church, according to which they who have the name and honor of being the people of God, and the Church—the people of Israel—are rejected on account of their unbelief. Others, on the other hand, who formerly were not God's people, but were unbelieving, are now, since they have received the Gospel and believe in Christ, become the true Church in the sight of God, and are saved. Consequently it was on account of their own unbelief that the former were rejected. Then the grace and mercy of God in Christ was offered unto everlasting life, and without any merit of their own, to all such as were formerly in unbelief and sin, if only they would accept and believe it. He declares: "For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all." Rom 11, 32.

21. Hereupon follows the text, which Saint Paul begins with emotions of profound astonishment at the judgment and dealings of God in his Church, saying:

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!"

22. Sublime are the thoughts and counsel of God, transcending by far the mind and comprehension of man, yea of all creatures, when he so richly pours forth his goodness and out of pure grace and mercy elects, as beneficiaries of that goodness, the poor and wretched and unworthy, who are concluded under sin—that is, those who acknowledge themselves before God to be guilty and deserving of everlasting wrath and perdition; when he does all this that they might know him in his real divine essence, and the sentiment of his heart—that through his Son he will give all who believe everlasting life. And, again, that they might know how he will reject and condemn the others—those who, in pride and security, boast of their own gifts and the fact that they are called the people of God in preference to all other nations; who boast that they have special promises, that they have the prophets, the fathers, etc.; who think that God will acknowledge no nation on earth but themselves as his people and his Church. He will reject them on account of their unbelief, in which they are fettered by the pride and imaginations of their own wisdom and holiness.

23. This is that rich, inexpressible, divine wisdom and knowledge which they possess who believe in Christ, and by which they are enabled to look into the depths and see what the purposes and thoughts of the divine heart are. True, in their weakness they cannot fully reach it; they only can apprehend it in the revealed Word, by faith, as in a glass or image, as Saint Paul says. 1 Cor 13, 12. But to blind, unbelieving reason, divine wisdom will be foreign and hidden; nothing of it will enter reason's consciousness and thoughts, nor will reason desire more though a revelation be given.

24. That attitude Saint Paul encountered, especially when the arrogant Jews opposed themselves so sternly and stubbornly to the preaching of the Gospel. Filled with astonishment, he exclaimed: What shall I say more? I see indeed that it is but the deep unsearchable wisdom of God, his incomprehensible judgment, his inscrutable ways. So he says elsewhere: "But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, even the wisdom that hath been hidden, which God foreordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the rulers of this world hath known." 1 Cor 2, 7-8.

25. This depth and richness of wisdom and knowledge, we Christians apprehend through faith; for, as Saint Paul says, it cannot be apprehended nor comprehended otherwise. Though the world will not do it, we will firmly believe that God is a true God and Lord, wise, just and gracious, whose riches and depth are ineffable. We will glorify him with our whole heart, therefore, as he ought justly to be praised and glorified by every creature, for his wonderful government of his Church, through his Word and revelation. Whosoever will hear and receive the same shall have light that will turn them to him and give them a knowledge of their salvation—an experience which others can never realize. And he is to be glorified because he manifests such unutterable goodness to all who are in sin and under God's wrath that he translates them, though they are unworthy and condemned, from the power of death and hell into the kingdom of eternal grace and life, if they will only seek grace and believe on Christ his Son. And, on the other hand, he is to be glorified because, as a just judge, he rightfully rejects and condemns those who will not believe the revelation and testimony of his will in his Son; who insist on, and boast of, their blind fancies, of their own wisdom and righteousness. Being accordingly deprived of such light, such grace and consolation, they must forever be separated and cast forth from the kingdom of God, regardless of what great name and fame may have been theirs when they were supposed to be the people and Church of God.

26. And such are God's unsearchable judgments and his ways past tracing out. Such are his government and works. For by "judgments" is meant that which in his view is right or wrong; what pleases or does not please him; what merits his praise or his censure; in short, what we should follow or avoid. Again, by "his ways" is meant that which he will manifest unto men and how he will deal with them. These things men cannot and would not discover by their own reason, nor search out by their own intellect, and never should they oppose their judgments or speculations to God. It is not for them to say what is right or wrong, whether an act or ruling is divine. They should humble themselves before him and acknowledge that they cannot understand, they cannot teach God in such matters; they should give him, as their God and Creator, the honor of better understanding himself and his purposes than do we poor, miserable worms.

"For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor?
or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?"

27. Paul states three propositions which take away from the world all its boasting concerning divine things: To know the mind of the Lord—what are his thoughts and purposes, or what he has determined within himself from eternity; to be his counselor—advising or showing him what to do and how to do it; to give to him—assisting him, by one's own ability, to accomplish his divine purpose. All this is impossible to human nature; it cannot know his mind, and how much less will it be able, with all of its wisdom and activity, to counsel him or give him anything.

28. Therefore, it is a shameful presumption on the part of the world to presume by its own powers to ascertain and discover God's essence, his will and works, and to counsel him as to his duties

and pleasures; and shameful is it that it presumes with its works to have merited something from him, and to have earned a recompense; shameful presumption to expect to be honored as having achieved much for God's kingdom and for the Church—strengthening and preserving them and filling heaven with holiness!

29. God must defeat minds so perverted. In his administration he must disregard their opinions and attempts. Thus, being made fools by their own wisdom, they may stumble and be offended at it. So would God, by showing us the realities, convince us of the futility of our own endeavors and lead us to acknowledge that we have not fathomed his mind, his counsel and will, and that we cannot counsel him. No man or angel has ever yet first thought out for God his counsel, or offered suggestion to him. Much less is he compelled to call us into counsel, or recompense us for anything we have given to him.

THREE CLASSES OF PEOPLE

30. There are three different kinds of people on earth, among whom Christians must live. The first of these are that rude class which is unconcerned about the nature of God and how he rules. They have no regard for God's Word. Their faith is only in their mammon and their own appetites. They think only of how they may live unto themselves, like swine in the sty. To such we need not preach anything of this text: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God." They would understand nothing of it though we were to preach it to them everlastingly. They would rather hear of the husks and swill with which they fill themselves. Therefore we will let them remain the swine that they are, and separated from others as they are. But it is exasperating to have to encounter them among Christians.

31. The second class are they who are still reasonable, concerning themselves, about God's purposes and their fulfilment, and how we may be saved. The heathen, and even we ourselves when under the papacy, contended, according to reason, over these things. Here is the beginning of all idolatry on earth; everyone teaches of God according to his own opinion. Mohammed says: He that believes his Koran and its doctrines is pleasing to God. A monk: He that is faithful to the order and its regulations will be saved. The Pope: He who observes his prescriptions and ritual, who makes a pilgrimage to the apostles at Rome, buys himself an indulgence; he has acquired the forgiveness of sins: but he who neglects it is under the wrath of God. These observances they call judgments and ways, controlling consciences and directing them to eternal life; and they imagine that they are God's judgments and ways.

32. On the contrary, the Word declares that God wants none of these things; that they are error and darkness and a vain service—idolatry, which he hates and which provokes him to the utmost. All must acknowledge who have practiced their own self-appointed observances for any length of time, that they have no real assurance that God will be gracious unto them and take pleasure in them because of their lives and observances. Yet, in their blind delusion and presumption, they go on in their vagaries till God touches their hearts by a revelation of his law; then, alarmed, they must admit that they have lived without a knowledge of God and of his will, and that they have no counsel or help unless they lay hold on the words of the Gospel of Christ.

33. We were all like that heretofore. Even I, a learned doctor of divinity, did not know better. I imagined that with my monk's cowl I was pleasing to God and on the way to heaven. I thought that I knew the mind of God well. I wanted to be his counselor, and to earn a recompense of him. But now I realize that my belief was false; it was blindness. I know that I must learn from his Word; that nothing else avails before him but faith in the crucified Christ, his Son; and that in such faith we must live, and do as our respective callings or positions require. Thus we may know right and wrong in God's sight; for our knowledge is not of our own invention, but we have it from revelation. By revelation God shows us his mind; as Saint Paul says (1 Cor 2, 16): "We have the mind of Christ." And again (verse 10): "But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit."

34. The third class are those who transgress, having knowledge. They have the Word of revelation. I am not now speaking of those who knowingly persecute the truth—those of the first class, who are unconcerned about God—but I am speaking of those who recognize the revelation but are led by the devil to override it and go around it. They would conceive ways and judgments of God that he has not revealed. If they were Christians, they would be satisfied and thank God for having given us his Word, in which he shows us what is pleasing to him and how we may be saved. But instead, they allow themselves to be led by the devil to seek for other revelations and to speculate on what God in his invisible majesty is, and how he secretly governs the world, and what he has determined in regard to the future of each particular individual. And so presumptuous is our human nature that it would even interfere, with its wisdom, in God's judgment, and intrude into his most

secret counsel, attempting to teach him and direct him. It was because of his arrogance that the devil was cast out into the abyss of hell; because he aspired to interference in the affairs of divine majesty, and would drag down man in the fall with himself. So did he cause man to fall in paradise, and so did he tempt the saints; and so he tempted Christ himself when he set him on the pinnacle of the temple.

35. Against this third class Saint Paul directs his words, in answer to the impudent questions of wise reason as to why God punished and rejected the Jews, as he did, and allowed the condemned heathen to come into the Gospel grace; why he so administers justice as to exalt the godless and allow the godly to suffer and be oppressed; why he elected Judas as an apostle and afterwards rejected him and accepted a murderer and malefactor. With these words Saint Paul would command the wise to cease their impertinent strivings after the things of the secret majesty, and to confine themselves to the revelation he has given us; for all such searching and prying will be in vain and harmful. Though you were to search forever you would nowhere attain the secrets of God's purposes, but would only risk your soul.

36. If you, therefore, would proceed wisely, you cannot do better than to be interested in the Word and in God's works. In them he has revealed himself, and in them he may be comprehended. For instance, he manifests his Son, Christ, to you, on the cross. This is the work of your redemption. In it you may truly apprehend God, and learn that he will not condemn you on account of your sins, if you believe, but will give you everlasting life. So Christ tells you: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." Jn 3, 16. In this Christ, says Saint Paul (Col 2, 3), are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden. Herein you will have more than enough to learn, to study and ponder. You will marvel at the wonderful revelation of God, and you will learn to delight in and love him. It is a mine which can never be exhausted in this life by study, and in the contemplation of which, as Peter says (1 Pet 1, 12), even the angels never tire, but find unceasing joy and pleasure.

37. I say this so that we may be prepared to instruct and direct those we may meet who, assailed and tormented by such thoughts of the devil, are led to tempt God. They are beguiled by the devil to search and grope, in his false ways, after what may be the intention of God concerning them, and thereby they are led into such apprehension and despair that they are unable to endure it. Such individuals must be reminded of these words, and be reproved by them. So did Paul reprove the Jews and cavilers of his day when they presumed to comprehend God with their wisdom, to instruct him as his counselors and masters, to deal with him directly themselves, without any mediator, and to render him such service that he would owe them a recompense. Nothing will come of such searching. Against its endeavors he has erected barriers that, with all your striving, you will never be able to overcome. And so infinite are his wisdom, his counsel and riches, that you will never be able to fathom nor exhaust them. You ought to rejoice that he gives you some knowledge of his omnipotence in his revelation, as follows:

"For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him be the glory for ever."

38. Why should we boast, he would say here, when everything that has being—and our own wisdom and capabilities, of course—did not originate itself but had its origin in him and must be preserved by him, must exist through him? He says (Acts 17, 28): "For in him we live, and move, and have our being." And again (Ps 100, 3): "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves." That is, what we are and are able to do, and the fact that we live and have peace and protection—in short, all the good or evil that happens to us—comes to pass not by accident or chance. It all proceeds from his divine counsel and good pleasure. He cares for us as his people and flock. He governs us and gives us good things. He aids and preserves us in every time of need. Therefore, all honor and glory are due to him alone, from his creatures.

EVERYTHING IS OF GOD

39. But when he says, Of him, through him, in him, are all things—he says in the simplest way that the beginning, middle and end is of God; that all creatures have their origin in him, also their growth and their limitations. To illustrate: Every little grain of corn has its beginning. A root springs from the dead seed in the ground; then a shoot comes forth and becomes a stalk, a leaflet, an ear of corn, and here it pauses, having the three parts it is intended to have. All creatures also have their beginning, their continuation and end, filling up the period of their existence. When this order ceases, every creature will cease to exist. That which has a beginning and grows but does not attain its end, does not reach perfection, is nothing. To sum it all up, everything must be of God. Nothing can exist without origin in him. Nothing that has come into being can continue to exist without him. He has not created the world as a carpenter builds a house and, departing, leaves it to stand as it may. God remains with and preserves all things which he has made; otherwise they would not continue to exist.

40. Saint Paul does not simply say—as he does elsewhere—Of him are all things. He adds two other assertions, making a triple expression, and then unites the three thoughts into one whole when he says, "To him be the glory for ever." No doubt it was his intention therewith to convey the thought of this article of faith and to distinguish the three persons of the Godhead, even though he does not mention them by name, which is not necessary here. The ancient teachers also looked upon this passage as a testimony to the Holy Trinity. Their analysis was: All things are created by God the Father through the Son—even as he does all things through the Son—and are preserved, in God's good pleasure, through the Holy Spirit. So Paul is wont to say elsewhere; for example (1 Cor 8, 6): "There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things." And concerning the Holy Spirit, Genesis 1, 31 says: "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."

41. The Scriptures teach us that all creation is the work of one God, or the whole Godhead; and yet, inasmuch as they make a distinction between the three persons of the one Godhead, we may properly say that everything had its origin, everything exists and continues, in the Father as the first person; through the Son, who is of the Father; and in the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from both the Father and the Son; which three, nevertheless, are comprehended in the one undivided essence.

42. But how such a distinction of persons exists in the divine essence from eternity is a mystery which we shall and must leave unsolved. For we cannot, with our crude understanding, even fathom God's creatures; no creature is wise enough to understand these three parts of itself—the beginning, the middle and the end. Though they are distinct from each other, nevertheless they are so closely connected that we cannot with our physical senses separate one from the other. Who has ever been able to discover or explain the process by which a leaflet grows from a tree, or a tiny grain of corn becomes a root, or a cherry grows from the blossom to wood and kernel? Again, who can explain how the bodily members of a human being manifestly grow; what the sight of the eye is; how the tongue can make such a variety of sounds and words, which enter, with marvelous diversity, into so many ears and hearts? Much less are we able to analyze the inner workings of the mind—its thoughts, its meditations, its memory. Why, then, should we presume, with our reason, to compass and comprehend the eternal, invisible essence of God?

Trinity Sunday

Second Sermon. Text: Romans 11, 33-36

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.¹

1. This festival requires us to instruct the people in the dogma of the Holy Trinity, and to strengthen both memory and faith concerning it. This is the reason why we take up the subject once more. Without proper instruction and a sound foundation in this regard, other dogmas cannot be rightly and successfully treated. The other festivals of the year present the Lord God clothed in his works and miracles. For instance: on Christmas we celebrate his incarnation; on Easter his resurrection from the dead; on Whitsunday the gift of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Christian Church. Thus all the other festivals present the Lord in the guise of a worker of one thing or another. But this Trinity Festival discloses him to us as he is in himself. Here we see him apart from whatever guise assumed, from whatever work done, solely in his divine essence. We must go beyond and above all reason, leaving behind the evidence of created things, and hear only God's own testimony concerning himself and his inner essence; otherwise we shall remain unenlightened.

2. Upon this subject the foolishness of God and the wisdom of the world conflict. God's declaration that he is one God in three distinct persons, the world looks upon as wholly unreasonable and foolish; and the followers of mere reason, when they hear it, regard every one that teaches or believes it as no more than a fool. Therefore this article has been assailed continually, from the times of the apostles and the fathers down to the present day, as history testifies. Especially the Gospel of St. John has been subjected to attack, which was written for the special purpose of fortifying this dogma against the attacks of Cerinthus the heretic, who in the apostolic age already attempted to prove from Moses the existence of but one God, which he assigned as reason that our Lord Jesus cannot be true God on account of the impossibility of God and man being united in one being. Thus he gave us the prattle of his reason, which he made the sole standard for heaven to conform to.

3. O shameless reason! How can we poor, miserable mortals grasp this mystery of the Trinity? we who do not understand the operation of our own physical powers—speech, laughter, sleep, things whereof we have daily experience? Yet we would, untaught by the Word of God, guided merely by our fallible head, pronounce upon the very nature of God. Is it not supreme blindness for man, when he is unable to explain the most insignificant physical operation daily witnessed in his own body, to presume to understand something above and beyond the power of reason to comprehend, something whereof only God can speak, and to rashly affirm that Christ is not God?

4. Indeed, if reason were the standard of judgment in such matters, I also might make a successful venture; but when the conclusions of even long and mature reflections upon the subject are compared with Scripture, they will not stand. Therefore we must repeat, even though a mere stammering should be the result, what the Scriptures say to us, namely: that Jesus Christ is true God and that the Holy Spirit is likewise true God, yet there are not three Gods; not three divine natures, as we may speak of three brothers, three angels, three suns, three windows. There is one indivisible divine essence, while we recognize a distinction as to the persons.

¹ This sermon was first printed in 1535, at Wittenberg.

SCRIPTURE PROOF THAT CHRIST IS GOD

Paul, speaking of Christ in Hebrews 1, 3, refers to him as the express image of God's substance. Again, in Colossians 1, 15 he says of Christ: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." We must take these words for what they say—that all creatures, even angels and men, are ranked below Christ. This classification leaves room for God only: taking away the creature, only God remains. It is one and the same thing, then, to say that Christ is the firstborn of all creatures and that Christ is true and essential God.

5. To make the matter as clear as possible Paul uses the expression "image of the invisible God." If Christ be the image of God he must be a person distinct from him whose image he is, but at the same time in one divine essence with the Father. He and the Father are not one person, but two, and yet Christ could not be the express image of the Father's person, or essence, if he were not equally divine. No creature can be an image of the divine essence, for it does not possess that essence. To repeat, Christ could not be called the express image of God if he and the Father were not distinct persons; there must be one imaged and one who is the image. Expressed more clearly and according to Scripture, one person is the Father, who in eternity begets the other; the other is the Son, begotten in eternity, yet both are equally eternal, mighty, wise and just.

6. Though the Jews and Turks ridicule our doctrine, as if we taught the existence of three brothers in heaven, it does not signify. Might I also cavil were it to serve any purpose here. But they do us wrong and falsify our teaching; for we do not conceive of the Trinity as in the nature of three men or of three angels. We regard it as one divine essence, an intimacy surpassing any earthly unity. The human body and soul are not so completely one as the Triune God. Further, we claim the Holy Scriptures teach that in the one divine essence, God the Father begot a son. Before any creature was made, before the world was created, as Paul says, "before the foundation of the world," in eternity, the Father begot a Son who is equal with him and in all respects God like himself. Not otherwise could Paul call Christ the express image of the invisible God. Thus it is proven that the Father and the Son are distinct persons, and that nevertheless but one God exists, a conclusion we cannot escape unless we would contradict Paul, and would become Jews and Turks.

PAUL AND MOSES AGREE IN TESTIMONY

7. Again, Paul makes mention of Christ in different phrase, saying: "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents." 1 Cor 10, 9. Now, keeping this verse in mind, note how Paul and Moses kiss each other, how clearly the one responds to the other. For Moses says (Num 14, 22): "All those men ... have tempted me these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice," and in this connection the speaker is represented by the term "Lord," everywhere in the Bible printed by us in capitals to indicate a name belonging only to the Eternal, applicable to none but the one true God. Other terms used to designate God are sometimes applied also to men, but this word "Lord" refers only to God.

Now, Moses says: "And the Lord [Adonai, the true God] said ... All these men ... have tempted me these ten times." Then comes Paul explaining who this God is—saying they tempted "Christ." Crawl through this statement if you may; the fact remains that Paul declares it was Christ who was tempted, and Moses makes him the one eternal and true God. Moreover, Christ was not at that time born; no, nor were Mary and David. Nevertheless, the apostle plainly says, They tempted Christ, let us not also tempt him.

8. Certainly enough, then, Christ is the man to whom Moses refers as God. Thus the testimony of Moses long before is identical with that of Paul. Though employing different terms, they both confess Christ as the Son of God, born in eternity of the Father, in the same divine essence and yet distinct from him. You may call this difference what you will; we indicate it by the term "person." True, we do not make a wholly clear explanation of the mystery; we but stammer when speaking of a "Trinity." But what are we to do? we cannot better the attempt. So, then, the Father is not the Son, but the Son is born of the Father in eternity; and the Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father and God the Son. Thus there are three persons, and yet but one God. For what Moses declares concerning God Paul says is spoken of Christ.

9. The same argument substantially Paul employs in Acts 20, 28, when, blessing the Church of Miletus and exhorting the assembled ministers concerning their office, he says: "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood." This, too, is a significant text, proving beyond all controversy that Christ our Lord, who purchased the Church with his blood, is truly God, and to him the Church belongs. For the apostle plainly asserts it was God who bought the Church with his blood and that the Church is his own.

Now, in view of the fact already established that the persons are distinct, and of the further statement that God has purchased the Church through his own blood, we inevitably conclude that Christ our Saviour is true God, born of the Father in eternity, and that he also became man and was born of the Virgin Mary in time.

10. If such blood—the material, tangible, crimson blood, shed by a real man—is truly to be called the blood of God, then he who shed it must be actually God, an eternal, almighty person in the one divine essence. In that case we truly can say the blood flowing from the side of the crucified One and spilled upon the ground is not merely the blood of an ordinary man, but God's own. Paul does not indulge in frivolous talk. He speaks of a most momentous matter; and he is in dead earnest when he in his exhortation reminds us that it is an exalted office to rule the Church and to feed it with the Word of God. Lest we toy in the performance of such an office we are reminded that the flock is as dear to him as the blood of his dear Son, so precious that all creatures combined can furnish no equivalent. And if we are indolent or unfaithful, we sin against the blood of God and become guilty of it, inasmuch as through our fault it has been shed in vain for the souls which we should oversee.

11. There are many passages of similar import, particularly in the Gospel of John. So we cannot evade the truth but must say God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are three individual

persons, yet of one divine essence. We do not, as the Jews and Turks derisively allege, worship three Gods; we worship only one God, represented to us in the Scriptures as three persons.

Christ said to Philip (Jn 14, 9), "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." There Christ claims unity and equality with the Father in the one divine essence. So does Paul in Colossians 1, 15, where he calls Christ "the image of the invisible God," at the same time indicating two distinct persons: the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father, yet they are one God. Such passages, I say, are frequent. By means of them the sainted fathers valiantly maintained this dogma of the Trinity against the devil and the world, thus making it our heritage.

12. Now, what care we that reason should regard it as foolishness? It requires no skill to cavil over these things; I could do that as well as others. But, praise God, I have the grace to desire no controversy on this point. When I know it is the Word of God that declares the Trinity, that God has said so, I do not inquire how it can be true; I am content with the simple Word of God, let it harmonize with reason as it may. And every Christian should adopt the same course with respect to all the articles of our faith. Let there be no caviling and contention on the score of possibility; be satisfied with the inquiry: Is it the Word of God? If a thing be his Word, if he has spoken it, you may confidently rely upon it he will not lie nor deceive you, though you may not understand the how and the when.

Since, then, this article of the Holy Trinity is certified by the Word of God, and the sainted fathers have from the inception of the Church chivalrously defended and maintained the article against every sect, we are not to dispute as to how God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God. This is an incomprehensible mystery. It is enough that God in his Word gives such testimony of himself. Both his nature and its revelation to us are far beyond our understanding.

PHYSICAL LIFE INEXPLICABLE TO REASON

13. And why should you presume to comprehend, to exactly understand, the sublime, inconceivable divine essence when you are wholly ignorant of your own body and life? You cannot explain the action of your laughter, nor how your eyes give you knowledge of a castle or mountain ten miles away. You cannot tell how in sleep one, dead to the external world, is yet alive. If we are unable to understand the least detail of our physical selves, anything so insignificant as the growth of a mere hair, for instance, can we, unaided by the revelation of God's Word, climb by reason—that reason so blind to things within its natural realm—into the realm of heavenly mysteries and comprehend and define God in his majesty?

If you employ reason from mere love of disputation, why not devote it to questions concerning the daily workings of your physical nature? for instance, where are the five senses during sleep? just how is the sound of your own laughter produced? We might without sin occupy ourselves with such questions. But as to the absolute truth in a matter such as this, let us abide patiently by the authority of the Word. The Word says that Christ is the express image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creatures; in other words, he is God equally with the Father.

14. Again, John 5, 23 testifies that all should honor the Son as they honor the Father. And in John 12, 44 we read: "He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me." Also, John 14, 1: "Believe in God, believe also in me." And again, John 16, 15: "All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine." These and similar passages are armor that cannot be pierced: for they are uttered by God, who does not lie and who alone is qualified to speak the truth concerning himself. Thus the dogma of the Trinity is thoroughly founded upon the holy Scriptures.

THE THIRD PERSON OF THE TRINITY

15. Now, having established the existence of Christ in the Trinity, we must next consider the third person, the Holy Spirit, in Scripture sometimes termed the "Spirit" of God and sometimes his "Soul." This person is not spoken of as "born"; he is not born like the Son, but proceeds from the Father and the Son. To express it differently, he is a person possessing in eternity the divine essence, which he derives from the Father and Son in unity in the same way the Son derives it from the Father alone. There are, then, three distinct persons in one divine essence, one divine majesty. According to the Scripture explanation of the mystery, Christ the Lord is the Son of God from eternity, the express image of the Father, and equally great, mighty, wise and just. All deity, wisdom, power and might inherent in the Father is also in Christ, and likewise in the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from Father and Son. Now, when you are asked to explain the Trinity, reply that it is an incomprehensible mystery, beyond the understanding of angels and creatures, the knowledge of which is confined to the revelations of Scripture.

16. Rightly did the fathers compose the Creed, or Symbol, in the simple form repeated by Christian children: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son ... I believe in the Holy Ghost." This confession we did not devise, nor did the fathers of former times. As the bee collects honey from many fair and gay flowers, so is this Creed collected, in appropriate brevity, from the books of the beloved prophets and apostles—from the entire holy Scriptures—for children and for unlearned Christians. It is fittingly called the "Apostle's Symbol," or "Apostle's Creed." For brevity and clearness it could not have been better arranged, and it has remained in the Church from ancient time. It must either have been composed by the apostles themselves or it was collected from their writings and sermons by their ablest disciples.

17. It begins "I believe." In whom? "In God the Father." This is the first person in the Godhead. For the sake of clear distinction, the peculiar attribute and office in which each person manifests himself is briefly expressed. With the first it is the work of creation. True, creation is not the work of one individual person, but of the one divine, eternal essence as such. We must say, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit created heaven and earth. Yet that work is more especially predicated of the person of the Father, the first person, for the reason that creation is the only work of the Father in which he has stepped forth out of concealment into observation; it is the first work wrought by the divine Majesty upon the creature. By the word "Father" he is particularly and rightly distinguished from the other persons of the Trinity. It indicates him as the first person, derived from no other, the Son and the Holy Spirit having existence from him.

18. Continuing, the Creed says, I believe in another who is also God. For to believe is something we owe to no being but God alone. Who is this second person? Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son. Christians have so confessed for more than fifteen hundred years; indeed, such has been the confession of believers from the beginning of the world. Though not employing precisely these words, yet this has been their faith and profession.

19. The first designation of God the Son makes him the only Son of God. Although angels are called sons of the Lord our God, and even Christians are termed his children, yet no one of these is said to be the "only" or "only-begotten" Son. Such is the effect of Christ's birth from the Father that he is unequalled by any creature, not excepting even the angels. For he is in truth and by nature the Son of God the Father; that is, he is of the same divine, eternal, uncreated essence.

20. Next comes the enumeration of the acts peculiar to him: "Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." The distinct personality of the Son is thus demonstrated by acts peculiar to himself. Not the

Father and not the Holy Spirit, but the Son alone, assumed human nature of flesh and blood, like unto ours, to suffer, die, rise again and ascend into heaven.

21. In the third place we confess, "I believe in the Holy Ghost." Here again a distinct person is named, yet one in divine essence with the Father and the Son; for we must believe in no one but the true God, in obedience to the first commandment: "I am Jehovah thy God ... Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

Thus briefly this confession comprehends the unity of the divine essence—we accept and worship only one God—and the revealed truth that in the Trinity are three distinct persons. The same distinction is indicated in holy baptism; we are baptized into the faith of one God, yet Christ commands us to baptize "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

22. The peculiarity of this third person is the fact that he proceeds from both the Father and the Son. He is therefore called also the Spirit of the Father and the Son; he is poured into the human heart and reveals himself in the gathering of the Church of Christ in all tongues. Through the Word of the Gospel he enlightens and kindles the hearts of men unto one faith, sanctifying, quickening and saving them.

23. So the Creed confesses three persons as comprehended in one divine essence, each one, however, retaining his distinct personality; and in order that the simple Christian may recognize that there is but one divine essence and one God, who is tri-personal, a special work, peculiar to himself, is ascribed to each person. And such acts, peculiar to each person, are mentioned for the reason that thus a confusion of persons is avoided. To the Father we ascribe the work of creation; to the Son the work of Redemption; to the Holy Spirit the power to forgive sins, to gladden, to strengthen, to transport from death to life eternal.

The thought is not that the Father alone is the Creator, the Son alone Redeemer and the Holy Spirit alone Sanctifier. The creation and preservation of the universe, atonement for sin and its forgiveness, resurrection from the dead and the gift of eternal life—all these are operations of the one Divine Majesty as such. Yet the Father is especially emphasized in the work of creation, which proceeds originally from him as the first person; the Son is emphasized in the redemption he has accomplished in his own person; and the Holy Spirit in the peculiar work of sanctification, which is both his mission and revelation. Such distinction is made for the purpose of affording Christians the unqualified assurance that there is but one God and yet three persons in the one divine essence—truths the sainted fathers have faithfully gathered from the writings of Moses, the prophets and the apostles, and which they have maintained against all heretics.

24. This faith has descended to us by inheritance, and by his power God has maintained it in his Church, against sects and adversaries, unto the present time. So we must abide by it in its simplicity and not be wise. Christians are under the necessity of believing things apparently foolish to reason. As Paul says (1 Cor 1, 21): "It was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe." How can reason adapt itself to comprehend that three are one, and one is three; that God became man; that he who is washed with water in obedience to Christ's command, is washed with the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and cleansed from all sins? Such articles of faith appear utterly foolish to reason. Paul aptly calls the Gospel foolish preaching wherewith God saves such as do not depend on their own wisdom but simply believe the Word. They who will follow reason in the things dealt with in these articles, and will reject the Word, shall be defeated and destroyed in their wisdom.

25. Now, we have in the holy Scriptures and in the Creed sufficient information concerning the Holy Trinity, and all that is necessary for the instruction of ordinary Christians. Besides, the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and that of the Holy Spirit is also attested by miracles not to be lightly esteemed nor disregarded. The Lord our God brings to pass miraculous things for the Christian's sake—for the strengthening of his faith—and not merely as a rebuke to false teachers. Were he to consider the false teachers alone, he might easily defer their retribution to the future life, since he

permits many other transgressors to go unpunished for ten, twenty or thirty years. But the fact is, God openly in this life lays hold upon leaders of sects who blaspheme and slander him with their false doctrines. He inflicts upon them unusual punishments for the sake of warning others. Besides being openly convicted of blasphemy and having the condemnation of their own conscience, the misguided ones receive testimony to the fact that these false leaders are instigators of blasphemy against God's name and his Word. All men are compelled to admit God can have no pleasure in their doctrine, since he visits them with special marks of his displeasure, destroying them with severer punishments than ordinarily befall offenders.

26. History records that John the evangelist had as contemporary a heretic, by the name of Cerinthus, who was the first to arise in opposition to the apostolic doctrine and in blasphemy against the Lord Jesus with the claim that Jesus is not God. This blasphemy spread to such an extent that John saw himself compelled to supplement the work of the other evangelists with his Gospel, whose distinct purpose it is to defend and maintain the deity of Christ against Cerinthus and his rabble.

A feature of John's Gospel patent to all is the sublime beginning of his Gospel which renders it distinct from the others. He does not lay stress upon the miraculous doings of Christ, but upon his preaching, wherein he reveals himself powerfully as true God, born of the Father from eternity, and his equal in power, honor, wisdom, righteousness and every other divine work.

With respect to John and Cerinthus it is reported that the former, having gone to a public bath with some of his disciples, became aware that Cerinthus and his rabble were there, also. Without hesitation he told his disciples to be up and away, and not to abide among blasphemers. The disciples followed his advice and departed. Immediately after their departure the room collapsed, and Cerinthus with his followers perished, not one escaping.

27. We also read concerning the heretic Arius, the chief foe of his time toward the dogma of the deity of Christ. The injury done by this man to the cause of Christ was such as to occupy the Church for four centuries after his death; and still today his heresy has not been altogether rooted out. But the Lord took the matter in hand by the performance of a miracle which could not but be understood.

History records that Arius had ingratiated himself into the favor of Constantine, the emperor, and his counselors. With an oath he had succeeded in impressing them with the righteousness of his doctrine, so that the emperor gave command that Alexander, bishop of Constantinople, should recognize him as a member of the Christian Church and restore him to the priestly office. When the godly bishop refused to accede to this demand, knowing full well the purpose pursued by Arius and his followers, Eusebius and the other bishops who supported Arius threatened him with the imperial edict and expressed the determination to drive him out by force and to have Arius restored by the congregation as such. However, they gave him a day to think the matter over.

28. The godly bishop was fearful. The following of Arius was large and powerful, being supported by the imperial edict and the whole court. The bishop, therefore, resolved to seek help from God, where alone it is found in all things relating to God's honor. He fell down upon his face in the church and prayed all night long that God should preserve his name and honor by methods calculated to stem the tide of evil purpose, and to preserve Christendom against the heretics. When it was morning, and the hour had come when Alexander the bishop should either restore Arius to office or be cast out of his own, Arius convened punctually with his followers. As the procession was wending its way to the church, Arius suddenly felt ill and was compelled to seek privacy. The pompous procession halted, waiting his return, when the message came that his lungs and liver had passed from him, causing his death. The narrative comments: *Mortem dignam blasphema et foetida mente*—a death worthy such a blasphemous and turpid mind.

29. We see, then, that this dogma has been preserved by God first through the writings and the conflicts of the apostles, and then by miracles, against the devil and his blasphemers. And it shall be preserved in the future likewise, so that, without a trace of doubt, we may believe in God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. This is the faith which we confess with our children

daily. To guard against a mixing of persons or the abandonment of the tri-personality, three distinct acts are predicated. This should enable the common Christian to avoid confusing the persons, while maintaining the divine unity as to essence.

We proclaim these things on this Sunday in order to call attention to the fact that we have not come upon this doctrine in a dream, but by the grace of God through his Word and the holy apostles and Fathers. God help us to be found constant and without blemish in this doctrine and faith to our end. Amen.

First Sunday After Trinity

Text: 1 John 4, 16-21

16 God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him. 17 Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he is, even so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love. 19 We love, because he first loved us. 20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen. 21 And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.

GOD IS LOVE

This epistle text is amply expounded in the "Explanation of Certain Epistles of the Apostles" printed in other volumes. Those who wish may read there one or more sermons for themselves or their people. They are too long to insert here.

Second Sunday After Trinity

Text: 1 John 3, 13-18

13 Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not abideth in death. 15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. 16 Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth.

EXHORTATION TO BROTHERLY LOVE

1. The Epistles and Gospels selected for the Pentecost cycle of Sundays have love as their general theme. They deal not only with the love we owe to Christ and God, which is only to be thankful for the unspeakable blessing of forgiveness of sins and salvation through Christ's blood and death, but also of the love we owe our neighbor; not a love in return for favors, but one that unceasingly gives, forgives and works all good even when unrequited.

2. John here admonishes the Christian to exercise the virtue of love. Considering the evident rarity of love among men, this admonition is necessary. He particularly warns Christians not to wonder at the world's hatred and desire for their death. Such was the hate of Cain for his brother, of which the apostle has just spoken. The world's hate, it must be admitted, repels love and powerfully obstructs its exercise.

3. Is it not surpassing strange that one can hate those who love him and from whom he has received only kindness? Such wickedness is almost inconceivable, we say. What incentive is there for any to render the world service when in ingratitude it rewards love with hatred? But let us examine ourselves, who are baptized and have received the Gospel, and confess how we requite the supreme love of God in giving us his Son. What a beautiful example of glad gratitude we display! For the shame of it we ought to despise ourselves before God and his angels.

And what shall we say of those who will not endure the preaching of the glorious message of God's grace and blessing, but condemn it as heresy? to whom they who seek to serve, to benefit and save the world by declaring the good news, must be, as Paul says, "as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things," 1 Cor 4, 13. Indeed, no criminal receives more wretched and ignominious treatment and execution, of which the Pope and his followers are a case in point.

THE WORLD'S HATRED

4. While experience has proven this otherwise incredible fact, John vouchsafes the admonition notwithstanding: "Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you." If we are not to wonder at this, is there anything in the world to incite wonder? I should truly think the hearing of a single sermon on the grace of Christ would suffice to bring the world to receive the Gospel with intense joy and never to forget the divine mercy and blessing. It would be no wonder should the earth suddenly open and engulf mankind because of its ingratitude to God who has given his Son to become man for the purpose of redeeming us condemned mortals from sin and death and restoring us to life and salvation. Is it not a horrible thing that any man should shun and oppose such a Savior and his doctrine even more than he does the devil himself?

5. But what is God's attitude toward such conduct? Well does he say to the Jews through the prophet: "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of bondage; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what Balak, king of Moab, devised; and what Balaam, the son of Beor, answered him; remember from Shittim unto Gilgal, that ye may know the righteous acts of Jehovah." Mic 6, 3-5. And well does Christ say to his ungrateful people: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Mt 23, 37. As if he would say, "I surely did not come to effect your death and condemnation by my message. I am about to suffer death and God's wrath for your sins. I bring you God's endless grace and blessing for time and eternity. Then why this bitter hatred against me and my message?"

6. "Since the world hates even God for his kindness," argues John, "marvel not, my beloved, that you suffer the same fate. What does it signify that I show my love by hazarding life and limb to sustain this doctrine of the Gospel and help my neighbor? Mine is but a poor, mean, uncouth, offensive love in comparison with the love that led Christ to die for me and to redeem me from eternal death. If God's supreme, unfathomable love fails to awaken the gratitude of the world, what wonder if the world hates you for all your kindness? Why will you bring down your fist and stamp your foot in anger at such ingratitude? You are yourselves of that race for whom the Son of God had to die. And even were you to die for the Gospel, your sacrifice would be as nothing in comparison to the fact that God, for the sake of the world, spared not his own Son but permitted the world to put him to death."

7. But whence arises the world's hatred? John tells us in verse twelve when he mentions the incident of Cain, who, he says, "was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous." An excellent reason, indeed, for hating—the hater and murderer is evil and the benefactor good! In civil and domestic affairs it is the evil-doers and disobedient who incur displeasure and receive punishment; and such reward is just. But whenever God has dealings with the world, it shows what a rotten fruit it is by hating, persecuting, and putting to death as evil-doers and impostors its very benefactors. This trait it inherits, John tells us, from its ancestor Cain, the great fratricide saint. He is a true picture of the world of all times, and ever its spirit and fashion is patterned after him.

8. When mother Eve, the dear, godly woman, bore her first son, she declared in her joy and her hope of God's promise of the future seed that should bruise the serpent's head: "I have gotten a man with the help of Jehovah" (Gen 4, 1); and she named him Cain, which means "obtained," as if she would say, "I have obtained the true treasure." For she had not before seen a human being born; this was the first, precious fruit of man. Over Cain she rejoiced, pronouncing herself blessed. This son was trained in the hope that he should be a savior of the future race, a comfort to his brothers and sisters with all their offspring. Nor was he unaware of these proud hopes. Proudly he lorded it

over his brother, who in contrast had to bear the ignominious name of Abel, meaning "nothing," or "vanity," as if voicing the thought of the parents' hearts: "Alas! this one has no future. Cain is the rightful heir to the blessing God has promised man; he is lord and master of his brethren."

9. It is likely that the godly father and mother for many years drew their solace from the hope placed in their first-born son, as they looked forward with intensest longing to the redemption from their deplorable fall. Doubtless they trained both sons very carefully and instructed them concerning their own sin and fall and the promise God had given them, until they were fully grown and had entered into the priestly office. Cain the first-born was particularly zealous in that respect, desiring to be first inasmuch as he offered his first fruits of the earth, given by God and obtained by his own labor, as he no doubt had seen his father offer. Abel, however, the inferior, the poor shepherd, offered the firstlings of his sheep, given him of God and obtained without effort and toil of his own. Now, God in a wonderful way manifested his preference concerning the gifts upon the altar. Fire descended from heaven and consumed Abel's offering, but Cain's remained. The fire was the sign of God's favor. The text says: "And Jehovah had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." Gen 4, 4-5.

10. Thereupon Adam and Eve saw that the hope and solace centering in their first-born son, were a delusion. They began to learn the wonderful judgments of God, who gave precedence to Abel, the male counterpart of Cinderella—which is all he was in his own sight when he compared himself with his brother. Now Cain, with full confidence in his position, spoiled by the delusion of his parents that as the first-born he was God's preference, felt himself outraged. His hypocrisy, hitherto masked, comes to the surface. He burns with secret hate against God, with hate and anger against his brother, which he takes no trouble whatever to disguise. The parents rebuke him, but effect nothing. The flame of his resentment rises higher, and meeting him alone upon the field, he fells him to the ground. Far from contemplating amendment of life or seeking grace from God, he has no mercy upon the only brother he has on earth, who has done him no harm whatever. He cannot forgive him and leave him in unenvied possession of the grace of God.

11. Such was the solace and joy poor Adam and Eve lived to experience in their first children! From this time on their earthly life was fraught with gloom and sorrow, particularly since they could not but see the source of these in their own fall and they would have pined to death had not God comforted them with another son. For when it became evident that the hope they had placed in Cain was a delusion, and that they were deprived of the son who, beyond a doubt, possessed the grace of God, they, without another son, would not have known where to look for the solace of the promised seed.

CAIN THE WORLD, ABEL THE CHURCH

12. Note, in this man Cain is pictured the world in its true, characteristic colors; in him its true spirit stands reflected. Certainly his equal has never been. In him are unquestionably prefigured the very flower, the very quintessence, of holiness on earth—the most pious servants of God. On the other hand, that poor, wretched, abject male counterpart of Cinderella, Abel, well represents the obscure little brotherhood, the Church of Christ. She must yield to Cain the lord the distinction of being everything before God, of being the recipient of every gift of God, of being entitled to all honor and every privilege. He feels important in his imagined dignity, permits this spirit to pervade his sacrifices and his worships, and thinks that God cannot but favor and accept his offering rather than that of his brother.

Meanwhile, the pious Abel goes his way, meekly suffering his brother's contempt. He willingly yields Cain the honor, esteems himself vastly inferior and beholds no consolation for himself aside from the pure mercy and goodness of God. He believes in God and hopes for the promised future seed. In such faith he performs his sacrifice as a confession, a sign, of his gratitude.

13. This illustration is intended by God as solace for his little throng; for the incident is not written for Abel's sake but for the sake of the humble children of God, whose condition is like that of Abel. God has not forgotten them, though they are haughtily ignored by proud Cain, who regards them as nothing in his presence. God graciously looks upon them and rejects proud Cain with his birthright and offering.

14. Innocent Abel becomes the object of anger and hatred when the Word of God lays hold of Cain revealing God's displeasure where he had fancied himself worthy, and God's unwillingness to regard his offering and devotion as superior to this of his brother and more meritorious. Cain begins bitterly to hate and persecute his brother. He finds no rest until Abel is laid low and cut off from the earth. Now you have the cause of the world's hatred and anger against Christians; simply this, as John says of Cain: "Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

15. What offense had godly Abel committed against his brother to be so hated? He had even regarded that brother as the first-born, as vastly superior to himself, and had done him all honor and loved him as became a brother. He was easily satisfied, desiring simply the grace of God. He prayed for the future seed, that is, for the salvation and happiness of his parents, his brother and the entire human race. How could Cain be unmerciful and inhuman enough in his frenzy to murder his own flesh and blood?

The answer is found in the fact that the devil had filled Cain's heart with pride and vanity over his birthright. He considered himself a man of distinction, with every claim upon God's favor and sinless, whilst his brother was nothing whatever. Cain's heart is devoid of true brotherly love; he has only contempt for Abel. He cannot endure God's manifest favor toward his brother, and will not be moved by the injunction to humble himself and seek God's grace. Anger and envy possess him to the extent that he cannot tolerate his brother alive. In violation of God's commandment and his own conscience, he becomes a murderer, and then goes his way as if he had done right.

16. This is what John means when he says that Cain had no other cause for his crime than that his own works were evil and his brother's righteous. Similarly, that obedient daughter of Saint Cain, the world, hates the Christians; and for no other reason than the latter's love and goodness of heart. Witness the examples of the holy patriarchs, the prophets and, most of all, of Christ himself.

17. What sin against the world did the beloved apostles commit? They desired the injury of none, but went about in extreme poverty and toil, teaching mankind how, through faith in Christ, to be saved from the devil's kingdom and from eternal death. This the world will not hear and suffer; hence the hue and cry: "Kill, kill these people! Away with them from off the earth! Show them no mercy!" Why this hostility? Because the apostles sought to relieve the world of its idolatry and

damnable doings. Such good works the world could not tolerate. What it desires is nothing but praise and commendation for its own evil doings, expecting from God the impossible endorsement, "Your deeds are good and well-pleasing to me. Pious children of mine are you. Just keep on cheerfully killing all who believe and preach my Word."

18. In the same way does the world conduct itself today with reference to our Gospel. For no other reason are we hated and persecuted than because we have, through God's grace, proclaimed his Word that recovered us from the blindness and idolatry in which we were sunken as deeply as the world, and because we desire to rescue others. That is the unpardonable sin by which we have incurred the world's irreconcilable anger and its inextinguishable hatred. It cannot permit us to live.

We preach no other doctrine than faith in Christ, which our children pray and they themselves confess in words. We differ only in our claim that Christ having been crucified for us and having shed his blood to redeem us from sin and death, our salvation is not effected by our own works, or holiness or devotion. The fact that we do not regard their faithless worship equal to Christ himself, but teach men to trust in the grace of God and not their own worthiness, and to render him gratitude for his grace—this fact is intolerable to the world. It would be well for our adversaries if they would receive such teaching, since it would render them more than ever what they profess to be: our superiors in wisdom, knowledge and reputation—a claim we are willing to concede. But Cain's works are evil and Abel's righteous. The world simply cannot tolerate the Gospel, and no unity or harmony is ever to be hoped for. The world will not forsake its idolatry nor receive the faith. It would force us to renounce the Word of God and praise its Cain-like worship, or take death at their hands.

19. Therefore, John says, "Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you," for it is compelled to act according to the nature inherited from its father Cain. It would have all merits and concede to Abel none. The world comprises the exalted, the wise, the learned, the mighty. The Scriptures represent these as under necessity to hate and persecute the poor throng of the Church of Christ by reason of the good works done by them. They can under no consideration tolerate the idea of being taught by this despised and humble throng the doctrine of salvation through the grace and mercy of God alone, not through man's own merits. They cannot endure the teaching that their offering—the mass, regarded by the Papists as a work of superlative merit and holiness—avails nothing before God.

20. In the text the nature of the world is portrayed for our recognition. So to understand the world as to know what may be expected from it is essential and valuable knowledge for the Christian. Thus armed he will not be dismayed and become impatient of suffering, nor permit its malice and ingratitude to mislead him to hate and desire for revenge. He will keep his faith and love, suffering the world to go its way if it refuse to hear his message. The Christian should expect nothing better from the world than its bitter persecution in return for his good works and love. The Church of Christ on earth, let him remember, is never to have an easier lot. He is not to judge according to show and appearance, thinking: "They are the great throng, the wisest and cleverest people on earth; how is it possible that they should all be in error and under condemnation?"

21. It is necessarily true that discipline and peace are impossible without the most excellent, exalted, erudite, clever people—royal, princely, noble in achievement and honor. Cain is never plain and lowly. He is always eminently clever, wise, holy and in every way vastly Abel's superior. In fact, he must in himself represent all desirable things, as his name indicates. And the same characteristic is manifest in his children, who are ingenious in the invention of every variety of art. Deplorable the fact that a man of Cain's qualifications, born of godly parents and signally honored of God, should display such hatred and inhumanity toward poor Abel merely because of God's Word and Abel's faith.

22. Such knowledge is comforting to the godly little company of Christians, who are confident they have God's favor and know it to be the occasion of their persecution; they have no protection and succor but are exposed to the same fate as Abel. If they fare better, they may thank God for it. But they are ever to abide in love toward God, whose love they have received and felt, and likewise toward

men, their enemies not excepted. This was Abel's way; could he have lived again, he would have kept his brotherly love for his murderer, forgiving him and even imploring God's forgiveness for him.

"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren."

LOVE MOVES CHRISTIANS

23. To abide in love should be the motive for us Christians. John contrasts it with the motive of the world in hating us—its wickedness. The world's hatred of you, as John's words imply, is not strange. The contrast between you and the world is exceedingly great. Through its own evil works, unbelief, pride, contempt for the Word and grace of God, and the persecution of the godly, the world has become by this time the victim of Satan and eternal death. It spurns all counsel and aid directed toward its rescue. Stiff-necked and hardened, under evident condemnation by its own conscience, it has chosen to persist in its doom. But we believers in Christ, God be praised! are different people. We have come forth from death; we have passed through death and entered into life through the knowledge and faith of the Son of God, who has loved us and given himself for us.

24. Such grace and goodness of God, says the apostle, should prompt you not to be offended and vanquished by the world's ingratitude, hate and malice, and thus to cease from holy endeavor and become likewise, evil, which course will result in the loss of your treasure. It is yours, not by your own effort, but by grace alone; for at one time you as well as they languished in the kingdom and power of death, in evil works, far from faith and love.

Remember to comfort yourselves, therefore, with the thought of this great blessing, an advantage you enjoy above the others. What if the world, abiding in death, does hate and persecute you who abide in life? Whom can its hatred injure? It cannot take from you the life which it lacks while you possess it, nor deliver you to death, from which you have passed, through Christ. When it does its worst it may perhaps falsely slander you, or deprive you of your property, or destroy your corrupt body—the final home of maggots and in any event doomed to corruption—and thus through the death of the body help you gain true life. Thus vengeance will be yours rather than its own. Yours will be the joy of being transplanted from death into life, whereas the world must abide in death. While they of the world think to deny you both the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth, they themselves lose body and soul. What more terrible retribution could their hatred and envy receive? For the sake of denying gratification to the devil and the world, and much more for your own welfare, you must not allow your persecutions to rob you of your peace and salvation, nor to lead you to lose your faith through impatience and desire for revenge. Rather, pity their wretchedness and doom. You lose nothing by their oppression; yours is the gain, theirs the loss. For the slight grief inflicted upon you with reference to body and time, it shall dearly pay both here and hereafter.

25. How do we know we have passed from death unto life? John says, because we love the brethren. Just what does he mean? Is it not our doctrine that Christ first loved us, as John elsewhere says? that before we ever loved him he died and rose again for us? When we fully believe in our Savior's love, then our own hearts respond with perfect love to God and our neighbor. Why, then, does John say, "We have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren"?

26. The explanation is found in the words "We know." John says plainly, "From the fact that we love the brethren, we know we have passed out of death into life." Love of the brethren is the test whereby we may ascertain who are the true believers. The apostle directed this epistle especially against false Christians; many there are who extol Christ, as did unbelieving Cain, and yet fail to bear the fruit of faith. John's reference is not to the means whereby we pass from sin and death to life, but to the proof whereby we may know the fact—not to the cause, but to the effect.

27. It is not sufficient to boast of having passed from death into life; there must be evidence of the fact. Faith is not an inactive and lifeless thing. When there is faith in the heart, its power will be manifest. Where power is not in evidence, all boasting is false and vain. When the human heart, in its confidence in divine mercy and love, is thrilled with spiritual comfort, and also warmed into kindness, friendliness, humility and patience towards the neighbor, envying and despising none but

cheerfully serving all and ministering unto necessity even to hazarding body and life—when this is the case, then the fruits of faith are manifest.

Such fruits are proof that the believer has truly passed from death into life. Had he not true faith, but doubted God's grace and love, his heart would not prompt him, by reason of his love and gratitude to God, to manifest love for his neighbor. Where man has faith, and where he realizes God's infinite mercy and goodness in raising him from death to life, love is enkindled in his heart, and he is prompted to do all manner of good, even to his enemies, as God has done to him.

28. Such is the right interpretation and understanding of John's expression: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." It leaves in its integrity the foundation, justification, or deliverance from death, through faith alone. This is the first element of Christian doctrine. Granting that faith does justify, the next question is whether the faith is real or simulated, being merely a deceptive show and unsupported claim. The clear information imparted by the apostles is, that love, indeed, does not deliver from death, but that deliverance from death and the presence of life becomes a matter of sight and knowledge in that love has been wrought. With true faith we must have come to the point where we no longer, like Cain, in our pride and conceit, despise our neighbor; where we are not filled with envy, hatred and bitterness; where we desire, and to the extent of our power, promote the interests of our neighbor and work him all good.

29. John draws to a close by showing the opposite side of the picture, in that he addresses earnest words that reëcho like peals of thunder to those who make the carnal boast of being Christians while destitute of love. He cites several facts as evidence that where love is lacking, necessarily faith and deliverance from death are absent, likewise. Thus no opportunity is given for self-deception or a frivolous excuse based upon wordy boasting of one's faith. The reality of the inner life is known by the presence of love, which in turn attests the presence of faith in the heart.

I. "He that loveth not abideth in death."

30. Here, in clear, decisive words, the conclusion is expressed that no man may boast of life unless he has love. If it is true that faith must be active, it is conversely true that the absence of fruitage demonstrates one's continuance in the old Cain-like manner of existence, torpid and dead, bereft of solace and the experience of God's grace and life. Let no one presume to think he has passed into life so long as he is devoid of love and the fruits of faith. Let him become serious, and in alarm make ready to become a true believer, lest he remain in eternal death and under greater condemnation than those who have never heard the Gospel.

II. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

31. Still clearer and stronger becomes the argument that lack of love means continuance in death. The stern and frightful judgment is here expressed that the unloving person is no better than Cain the fratricide. His heart is under the influence of deadly hate and murderous malice against the brother who refuses to be subservient to his desires. Kindling rage will prove its existence by appropriate works unless restrained by the fear of disgrace and punishment. He wishes his brother nothing good, but rejoices in his misfortune.

All this, however, is impossible for one who believes that he has been delivered from death. One who knows the wretchedness and misery of death from experience, but has entered upon life with its solace and joy, blessings he seeks to maintain—such a person will desire for others the same blessing; he cannot rejoice in another's death. Therefore it is true conversely: "We know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

HATRED NATURAL TO HUMAN REASON

32. Thus we see the nature of the human heart without faith and the knowledge of Christ; at bottom it is but the heart of a Cain, murderous toward its neighbor. Nor can anything better be expected from him who is not a Christian. The Scriptures repeatedly denounce such faithless hypocrites as bloodthirsty and deceitful. "Jehovah abhorreth the bloodthirsty and deceitful man." Ps 5, 6. "For their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood." Prov 1, 16. See also verse 11. All mankind are by nature the children of the murderer Cain. They are, of course, no better than their father. While Cain was a man most magnificent, intelligent and wise, being the first fruit born of those holy parents Adam and Eve, and in his superior endowment with natural virtues infinitely superior to all who come after him, he was nevertheless an unbeliever before God. Hence he became the murderer of his brother.

III. "Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?"

33. These words delineate true Christian love and hold up the sublime example, or pattern, of God's love manifest in Christ. Christ's blood and death is God's own blood and death. Paul in Acts 20, 28, speaks of God having purchased the Church "with his own blood." The heart of man by faith receives and apprehends this sacrifice. Under its transforming influence he is disposed to work good to his neighbor as he has himself received good. He even jeopardizes his life to that end, being conscious of his redemption from eternal death, and knowing physical death powerless to affect his eternal life. But the heart that fails to appropriate Christ's sacrifice is without faith and insensible to God's love and eternal life.

34. John uses an illustration plain enough for anyone to understand, and from which we may judge that the soul found wanting in small duties will be deficient in great ones. According to the apostle, if one possesses this world's goods and sees his neighbor want, he being able to render assistance without injury to himself, and yet closes his heart against that neighbor, not assisting him with even the slightest work of love, how can the love of God dwell in him since he appreciates it so little that he will not spare his needy brother a penny? How can he be expected, then, to render a greater service—to even lay down his life for his brother? What right has such a soul to boast—how can he know—that Christ has laid down his life for him and delivered him from death?

35. How frequently are such people to be found! Having this world's goods and being able to help the needy, they close their hearts against the unfortunate, as did the rich glutton toward poor Lazarus. Where shall we find in imperial courts, among kings, princes and lords, any who extend a helping hand to the needy Church, or give her so much as a crust of bread toward the maintenance of the poor, of the ministry and of schools, or for other of her necessities? How would they measure up in the greater duty of laying down their lives for the brethren, and especially for the Christian Church? Note the terrible judgment that they who are devoid of brotherly love are in God's sight murderers and cannot have eternal life.

36. But the merely selfish may well escape our censure in comparison with those who not only close their purses to the poor but shamelessly and forcibly deprive and rob their needy neighbor of his own by overreaching, by fraud, oppression and extortion; who take from the Church the property rightfully hers and especially reserved for her, snatching the bread from her mouth, so to speak. Not only is the papistical rabble today guilty of such sin, but many who would be known as evangelical practice the same fraud with reference to the parochial estates and general property of the Church, and, in addition, tyrannically harass and torment the poor ministers. But oh, how heavy and terrible

the impending judgment for those who have denied to Christ the Lord in his thirst even the cup of cold water!

IV. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth."

37. The world and the false Christians in word pretend great love; but in practice, when love should manifest itself in deeds, it is found to be insincere. So John admonishes that where our love is not ardent enough to lead us to lay down our lives for our brethren, however much we may profess Christ, that love is assuredly only a vain show, a false pretense, wherewith we deceive ourselves and remain in infidelity and death, and in a more deplorable condition than those who are wholly ignorant of the Gospel. Therefore, let him who would proceed safely and prove himself a Christian remember to prove himself such by his deeds and works. Then men will know that he does not, a murderer and liar, like others, follow the devil. They will know, on the contrary, that he truly and with the heart clings to the Word of God, having passed from death to life.

Third Sunday After Trinity

Text: 1 Peter 5, 5-11

5 Likewise, ye younger, be subject unto the elder. Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. 6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; 7 casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you. 8 Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: 9 whom withstand stedfast in your faith, knowing that the same sufferings are accomplished in your brethren who are in the world. 10 And the God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, establish, strengthen you. 11 To him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

HUMILITY, TRUST, WATCHFULNESS, SUFFERING

1. This is the conclusion of Saint Peter's epistle. It is an exhortation to good works, such as a Christian, or believer, should practice. It is evident that the doctrine of the Gospel is not such as is charged by some, forbidding good works, or not earnestly commanding and urging them. Most diligently and repeatedly it urges the doctrine of works—such works as are, indeed, good works. There are in this epistle four natural heads which furnish us four good sermons.

I. HUMILITY

2. The apostle has, in the verses immediately preceding our text, exhorted the elders, that is, preachers, to be in their lives "ensamples to the flock," not "lording it over the charge allotted" to them, but using their office for the service of others. And here in our text he exhorts the others, especially the young, to "be subject unto the elder." And, in general, he admonishes all to "gird" themselves "with humility, to serve one another." So Paul likewise admonishes that we should honor one another. Humility is the noblest and sweetest virtue love brings forth, and it is the most essential to peace and discipline. But especially does it become and adorn the young, making them pleasing and precious to God and men, bringing forth an abundance of good fruits.

3. If mankind could be led so to believe this that the virtue of humility would be generally practiced, it would be well everywhere. This would be a beautiful world, filled with discipline and good works. I would much prefer to see a city in which the young are reared in this virtue than a hundred monasteries of barefooted and Carthusian friars, though they lived ever so strictly. Alas! the greatest and most frequent complaint heard anywhere is concerning the disobedience, wantonness and pride of the younger generation found among all ranks. Therefore it is necessary to use all diligence that this exhortation be instilled into the hearts of the young and urged upon them, in the hope that it may benefit them.

4. First of all, Peter presents the divine command. We are not left to our own good pleasure in the matter—to show humility or not, as we please. God earnestly asks it of us, and asks that we do it lovingly and willingly. Otherwise his anger will be poured out upon us and we will have no happiness nor favor, not even among men. For everyone is a foe to pride and arrogance. These offenses are condemned by the whole world, even by strangers whom they do not concern.

One may be guilty of pride and not see his own shame, yet he cannot suffer it in another; he will hate and condemn that one. This vice hurts no one save himself. He makes himself hateful and contemptible before God and men. Everyone calls him a great, proud bag of filth and cries shame upon him. God metes out judgment and scorn to him, witnessing that he will not let this vice go unpunished, but will put the offender to shame. As Peter here says: "God resisteth the proud."

5. Men should be moved by the examples which daily come to light in fulfilment of this passage. If we should have no regard for our own honor and standing before the world, neither for the contempt and the curses of all men; if the illustrious example of the noble character and eternal majesty of God's Son, our Lord, should not stir us (which ought to move us if we have one spark of Christianity in us), as we behold his unspeakable and incomprehensible humility which, rightly viewed, should melt the Christian's heart—if all this does not move us, we should be humbled by the many awful examples of God's fearful wrath which, from the beginning, he has hurled against pride.

6. What is more terrible than the eternal, irreparable fall and banishment of once lofty angelic nature that resulted when the devil robbed himself of the honor and glory enjoyed by the noble blessed spirits, and of the contemplation of eternal God, and brought upon himself everlasting and intolerable damnation by seeking to make himself equal with God, and through similar pride, led the human race to its awful fall? But what a blind, condemned creature are you, who, with your filthy, shameful pride

and haughtiness, become like the spirit of evil, thereby turning all the world into your enemy and opposing yourself to the divine majesty, before which even the angels must tremble! If you have no fear of losing the favor and prayers of mankind, at least be afraid lest God send down upon your head his lightning and thunder, with which he crushes iron, rocks, and mountains, and hurl you forever into the abyss, as he hurled down the proud spirit and his angels.

7. Saint Peter exhorts both those who are in the office of the ministry, and other Christians, to whom God has given something, that they abide in their calling and office and conduct the same humbly, gladly obeying and serving others. Right here this vice of pride is the most hurtful to Christianity. For its whole government, life and essence are so ordered by God that no one should exalt himself and lord it over others, as the Pope, the true Antichrist has done. Only humility and deeds of Christian love and service should prevail in all classes and in all offices and works.

PRIDE OPPOSED TO THE FIRST TABLE

8. Pride in this order of the Church is really and directly opposed to the first table of the law. It is a genuinely devilish pride in God's name and Word on the part of such people as would be wise in matters of faith and would lord it over God's Word. They puff themselves up if, forsooth, they have a gift more than others, and they hold God and all men as nothing. This vice is common among the great, learned and wise bishops and preachers. It prevails among those who learn of them and cling to them, especially beginners who, inexperienced and undisciplined, are brought into prominence. Such puff themselves up and boast: "I also am a learned doctor. I love the Spirit and other gifts just as well as, and even in greater measure than, these preachers." So they think they deserve to be heard and honored above others. They consider themselves so wise that all the world, in comparison, are geese and fools.

And the greater one's gifts, the greater and more harmful such pride. It is common in other professions, also. He who has a little ability, or bears the title of doctor, makes much ado about it, and despises others. He acts as if what he has were not given him by God, but as if it were his by nature and birth, and therefore he deserves the praise and worship of all men. Such persons do not realize they are acting in opposition to God, and that they will themselves plunge into the abyss of hell before they can hurl God down from his heavenly throne.

9. See, from the examples of our own time, how God has overthrown such people. Thomas Münzer, with his tumultuous prophets, and later the Anabaptist faction, were proud of heart, would not listen to admonition, and lo! suddenly they went down to ruin, not only in utter disgrace, but to their own miserable and eternal loss and that of many people who had been misled by them. So, too, there are at the present day many proud spirits. Some dare not yet publicly show themselves. Such as have perceived that they are learned, or are held in regard by men, thereupon grow boastful and, despite all their skill and learning, abide without the Spirit and without fruit, even if they do not work more harm in addition to bringing themselves into condemnation.

10. Thus it is in all kinds of gifts and offices where men are not God-fearing and humble. For example, those who are intrusted with the civil government—princes, counselors, lawyers (where they are not "theologians," that is, Christians)—are so insolent and proud that they imagine themselves alone to be the people, whom others are to reverence as gods. In their pride, they despise God and men, and by their arrogance they lead the land and the people to destruction. These have already the judgment upon themselves that they, as God's enemies, must be hurled down. For they have cut themselves loose from God's kingdom and grace; and the blessings of baptism and of Christ, with his suffering and blood, are lost upon them.

11. We have now shown how pride conflicts with the demands of the first table of the law. Men do not employ the spiritual treasures and gifts to God's honor nor to the good of their neighbors. Thus they mar these gifts and, in their wicked course, go to the devil, into whose likeness they have grown.

PRIDE OPPOSED TO THE SECOND TABLE

12. Further, this vice is just as general in the sphere of the second table of the law—among the common people and in the temporal life of the world, each one boasting of himself and despising others. Prince and nobleman think that all the world is nothing in comparison with themselves. Commoner and peasant, puffed up because they have much wealth, imagine they must defy everybody, and do good to nobody. These deserve to be spit upon by all men. Such pride does not become them better than ornaments of gold or silver would become an image of stone or a wooden block. Finally, the women, with their foolish pride of dress, must not be forgotten. One prides herself on being better or more beautifully adorned than her neighbor. She is, in truth, a finely decorated goose. She imagines that no other woman equals her. Yea, there is scarcely a house-servant or maid but brags over others.

13. In short, we have come to the point where all men, with their insolence and boastfulness, seek to lord it over others. None will humble himself to another. Each thinks he has full right to act as he does, and is under no obligation to yield to others. And the civil government has grown so weak that there is no hope of restraining the haughtiness of all classes, from the highest to the lowest. At last, God must strike with thunder and lightning to prove to us that he resists such people and will not tolerate pride. Therefore the young, who can still be led, should be exhorted and trained, as far as possible, to guard themselves against this vice.

14. Peter uses for his purpose a peculiar term when he says, "Gird yourselves with humility." "Gird" has the meaning of being bound or joined together most firmly; or, as a garment, most carefully woven through and through so that it cannot tear. He illustrates by this term how Christians, with all diligence, should strive after the virtue, and manifest and practice it among themselves, as if upon them as a band it was a special obligation. Thus, he says, must you be twined together and bound to each other, and your hands clasped together. So must you be joined by humility, which cannot be dissolved, dismembered, or torn, even though occasion be given one, here and there, incited by the devil, or the evil word of someone else, to fly into a passion, and grow defiant and boastful, as if to say: Must I suffer such things at the hands of this man? But rather say to yourselves. We are Christians, and must bear with each other and yield, in many things; for we are all one body, and we are placed together here on earth for the sole reason that we may, through love, serve one another.

15. And each should recognize his own weakness. He should remember that God has given others also something and can give them yet more, and that therefore he should gladly serve and yield to others, remembering that he needs their help. Each one is created for the sake of others, and we are all to serve one another. God gives the same grace and salvation to all, so that none may exalt himself above his neighbor; or, if he lift himself up, that he lose the grace conferred and fall into deeper condemnation. Therefore we must hold fast to this humility, so that the unity may not be destroyed. For Satan seeks to destroy this also, and uses every possible means to lead people to despise each other and to be proud and insolent in their treatment of each other. And these are things to which flesh and blood, even without special incitement, are inclined. Thus humility is easily and quickly lost if men are not alert to fight against the devil and their own flesh.

THE BEAUTY OF HUMILITY

16. Humility is one of the beautiful garments and ornaments with which Christians should adorn themselves before God and the world. Paul, in Colossians 3, 12, says, "Put on humility." He regards this virtue as more precious than all earthly crowns and splendor. This is the true spiritual life. It is not to be sought elsewhere, by running into the cloisters or the deserts, by putting on gray gown or cowl. Peter here admonishes all classes to cultivate this virtue. This sermon on good works concerns every station in every house, city or village. It is for all churches and schools. Children, servants and the youth should be humbly obedient to parents, superiors and the aged. On the other hand, it is for those in the higher stations of life who serve their inferiors, even the lowest. If all men so observed this virtue the world would be full of good works. For it is impossible that humility should do evil. It is profitable and pleasant to all men.

17. By this virtue, true saints and Christians can better be known than by monastic seclusion and holiness. It requires no great effort to wear a gray cowl. It is not even such a great trial to lie on the ground at night and to arise at midnight; scoundrels, thieves, and murderers must often do the same. But to wear and hold fast to this angelic garment, humility—this the world is not so willing to accept as monasticism and its works. And thus it comes to pass that flesh and blood do not strive after this holy life. Each man seeks an easy life, in which he can live to himself and need serve no one nor suffer anything at the hands of others; just as the monks have sought and chosen.

18. Peter adds to this admonition the reason: "For God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." As I have said above, he strives to show the earnestness of God's command. The command is accompanied by a threat. He does not simply say, God punishes the proud, or God is hostile to them; but he "resisteth" them, he sets himself against them. Now, what is the pride of all men toward God? Not so much as a poor, empty bubble. Their pride puffs itself up and distends itself as though it would storm the sky and contend against the lightning and thunder, that can shatter heaven and earth. What can the combined might of all creatures accomplish if God oppose himself thereto? And how does a miserable man, whose heart is overwhelmed by a small pestilence, rise against the majesty of heaven which can, any moment, cast him down into the abyss? What are earth and ashes proud of? says Sirach, 10, 9.

19. Is it not enough and more than enough that other sin and disobedience are laid to our account, by which we anger God and merit heavy punishment, without our trying further to provoke him with our pride and haughtiness, so that he must arise in his majesty and resist us? With other sins he can have patience, that he may exhort and incite us to repentance. But if, in hardened impenitence, we defy and oppose him, he cannot but rise up against us. Who is there that will bear it, or be able to stand, when God sets his countenance and his power against a poor man already subject, every moment, to death and the power of the devil?

THE CONSEQUENCE OF PRIDE

20. From the beginning, innumerable instances in history have proved the truth of this saying, "God resisteth the proud." They show how he has always overthrown and destroyed the proud world and has cast down the haughty, scornful kings and lords. The great king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, was humbled when banished from his royal throne to the companionship of the beasts of the field and compelled to eat grass with them, Dan 4, 30ff. Again, remember how suddenly the great king Alexander was hurled down, when after the victory and good fortune God had given him, he began to grow proud, and wanted to be revered as a god? Again, there was King Herod Agrippa, Acts 12, 23. The proud, learned emperor Julian, a virulent mocker and persecutor of Christ, whom he had denied—how soon was he drowned in his own blood! And since then, what has become of all the proud, haughty tyrants, who proposed to oppress and crush Christianity?

21. The Pope, also, has ever, in devilish pride, exalted himself, and in the temple of God set himself forth as God. Further, in worldly pomp and pride he has lifted himself above all others. He has even learned, from heathen emperors, as Diocletian and other tyrants, to have men kiss his feet. Yea, he has forced emperors and kings to submit to this humiliating act. What open, inhuman insolence and pride Pope Alexander the Third practiced when, by threatening against him his empty ban, he compelled the pious and mighty German emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, to prostrate himself at his feet while he stepped upon him and said, Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; and when the emperor protested against such shameful pride and said, Non tibi, sed Petro (Not to thee, but to Peter), the Pope, with increasing scorn, replied, "Et mihi, et Petro" (Both to me, and to Peter). This is pride carried almost to its highest point.

22. The Turk, too, is prouder now than ever, and, I hope, has reached the heights of pride, beyond which he cannot and shall not proceed. Meantime, may he not attack and humble us! But it will come to pass, in the end, that God will overthrow both pope and Turk through his divine power, and, as Daniel says, without the aid of men. This word will not fail, "God resisteth the proud." Its truth must appear in human events, so that men may see what is meant by the declaration, "God resisteth"; otherwise no one would believe it. Though the Turk and all the world should be a thousand times more proud and powerful, this should not help them when he who is above sees and grows angry, and lifts his hand. He asks as little about the power of all Turkish emperors and of the Pope as about a dead fly.

23. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," Heb 10, 31. This, however, is nothing else than with scorn and defiance to oppose his will, so that he, in turn, must set himself against man and must lift his hand. Therefore, let everyone beware lest he boast and grow defiant in the presence of the divine majesty. Not only must he beware, that he may not awaken God's anger, but that he may have grace and blessing in the things he ought to do. For, if thou beginnest something in thine own power, and wisdom, and haughtiness, think not he will grant thee success and blessing to carry out thy purpose. On the other hand, if thou humblest thyself, and beginnest aught in accordance with his will, in the fear of God and trusting in his grace, there is given thee the promise, "He giveth grace to the humble." So, then, thou shalt not only have favor with men, but success shall crown thine efforts. Thou shalt prove a useful man, both to God and to the world, and shalt complete and maintain thy work despite the resistance of the devil. For where God's grace is, there his blessing and protection must follow, and his servant cannot be overthrown or defeated. Though he be oppressed for a time, he shall finally come forth again and be exalted. So Peter concludes by saying:

I. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."

24. Peter shows in these words what true humility is and whence it comes. The heart, through knowledge of its sin, becomes terrified in the presence of God's anger and anxiously seeks grace. Thus a humility is born, not merely external and before men, but of the heart and of God, from fear of God and knowledge of one's own unworthiness and weakness. He who fears God and "trembles at his word" (Is 66, 5), will surely defy or hector or boast against nobody. Yea, he will even manifest a gentle spirit toward his enemies. Therefore, he finds favor both with God and men.

25. The cause of this, Peter says, shall be "the mighty hand of God." As though he would say: Ye may not do nor leave undone this thing for the sake of men, but ye ought to humble yourselves under the hand of God. God's hand is powerful and mighty in a twofold respect: It dashes down and overthrows the proud and self-secure, however hard and iron their heads and hearts may be. They must languish in dust and ashes; yea, must lie despondent and desperate in the anguish and torments of hell, if he touch them but a little with the terrors of his anger. These are experiences through which the saints also pass, and concerning whose severity they make lamentation. "For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine indignation," Ps 38, 2-3. "For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping. Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast taken me up, and cast me away," Ps 102, 9-10. "I am consumed by the blow of thy hand. When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth," Ps 39, 10-11.

THE REWARD OF HUMILITY

26. In the second place, God's hand is mighty to raise, to comfort and strengthen the humbled and the fearful, and, as Peter says here, to exalt them. Those who in terror have been cast down should not, therefore, despair, or flee before God, but rise again, and be comforted in God. God wants it preached and published that he never lays his hand upon us in order that we may perish and be damned. But he must pursue this course in order to lead us to repentance; otherwise we would never inquire about his Word and will. And if we seek grace, he is ready to help us up again, to grant us forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. The Psalms and the Prophets here and there speak of this. "Jehovah hath chastened me sore; but he hath not given me over unto death," Ps 118, 18. "Jehovah raiseth up them that are bowed down," Ps 146, 8.

27. God will "exalt you in due time," says Peter. Though God's help be delayed, and the humbled and suffering seem to lie oppressed all too long under God's hand, and on that account to languish, nevertheless, let them hold to the promise Paul has given: God "will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able," 1 Cor 10, 13, but he will hear your cry, and will, at the right time, help; and with this let them be comforted. But again, let the proud fear, even though he permit them to go unpunished and to continue in their boastful course for a time. He watches their lives, and, when the proper time comes, he will descend all too heavily upon them, so that they cannot bear it. He has already stretched forth his mighty hand, both to cast down the godless and to exalt the humble.

II. "Casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you."

28. What will become of him who lives a God-fearing and humble life, suffering the insolence, pride and wantonness of the world? Or, where will he find protection and defense, to abide in his godly ways? We see daily how the pious are harassed and persecuted, and are trod on by the world. The Apostle says: "Ye Christians must endure temptation and adversity, want and need, both physical and spiritual, in the world, and your heart is oppressed with anxiety and cares, and ye think within yourselves: O, what will become of me? How shall I be supported? What if I should die?" (The world only concerns itself about how it may be enriched and be filled, and anxious, unbelieving consciences would, through themselves and their own good works, seek to have a gracious God and to die in peace.) "In view of all this," he says, "only hearken, I will counsel and instruct you aright as to what disposition you should make of your troubles."

There is a brief passage in the 55th Psalm, verse 22, which reads: "Cast thy burden upon Jehovah, and he will sustain thee: he will never suffer the righteous to be moved." Follow ye this advice. Let not your burden rest upon yourselves; for ye cannot bear it, and must finally perish beneath its weight. But, confident and full of joy, cast it from you and throw it on God, and say: Heavenly Father, thou art my Lord and God, who didst create me when I was nothing; moreover hast redeemed me through thy Son. Now, thou hast committed to me and laid upon me, this office or work, and things do not go as well as I would like. There is so much to oppress and worry, that I can find neither counsel nor help. Therefore I commend everything to thee. Do thou supply counsel and help, and be thou, thyself, everything in these things.

29. Such a prayer is pleasing to God, and he tells us to do only what we are commanded, and throw upon him all anxiety as to the issue and what we shall accomplish. As also other passages of Scripture declare: "Commit thy way unto Jehovah, trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass," Ps 37, 5. No heathen, philosopher, jurist, if he have not God's Word, can throw his care and complaint upon God. He thinks that all the world, especially the great, the wise, who rule, must accomplish everything by their own planning and circumspection. And where trouble arises—for it is quite common for even the greatest and wisest people to make mistakes—he becomes a madman or a fool, and begins to murmur and argue against God and his government, as though God's rule merited criticism. But such

men receive their deserts when God permits their calculations and hopes to fail, and lets the reverse obtain. For they will not admit they have need of him. They think they have sufficient wisdom and power, and that God must respect their plans. Thus, they spend their lives in many vain, useless cares and projects, and must, in the course of their experience, learn and confess, many a time, that the very opposite of their judgment is the truth.

30. Christians have the rare faculty, above all other people on earth, of knowing where to place their care, whilst others vex and torture themselves and at length must despair. Such must be the consequence of unbelief, which has no God and would provide for itself. But faith understands this word Peter quotes from the Scriptures: "Because he careth for you." It joyfully meditates thereon and does and suffers faithfully. For faith knows this to be its duty. Its trouble, however, it commits to God, and proceeds with vigor against all that opposes. It can call upon God as a father, and it says: I will do what God has commanded me and leave the result with him.

31. The Christian must take this course if he would proceed safely and happily in matters of the highest import. In time of danger and in the hour of death, when, with all his worrying, he cannot discover where he is or how he is journeying, he must, with eyes, senses and thoughts closed to the world, surrender himself in faith and confidence and cast himself upon God's hand and care and protection, and say: God has permitted me to live until this hour, without my solicitude. Moreover, he has given me his beloved Son as a treasure and sure pledge of eternal life. Therefore, my dear soul, journey on in joy. Thou hast a faithful Father and Savior, who has taken thee into his own hand, and will preserve thee.

32. The Christian Church collectively must so proceed in the discharge of its high spiritual office, of which Peter speaks here, that no man or creature, by his own wisdom and power, can sustain or accomplish any work. No power, might, or protection that can comfort, or upon which one may rely, is to be sought in the world. Wholly in God, and in God alone, must help be sought. By his divine power God must uphold the Church. He has, from the beginning, always and wonderfully preserved it in the world, in the midst of great weakness, in disunion occasioned by schismatics and heretics, in persecution by tyrants. And the government is wholly his, though he commits the office and service to men, whom he would summon and use to administer his Word and sacrament. Therefore, each Christian, especially if he fills such an office and partakes of this fellowship, should be intent, in that whereunto God has called and appointed him, upon serving God faithfully and doing that which is commanded him. The anxiety respecting the Church's continued existence and her preservation against the devil and the world, can be left to the Lord. He has taken this upon himself and thus has removed the burden from our shoulders, that we might be certain of the permanence of the Church. If its preservation were committed to human counsel, might and will, the devil, with his power, would soon overthrow and destroy it.

33. Likewise, in every office and station, each one should follow this counsel of Saint Peter. A prince should seek to protect his land and people, to promote God's Word, to maintain discipline and peace, to do justice to every man, to punish the disobedient, etc. Councils, officials, and those in authority should faithfully advise and direct to this end. Pastors and preachers should rightly and fearlessly declare God's Word and truth. Every citizen and subject should be intent upon his work and duty, and whatever, in connection therewith, is unusual he must simply commit to God.

But the world does not pursue this course. Each one says: Why should I incur so much danger, opposition and hostility? Again, why should I labor and toil for naught? I will not accomplish my work at any rate. In this spirit of fear and worry, his proper office and work are delayed, or he is always careless.

But let such people know that they are not Christians, nor do they promote God's kingdom or profit the offices conferred on them. If they do not propose to mend their ways, they should give up the office bestowed on them by God. It is not enough to simply sit at ease in one's office and accept the plaudits of men. We all like to render esteem and honor to office and station. But know

this, that you are not in office to parade about in beautiful garments, to sit in the front row, and be called "Gracious Master" and "Esquire." You are to conduct faithfully the office with which God has clothed and honored you, regardless of human honor and profit, shame or injury.

34. But men are not generally inclined to believe and trust God. They are not inclined to remember that he cares for us; that he has assumed and must bear the greatest of burdens, which no man on earth can bear; that he cared for us before we were born, and could still, of himself, execute all things dispensing with all human help, but he prefers to accomplish his purpose through human means, and to employ us as instruments in these divine works—governing, punishing, teaching, comforting.

35. The world is particularly culpable in this matter of pride. When divinely charged with some great work, it always seeks to determine, in advance, by its own wisdom, all future danger and accidents, and tries to anticipate them. The world looks for man's help, and seeks friendship and assistance wherever it can. It makes alliances, and resorts to other schemes. It puts its trust in these and then considers itself strong enough to meet opposition, and is sure of its cause by reason of its own efforts. This is not showing faith in God. It is not committing our cause and all care for ourselves to him. It is maintaining the cause through one's own anxiety and forethought. It is ignoring and disbelieving the fact that nothing can be accomplished by one's own vexed effort. No human wisdom has power to foresee the future. If we looked back at the examples furnished by history, we should learn how woefully human wisdom is deceived when it relies upon itself. The results are not what was expected, but the very opposite.

36. The Scriptures give many pertinent examples of the kings of Judah and Israel, whom the prophets often and severely rebuked because they sought refuge and help among strange nations and kings. The prophets warned them that they should not trust in human aid, but should do according to God's Word and command. They told them he would protect and uphold them. But the kings would not hear. They continued to form friendships and alliances with the kings of Egypt, Syria, Babylon and Assyria, and thus invited them as guests into the land, whereupon the heathen kings came with force and led away captive the inhabitants and laid everything desolate. That was their reward for not heeding God's Word; for not believing that he cared for them, and desired to protect and defend them if they would but trust and obey him.

The wisest and most eminent, even among the heathen, have lamented, in the light of their own experience, that they have been shamefully deluded by their counsels, even though founded on the most careful deliberations. Nor can it be said that the world has grown wiser in consequence of its own or others' sufferings.

37. This exhortation is preached to no one except the few who are Christians. They have regard for God's Word, and, now humbled, have learned that they should not rely on their own wisdom and reason, or upon human help and comfort. They have come to the belief that God cares for them. So they do what they know is right and are in duty bound to do, and suffer themselves not to be hindered by such fears as possess the world concerning dangers, injuries, and adversities. They commend all such things to God, and at his word go right through with courage.

38. Let me illustrate from my own experience. What should I have done when I began to denounce the lies of the indulgence system, and later the errors of the papacy, if I had listened and given heed to the terrible things all the world wrote and said would happen to me? How often I heard it said that if I wrote against such and such eminent people I would provoke their displeasure, which would prove too severe for me and the whole German nation. But, since I had not begun this work of myself, being driven and led thereto by reason of my office (otherwise I should have preferred to keep silence), I must continue. I commended the cause to God and let him bear the burden of care, both as to the result of the work and also as to my own fate. Thus I advanced the cause farther, despite tumultuous opposition, than I had ever before dared to think or hope.

39. Oh, how much good would God accomplish through us if people could be persuaded, especially the eminent lords and kings, that what Peter here says is true: "He careth for you!" How much he could do if they believed that truth instead of seeking, through their own wisdom and reason, to equip, strengthen, and compose themselves by aid of human might and assistance, friendship and alliance, for the accomplishment and maintenance of their cause! It is apparent that mortal plans fail and have always failed, and that they accomplish nothing. God hinders and resists man's work when he will not trust him. Hence God can grant no success or favor to that which is founded on human wisdom or on trust in human powers. This is a truth men must finally perceive by experience, and they must lament because they would not believe it.

40. Let him who would be a Christian learn to believe this. Let him practice and exhibit faith in all his affairs, bodily and spiritual, in his doing and his suffering, his living and his dying. Let him banish cares and anxious thoughts. Courageous and cheerful, let him cast them aside; not into a corner, as some vainly think to do, for when burdens are permitted to conceal themselves in the heart they are not really put away. But let the Christian cast his heart and its anxieties upon God. God is strong to bear and he can easily carry the burden. Besides, he has commanded that all this be put upon himself. The more thou layest upon him, the more pleasing it is to him. And he gives thee the promise that he will carry thy cares for thee, and all things else that concern thee.

41. This is a grand promise, and a beautiful, golden saying, if men would only believe it. If a powerful ruler here on earth were to give such a promise, and were to demand that we let him have all the concern about gold and silver and the needs of this life, how cheerfully and contentedly would every one cling to such promise! But now a greater lord says all this, one who is almighty and truthful, who has power over the body and life, and who can and will give us everything we need, both temporal and eternal. We should have in all this, if we only believed it, half of heaven, yea, a perfect paradise on earth. For what is better and nobler than a quiet, peaceful heart? For this all men are striving and laboring. So have we been doing hitherto, running to and fro after it. Yet it is found nowhere except in God's word, which bids us cast our cares and burdens on God and thus seek peace and rest. It counsels us to throw upon him everything that threatens to oppress and worry us. God would not have anxiety dwell in our hearts, for it does not belong there; it is put there by the devil.

42. Therefore, a Christian, even though obliged to suffer all manner of adversity, temptation and misfortune, can cheerfully go forward and say: Dear Lord God, thou hast commanded me to believe, to teach, to govern and to act; this I will attempt in thy name, and I will commend to thee whatever may happen to me in the course of duty. There you have a man who is equal to any task, and can do much good. For he is freed from the greatest misfortune and has laid the heaviest weight upon God, whilst another man does nothing except fill his heart with anxiety and gloom. This other can apply himself to no good work. He becomes unfit both to do and to suffer. He is afraid of every trifle and, because of his vexation or impatience, can do nothing worth mentioning.

What is the world doing now? Princes, lords, counselors, citizens, and peasants—all want only power, honor, and wealth. None desires to render service. Everyone fears that this or the other thing might happen to him. Though the world never needed more careful rule than at the present time, lords and princes, simply because they are such, idly sit adorned with beautiful crowns, though they have received their trust from God to discharge their princely office. For the world must be governed, the youth must be educated, the wicked must be punished. But if thou desirest the honor only, and art not willing to step in the mire, to suffer people's displeasure, and through it all learn to trust God and for his sake do everything, thou art not worthy of the grace given for the accomplishment of a good and praiseworthy work. In punishment, resting under God's wrath, thou must remain unfit for every good work.

III. "Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom withstand stedfast in your faith."

43. The apostle has set forth two things to be practiced throughout the Christian life; namely, Christian humility—which is fear of God—and faith and confidence in God. Now he admonishes his readers to battle and warfare, that these blessings may be preserved. He shows us our enemy and adversary who seeks to rob us of our treasure and deprive us of our salvation and eternal blessedness. Hence he would say: Be not concerned about living a life of earthly glory, and let not anxious cares fill your soul. But be intent on humbling yourselves before God. Trust in him. Let this be your care, that you may abide in the grace of humility. Let it never be wrested from you. For the devil seeks to instill these forbidden cares, and to produce disobedience against God, that he may tear faith and God's Word out of your heart.

WATCHFULNESS ENJOINED

Therefore, you must not ignore these facts, and meanwhile strive after something else. You are not to go along in false security or sleep and snore as though there were no danger. You must rather know that you have not been placed in a garden of roses here, but in the midst of heavy conflicts, where you must be on your guard, always watchful and prepared for resistance. For you have an adversary who is not insignificant or to be despised, but is strong, mighty, and moreover wicked and ferocious. He does not fight with stone and wood, destroying rocks and trees, but he has his eye fixed on you Christians. He never grows tired or weary, but without rest and ceasing he pursues you; not only to spy upon you and to harass you, in which he can be withstood, but he desires utterly to devour you.

44. His sole purpose and plan is to murder and destroy men, spiritually and bodily; even as, at the beginning, when man had been created, he led and cast him into death. He practices his schemes with awful and deadly effect in the world against those who do not believe in Christ, and he will never stop until the judgment day. One can perceive his incessant activity. He bustles about and openly raves and roars against all Christendom. He uses for his purpose the Turks, and other tyrants and godless people, not to speak of the sorrow and murder he works by so possessing people that in their frenzy they do themselves injury, or without cause murder others. He otherwise, through wicked and shameful snares, leads men into misfortune and sorrow.

In short, the world is nothing else than the devil's murderous cave, both spiritually and physically. God, in order to somewhat hinder and restrain physical murder, has ordained temporal government, parental and other authority. These in their office are to be sober, watchful, and diligent. We ought to thank God for his preservation of such authority, for otherwise there would be no peace—everywhere on earth nothing but murder. Nevertheless, the awful murder the devil perpetrates on those who are without God's Word and faith, is not thereby checked.

45. Some other defense and protection, then, another kind of watchfulness, must be sought, in order that men may remain undestroyed and unharmed in the presence of this bloodthirsty murderer. Of this Peter speaks here to the little company of Christians, and says: Ye, through Christ's blood and death rescued from the devil's lies and murderous intent, have been made alive and have been transplanted into the heavenly life, like your beloved fathers, Adam, Abel, and others. They are no longer under bondage to Satan, but live in Christ, though the body lie for a time in the earth and truth and life must be supplied to their body and soul. But because ye still dwell in the world, ye are exposed to all danger. Physically, ye are yet in the murderer's house; therefore ye must take good heed, that he may not kill you again, and murder your souls dwelling in these mortal bodies. It shall harm you none that the soul was ruined and the body is yet subject to death. "Because I live," says Christ (Jn 14, 19), "ye shall live also." However, ye must struggle if ye are to abide in the truth and life. To this ye are appointed whilst ye live here on earth; otherwise ye would already be in Paradise. But the devil has not yet been consigned wholly to the punishment of his damnation, which will be at the last day, when he will finally be cast down from his airy height, and from the earth, into the abyss of hell. Then he will no more be able to attack us, and there will no longer be cloud or veil between us and God and the angels.

SOBERNESS ESSENTIAL

46. In order, now, he continues, that ye may be saved from his murderous designs, and may preserve the life you have begun, ye must be sober and watchful; not only mindful of the body, but much rather of the mind and soul. It is true that a Christian who is to resist the devil must be physically sober, for a full hog and drunkard cannot be watchful nor can he plan defense against the devil. Yet must a Christian much more guard himself, lest the soul become sleepy or drunken. As the soul is burdened by the body when the latter is overwhelmed by drunkenness, so, when the soul is watchful and sober, the body also is temperate and prepared to hear God's Word. But where the body is oppressed by drunkenness, there the soul must first have been a drunkard, not heeding God's Word nor giving attention to prayer. Where the soul is drunken and drowned in such security, it will not avail that the body suffer hurt by strict fasting and self-mortification, after the fashion of the Carthusians and hermits.

47. Saint Peter, then, forbids not only bodily drunkenness, but also drunkenness of the soul. One's soul is drunk when he lives in carnal security, without thought and anxiety as to whether he have and hold God's Word or not; when he asks no questions, either about God's wrath or his grace; and when he, moreover, lets himself be filled with the sweet poison of false doctrine through the mob of evil spirits Satan employs for this purpose, until he grows numb, loses faith and clear judgment and finally becomes overfull of drunkenness and spews it out upon others.

48. The same thing results when men begin to be wise in divine things by following human reason. Saint Peter aptly describes this false doctrine with the expression, "cunningly devised fables," 2 Pet 1, 16. He says: "We did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Such are the beautiful words and sermons which make a great show of wisdom and holiness, and naturally please men. For instance it is a cunningly devised fable when one with the aid of philosophy, which reason can understand, sets forth in grandiloquent words what a fine thing it is for a man to live honorably, chastely, and to practice good works and virtues. The aim is, with such pretense, to have us believe that we, through these works (not alone through faith), are justified before God; that is, are redeemed from sin and death.

49. Again, other factious spirits travel about with worthy sayings which they have heard from us—externals do not help souls; the Spirit must do the work—and then they proceed to fling contempt on baptism and the Lord's Supper. So Thomas Münzer, with his seditious peasants, and the Anabaptist rabble, went about, with great demonstration, preaching about the shameful, wicked life of the world, especially of the authorities, declaring that these were godless people and tyrants, and deserved God's wrath and punishment; that therefore men should depose and execute them, and establish a new government, of only pious and holy people.

These and similar things Peter calls "cunningly devised fables." They are exaggeratingly pretended to be the product of great wisdom and art, and are rendered sweet and palatable to reason. So has all idolatry, heresy, and false doctrine, from the beginning on, prevailed, being fashioned and most beautifully adorned by people learned and wise and held in the esteem of the world.

50. How admirable did the position of Arius and his adherents appear in comparison with the true faith concerning the divinity of Christ, when they declared that though Christ should be exalted above all angels and creatures, and that all honor, dominion and power in heaven and on earth belong to him, yea, that he is quite equal to God—all this, yet he is not "homo-ousios"; that is, he is not in one undivided, divine, eternal essence, which is of such unity that it could be imparted to no one else. It would be too much to say that a man is God, etc. With such pretense was a great multitude of Christians seduced. Even few bishops remained in the pure doctrine and faith. And afterward this poison prevailed among the wise people of Asia and Greece, until Mohammed, with his Saracens and Turks, had miserably corrupted the greatest part of the world.

51. Likewise the Pope has adorned and colored with a glorious form his abominations and idolatry, claiming for his order of service that it is a meritorious and beautiful thing. Again, he calls attention to the serviceableness of the beautiful, orderly government and power of the Church, with its well regulated gradations of office and position—bishops superior to the ordinary priests, and over the bishops Saint Peter's chair at Rome. In that chair is vested the authority for the convocation of general councils so often as these may be necessary. These councils are to judge and decide in all matters of faith, and their decisions everyone must follow and obey. Again, he boasts what great service and consolation to the whole world is the work of the priests in the mass, when they daily renew and offer to God the sacrifice made by Christ on the cross. This is the sweet wine in the "golden cup" of the scarlet harlot of Babylon, with which she has made drunken all kings and nations, Rev 17, 2-4.

52. Where the devil finds those who give ear to such fables, he takes them captive and so fills them with these falsehoods that they neither see nor hear anything else. They think their belief is the only one, and they will not suffer themselves to be instructed out of God's Word. And so, in their madness, without rightful intelligence of faith and all principles of pure doctrine, they continue in their darkened mind, with their fantastic, lying prattle, without repentance and amendment, having no grace to learn or do anything good. This is amply proved by the example of all seditious spirits.

53. Therefore, Peter admonishes us to be "sober and watchful," especially in spirit, and to guard ourselves against this sweet poison and these beautiful, adorned lies and fables of the devil. He teaches us how to equip and defend ourselves against his wicked devices.

IV. "Whom withstand stedfast in your faith."

54. The true defense and resistance, in which we are to be sober and watchful, is to be well grounded in God's Word and cling firmly thereto when the devil seeks, with his cunningly devised fables, born of human understanding and reason, to overthrow our faith. Reason is the devil's bride, and always vaunts itself wise and skilful in divine things, and thinks what it holds to be right and good must be accounted so before God. But faith holds to God's Word alone. It knows that before God, human wisdom, skill and power, and whatever gifts and virtues man may have, count for nothing. Only his grace and the forgiveness of sins in Christ has value. Therefore, faith can repel and defeat all these fine pretensions and cunning fables.

55. Worldly dominion and authority boasts before God in this fashion: My crown is a crown in God's sight, for my power and sovereignty have been given me by God. Therefore, whatever I say he must respect and regard as valid, and everyone must endorse my words and actions.

The wise philosopher or jurist would thus give expression to his boasts and pretensions: We are the learned, the wise rulers of the world, and have admirable laws and statutes. We have superior and beautiful doctrines concerning good works and virtues. Men must listen to us and allow our judgment to have precedence. He who can do, or does, such things as we have done is, in God's sight, superior to others.

FAITH, NOT WORLDLY WISDOM, ESSENTIAL

56. No, dear man, says faith to this, I grant that the things of which thou boastest have been ordained and confirmed by God; but they are not of value save for this temporal life. The world regards it a crown to be known as wise. But in the presence of God thou shouldst lay aside thy crown, let thy might and power, thy law and wisdom, go, and say: God, be merciful to me a poor sinner! Reason has this advantage, that it is equipped and adorned with God's promise to confirm its rule here on earth and to be pleased therewith; but with the provision that reason shall not interfere in God's government, or boast over against him. Let it be known that what is called wisdom and prudence on earth, is foolishness before God. What in the sight of the world is commended and honored as beautiful, valuable, as of honor and virtue, is before God sin, and subject to his wrath. What on earth is called life, is before God nothing but death.

57. If, now, the parental, governmental, and other authority which he, himself, has arrayed and through his word established, and which is even administered by Christians, does not endure before him in that other life, how much less will he allow that to stand which man has devised or subtly contrived out of his own head and heart! Wouldst thou be wise and prudent, then cultivate these virtues in the sphere appointed thee, in thy home, the State, and whatever office thou hast. In these temporal things, rule as well as thou canst. Thou wilt find little enough to help in all thy books, thy reason and wisdom. But when thou beginnest to devise out of thine own reason the things of God, though they may all seem trustworthy wisdom, yet, as Peter says, they are nothing else than fables and lies.

58. For example, a monk's words: Whoever dons a cowl can lead a holy life, for he is cut off from the world, can banish all care and sorrow, and can undisturbed, in peace and quietness, serve God—these words appear wisely spoken, but at bottom they are nothing but unreliable and useless chatter. This is proved from God's Word, which teaches that God has forbidden us to invent our own worship; also, that God would have us serve him in our ordinary life and station and not by fleeing therefrom. Hence, such monkery can not be a holy, godly life. In Psalm 119, 85, we read: "The proud have digged pits for me, who are not according to thy law." That is, they preach to me about praiseworthy things, and represent their cause as most worthy, in order to overcome me. But when I look at their words aright, I do not find them to be in accord with thy Word and commandments, which (says he) "are faithful." A lie is always beautiful. It attracts and pretends to be truth. It has, further, the advantage that it can adorn itself from the wardrobe of God's Word, and, perverting the Word, can use it in an uncertain sense. On the other hand, the truth does not so glitter, because it does not make itself plain to reason. For example, a common Christian, a type of the brethren, hears the Gospel, believes, uses the sacraments, leads a Christian life at home with wife and children—that does not shine as does the fascinating lie of a saintly Carthusian or hermit, who, separated from his fellow men, would be a holier servant of God than other people. Yet the latter is useful to nobody. He lets others preach and rule, and labor in the sweat of their brows.

GOD'S WORD THE CHRISTIAN'S GUIDE

59. The one important thing, then, is to see to it that we have God's Word, and that we regulate all the teachings and claims of men in accordance therewith. We will thus distinguish between the true and the false. We must remember, also, that human reason holds a far inferior position to faith and is not to be acknowledged as trustworthy, save as it is authorized by God for temporal authority. He who has faith can easily perceive when reason conflicts with God's Word or seeks, in its wisdom, to rise superior thereto; just as, in worldly things, each one in his station, office, or calling, knows full well, when another attempts the same work, whether he does it right or not. So every householder well understands that in his home wantonness and wrong-doing on the part of the servants are not to be tolerated. However, in divine things, reason can so attire and adorn itself as not to be recognized except by one who, guided by faith, has a right knowledge of God's Word.

Reason will not refrain from intruding, with its wisdom and prudence, into the affairs of God, where it has no orders. Thus the devil creates endless misery, as he did at the beginning in the case of our first parents. And yet reason will not permit, in its own domain, the slightest interference of one unskilled in reason's code.

60. If a cobbler were to arise in the Church and censure the people because they did not wear his make of shoes, and should try to convince people that such a procedure was necessary to salvation, they would pursue him out of the Church with shoes and slippers, and cry after him: Stay at home in your shop with your shoes and lasts! What does that concern the spiritual estate?

But when a factious spirit stands up and in his supposed wisdom grunts forth: I am a holy, pious man. I have a special illumination from the spirit. Therefore do not believe what the others say, which is nothing but the dead letter, that one person can be God and man; that a virgin can be a mother; that a man can be cleansed from sin by water and the spoken Word, etc.,—when he does this, then there is no one to offer resistance. Reason then gains the victory if it only claims the glory of guidance by the Spirit, of a holy life, etc., even though God's Word and faith are not present in their purity. Behold, what mischief the Turk, with his Mohammed, has wrought and is still working, solely by claiming the honor of worshipping the one God, and asserting that he alone has the true God! He declares that only he and his followers are God's people on earth, to honor which God they war and fight against the Christians. He presses his cause the more vigorously because he has such large fortune and victory; so even many Christians who come among them adopt their faith and become Turks. But none of the Turks turn Christian.

61. Therefore, no other counsel can be offered for resisting the devil and escaping destruction by him, than this, that we remain firm in faith, says Saint Peter. One must have a heart which holds fast to God's Word and fully understands the same and holds it to be true. For faith cannot exist or endure without the Word, nor can it hear or understand aught else. One must separate the Word far from all reason and wisdom, placing it above these. He must hold reason as nothing—yea, as dead—in matters pertaining to God's government and to how man is to escape sin and eternal death. Reason must keep silent and give to God's Word alone the honor which belongs to the truth, "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ," as Saint Paul says, 2 Cor 10, 5. If reason is to be my teacher in these things, what need is there of faith? And why should I not throw away all the Scriptures? We Christians, says Paul (1 Cor 1, 20-21), preach something else and higher than reason comprehends, for the wisdom of the world is mere folly. If reason taught me that the mother of Christ is a virgin, the angel Gabriel might have remained in heaven and kept silent concerning the matter. Your faith, says Paul again (1 Cor 2, 4), should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Now you have seen the tricks and wiles of the devil with which he seeks to devour you, which he bases on reason as opposed to God's Word.

62. Peter admonishes all Christians, especially the preachers, how to defend themselves against the devil's intrigues and artifices, with which he seeks to capture them. In order that Christians may be properly equipped, Saint Peter calls attention to two things: First, we must know the enemy and realize his purpose; second, we must be armed to meet him and defend ourselves, that we may stand before him and conquer. He is a terrible, mighty foe, says Peter, and is the god of this world. He has more wisdom and more deceptive snares than all men, and can so blind and unsettle reason that it will cheerfully believe and follow him.

He is, moreover, a wicked and bitter enemy to you who in Christ have life. He cannot bear to see you Christ's. He thinks and plots about nothing else than your overthrow. And think not that he is far from you, or that he will pursue you from a distance. He has encamped close to you and right around you; yea, in your own territory—that is, in your flesh and blood. There he seeks how to reach you, and overtake you when unguarded, attempting now this, now that. Misguided faith, doubt, anger, impatience, covetousness, evil passions, etc., are points of attack—any place where he finds an opening or discovers that you are weak. Therefore, think not that he is simply jesting. He is more furious and hungry than a famished and angry lion. He does not purpose merely to wound or prick you, but wholly to consume you, so that nothing of body or soul will remain.

63. Whoever would withstand such a foe must be equipped with other armor and weapons than those furnished by human wit and understanding, by human powers or ability. Your defense is nothing else, says Peter, than faith, which holds and grasps God's Word. And because the believer holds fast to this, the devil can gain nothing. It is God's truth and power, before which, with his lying and murdering, he cannot stand; he must yield and flee. Therefore Ephesians 6, 16 says: "Taking up the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one." These fiery darts are chiefly those he hurls into the heart through the beautiful thoughts of human reason. He thus transforms himself into an angel of light, to displace right thoughts and faith, and to introduce human whims and false faith. His aim is, also, to lead into doubt, distrust, hatred, and anger toward God.

Thus it is, too, in the other temptations and trials of life, when Satan drives men into sin and disobedience against God's commandment, into such sins as avarice, usury, anger, revengefulness, unchastity, and other vices. Here he uses the same insidious arts, first tearing God's Word out of the heart, then blinding reason with sweet and beautiful thoughts. He says: The thing proposed is not so wicked. God will not be so angry with you. He can afford to be patient with you, you still love the Gospel. With such suggestions as these he carries you away and plunges you under God's fearful anger and condemnation.

64. If you would withstand these wiles, there can be no other plan or counsel than this: Fight with God's Word in firm faith against these suggestions and allurements. Further, keep in mind both your former misery and your present treasures of grace. Remember how you were once under God's wrath when, without fear of God and without faith, you were the devil's own, subject to all his will, and must have perished had not God, in boundless goodness, forgiven you your sin and bestowed on you his grace. And now give heed that you may not lose this treasure, to which end the Holy Spirit has been promised you. You need not succumb if you remain in faith. Again, if you experience weakness and suffer want, you are bidden to call upon him, certain that he will hear you. The promise is: "If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name," Jn 16, 23. Also: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you," Jn 15, 7.

65. Peter would, with his admonitions, make Christians bold and confident for resisting the temptations of the devil and defending themselves. He would not have us feel terrified nor despair before Satan, even though that wicked one press us hard through the instrumentality of the world and of our own flesh, as well as by his direct onslaughts. We are not to fear though he seem too strong for us, and though surrender to his prowess seems inevitable. We are to have a manly heart and fight valiantly through faith. We must be assured that, if we remain firm in the faith, we shall have strength and final victory. The devil shall not defeat us; we shall prove superior to him.

We have been called of God and made Christians to the end that we renounce the devil and contend against him, and thus maintain God's name, Word, and kingdom against him. Christ, our head, has already, in himself, smitten and destroyed for us the devil and his power. In addition, he gives us faith and the Holy Spirit, whereby we can wholly defeat Satan's further wickedness and his attempts to overthrow us.

66. A Christian should bear all this in mind, I say, and learn to experience the strength and power of faith. So will he not yield to temptation and enticement. Nor will he, from love of the devil or the world, to his own eternal hurt, and for the sake of small temporal advantage, pleasure, or honor, cast from him God's grace and the Holy Spirit, and put himself again under God's eternal anger and condemnation.

V. "Knowing that the same sufferings are accomplished in your brethren who are in the world."

67. This is a very precious and comforting passage, the truth of which Peter learned not only by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but from his own experience. One instance of his experience was when, in the high-priest's house, he thrice denied his Lord, and soon thereafter fell into such anxiety and despair that he would have followed the traitor Judas had not Christ turned and looked on him. It was for this reason that Christ, so soon after his resurrection, first of all commanded that the glad tidings should be announced to Peter. Christ also said to him, before all this happened: "Simon, ... I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not; and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, establish thy brethren," Lk 22, 31-32.

CONDUCT IN SUFFERING

Peter makes faithful use of the present passage for his readers' comfort: Ye must expect, in the world, says he, to suffer many and severe things, both in temptations of soul and body, against the first and the second table of the law, Satan lying in wait for you with his deceitful and murderous arts.

68. Weak Christians suffer beyond measure because they are plagued and beset so constantly by the devil. Their afflictions so sorely oppress them that they conclude that no one suffers so severely as do they. Especially does this seem the case in the great spiritual temptations which come to those endowed with peculiar gifts and who are called to positions of prominence in the Church. So Paul often laments his great temptations, which the common people do not understand and cannot endure. God, moreover, is careful to lay on each one just the cross he is able to carry. Still these sufferings are such that even the great and strong must languish and wither beneath them were it not for the comfort God bestows. These troubles grip the heart, and consume the very marrow, as the Psalms often lament.

69. Some of those living in cloisters, and other pious, tender consciences, have learned by experience how hard such burdens are to bear, especially in the darkness of the papacy, where they receive but little genuine comfort. There are, also, some inexperienced and forward spirits who have seen but have not understood these things, and who yet desire to be regarded as people of large experience. When, however, the test comes, they are found wanting. It is related of one of this class, who heard others bemoaning their temptations, that he prayed God to let temptation visit him also; whereupon God permitted him to be tempted with carnal lust. But when he found he could not bear it, he again prayed God, asking that the burden of his brother, whom he regarded inferior to himself, be given him. But when this request was granted, he prayed yet more earnestly that God would give him back his former burden.

70. Amid such temptations Peter comforts suffering Christians by telling them that they are not the first, nor the only ones, to be thus assailed. They are not to feel as if it were a wonderful, rare, unheard of cross which they bear, or that they bear it alone. They are to know that their brethren, the Christians of all times, and scattered through all the world, must, because they are in the world, suffer the same things at the hand of Satan and his minions. It assuages and comforts beyond measure for the sufferer to know that he does not suffer alone, but with a great multitude.

71. It is true that in external temptations this comfort is easily grasped, because of the knowledge of others' experiences. But when Satan assails thee alone with his poisonous darts—for example, when he tempts thee to doubt God's grace, as if thou alone hadst been cast off; or when he suggests horrible blasphemies, hatred of God, condemnation of his government, and so tortures and fills with anguish thy heart that thou art led to think that no man on earth is more fearfully assailed than thyself—then there is need to make use of this comfort which Peter offers thee and all Christians. In other words, Peter would say: "My friend, let not the devil and thy sufferings terrify thee or lead thee to despair. Thou shouldst know this for a certainty, that thou sufferest not alone. No matter how shamefully he attacks thee, he has done and is doing the same to others."

The devil seeks, not only our own destruction, but also that of all Christendom. It is ever his purpose to tear out of men's hearts, in the midst of their sufferings, God's Word and faith. He would rob them of their comfort in Christ, and depict God in the most horrible and hostile light, that the heart may have not one kind thought regarding him. And he can do this; not only with lofty, refined, subtle thoughts, but also by gross suggestions from without, before which a man must fear and shudder. I, myself, saw and heard a girl who complained of a temptation of this nature; namely, that while she stood in the church and saw the sacrament elevated, the thought occurred to her: Lo, what a big knave the priest is elevating. And she was suddenly so frightened at the terrible thought that she sank to the floor.

72. Such terror and anxiety proceed from the fact that one imagines that no one else has ever experienced such dreadful assaults. He thinks he has a special, strange, and unusual affliction. Although it is true that men's temptations differ and come from different sources and one may imagine his own a peculiar kind, yet the sufferings and temptations of all Christians are alike in this, that the devil tries to drive them all from the fear and confidence of God into unbelief, contempt, hatred, and blasphemy against God. Therefore, the apostles are accustomed to call Christians' sufferings a fellowship in pain and tribulations. They point all men who suffer to the agonies of Christ our Lord, as the head and exemplar. Peter says in his first epistle, ch. 1, 11: "The Spirit of Christ ... testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them." And Paul says, "I fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh," Col 1, 24.

73. If one would speak of specially severe sufferings, surely no human heart can comprehend, much less tell, how great and heavy were the anxiety and sorrow of our first parents on account of their miserable fall. And what sorrow must Adam have witnessed during the nine hundred years of his life in the experiences of his first son Cain, and his children! No man has ever borne such a burden as lay on both parents for nearly a hundred years after Abel's death, until their third son was born. Truly, these nine hundred years were a period of sorrow and misery.

Perhaps, on the last day, we shall discuss with this our father the solitary suffering of that time, of which we know nothing. And we shall willingly confess that in sorrow's school he stands far above us and we have been only insignificant pupils. It must have been most severe and dangerous for him, since he had no example before him of similar suffering with which to comfort himself.

74. Likewise, if thou couldst rightly understand what the other holy patriarchs, the prophets and apostles—especially Paul and Peter—and later all the beloved martyrs and saints, have endured thou wouldst be forced to say that all thy temptation and suffering are nothing in comparison. But above all these must we reckon the experiences of the Lord Christ, whose heart was so pierced by Satan's fiery darts and bitter thrusts that the bloody drops of sweat were pressed out of his body. He has gone before and surpassed us on the way of sorrow. We, with all our suffering, can only follow his footsteps.

OF TEMPTATION

75. Therefore, learn well this saying of Peter, and think not that thou alone endurest this severe, fearful temptation and these onslaughts of the devil. Remember that thy brethren, not only they who are dead—who also have set thee a good example—but also those who live with thee in the world, have suffered and do suffer such terror and distress. For they have the very same enemy Christ and all Christendom have. Thou canst be glad and shout: God be praised! I am not the only one that suffers, but with me there is a great multitude, all Christians on earth, my beloved brothers and sisters, even down to the last who shall walk this earth. And in this passage Peter comforts and strengthens me, as Christ commanded him, who also has tasted of these sorrows, and, indeed, in far greater measure than I and others have.

76. I have at times thought, in my trials, that I should like to argue with Peter and Paul as to whether they were tried more severely than I. For, when he can do nothing else, the devil resorts to the plan of leading a man to fix his attention solely on his own affliction, and oppresses him with the thought: No man has been so cast off by God, or has sunk so deep into anxiety and distress. The devil has often so wearied me with such arguments that at length I could offer no further opposition to him, but simply turned him over to Christ, who can quickly silence him with arguments. If we have not Christ with us, Satan proves far too strong for us. We cannot silence him. He soon renders helpless all our skill, and slays us with our own sword.

77. Ah, these seditious leaders and other self-secure spirits are poor, miserable people, who know nothing at all of this conflict! They drown in their own imaginations, and think they are perfect. And some of them are so shameless and without fear as to blaspheme, saying that God himself could not take their virtue from them. The devil simply strengthens them in these thoughts, and hardens them the more. This very thing is a sign that they do not yet know the devil; they are already blinded and taken captive by him, so that he can ruin them when he pleases.

78. Genuine Christians are not thus self-confident and boastful when they are attacked. In severe conflicts and anxieties they labor that the devil may not deprive them of the sword. I know that I am learned and have seen something of what the devil can do; but I must bear him witness, from my daily experience, that he can overcome me unless I am well established in faith and have Christ in my heart. Thomas Münzer was so firm and inflexible, as he thought, that he dared to say that he would not behold Christ, if he did not himself wish to speak with him. But at last, when the devil began to attack him, men saw what his pride and boasts were. No, they are not the ones to accomplish anything, who go about so boastful, as if they had consumed the devil. They do not see that they, themselves, were long since devoured seven times over by him and are held fast in his jaws.

79. The heretic Arius was also secure and proud enough against the pious bishops and Christians. Yea, when he was punished for his error by his bishop, and admonished to desist, he became the more obstinate. He complained about the bitter persecution to which he was subjected. But his suffering was that they would not approve his horrible blasphemy. Just so in every age the heretics and blasphemers, yea, even open murderers and tyrants, pose as martyrs when they are not permitted to run against God's Word and against pious people. So confident do they try to be that they have no fear of God. They count the devil a dead bee until, at length, he suddenly seizes and destroys them in a moment.

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