



# The Homilies for the Modern World

*Lenten Meditations 2018*

The First Book of Homilies are a collection of twelve sermons published in England by Archbishop Cranmer in 1547. Cranmer published The Homilies during a time when the level of spiritual ignorance in the Church was astounding. Before the Reformation, all services were conducted entirely in Latin. Because of this, among other reasons, the clergy lacked the education and experience necessary to write solid and edifying sermons for their congregations. The Homilies were written by bishops and scholars in the Church to fill this pressing need. They were appointed to be read every Sunday in order to instruct both the clergy and laity in the basic doctrines and practices of the Christian faith as illuminated by the recent reformation sweeping through the Western world.

In the Anglican Communion, much attention is given to prayer books, and a bit to the 39 Articles, but The Homilies are all but forgotten. However Article XXXV of the 39 Articles explicitly endorses The Homilies, declaring that they “contain a godly and wholesome doctrine.” It is regrettable that The Homilies have fallen into disuse as they contain a goldmine of crucial biblical truths that still have vital spiritual power for today.

In an attempt to begin to remedy this situation, my father, Jerrell P. Hein, and I have taken the time to interpret these sermons for the modern day. We have updated the language, metaphors, and illustrations in a way that would make The Homilies preach once again for today. Our goal was not to create a literal adaptation to modern English, but rather a sort of re-preaching of the truths that gripped our forefathers, so that they can now grip our hearts as well.

This small booklet contains parts of sermons I,II,III,IV,V,VI,VIII, and IX broken into 40 short segments appropriate for daily meditations through Lent. My prayer is that they encourage and challenge you in your walk with the Lord Jesus Christ.

“He who has ears, let him hear.” - Matt 13:9

Peace.

The Rev. Kurt Hein

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***Reading Holy Scripture I***

For a Christian there is nothing more necessary or profitable than knowing holy Scripture; for it contains within it God's true word, presenting both God's glory and our duty. And there is no truth nor teaching necessary for our justification and eternal salvation except that which can be drawn from that deep fountain and well of truth. Therefore if you desire to enter the right path to God, you must apply your mind to know holy Scripture. Without it you can neither sufficiently know God or his will, nor your calling and duty. As water refreshes the thirsty and food nourishes the famished, the reading, hearing, meditating, and studying of holy Scripture satisfies those that desire to know God or themselves. Those that are drowning in temporal lusts cannot stomach God's word because they neither savor God nor live a godly life. Just like a person, after becoming sick, finds all food distasteful, those whose minds are sick with sin and love of the world find even the sweet word of God to be bitter to their taste.

So don't listen to the corrupt judgement of those that are enslaved to their passions and don't care about anyone except their own carcass. But reverently hear and read holy Scripture, which is the food of the soul. Don't run to the stinking puddles of human traditions, devised by someone's imagination. Instead diligently search for the well of life in the books of the Old and New Testament. There you will find your justification and salvation. For holy Scripture tells us everything that we ought to do, avoid doing, believe, love, and expect to receive from God's hand. Within the books of holy Scripture we discover the Father, from whom, the Son, by whom, and the Holy Spirit, in whom, all things exist and are sustained. We learn that these three divine Persons are one God and one Being. We also learn to know ourselves and how despicable and in need of mercy we are! And we learn to know God, how good he is in himself, and how he makes us and all of his creation share in his goodness. We are instructed how to know God's will and desires for us. As the great scholar and preacher John Chrysostom said, "Whatever is required for the salvation of man is fully contained in the Scripture of

God. He that is ignorant may there learn and have knowledge. He that is hard hearted and an obstinate sinner, shall there find eternal torments prepared by God's justice, to make him afraid and soften his heart. He that is oppressed with misery in this world shall there find relief in the promises of eternal life, to his great consolation and comfort. He that is wounded by the devil unto death shall find there medicine, whereby he may be restored again unto health." "If it shall require to teach any truth or reprove false doctrine, to rebuke any vice, to commend any virtue, to give good counsel, to comfort, or to exhort, or to do any other thing requisite for our salvation; all those things," says St. Chrysostom, "we may learn in abundance from Scripture." "There is," says Fulgentius, "abundantly enough both for those grown to eat and children to nurse. There is whatever is proper for all ages and for all types and sorts of people."

**February 15th**

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

***Reading Holy Scripture II***

Therefore the books of holy Scripture should often fill our hands, our eyes, our ears, our mouths, and most of all, our hearts. For the Scripture of God is the heavenly food for our souls (Matt 4:4): hearing and keeping it makes us blessed (Luke 11:28) and sanctifies us and makes us holy (John 17:17). It turns our souls to God (Ps 19:7-10). It "is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119:105). It is a "sure and steadfast anchor of our soul" (Heb 6:19). It "gives wisdom" and "knowledge and understanding" (Prov 2:6). It "comforts," (Ps 119:50) makes glad, and cleanses our consciences. It is a more valuable treasure than any "gold and abundance of costly stones" (Prov 20:15). It is "sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb" (Ps 19:10). It is called "the best part" that "Mary chose," for it contains eternal comfort (Luke 10:39,42). The words of Scripture are called "words of eternal life" (John 6:68) for they are the way that God brings life into the world. God has promised that they have the power to transform your life, turning you toward himself through the working of the Holy Spirit. And when God's words are received into your heart, they always do God's heavenly and spiritual work within. They are "living and active, sharper than any two-edged

sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). Christ calls the person who constructs their life on the solid foundation of God’s word a wise builder (Matt 7:24). By God’s word we will be judged, for Christ says that “the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day” (John 12:48). Christ promises that God loves and has favor on those that keep his words and that the triune God will dwell within him (John 14:21).

**February 16th**

Friday after Ash Wednesday

***Reading Holy Scripture III***

Whoever diligently reads this word and presses it upon his heart will find that his strong desire for transitory things will diminish as a greater desire for the heavenly things that God has promised grows within him. There is nothing in this world that strengthens faith and trust in God, preserves spiritual freedom and inner purity of heart, and also outward godly living and behavior like continually reading and meditating on God’s word. By continually reading and diligently studying the holy Scriptures, all these things become so deeply stamped and engraved upon the heart that they almost become second nature! The effect and strength of God’s word both illuminates the ignorant and sheds more light on those that faithfully and diligently read it. It comforts their hearts and encourages them to do what God has commanded. It teaches patience in adversity and humility in prosperity. It shows the honor due to God, and the mercy and love due to our neighbor. It gives good counsel when we find ourselves in uncertain circumstances. It instructs us to look to him for aid and help in all dangers because God is the only giver of victory in all battles and temptations from both our physical and spiritual enemies. But you do not receive the full benefit by only reading or saying the words. Rather immersing yourself in Scripture leads to the most Holy Spirit inspired transformation of heart and life. You will become less and less proud, less angry, less greedy, and less desirous of empty worldly pleasures. You will also learn to daily forsake your old sin-addicted life and increase in more and more virtue. In a nutshell, there is nothing that will keep your

mind more focused on what is godly and drive away ungodliness than the continual reading or hearing of God's word when it is joined with the desire to know and follow God's will. For without a clear aim, pure intent, and good mind nothing is truly good in God's sight. And conversely nothing obscures the beauty of Christ and the glory of God, nor causes more blindness and all kinds of selfishness, than ignorance of God's word.

**February 17th**

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

***Reading Holy Scripture IV***

If we profess Christ, why aren't we ashamed of our ignorance of his teaching? Wouldn't a professing PhD in Mathematics be ashamed if he were found out to be ignorant of algebra? And wouldn't it be incredibly shameful to be called a philosopher without having read the books of philosophy, or to be called a lawyer, or an astronomer, or a physician if you were ignorant in the books of law, astronomy, and medicine? How can anyone say that they profess Christ and his practices, if they do not apply themselves to read and hear, and therefore know, the books about Christ and his teaching? Although other realms of knowledge are important, yet the study of God surpasses all other studies. If we love to read and hear human thoughts and discoveries more than his precious Gospel, what excuse will we have at the last day when we stand before Christ? What will you say when it is revealed you found no time for what was most important but rather spent your free time on other lesser pursuits? Therefore we who profess God and believe and trust him, must apply ourselves with the time we have to diligently hear and read his word.

But many, who don't have any desire for God's word, often make two excuses for their behavior. Some excuse themselves from reading Scripture by saying that their ignorance will inevitably lead them to interpret it incorrectly. Others think that the Scripture is so difficult to understand that it can only be studied by scholars and theologians. To answer the first excuse, ignorance of God's word is actually the cause of all error, as Christ himself affirmed to the Sadducees, saying, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God"

(Matt 22:29). How can you reject error if you are ignorant of truth? And how can you inform yourself if you won't read or hear the word of God which will give you knowledge? The person that now is most knowledgeable started as ignorant. But he didn't avoid reading, because he didn't want to remain ignorant and by his ignorance remain in error. If you are afraid to learn the truth of God, which is of the utmost importance for you, because you think you are going to fall into error, you may as well just lay in bed all day to keep yourself from falling into a swamp; nor eat any food so you don't get sick from overeating; nor plant a garden, nor work in your job, nor use your goods, because you are afraid your plants will die, your work be ineffective, and your goods destroyed. If that's your logic, it would be best for you to lie around doing nothing, and never move yourself to do anything beneficial, just in case something bad might happen to you! But if you are afraid that you may fall into error by reading holy Scripture, let me show you how to read it without that danger. Read it humbly with a meek and lowly heart, with your intention to glorify God and not yourself with the knowledge that you obtain. Always read it while continually praying to God, that he direct your reading of Scripture to a beneficial effect; and don't pretend to know more about Scripture than you actually do. For as Augustine says, "The knowledge of holy Scripture is a great, large, and a high palace, but the door is very low; so that the high and arrogant man cannot run in, but he must stoop low and humble himself in order to enter into it." Presumption and arrogance is the mother of all error, but humility doesn't need to fear error. For humility only searches to know the truth. It will search and bring together information from various places, and where it cannot figure out the meaning, it will pray, it will ask others with more knowledge, and it will not presumptuously and hastily claim to know anything that it really doesn't. Therefore the person who is humble can boldly search for truth in Scripture without any danger of error. And if he is ignorant, it is even more important that he read and search holy Scripture to raise him up out of ignorance. A person can learn through hearing only, but will advance much more with both hearing and reading.

***Reading Holy Scripture V***

Now concerning the difficulty of understanding Scripture, the person who is so weak that he can't stomach rich food can still drink warm, nutritious milk and wait to eat the rest until he becomes stronger and more knowledgeable. For God receives both the educated and uneducated, and does not reject anyone who comes to him, but treats everyone with equity. Scripture is full of valleys and flat pathways that are easy for anyone to walk upon, as well as high hills and mountains which only the very few can climb. And "whosoever gives his mind to holy Scripture with diligent study and burning desire," John Chrysostom says, "it cannot be that he should be left without help. For God Almighty will send him some godly professor to teach him, as he did to instruct the Ethiopian eunuch, the treasurer of the queen, who had a great desire to read the Scripture even though he didn't understand it. Yet because of his desire for God's word, God sent his apostle Philip to declare to him the true meaning of the Scripture that he was reading. Or if we lack someone knowledgeable in Scripture to instruct and teach us, God himself from above will enlighten our minds, and teach us those things which are necessary for us, and in which we are ignorant." And in another place Chrysostom says that, "man's human and worldly wisdom or study is not needed to understand Scripture, but the revelation of the Holy Spirit, who inspires the true meaning to those that search for it with humility and diligence." "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matt 7:7). Even if we read the same passage once, twice, or three times, let us not cease to continue reading, praying, and asking for teaching from others. By this continual knocking, eventually the door will be opened to you, as Augustine says, "Although many things in the Scripture are spoken in obscure mysteries, yet there is nothing spoken under dark mysteries in one place without also being in other places spoken in more plain and familiar terms for both the educated and the uneducated. And it is the duty of everyone to learn those things in the Scripture that are plain to understand and necessary for salvation, and to also commit them to memory and powerfully make use of them. And also he should be



content to be ignorant of the mysteries of Scripture until God decides to open them up to him. If anyone lacks either the ability or opportunity to read, God will not judge him, yet this should not be an excuse for those who are able and do have opportunity to read the Scripture.

Nevertheless, the difficulty of some places in Scripture should not cause us to neglect reading it altogether!" Finally St. Augustine says, "By the Scripture all are healed, the weak are strengthened, and the strong are comforted. Because of this no one is opposed to people reading Scripture except he who is ignorant of how wonderful it is, or is so spiritually sick that he hates even the medicine that brings the deepest healing, or is so ungodly that he wants people to continue in blindness and ignorance of God."

We have briefly discussed some of the great advantages of God's holy word, which is one of God's chief and primary benefits given and declared to humankind here on earth. Let us thank God from our heart for this great and special gift, beneficial favor, and fatherly provision. Let us be glad to "fan into flame the gift" (2 Tim 1:6) from our heavenly Father. Let us hear, read, and know these holy rules, commands, and statutes of our Christian religion, which we have made a profession to obey in our baptism. Let us with fear and reverence treasure these necessary and fruitful lessons in the chest of our heart. Let us "meditate day and night" (Ps 1:2) and contemplate them. Let us ruminate, as if chewing the cud, that we may obtain their sweet juice, spiritual power, marrow, honey, kernel, taste, comfort, and consolation. Let us sustain, comfort, and inform our consciences with their most infallible certainty, truth, and perpetual assurance. Let us pray to God, the only Author of these heavenly subjects, that we may speak, think, believe, live, and depart from this life in harmony with their wholesome teachings and truths. And through all this we shall have in this world God's protection, favor, and grace, with unspeakable peace and a restful conscience. And after this difficult life we will enjoy the endless bliss and glory of heaven, which the one who died for us all gave us all, that is Jesus Christ: to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory both now and forever. Amen.

***Humanity's Distress I***

The Holy Spirit, in writing the holy Scriptures, makes it his priority to diligently pull down human pride, which is the universal plight of every human ever since it infected our first father Adam. This is why Scripture teaches us many lessons against this deeply rooted sin, in order to instill in us the most commendable virtue of humility, to reveal to us ourselves, and to remind us of what we are when left to ourselves.

In the book of Genesis the Almighty God gives us a description of ourselves in our great-grandfather Adam. This description should encourage us to consider what we are, from what we are, from where we came, and to where we are going. He says, "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). Like a mirror, this statement reveals that we are but ground, earth, and ashes, and that we will return to earth and ashes. The holy patriarch Abraham also remembered this description appointed and assigned by God to all humankind. This is why he called himself "but dust and ashes" when he prayed earnestly for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:27). We also read in the Old Testament of men and women of God, such as Judith, Esther, Job, and Jeremiah, putting on sackcloth and throwing dust and ashes on their heads when they mourned their sinful living. They called and cried to God for help and mercy with this ceremony of sackcloth, dust, and ashes, in order to declare to the entire world what a humble and lowly view they had of themselves. When they did this they clearly demonstrated how they remembered God's description given to Adam, that they are vile, corrupt, frail, dust, earth, and ashes.

The book of Wisdom also completely tears down our proud ego, causing us to remember our mortal and earthly source. That we are all "mortal...and the offspring of him that was first made of the earth" (Wis 7:1 KJV) and that everyone whether they are a king or pauper have the exact same beginning and end, "For all men have one entrance into life, and the like going out" (Wis 7:6 KJV). Every day we see that, left to ourselves, this is our tragic end. The almighty God commanded the prophet Isaiah to proclaim to the whole world saying, "All flesh is grass,

and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades” (Isaiah 40:6-8). And the holy prophet Job, who intimately experienced the unhappy and sinful estate of humankind, declares the same truth with these words, “Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not. And do you open your eyes on such a one and bring me into judgment with you? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” (Job 14:1-4). And all people because of their evilness and internal disposition, were so universally given over to sin that, “the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart” (Gen 6:6). Because of their sin, God’s anger was so great that he cleansed the whole world with a flood, drowning everyone except Noah and his small family.

**February 21st**

Wednesday in the First Week of Lent

### ***Humanity’s Distress II***

It is not without good reason that the Scripture often calls humans “earth.” “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD” (Jer 22:29 KJV). Despite what anyone else might style, label, or entitle us, the prophet Jeremiah correctly describes us as “earth, earth, earth.” And so God, who knows best what to call us, properly describes us in this way. And he continues this description, speaking through his faithful apostle Paul, “All, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written, ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’ ‘Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.’ ‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’ ‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’ ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.’ ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes’” (Rom 3:9-18). Paul also writes, “For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all” (Rom 11:32), and, “The Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (Gal 3:22). In many places Paul reveals our true colors, saying we are, “by

nature children of wrath” (Eph 2:3) and that we are “not...sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us” (2 Cor 3:5). If we can’t claim anything of ourselves, we certainly can’t do anything of ourselves! Furthermore the wise man in the book of Proverbs states, “the righteous falls seven times” (Prov 24:16)!

The most tried and true man Job “feared all his works” (Job 9:28 author’s translation). John the Baptist, who was set apart for God from his mother’s womb, was praised even before his birth, being called an “angel” (Mal 3:1), “great before the Lord” and “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15). He prepared the way for Jesus Christ who commends him as “more than a prophet” (Matt 11:9) and “among those born of women there has arisen no one greater” (Matt 11:11). Yet even John the Baptist plainly confessed to Jesus Christ that “I need to be baptized by you” (Matt 3:14). He properly praises and glorifies his Lord and Master Christ, and humbles himself saying that he is “not worthy to stoop down and untie” (Mark 1:7) even the Lord’s sandals. Rather, he gives all honor and glory to God. In the same way, Paul often confesses what he is of himself and, as a faithful servant, always gives all praise to his Master and Savior. John the Evangelist states the selfsame truth when he, along with all other holy men of God, openly confesses, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8-10). The author of Ecclesiastes also makes this true confession, “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” (Eccl 7:20). And David was greatly ashamed of his sin, but was not ashamed to confess it! Throughout his life he often earnestly and mournfully desired God’s great mercy for his offences and prays to the Lord, “Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you” (Ps 143:2). The burden of his sin weighed on him as is evidenced by his confession that his sins are many in number, hidden, difficult to understand, and impossible to fully know, speak, or count! David, having earnestly entered into deep contemplation and consideration of his sins, was not able to arrive at the bottom of them. Therefore he prays to God, “Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden

faults” (Ps 19:13). He correctly understood his sin’s original root and fountainhead, properly perceiving the inclinations, provocations, stirrings, stings, buds, branches, dregs, infections, tastes, feelings and scents of them to always be within him. This is why he says, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps 51:5).

Our Savior Jesus says, “There is only one who is good” (Matt 19:17b). “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5b) and, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). He commands all of us to say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty” (Luke 17:10b). He prefers the penitent tax collector over the proud, holy, and respected Pharisee. He calls himself a physician saying, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17). He teaches us in our prayers to acknowledge that we are sinners and to ask every day for forgiveness and deliverance from all evils by our heavenly Father’s hand. He reveals that it is our own sin arising from our hearts that defiles us. He teaches that an evil word or thought deserves condemnation, affirming that, “on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak” (Matt 12:36). He says that he was sent to save only the “lost sheep” (Matt 15:24). This is why few of the proud, righteous, educated, wise, mature, and holy Pharisees were saved by Christ, because they justified themselves by their external counterfeit holiness before others. Therefore let us beware of hypocrisy, pride, and justifying ourselves.

**February 22nd**

Thursday in the First Week of Lent

### ***Humanity’s Distress III***

The true knowledge of ourselves is absolutely necessary in order to have a correct view of God. We have learned how godly men have always thought of themselves with humility. We have also learned how God himself, in his holy word, teaches us to judge and think of ourselves. For left to ourselves we are like crabtrees which are unable to produce apples. Left to ourselves we are like bad soil that only grows weeds, nettles, brambles, briars, and dandelion. Our lack of fruit is shown

in Galatians chapter five. We don't have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness or self control except from God. That's why these virtues are called the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22) and not the fruit of man.

Therefore let us truthfully acknowledge who we are before God: wretched sinners in need of his mercy. Let us earnestly turn to him, sincerely humble ourselves, and cry to God for mercy. Let us confess with our mouth and heart that we are full of imperfections. Let us also understand that our works are imperfect. Then we won't attempt to stand foolishly and arrogantly in our own self-flattering imagination, pretending that we can justify ourselves by our own merit and works. For even our best works have imperfections. We come nowhere close to loving God as we are commanded to do, with our entire heart, mind, and strength. We don't respect or reverence God as we ought. We don't pray to him perfectly. We don't give, forgive, believe, love, and hope perfectly. Nor do we speak, think, and do perfectly. Therefore let us not be ashamed to plainly confess our state of imperfection. In fact, let us not be ashamed to confess imperfection in even our best deeds! We should not be ashamed to say with Peter, "I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). And let us all confess with the holy prophet David, "Both we and our fathers have sinned; we have committed iniquity; we have done wickedness" (Ps 106:6). Let us all openly confess with the prodigal son, as he confessed to his father, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:18-19). Let us say with holy Baruch, "O Lord our God, to us is worthily ascribed shame and confusion, and to you righteousness: we have sinned, we have done wickedly, we have behaved ourselves ungodly in all your righteousness" (Baruch 2:6,12 author's translation). Let us agree with the holy prophet Daniel, "We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame" (Dan 9:5,7a). So all the good men in holy Scripture teach us to humble ourselves and to exalt, extol, praise, magnify, and glorify God.

***Humanity's Distress IV***

So we have learned how evil we are when left to ourselves; how by ourselves, we have no goodness, help, nor salvation, but rather the contrary: sin, damnation, and eternal death. If we take time to deeply consider these matters, we will better understand the tremendous mercy of God and how salvation can only come through Jesus Christ. For in ourselves, even at our best, we find nothing able to deliver us from this miserable captivity into which we were sold, through the envy of Satan, and by the breaking of God's commandment in our first parent Adam. We have all become unclean but are unable to cleanse ourselves or to cleanse anyone else. We are "by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Eph 2:3b), but are unable to make ourselves the children or heirs of God's glory. We are "straying like sheep" (1 Pet 2:25b) but so great is our weakness that we are powerless to return to the flock. We should not glory in ourselves since when left to ourselves we are only sinful. Neither can we rejoice in any of our good works, which are all so imperfect and impure that they are unable to stand before the righteous judgment seat of God, as the holy prophet David prays, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you" (Ps 143:2).

Therefore, we must flee to God or we will never find peace, rest, and quietness of conscience in our hearts. For he is the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (2 Cor 1:3). He is the Lord with whom is "plentiful redemption" (Ps 130:7). He is the God which "according to his own mercy" (Titus 3:5) saved us. He shows his compassion and incredibly great love for us by choosing voluntarily, even when we were dying in our sins, to save us and provide an eternal kingdom for us. And he gives us all of these spiritual treasures not because we deserve it or merit it by our good deeds, which we don't have anyway, but only because of his free mercy. And because of whom? Only because of Jesus, who is the "lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet 1:19). He is the dearly beloved Son for whose sake God is fully pacified, satisfied, and unified with humanity. He is the "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), the only one of whom it can be said "has done all things well" (Mark

7:37) and has “committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth” (1 Pet 2:22). Only he can say, “The ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me” (John 14:30). No one else can truly declare, “Which one of you can reprove me of any fault?” (John 8:46 author’s translation). He “holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever...once for all...he offered up himself” on the altar of the cross. “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb 10:14). He is the “one mediator between God and men...who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:5-6), whose “blood...cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). He is the physician, “who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases” (Ps 103:3). He is the savior that “will save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:24). In summation, he is the abundantly flowing fountain “from whose fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (John 1:16 authors translation). For in him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). And in him and by him we have from God the Father all good things related to either the body or to the soul.

O how much we owe our heavenly Father for his great mercy, which he has so abundantly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior! How can we sufficiently and worthily thank him? Let us all together burst forth with joyful voices, always praising and lifting up our Lord of mercy for all his love and kindness that he has shown to us in his dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

So far we have learned what we are when we are left to ourselves; we are truly sinful, wretched, and damnable. And again, we have also learned that, left to ourselves and by ourselves, we are not able to think a good thought, or do a good deed, so that we find in ourselves absolutely no hope for salvation but only those things that lead us to our own destruction. And finally we have learned of the love, kindness, and great mercy of God the Father toward us and how good he is toward us because of Jesus. He does all this apart from anything we merit or deserve, but only because of his own great mercy and kind-hearted goodness. Now, how these exceedingly great mercies of God that are shown in Jesus Christ for us are obtained and how we are delivered from the enslavement of sin, death, and hell will be the subject of the next sermon. In the meantime, in fact at all times, let us learn how to know



ourselves, namely our frailty and weakness, and not flaunt and boast of our own good deeds and merits. We should also acknowledge the incredible mercy of God toward us and confess that, even though all evil and damnation come from us, even more all goodness and salvation come from him. As God himself says by the Prophet Hosea, “O Israel, your destruction comes from yourself, but only in me is your help and comfort” (Hosea 13:9 author’s translation). If we humble ourselves in this way before God we can be sure that on the day of his coming he will lift us up into the kingdom of his dearly beloved Son Jesus our Lord, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory forever. Amen.

**February 24th**

Saturday in the First Week of Lent

***Salvation in Christ I***

We cannot be justified and made righteous before God by our own works, no matter how good they may be, because we all are sinners and offenders against God. We all break his law and commandments. Therefore we all must seek another righteousness or justification from God’s hand. From God we receive release, pardon, and forgiveness from our sins and trespasses. And when embraced by faith, the justification and righteousness that we receive by God’s mercy and by Christ’s merits is taken, accepted and approved by God for our complete and entire justification.

In order to understand this better, we must remember the great mercy of God. The whole world was wrapped up in sin by breaking God’s law, yet God sent his only Son our Savior Jesus Christ into this world to fulfill the law for us and to shed his most precious blood. Through his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus made amends to his Father for our sins, making peace with God by assuaging the divine wrath justly brought upon us by our sin. So great is God’s mercy that infants, being baptized and dying in their infancy, are by Christ’s sacrifice washed of their sins, brought into God’s gracious family, and made heirs of the kingdom of heaven. And likewise, when those who sin after their baptism sincerely turn again to God, they too are washed from all their sins such that they are left without any spot of sin deserving damnation. This is the

justification and righteousness that Paul speaks about when he says, “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin...for all...are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:20,23,24). And again he says, “We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Gal 2:16).

Although this justification is free to us, it came at a great price. At first glance many seem to find this statement to be contradictory. If a ransom was paid for our redemption then how can it be given to us for free? A prisoner who pays his ransom is not let go freely. For if his release were truly free he would have no need to pay, for that is the essence of something being free. If justification were free, wouldn't liberty be given to us without payment of a ransom?

But God answers this difficulty by his great wisdom in the mystery of our redemption. God has mixed his justice and mercy together. Although he is infinitely just to do so, he does not condemn us into the eternal captivity of Satan and his prison of hell, devoid of mercy forever. And although he is infinitely merciful, he does not deliver us without justice or the payment of a just ransom. But God joins his endless mercy together with his upright and equal justice. He reveals his great mercy by delivering us from our former captivity without requiring any ransom to be paid or amends to be made by us. And even though we could not do it ourselves, he provided a ransom for us, that is the most precious body and blood of his own most dear and beloved Son Jesus Christ, who besides providing our ransom, perfectly fulfilled God's law. So God's justice and mercy embrace each other, and thus fulfill the deep mystery of our redemption. Paul speaks of God's justice and mercy knit together in Romans chapter three, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness” (Rom 3:23-25). And again in the tenth chapter, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom

10:4). And in the eighth chapter, “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:3,4).

**February 26th**

Monday in the Second Week of Lent

***Salvation in Christ II***

In these places the apostle Paul teaches us the three parts that all must go together in our justification. First there must be God’s great mercy and grace. Second there is Christ’s righteousness which is the satisfaction of God’s justice by the full payment of our redemption in the offering of his body and the shedding of his blood along with his perfect and complete fulfilment of the law. And finally there is our part which God works within us, that is a true and living faith in the merits of Jesus Christ.

So God justifies us not only by his mercy and grace, but also by his justice, which the apostle Paul calls “the righteousness of God” (Rom 3:21,22,25,26). And God’s righteousness and justice consist in him paying our ransom and fulfilling the law. The grace of God does not exclude God’s righteousness in our justification but rather excludes all human righteousness. God’s grace excludes the righteousness of our works and any possibility of them meriting or deserving our justification before God. This is why Paul declares that we bring nothing to our justification except a true and living faith, which nevertheless is “the gift of God” (Eph 2:8) and not a human work apart from God. But this justification before God by faith does not exclude repentance, hope, love, fear, and awe of God, but it excludes them from the role of justifying us. So although they are all present together in the one who is justified, yet they are not how someone is justified before God. Justification by faith also does not exclude the righteousness of our good works, nor the necessity of us doing good works after our justification as our duty toward God (for it is our duty to serve God our entire lives by doing the good deeds that he commands). However it does exclude us from attempting to do

good works in order to be made good by them! For all the good works we do are imperfect and therefore unable to justify us, but our justification comes freely, by the sheer mercy of God. And how great and free is God's mercy, that even though the entire world was not able by its own power to pay any part toward the ransom for her freedom, it pleased our heavenly Father, because of his infinite mercy, without any contribution or deserving on our part, to prepare for us the most precious treasure of Christ's body and blood! Christ's body and blood fully paid our ransom, fulfilled the law, and completely satisfied his justice. So Jesus is the righteousness of all who truly trust in him, because he paid their ransom by his death. For them he fulfilled the law through his life. Now every true Christian can be called a fulfiller of the law, for what they lack in their weakness Christ's righteousness has supplied.

**February 27th**

Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent

### ***Salvation in Christ III***

We have learned that that we must seek our justification and righteousness from God and that this righteousness is given to us by Christ's death and merits. We also learned how three things are required for obtaining this righteousness; God's mercy, Christ's righteousness, and a true and living faith, from which springs good works. We also learned that no one is justified by their good works because no one fulfills the law completely. In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul proves this point by saying, "If a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law" (Gal 3:21). He continues later, "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace" (Gal 5:4). And again Paul writing to the Ephesians declares, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9). In a nutshell, the sum of all of Paul's argument is this: if righteousness comes from works, then it does not come from grace; and if it comes from grace, then it does not come from works. All the prophets testify to this same truth, as Peter writes, "To him (Christ) all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43).

Likewise, the ancient Greek and Latin authors also attest to justification by a true and living faith alone in Christ. We will specifically look at three, Hilary, Basil, and Ambrose. Hilary declares this truth plainly in the ninth Canon of Matthew, "Faith only justifies." And Basil, a Greek author, writes, "This is a complete and whole rejoicing in God, when a man does not exalt himself for his own righteousness, but instead looks for the righteousness of God by faith." And the Latin author Ambrose says, "This is the ordinance of God, that he who believes in Christ should be saved without works, by faith alone, freely receiving remission of his sins." Meditate on these words. Without works, by faith alone, we freely receive remission of our sins. How can it be more clearly stated? We are forgiven of our sins, freely, without works, by faith alone. You can also read similar statements from the other ancient writers such as Origen, Chrysostom, Cyprian, Augustine, Prosper, Oecumenius, Photius, Bernardus, and Anselm, just to name a few. However, when they teach that we are justified by faith alone, they do not mean that justifying faith is alone. Justifying faith is never found without its fruits of true repentance, hope, love, fear, and awe of God. Nor do they mean that nothing is required of us after we have faith in Christ so that we can be idle and ought to stop doing all good works since we are justified by faith alone! But this statement, that we are justified by faith alone, freely, and apart from works, is spoken in order to clearly reveal how all of our works are unable to merit or deserve our justification in the sight of God. It plainly shows the weakness of man and the goodness of God, the great infirmity of ourselves and the incredible might and power of God, the imperfection of our works and the most abundant grace of our Savior Jesus Christ. Justification by faith alone wholly assigns the merit and deserving of our justification to Christ alone and his most precious blood.

This teaching from holy Scripture is the strong rock and foundation of the Christian religion of which the ancient authors of Christ's Church approve. Justification by faith alone exalts and presents the true glory of Christ and tramples down the empty glory of man. Anyone who denies this teaching is not to be counted as a true Christian, because they do not present Christ's full glory. Instead, they are an

enemy of Christ and his Gospel, choosing instead to promote empty human glory.

**February 28th**

Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent

***Salvation in Christ IV***

Although it is absolutely true that we are justified by faith alone apart from any merit of our good works (as the apostle Paul puts it) and that we are freely forgiven by a living and mature faith in Christ (as the ancient authors say), it must be clearly taught and properly understood so that selfish people do not abuse this teaching. If not taught and understood properly, selfish people will take this doctrine as an excuse to further indulge the lusts and desires of the world, flesh, and the devil. Because we do not want anyone to live in error due to misunderstanding this teaching, we will take time to clearly and plainly explain this doctrine. When properly understood, no one will have grounds for thinking that they can make this teaching a reason to have selfish “liberty” in the pursuit of sinful desires, wicked actions, or ungodly living.

First we must understand that our justification by Christ is not both the action of God toward man and the action of man toward God. Justification is not the action of man, but of God. For we cannot make ourselves even a little bit righteous by our works. To affirm that someone by his own works can take away and cleanse his own sin and so justify himself is the greatest arrogance and presumption that the Antichrist could set up against God. Justification is the action of God alone. It is not something we render to him but that we receive from him. It is not something we give to him but rather something we receive from him by his free mercy, and only by the merits of his most dearly beloved Son, our only redeemer, savior, and justifier, Jesus Christ. So to be justified by faith apart from works, or to be justified by faith alone in Christ alone, is not our own act. Neither does our faith in Christ justify us or deserve our justification, because that would mean that our justification is due to some act or virtue within us. Although we hear God’s word and believe it, and although we have faith, hope, love, repentance, fear, and awe of God within us, and do an infinite number of good works, yet we must

renounce the merit of our faith, hope, love, and all other virtues and good deeds which we either have done, will do, or can do. We must renounce them as altogether too weak, insufficient, and imperfect to deserve remission of our sins and our justification. Therefore we must only trust in God's mercy and in the sacrifice that our high priest and savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God, made for us once for all upon the cross. Through his sacrifice we obtain God's forgiveness of our original sin at baptism. We also receive forgiveness of all the sin we commit after our baptism if we truly repent and sincerely turn to him again.

Our faith can be compared to John the Baptist. Even though he was a great and godly man, he did not point to himself as the source of the forgiveness of sins but pointed to Christ saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). So also our living faith, no matter how great and virtuous it may be, points away from itself to Christ, for it is only through him that we have forgiveness of sins and our justification. So our faith in Christ says to us, "I do not take away your sins. It is Christ alone! To him alone I send you for that purpose, to forsake all your good virtues, words, thoughts and works, and to put your trust in Christ alone."

**March 1st**

Thursday in the Second Week of Lent

### ***Salvation in Christ V***

We have discussed how, since no one can fulfill the law of God, all are condemned by it. For this reason something else beside the law is required for our salvation. What is necessary is a true and living faith in Christ, which brings forth good works and a life according to God's commandments. We have also heard the conviction of the ancient Church writers, who plainly declare that only faith in Christ justifies a person. By this they mean that we put our faith in Christ and are justified by him alone, and that we are justified by God's free mercy and the merits of Christ alone and not by any of our own virtues or good works. Only Christ merits our justification since we are unable to deserve it ourselves.

We have tried to be careful in our explanation of this doctrine in an attempt to avoid arguments about words with those who enjoy

disagreements. Although we know that those who love an argument will always find a way to have it! In any case, the truth is that our own works do not justify us. That is, our works do not merit or deserve the forgiveness of our sins, nor do they transform us from being unrighteous to righteous before God. It is only through the merits of Christ and through what he deserves that we are justified. The reason Scripture tells us that faith justifies, and not some other virtue or work, is not because faith merits our justification but because faith is a gift from God which sends us directly to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. To say that “we are justified by faith without works” is the same as saying “we are justified by faith alone.” When the ancient Church fathers say that we are justified by faith alone they mean exactly what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote that we are justified by faith apart from works. Since it is only through the merits and work of Jesus that we have forgiveness, we adamantly deny that our faith, works, or any other virtue merits or deserves our justification before God. We say this in order to properly humble ourselves before God and give all glory to the only one who is worthy, Jesus Christ.

We have learned about God’s action in our justification, that he has freely given forgiveness to us by his mercy, through a true and living faith, without us deserving it. Now let us talk about the actions and duty of a Christian toward God. How should we respond to God in the light of his great mercy and goodness? Should we live our life in unfruitful laziness after we are baptized and justified, not caring about our lack of love toward God and our neighbor? Should we live our lives contrary to God’s desires, walking in the lusts and temptations of the world and self, serving the devil instead of God? No! The faith that gives birth to evil works or apathy instead of repentance is not a true, pure, and living faith, but is a dead, demonic, counterfeit, and fake faith. This is what both the apostle Paul and James call it. For even the demons know and believe that Christ was born of a virgin, that he fasted forty days and nights, that he did all kinds of miracles, and that he declared himself to be the true God. They also believe that Christ suffered the most painful death to redeem us and that he rose on the third day. They believe he ascended into heaven and that he sits at the right hand of the Father and will come again to judge the living and the dead. The demons believe



these articles of our faith along with all that is written in the Old and New Testaments. Yet even though they have this “great” faith, they still remain demons, set apart for damnation and lacking true Christian faith. True Christian faith is not simply an intellectual belief in the holy Scripture and the articles of faith, but also a sure trust and steadfast confidence in God’s merciful promises that he will save us from eternal damnation through Christ. This true and living faith transforms the heart to love and obey God’s commandments. Satan doesn’t have this sort of faith, neither do those who outwardly profess with their mouth, outwardly receive the sacraments, and go to church to keep up their outward appearance of being Christian, yet in their living and works show the opposite. How can you have faith and confidence in the God who saved you by the work of Christ and by reconciling you to himself, giving you a portion in the kingdom of heaven, yet live a life apart from God that denies Christ by your deeds? Clearly no one who lives like an enemy of God actually trusts in him! Those that know Jesus Christ to be the savior of the world also know that no wicked person will enter the kingdom of God. They know that God hates unrighteousness and that he will “destroy those who speak lies” (Ps 5:6). They know that all who do good works, which can only be done by a living faith, will go “to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29). And they also know that for “those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury” (Rom 2:8).

**March 2nd**

Friday in the Second Week of Lent

### ***Salvation in Christ VI***

Let’s conclude by taking time to consider the infinite grace that God has shown us despite what we deserve. He created us out of a piece of dirt, and because of his infinite goodness he has exalted us by fashioning us in his own image and likeness. And even though we were condemned to hell and eternal death because of our sin, he gave us his own natural Son (being eternal God, immortal, and equal to himself in power and glory) to be made human and to assume our mortal nature along with all of its infirmities. As a human, he suffered the most

shameful and painful death for our sins in order to justify us and to restore us to eternal life. Through this sacrifice he made us the dearly loved children of God and brothers of his only Son, Jesus Christ, and we have become fellow heirs with him of his eternal kingdom of heaven. If we take the time to deeply meditate on these great and merciful gifts of God, we will not be motivated to live an idle life devoid of good works. Understanding God's mercy will not stir us up to do evil, but if our hearts are not diamond-hard, they will be moved to offer up our entire selves to God, with all of our will, might, and power in order to serve him with good works our entire lives and to seek his glory and honor instead of sensual and fleeting pleasures. We will dread the possibility of willfully offending, either in words, thoughts, or deeds, a God who is such a merciful and loving redeemer. The gifts of God, upon deep reflection, propel us, for his sake, to always be ready to give up our lives for our neighbors and, as much as lies within us, to intend with all our various endeavors to do good to everyone. These are the fruits of true faith. True faith does good to everyone. And above all things and in all things, true faith advances the glory of God, in whom alone we have our sanctification, justification, salvation, and redemption. To him be glory, praise, and honor forever. Amen.

**March 3rd**

Saturday in the Second Week of Lent

***The Danger of Leaving God I***

Regarding man's departure from God, the Wise Man in the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus tells us that pride was the root cause, for by pride, man's heart was turned from God his Maker. He tells us that pride is the fountain of all sin, and that the one full of pride will also be full of cursing, and that in the end, his pride will destroy him. Also, as we depart from God with our pride and sin, in response, God departs from us with all his goodness. The prophet Hosea clearly affirms that those who depart from God by their immoral living, but who still would wish to pacify God through their sacrifices, are laboring in vain. Despite their many sacrifices, God still departs from them. Regarding this, Hosea says, "Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God ...

With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the LORD, but they will not find him; he has withdrawn from them” (Hos 5:4,6).

On the topic of turning to God, or from God, we must understand that there are many ways in which this may occur. Sometimes, men depart directly from God by idolatry, as both the nations of Israel and Judah did in the Old Testament. Sometimes, men depart from God by a lack of faith and by mistrusting God. Isaiah speaks of this when he says, “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD!” (Is 31:1). And what is the end of their lack of faith and trust in God? “When the LORD stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together” (Is 31:3).

Sometimes, men depart from God by neglecting God’s commandments concerning their neighbors, which say that they should show sincere love towards all men. The prophet Zechariah, speaking to the people as God’s mouthpiece, said about this, “Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart. But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear. They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the LORD of hosts. ‘As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘and I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations that they had not known. Thus the land they left was desolate ...’” (Zech 7:9-14).

In short, everyone who does not abide in the word of God, but instead follows their own desires and stubborn heart goes “backward and not forward” (Jer 7:24), turning away and departing from God. The ancient church father Origen says about this, “The one that with his mind, with study, with good works, and with thought and care applies himself to God’s word, thinking upon it day and night, and doing God’s commandments – this is the one who is turned to God.” And conversely,

Origen says, “The one that is occupied with myths and false stories, when he could be hearing the word of God – this is the one who is turned from God. The one who is engulfed in his business dealings and the pursuit of wealth, yet does not have time to hear the word of God – this is the one who is turned from God. The one entangled with concerns for his possessions, who is covetous of other’s belongings, and who strives for the glory and honor of this fallen world – this is the one who is turned from God.” So, the one who follows his own mind and does not honor or obey those things commanded by God, not listening to them, embracing them, or imprinting them in his heart so that he may live accordingly – this is the one that is turned from God - even though he does other “good works” which in his mind seem better to him than God’s commandments.

**March 4th**

Monday in the Third Week of Lent

***The Danger of Leaving God II***

All of this is shown to be true by the example given to us in Scripture of king Saul, who’s life is a warning to us. Saul was commanded by God through the prophet Samuel to kill all the Amalekites and to destroy all of their goods and cattle. But Saul, perhaps moved by pity and by his own idea of devotion to God, spared Agag king of the Amalekites, and saved the best of the cattle for a sacrifice to God. Seeing this, God was very angry, saying to Samuel, “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me, and has not performed my commandments” (1 Sa 15:11). When Samuel asked Saul why, against God’s specific commandment, he had saved the cattle, Saul excused himself by blaming the people for having demanded it, and by his reasoning that these were the best cattle, so God surely would be pleased with his good intention to honor him with their sacrifice. Samuel responded by rebuking Saul’s self-made good intentions which were not according to God’s word, nor really for his honor, saying, “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the

word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king” (1 Sa 15:22-23).

Through all these examples in Scripture, we may know that as we forsake God, so shall he ever forsake us. Furthermore, the miserable condition of being forsaken by God may be perceived by considering the severe warnings of God given to us in Scripture. It is beyond our capacity to fully comprehend the misery that follows being rejected by God. Yet, we can understand enough, so that unless our heart is stone cold, we can fear and tremble as we bring to mind the severity of God’s warnings.

When God takes from us his word, the true teaching about Christ, and his merciful help, which is always joined to his word, and leaves us to our own reasoning, will, and strength, then God is declaring that he is beginning to forsake us. For God has shown his face of mercy in Jesus Christ to all who truly believe his Gospel. And if those who believe behold Christ’s face as they should, they will be transformed into his image, will be made partakers of the heavenly light and of his Holy Spirit, and will do the good works which naturally flow from the children of God. However, if after believing they neglect Christ, if they become unthankful to him, and if they do not live according to Christ’s example and teaching for the purpose of proclaiming God’s glory, then God will take his kingdom away from them, and take away his holy word with which he would reign in them, because they did not bear good fruit.

It is important to understand that because of God’s great mercy and patience, he does not bring all of this great anger upon us immediately. But, when we first begin to pull back from believing his word, and begin to waiver in our obedience to it, God sends his messengers, the true preachers of his word, to rebuke and exhort us, reminding us of our duty toward God. They remind us that God in his great love toward us delivered his own Son to death, so that we by his death might be delivered from death and be restored to eternal life. They furthermore remind us that we who have received eternal life will dwell with Christ forever, and be partakers and inheritors with Christ of his eternal glory and heavenly kingdom, and that in right response to this great gift, we should live a godly life as his children. But, if we ignore the rebuke and exhortations of God’s word toward faith and obedience, and

instead continue to willfully disobey his word and divine will, and if we sin against others by looking down on them, envying them, or hating them, or if we commit murder, robbery, adultery, gluttony, lying, cursing, or any other ungodly behavior, then God will threaten us with his divine vengeance. He will swear in his great anger that whoever rejects his word and continues in these evil works will never enter his rest, which is the kingdom of heaven.

**March 5th**

Tuesday in the Third Week of Lent

***The Danger of Leaving God III***

So, nothing should concern us and trouble our heart more, or stir more fear within us, as when we know in our conscience that we are sinning willfully and repeatedly against God, and that God has not corrected us through adversity, but instead has quietly allowed us to continue in our sinful desires which we crave. In this situation, it is time to cry out to God, as David did when he said, “Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me” (Ps 51:11). “Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger” (Ps 27:9). “Hide not your face from me, lest I be like those who go down to the pit” (Ps 143:7). These cries of prayer by David to God demonstrate to us what a horrible danger a person is in when God turns his face from them. David’s example should also move us to cry to God with all of our heart so that we are not found in a similar situation, which is no doubt so sorrowful, so miserable, and so dreadful, that no person can express it adequately. For it is a grief unto death to be under the wrath of God, to be forsaken by him, to have his Holy Spirit, the Author of all goodness, be taken from him, and to be brought into such a wicked state that he is fit for nothing else than the eternal condemnation of hell. Not only does David’s example show that if God turns his face from someone, he is left bare from all goodness and is far from having a hope of remedy, but also the prophet Isaiah shows that God may ultimately forsake his unfruitful vineyard. “He (God) dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes” (Is 5:2). After all this, Isaiah says what God will do, “And now I

will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briers and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it” (Is 5:5-6). He will not only allow it to produce weeds and thorns, but also, in order to punish its unfruitfulness, will not trim or fertilize it. Finally, God will command the clouds to not rain upon the vineyard, by which is signified that the teaching of his holy word will also be taken away. (In the New Testament, the apostle Paul refers to the word in a similar manner, when he talks about the ministers of the word who planted and watered the congregation in Corinth (1 Co 3:6).) The result of God’s actions is that such a person is no longer of his kingdom, is no longer governed by the Holy Spirit, and is removed from the grace and benefits that he would have enjoyed forever in Christ. They will be deprived of the heavenly light and life, which they had in Christ when they were abiding in him, and they will be, as they once were, as men without God in this world. They will be given over to the power of the devil, who rules over all those who are cast away from God, as he did with Saul and Judas, and as he does in those who live following their own sinful desires - the “sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2), and the “children of wrath” (Eph 2:3).

Therefore, let us be warned brothers and sisters in Christ, so that we do not reject God’s word, by which we obtain and retain true faith in God, so that we are not cast away by God so far that we become as the “sons of disobedience” and the “children of wrath.” Regarding these “children of wrath,” there are two types who, although almost completely opposite one another, both are very far from returning to God. The first type, weighing his own sinful and wicked living against the perfect judgment of God’s righteousness, is beyond counsel and comfort, so that he refuses to believe that God can and will take him again into his favor and mercy. The second type, after hearing the great promises of God’s love and mercy, but not taking from them a correct understanding of true faith, instead extends God’s promises beyond God’s intentions, believing that even if he continues in sin and ungodly living for his whole life, yet at the end of his life, God will show his mercy on him and will bring him back. Both of these two types of men are in a

state of near damnation, yet God, who does not desire the death of the wicked (Ezek 33:11), has shown us a way by which both of these types of men, if they will listen in time, may escape final condemnation. The first type should firmly believe in God's mercy as revealed in Scripture. The second type should not only eagerly believe God's promises, but also be as eager to believe God's warnings.

Therefore, let us all follow the advice of the Wise Man of the book of Ecclesiasticus who says, "Do not delay in turning to the LORD, and do not put it off day after day. For the LORD's wrath comes suddenly, and while you may believe you are secure, you will be destroyed in the day of his vengeance" (Ecclus 5:7 author's translation). So, let us instead turn to God now with a humble heart, and he will receive us into his favor and grace for his holy Name's sake, and for the sake of his gracious promises given to all faithful believers in Jesus Christ, God's only natural Son. All honor and glory and power be to the Son, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

**March 7th**

Wednesday in the Third Week of Lent

***True and Living Faith I***

Brothers and sisters, we have come to God and have been justified by him through faith. But, so that we are not confused or deceived about the biblical meaning of the word "faith," we must carefully study the two ways in which this word is used in Scripture.

There is one type of faith, which in Scripture is called a "dead faith." This type of faith does not produce good works, but instead is barren and unfruitful. The apostle James compares dead faith to the faith of demons, who believe that God is true and just, and even tremble in fear in this knowledge, yet continue to pursue their evil works (Ja 2:17,19). It is this kind of faith that certain professing Christians also have. As the apostle Paul says, "They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work" (Tit 1:16). Dead faith is a persuasion in a man's heart, where he knows that there is a God, and agrees to the truth of God's word contained in the Scripture. He mentally assents to the word of God, and says that he believes it to be true. But this kind of belief by itself is not



true biblical faith. It is simply like someone who reads about Julius Caesar and believes that everything he has read is true, and that now he has a good knowledge of Caesar's life and deeds. He can be said to believe in the history of Caesar, yet he does not believe in Caesar, because he does not look to Caesar for help or benefits in life. Similarly, someone who believes that everything spoken about God in the Bible is true, but yet lives such an ungodly life that he cannot expect to enjoy the promises and benefits of God, such a person has a faith in the words of God, but it cannot be said that he believes in God. He does not have a faith and trust in God that leads him to look for grace, mercy, and eternal life from God's hand, but instead he can expect rebuke and punishment from God, according to his evil works. As the ancient writer Didymus Alexandrinus once said, "Inasmuch as faith without works is dead, it is not now faith; as a dead man is not a man." Therefore, while a dead faith is a type of faith, it is not the type of true and living faith that saves sinners.

There is a second type of faith described in Scripture, which is not barren and unfruitful like the first type, but instead works through love, as Paul declares in the book of Galatians. While the first type of faith is called a dead faith, this second type of faith is called a living faith. Those that have a living faith, as stated plainly in the articles of our religion, can have a sure trust and confidence in the mercy of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and a steadfast hope in all the good things to be received from God's hand. And although we may be weak and tempted by our spiritual enemy to fall into some sin, yet, if we return again to God by true repentance he will forgive and forget our offences for the sake of his Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and will make us inheritors with him of his eternal kingdom. And until that kingdom comes in its fullness, God will be our protector and defender in all trouble and danger, whatever may happen. Though at times he may send us painful adversity in order to correct us for our sin, even so he will be a loving Father to us and not withdraw his mercy from us in the end, provided we trust in him, commit ourselves to him, hang on to him, call upon him, serve him, and obey him. This is the true and living Christian faith, not just something outwardly professed, but something that lives and stirs within the heart. This living faith does not lack hope and trust

in God, nor the love of God and neighbor, nor the fear of God, nor the desire to hear God's word and to flee evil while gladly doing good works. This faith is the sure foundation for the gifts which we look for and trust to receive from God, although we do not yet see them with our senses. As the author of Hebrews states, "... for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Heb 11:6b). And nothing pleases God more than to see this assured faith and trust in him among his children.

**March 8th**

Thursday in the Third Week of Lent

***True and Living Faith II***

Regarding this living faith, there are three important points to be noted. First, that this faith does not lay dormant in the heart, but is fruitful in bearing good works. Second, that without it no good works can be done that are acceptable and pleasing to God. And third, that there are certain kinds of good works that this living faith produces.

Regarding the first point, as a light cannot be hidden, but will shine out in one direction or another, so a true faith cannot be kept secret, but when the right occasion comes, will shine out and show itself by good works. And as the physical body of a man works for nourishment and preservation as it has need and opportunity, so also the soul that has a living faith will always be doing some good work, and will not be unoccupied, which is the evidence that this faith is living and not dead.

Therefore, when a man hears in the Scriptures the great things said about faith – that it makes us pleasing to God, that it brings us into life with God, and that it causes us to be adopted as children of God – but then imagines that this means he is free from doing good works and may live as he pleases, he is then playing with God and deceiving himself. This twisted attitude toward God and good works is a sure sign that such a person is far from having a true and living faith, and also far from even knowing the correct meaning of the term. For the sure and living Christian faith is not only to believe everything spoken by God in the holy Scripture, but also to earnestly trust and have confidence in God. It is to trust that God pays close attention to us, that he cares for

us, as a father cares for the child he loves, and that he will be merciful to us for his only Son's sake. It is to trust that we have our Savior Christ as our perpetual Advocate and Priest, in whose merits, sacrificial offering, and suffering, our sins are continually washed away - whenever we truly repent and return to him with our whole heart, firmly determining within ourselves, by the power of his grace, to obey and serve him and keep his commandments, and never to turn back to sin. This is the faith that the Scriptures present to us as true and pleasing to God. This faith, when it considers what God has done for us, is moved by the power of the Holy Spirit to serve and please him, to keep his favor, to fear his displeasure, and to continue as his obedient child, showing thankfulness by keeping his commandments. All these things living faith does freely, the primary motivation being love of God, not fear of punishment or desire for earthly reward, recognizing how we have received God's mercy and pardon freely and not by our own merit.

This true and living faith will show itself, and cannot sit idle for long. As it is written, "... the righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab 2:5), for living faith does not sleep and lay idle when it should be awake and busy. As Jeremiah says, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit" (Jer 17:7-8). In the same way, faithful believers, putting away all fear of adversity, will show the fruit of their good works as they have opportunity.

**March 9th**

Friday in the Third Week of Lent

### ***True and Living Faith III***

The Wise Man from the book of Ecclesiasticus says, "He that believes in the LORD listens to the commandment ..." (Ecclus 32:24 author's translation). If we do not demonstrate faithfulness in our living, the faith that we pretend to have is only a false faith, because the true Christian faith is demonstrated by good living and not by words only. As Augustine says, "Good living cannot be separated from true faith, which works through love." And as Chrysostom says, "Faith of

itself is full of good works: as soon as a man believes, he will display them.”

The Scripture teaches how true faith produces an abundance of good works, and how the works of one man may be more acceptable to God than another man's works. The author of Hebrews tells us that the faith of Abel made his sacrifice more acceptable to God than the sacrifice of Cain. In the Scriptures, we also learn that true faith caused Noah to build the ark, and made Abraham leave his home country and friends and travel to a far country to dwell there among strangers. So also, Isaac and Jacob depended only on the help and trust that they had in God. When they came to the country that God had promised them, they did not build cities, towns, or even houses, but lived like strangers in tents, that might at any time be pulled up and moved. Their trust was so entirely in God that they put little worth in any earthly thing, because they knew that God had prepared for them better places to dwell in heaven, places founded and built by God himself. True faith made Abraham ready, when God commanded, to offer his own son and heir Isaac, whom he loved dearly, and who was promised to provide him innumerable descendants, one of which would bless all the nations of the earth. Abraham trusted so much in God that he believed that even if Isaac were killed, God was able by his omnipotent power to raise him from the dead, and fulfill his promises. Abraham did not lose trust in the promise of God, although to his eyes and reasoning mind all the circumstances seemed contrary to the fulfillment of that promise. He believed truly that God would not leave him in lack and famine that was in the country where he dwelled. And in all the other dangers that he encountered, he trusted that God would be his God, his protector, and his defender, even if the circumstances appeared at first to say the opposite. This same living faith was in the heart of Moses, who refused to accept the inheritance of being the son of Pharaoh's daughter and rejected an earthly life of sinful pleasure. Instead, he accepted the suffering and sorrow of being one of the people of God. By faith he was not deterred by the threats of Pharaoh, because his trust was in God, and he passed by the pleasures of this world, looking to the reward to come in heaven, setting his heart on the invisible God as though he had seen him with his own eyes. By faith the children of Israel passed through the

Red Sea. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down without human effort, and by faith many other amazing miracles have been accomplished. In all good men that have lived before us, true faith has produced their good works, and has obtained the promises of God. Faith has shut the lions' mouths for Daniel, and has quenched the effect of intense fire for his friends. Faith has delivered men from the sword, has given weak men strength and victory in battle, has overthrown enemy armies, and has raised the dead to life. Faith has given men the strength to suffer adversity with patience – some being mocked and whipped, bound and thrown into prison, some being stripped of all their earthly possessions and living in poverty, some wandering in mountains, hills, and the wilderness, some tortured and killed, some stoned, some sawed in two, some pulled into pieces, some beheaded, some broken without mercy, not asking to be released because they looked forward to a better resurrection.

**March 10th**

Saturday in the Third Week of Lent

***True and Living Faith IV***

All these spiritual fathers, martyrs, and other holy men had their faith firmly fixed on God, even when all the world was against them. They not only knew God to be the Lord, Maker, and Ruler of all men in the world, but also, they had a strong confidence and trust that he was and would be their God, comforter, helper, maintainer, and defender. The faith that these men had was the true Christian faith, which is the faith we also must have. Even though they lived before there was the title of “Christian” that could be applied to their faith, they did, in fact, demonstrate that faith, because they looked for all the gifts of God the Father through the merits of his Son Jesus Christ, just as we do. The difference between them and us is that they looked for the day when Christ would come, and we live in the time after he has come. Therefore, as Augustine says, “The time is altered and changed but not the faith. For we have both one faith in one Christ.” We also have the same Holy Spirit as they had. Just as the Spirit taught them to trust in God and to call upon him as our Father, so he teaches us. As Isaiah says, “... you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name” (Is

63:16b). God gave them grace to be his children, as he does for us now. But now, after the coming of our Savior Christ, we have received more abundantly the Spirit of God in our hearts, so that we can obtain a surer trust than many of them had. Even so, we and they are all one, having the same faith in God. Their faith, conceived before Christ's coming, is highly praised in the New Testament as an example for us, and we should strive to give ourselves even more in speaking and living for God now that Christ has come. All the declarations of the New Testament make clear that the true and living Christian faith is not dead, vain, or unfruitful, but full of virtue, activity, and strength, bearing many good works.

Because all Scripture clearly declares that a true living faith in Christ does produce good works, every person should examine and test himself carefully, to see whether or not he has that same true and living faith in his heart, which he can know by considering the fruit of his own life. Many that profess faith in Christ fall into the error of thinking that they know God and believe in him, but in their lives they declare the opposite with their works. The apostle John speaks of this self-deception when he says, "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says, 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4). John also says, "No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you ..." (1 John 3:6-7a). And he also says, "By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him" (1 John 3:19-22). John furthermore says, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God ... We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him" (1 John 5:1,18). And finally, John sums up the reason he wrote the letter saying, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). In John's third letter, he

sums up succinctly the relationship between faith and works, saying, “Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God” (3 John 11b). And as the apostle John says that a living knowledge and faith in God produces good works, so he also says that hope and love cannot abide with evil works. Concerning hope, he says, “... but we know that when he (God) appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:2b-3). And concerning love, John says, “... but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected” (1 John 2:5a). And, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3a).

**March 12th**

Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent

***True and Living Faith V***

John did not write these things based on some fantasy he had, but as absolutely certain and necessary truths taught to him by Christ himself, who is the eternal and infallible Truth, and who in his own teachings clearly affirms that faith, hope, and love cannot exist without good works. Concerning faith, Christ says, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36). And Christ affirms the same teaching with a double oath that this is true, saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life” (John 6:47). Now, for “whoever believes in the Son” and has eternal life, it must follow that this person also has good works, and is careful to obey God’s commandments. Conversely, those who produce evil works, and who live in disobedience to God’s commandments without repentance, will not receive eternal life, but eternal death. Christ himself teaches this saying, “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt 25:46). Also, Christ says, “... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (Rev

21:6b-8). Christ clearly affirms that true faith produces good works when he speaks about love in this way, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me... If anyone loves me, he will keep my word... Whoever does not love me does not keep my words” (John 14:21a,23a,24a).

Finally, just as the love of God is displayed by good works, so is the fear of God. As the Wise Man says, “The fear of God causes a man to avoid sin,” and “He that fears God will do good works” (Ecclus 1:21, 15:1 author’s translation).

**March 13th**

Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

### ***True and Living Faith VI***

A person may easily deceive himself, believing in his mind that he knows God, loves him, fears him, and belongs to him, when by his ungodly deeds, he demonstrates that none of these beliefs about himself are actually true. For the proof of all these beliefs is given by a godly and Christian life. Now the person who feels that his heart is dedicated to seeking God’s honor, and who studies God’s will and commandments, and who does not live following his sinful desires, not serving the devil, but serving God - this person can rejoice in God, perceiving by the pattern of his life that he has the right knowledge of God, a living faith, a steadfast hope, and a right fear and love of God. Such a person serves God for God’s own sake, and also loves his neighbors, whether they are friends or enemies, doing good to every man as he has the opportunity, and willingly hurting no one. But, the person who throws off the yoke of God’s commandments from his neck, and lives after his sinful desires without repentance, and does not seek to know God’s word much less live according to it - this person is deceiving himself, and does not understand his own heart if he thinks that he knows God, loves him, fears him, or trusts in him.

Some imagine in their mind that they belong to God although they live in sin. They come to church, and present themselves as one of God’s dear children. However, the apostle John says, “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 John 1:6). Others in their vanity think that they



know and love God, but do not keep God's commandments. However, John says clearly, "Whoever says, 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). Some convince themselves that they love God, while they hate their neighbors. But John says, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 John 4:20), and "Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (1 John 2:9-11). And finally, John says, "By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil; whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother" (1 John 10).

Therefore, do not deceive yourself, thinking that you have faith in God, or that you love God, or that you trust and fear him, while you are living in sin. Your sinful and ungodly life declares the opposite of what you imagine or say about yourself. It is essential for a Christian to have a true Christian faith, and to test himself as to whether he has it or not, and to know how it should display itself in his life. Putting our trust in the world is futile, because the world and everything about it is just vanity. It is God who must be our defense and protection against all temptation to sin, error, superstition, idolatry, and all evil. If the world were on our side, and God was against us, what could the world do for us? Therefore, let us fully set our faith and trust in God; then neither the world nor the devil will overcome us.

**March 14th**

Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

***True and Living Faith VII***

Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us examine and test our faith to see what kind it is. Let us not flatter ourselves, but instead look objectively at our life and make a true judgment concerning it. As Christ says, "... the tree is known by its fruit" (Matt 12:33b). Let us do good works, which declare that our faith is living and true. Let us by our good works, which should spring out of faith, increase our confidence in our

election by God and make us stable in our Christian life. As the apostle Peter says, “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fail” (2 Pe 1:10). And as he says, “... make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love” (2 Pe 1:5-7). In this way, we demonstrate a living Christian faith, and confirm in our conscience that we are walking in the true faith, and also confirm for others that this is the true way to follow God. But if good works do not follow our professed faith, then we are just mocking God, deceiving ourselves, and misleading others. We may wear the name “Christian,” but we lack the true faith that is required of that title. True faith always produces good works, as James says, “... I will show you my faith by my works” (Ja 2:18b). Your good works must be a public testimony of your faith; otherwise, your faith, without good works, is just the devil’s faith and the faith of the wicked, an imaginary faith, and not the true Christian faith. The devil and the wicked are not made better by their counterfeit faith, but instead increase their damnation by it. So also, those that are baptized and have received the knowledge of God and of Christ’s merits, and yet live without good works, thinking that their mere claim of having faith is sufficient, or pursuing the sinful pleasures of this world without repentance, these presumptuous and willful sinners will face the great vengeance of God and eternal punishment in hell, the place prepared for the devil and those who lived in sin.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, as you profess the name of Christ, do not let any such deception and fantasy regarding your faith trick you. Instead, be sure of your faith by examining your life and looking at the fruits that are being born by it. Note the increase of love and charity produced by your faith toward God and your neighbor, and by this understand that your faith is true. If you feel and perceive this kind of faith in you, then rejoice in it, and be diligent to maintain and keep it. By consistently doing good, let your faith grow more and more, and in this way you can be sure that you are pleasing God by your faith, and that you, as other faithful believers have done before you, will in the

end come to him and receive the final reward of your faith. As Peter calls it, the "... the salvation of your souls" (1 Pe 1:9b), which God has promised to his faithful followers. To him be all honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

**March 15th**

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent

***Good Works Flow From Faith I***

Faith gives life to the soul, and those who lack faith are dead to God, just as much as those in the world whose bodies lack souls. Without faith, everything we do is dead before God, even if the work seems very positive and glorious in the eyes of men. Just as a carved or painted image is just a dead representation of the thing itself, lifeless and not moving, so are all the works of unfaithful people before God. They appear outwardly to be works full of life, but in reality, they are dead and do not lead to eternal life. They are only shadows of truly living and good things, but are not the living and good things themselves. For true faith does give life to works, and from such a faith come good works that are most certainly very good, and without such a faith no work is good before God.

As Augustine says, "We must not imagine that there are good works before faith, or that before a person has faith he may do any good work. While works done before faith seem to men to be worthy of praise, in reality, they are just vain. They are like the path of a horse that runs off the trail, and while it expends tremendous energy, it is for no purpose. Therefore, let no one think that he has done good works before he had faith, because where there was no faith, there were no good works. The will produces good works, but faith must guide and direct the will of man." As Christ says, "... if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness" (Matt 6:23a). Augustine interprets this teaching when he says, "The eye represents the will of man, by which a person does works." This means that the works of a person done without godly purpose and true faith are wholly dark, and there is no light in them. For good deeds are not measured and distinguished from evil works by simply observing the outward actions, but by understanding the purposes and goals for which they are done. For example, if an unbeliever helps clothe the

naked, feed the hungry, and other similar things, these works are only dead, vain, and fruitless to him because they are not done for the honor and love of God. It is faith that makes a work acceptable to God, and as Augustine says, "... whether you desire it to be or not, those works that do not flow from faith are nothing." Where faith in Christ is not the foundation, there is no good work, no matter what kind of outward building we build. There is one work which defines all good works, and that is faith that works through love. If you have this, you have the basis for all good works, because the virtues of strength, wisdom, self-control, and justice all flow from this true faith. Without this true faith, we do not have these virtues, but only the names and shadows of them. As Augustine says, "All the life of those who lack true faith is sin, and nothing is good without him who is the Author of goodness. Where he is not, there can only be false virtue, even if it displays itself in what appear to be the best works." Augustine also refers to the Psalms which say, "Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young ..." (Ps 84:3a). He interprets this as teaching that heretics, unbelieving Jews, and pagans all do good works – they clothe the naked, feed the poor, and do other works of mercy; but, because these works are not done with true faith, the "young birds" are lost. But, if they abide in true faith, then "faith is the nest" and the safeguard of the "young birds," that is to say, faith is the safeguard of their good works, so that they are not lost and instead result in a reward from God.

**March 16th**

Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent

***Good Works Flow From Faith II***

Augustine discusses this issue at length in numerous books, but Ambrose draws his conclusion in a few words when he says, "Anyone that would resist evil, either by his natural willpower or by his reason, is vainly adorning the time spent in this life. He does not attain the true virtues, because unless one worships the true God, even those things that seem to be virtue are vice."

The fourth century archbishop John Chrysostom speaks plainly on this topic when he says, "You will find many people who do not have

the true faith and are not one of the flock of Christ, yet in outward appearance, they do many good works of mercy and are full of pity, compassion, and a desire for justice. Despite all of that, they have no fruit from their good works, because they lack the chief good work. For, when the Jews asked Christ what they should do to do the works of God, he answered, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent' (John 6:29). In saying this, Christ called faith the work of God. As soon as a person has faith, he will flourish in good works, because faith itself is full of good works, and nothing is good without faith." Using an analogy, Chrysostom says, "Those who glimmer and shine in good works without faith in God are like dead men, who have beautiful and expensive tombs which benefit them nothing... Faith cannot be naked without works, for then it is shown to not be true faith. When faith is joined together with good works, it is above those works. Just as men first have life, and afterward are nourished, so must our faith in Christ come first, and afterward be nourished with good works. Life may exist without nourishment, but nourishment cannot be without life... A person must be nourished by good works, but first he must have faith. The person that does good deeds, but does not have faith, does not have life... I can show you a man that lived with faith without works and went to heaven, but without faith no man has life. For example, the thief who was hung next to Christ only believed, and God in his great mercy justified him. If someone would say that he just lacked time to do good works, otherwise, he would have done them, I would agree that this is true and would not argue with him. However, this I will certainly affirm – faith alone saved him. If he had lived longer, and had not valued faith and the good works that flow from it, then he would have lost his salvation again. This is the main point of what I am saying: faith alone saved this man, but works alone never justified any man." Here we have heard the mind of John Chrysostom, in which we can understand that neither is faith without works, when there is opportunity to do them, nor can works by themselves result in eternal life without faith.

***Good Works Flow From Faith III***

The types of good works that flow from a living faith are best known by our Savior Christ himself, who was asked about this by a certain prominent man. The wealthy young man asked, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” (Matt 19:16b). Jesus answered him, “If you would enter life, keep the commandments” (Matt 19:17b). But the prince, not being satisfied, asked further, “Which ones?” (Matt 19:18a). The young man asked Jesus which commandments Jesus was referring to, because the scribes and Pharisees had made so many of their own laws and traditions to bring men to heaven in addition to God’s commandments that this man was unsure if he would enter heaven by following those laws and traditions or by following the laws of God. Christ responded to the young man with a simple answer, repeating the commandments of God, and saying, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 19:18b-19). By listing these commandments, Christ declared that the laws of God direct a person to eternal life, and not the laws and traditions of men. We should take this as an important and true lesson given to us from Christ’s own mouth, that the works done according to the moral commandments of God are the true good works of faith that lead to the blessed life to come.

Unfortunately, even from the beginning, mankind’s blindness and malice has always made him ready to fall away from God’s commandments. The first man Adam, who was given only one commandment, which he fully understood, that he should not eat of the forbidden fruit, instead listened to Eve, who had been deceived by the subtle lies of the serpent. In doing this, he followed his own will and left God’s commandment. Since that time, all of Adam’s descendants have been so blinded by original sin that they have been always ready to fall from God and his law, and to invent a new way of salvation by means of works of their own imagination. This falling away from the eternal living God progressed to such a point that almost all of the world wandered around in their own fantasies, with some worshipping the sun, the

moon, and the stars. Others worshipped Jupiter, Juno, Diana, Saturn, Apollo, Neptune, Ceres, and Bacchus, while others even worshipped dead ancestors. Some, not satisfied with these objects of worship, gave honor to various kinds of animals, birds, fish, fowl, and snakes. In every country, village, and house images of these things were set up and the people worshipped them. This was the deep descent of mankind after it fell into its own fantasies, leaving behind the eternal living God and his commandments for innumerable images and false gods of its own making. Mankind remained in this error and blindness until Almighty God, pitying the condition of man, sent his true prophet Moses into the world to rebuke and correct this extreme madness, and to teach the people to know the only living God, and the way to rightly honor and worship him.

However, man was so corrupt and enamored with his own fantasies and false worship that despite all the admonitions, exhortations, promises, and threats from God, he would not turn away from his own inventions. Even the people of Israel, who had received numerous benefits from God, when Moses went up on the mountain for a few days to speak with Almighty God, began to invent new gods. As the ideas came into their heads, they constructed a golden calf, and knelt down to worship it. After that, the Israelites followed the Moabites and worshipped Chemosh, god of the Moabites. Read the books of Judges, Kings, and the prophets and you will see how unfaithful the people were, and how quickly they followed their own inventions, always ready to turn away from God's holy commandments. In those accounts, you will read about Baal, Molech, Chemosh, Milcom, Baal of Peor, Ashtoreth, Bel, the Dragon, the Bronze Serpent, and many others. The people built images of these false gods, and with great devotion invented pilgrimages, carefully adorning and scenting the images, then knelt down before them and made offerings to them. They thought all of this was highly pleasing to God, and was to be esteemed above the precepts and commandments given by God. At that time, God had commanded that no sacrifices be made except in Jerusalem, but the people ignored this commandment and built altars for sacrifice everywhere – in the hills, in the woods, and in their houses. They did not honor God's commandment, but valued their own fantasies and self-made devotion

more highly. This error among the people became so widespread that not only the uneducated, but also the priests and teachers were corrupted with the same abominations, partly because of their desire for glory and money, and partly because of their own ignorance. The corruption was so complete that King Ahab had only Elijah as a true teacher and minister of God, but had 850 priests that persuaded him to honor Baal and to sacrifice in the woods and tree groves. This horrible error in the life of Israel continued until three noble kings – Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah – God’s chosen ministers, destroyed the image worship and restored the people to the commandments of God. For their faithfulness, these kings will receive eternal rewards and glory from him.

**March 19th**

Monday in the Fifth Week of Lent

***Good Works Flow From Faith IV***

Besides all of the inventions of men already mentioned, the inclination of man to create his own holy devotions gave rise to new sects and religions such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes. Each had many seemingly holy and godly traditions and commandments, which by all appearances were glistening good works, but in reality, were all tending toward idolatry, superstition, and hypocrisy. Actually, their hearts were full of malice, pride, covetousness, and all evil. Christ spoke out vehemently against these sects and their pretended holiness, more so than against any other people, often saying things like, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean” (Matt 23:25-26). Despite all the traditions and outward shows of good works invented by their own imaginations, by which they appeared to the people to be the most religious and holy of all men, Christ, who saw their hearts, knew that they were inwardly the most unholy, most abominable, and furthest from God of all men. Therefore, he said to them, “You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart



is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” (Matt 15:7-9).

When Christ said that they worshipped God in vain by teaching as doctrines the commandments of men, he did not mean that any and all of the rules written by man were not to be followed. Christ himself was always obedient to the governors and their laws, made for keeping good order in society. Christ was renouncing the laws and traditions made by the scribes and Pharisees, which were not made for keeping good order in society as the civil laws were, but were set up as being the only right and pure way to worship God, equal to or even above God’s laws, as many of God’s laws could not be kept if the elders’ traditions were to be followed. God detested this arrogance of man making his own laws equal with God’s laws, which truly describe how to rightly honor and worship God, even to the point of requiring the people to disobey God’s law in order to follow man’s traditions. God has established his laws, and obedience to them honors and pleases him. It is also God’s desire that all of man’s laws which are not contrary to his laws should be obeyed, as they are necessary for every society to be properly governed. In fact, all civil laws should be written to lead men to better keep God’s laws, that as a result, God is honored by obedience to them. However, the scribes and Pharisees were not content that their laws would be considered no higher than other civil laws, and would be listed along with other temporal laws, but they instead called them holy and godly traditions, and wanted them honored not only as a right and true way to worship God, but also as the right way to honor God, even if the true commandments of God had to be ignored in order to follow them. Because of this, Christ spoke vehemently against them, saying, “For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15).

It is common with such man-made traditions that they require the sin of breaking God’s true commandments. More devotion and a more careful conscience in the keeping of the man-made laws is required than in the keeping of God’s commandments. Therefore, the scribes and Pharisees, who so superstitiously and scrupulously kept the Sabbath, were offended with Christ when he healed a sick man on the Sabbath, and were offended with Christ’s apostles when they gathered

the ears of corn to stop their hunger on the Sabbath. When Christ's disciples did not wash their hands as frequently as the traditions required, the scribes and Pharisees quarreled with Christ, saying, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat" (Matt 15:2). But Christ rebuked them for requiring others to break the very commandments of God in order to follow their own traditions. As an example, Christ pointed out that the elders taught the people to bring their offerings into the treasure house of the temple under the pretense of giving God honor, while leaving their fathers and mothers, to whom they primarily owed help, without aid. So, Christ said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!" (Mark 7:9b). The elders considered an oath more sacred which was made by the gold or sacrifice in the temple, than an oath made in the name of God himself or of the temple. They were more studious to pay their tithes of small things than to do the greater things commanded by God, such as doing works of mercy, or doing justly, or dealing sincerely, uprightly, and faithfully with God and man. Christ said that both the small and great things should be done. The elders were so blind in their judgment that they stumbled over a straw while they leaped over a block. They would carefully pick a fly out of their cup, but then drink down a whole camel. Therefore, Christ called them blind guides, warning his disciples frequently to avoid their teaching. Although they seemed to the world to be the most perfect men, both in their life and teaching, their life was actually full of hypocrisy, and their teaching was a sour leaven mixed with superstition, idolatry, and perverse judgment, as they set up the traditions and commandments of men in place of God's true commandments.

**March 20th**

Tuesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

***Good Works Flow From Faith V***

Truly good works are those that God has commanded in his holy Scripture, but are not those that men have created out of their own brains, out of a blind zeal and devotion, but without the word of God. By misunderstanding the correct source and nature of good works,

mankind has highly offended God, and has departed from his will and commandments. We have previously seen how the world, from the beginning until Christ's time, has always been ready to depart from God's commandments, and to seek other ways to honor and serve him with a devotion invented in its own mind. As a result, they established their own traditions above God's commandments. Even after Christ's life on earth, this has also happened just as much as it did among the Jews of Jesus' times. And this error has occurred because of the corruption and negligence of those who ought to have exalted God's commandments, and who ought to have preserved the pure and heavenly teachings given by Christ.

Anyone with some judgment and knowledge combined with a true zeal for God recognizes and mourns that this false teaching, superstition, idolatry, hypocrisy, and abuse have entered into Christ's true religion. Working little by little, like sour leaven through dough, the sweet bread of God's holy word has been greatly hindered and laid aside. The Jews of Jesus' day, even in their great blindness, never had so many pilgrimages to sites of images, nor so much kneeling, kissing, and incensing of them as exists in our time. Sects and false religions were not as widely popular nor as superstitious and ungodly as they are among us in our time. These sects and false religions are filled with hypocritical and false good works, deceitfully leading away many ignorant people. The people are taught to purchase their merit with God at markets, where they can buy holy relics, images, shrines, and other such merchandise, all ready for sale. All of the merchandise is "holy" – holy robes, holy beads of pardon, holy shoes, and holy rules, all full of holiness. Along with this, they practice foolish and superstitious traditions, trusting in "holy" jewelry to protect them from bad luck and curses, or to assist them in their salvation. These superstitions are not as prevalent in cultures affected significantly by the truth of God's word, but are still practiced widely in many places around the world, among both the educated and uneducated.

These superstitions have included rules regarding clothing, keeping silence, communal living, and food and drink. But let us also consider the great abuses that have occurred surrounding what are called by some the three chief vows of religion – obedience, chastity, and

poverty. First, under the pretense of obedience to the religious father of their sect, they were exempted from obedience to their natural father and mother, and from obedience to governmental laws, even though God commands they obey these earthly authorities. Thus, their profession of obedience to their sect became a forsaking of the obedience that God commands. Regarding the vow of chastity, it would perhaps be better if we could pass over this topic entirely, and just let the world judge the immoral behaviors that have become well known. Otherwise, we will have to describe unchaste actions with unchaste words, which will offend godly and chaste ears. Regarding the vow of poverty, even while they accumulated great wealth, equal to or greater than that of the merchants and aristocracy, they claimed by a subtle deceit to keep their vow of poverty, because all these possessions were “held in common.” In this, they mocked the world. And even with all their riches, they would not help their father or mother, nor the needy and extremely poor, without the prior approval of their religious father and leader. They were always ready to take from any man, but they were not allowed to give to any man, even those whom the laws of God required them to help. So, through their traditions and rules the laws of God were nullified among them, making Jesus’ words to the Pharisees also apply to them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” (Matt 15:3), and “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Matt 15:8). They also used the pretended holiness of long prayers, spoken day and night, to convince widows and other simple people to pay them to give these prayers on behalf of dead relatives and friends. In this way, they made themselves the object of Christ’s words, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore, you will receive greater condemnation” (Matt 23:14 NKJV), and “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves” (Matt 23:15).

***Good Works Flow From Faith VI***

It is a lie that man can be made more godly and perfect by keeping the rules, traditions, and teachings of men, than by keeping the holy commandments of God. Among these papal superstitions and abuses are the prayer beads, the great Rosary or Lady Psalter, in which the Ave Maria is recited 150 times, the prayer of Fifteen O's, which was supposed to deliver 15 souls from purgatory, St. Bernard's verses which, when recited, were supposed to give a man knowledge of the day of his death, and St. Agathe's Letters, which are supposed to quench fire. Also, there were the false teachings of purgatory, masses for the satisfaction of sin, and pilgrimages for the forgiveness of sin, along with false relics, holy beads, bells, bread, water, candles, and fire. There were superstitious fastings, secret brotherhoods, and papal pardons for sale, all highly esteemed as ways to attain eternal life and the remission of sin, while God's glory and commandments were neglected. The councils of the Roman Catholic Church produced ungodly laws, decrees, required ceremonies, and other vain inventions that were believed to be incomparable in wisdom, authority, learning, and godliness. They taught that their decrees, the laws of Rome, were to be considered just as authoritative as the four gospels of the New Testament, and that all other governmental laws must defer to them. In the process, the laws of God were partly ignored and were less esteemed, so that the decrees of the councils, with their man-made traditions and ceremonies, were more carefully observed and held in the greatest reverence. In this way, the people in their ignorance were blinded with the outward show and appearance of all these things, so that they believed that keeping them was a more holy and perfect service to God, and more pleasing to him, than keeping God's commandments. This is the corrupt inclination of man – always superstitiously given to inventing a new way to honor God in his imagination, and then having more zeal and devotion to keeping this invented service to God than to seeking out and keeping God's true commandments. All the while, man takes God's commandments as men's commandments, and men's commandments for God's commandments, and as the highest and most perfect of all of God's

commandments. So everything became confused, so much so that only a small number of well taught men knew and would affirm the truth, properly separating God's commandments from the commandments of men. As a result, error, superstition, idolatry, false religion, unjust judgment, contention, and ungodly living grew greatly.

Therefore, if you have a desire to know the right and pure way to honor God, and if you care about your own soul and the life to come, which is without both pain and end, then be diligent to above all things read and hear God's word. As you are reading and hearing, note carefully what you should do according to his will, and apply yourself to doing it with all your heart. First, you must have a confident faith in God, and give yourself completely to him, loving him in prosperity and adversity, always fearing to offend him. Then, for his sake, love all people, both friends and foes, because they are God's creation and image, and are redeemed by Christ, as you are. Consider in your mind how you may do good to all people within your reach, while hurting no one. Obey all of your superiors and government authorities, and serve your earthly authorities faithfully and diligently, while they are present or absent, not just because you fear the consequences of disobedience, but also for the sake of your conscience, knowing that you are commanded by God to obey them. Do not disobey your fathers and mothers, but honor and help them, pleasing them according to your ability. Do not oppress, kill, beat, slander, or hate any person, but love all people, speak well of them, and help every person as you have the ability, even your enemies who hate you, speak evil of you, and hurt you. Do not steal any person's possessions, nor covet your neighbor's goods, but be content with what you have earned honestly, while giving your own goods generously, as the need arises. Flee from all idolatry, fornication, and other immorality either in thought or in deed, done with any other man's wife, widow, maid, or other. Strive continually in this life to keep the commandments of God, which describe the pure, true, and right way to honor God, and when obeyed in faith are the God ordained path into heaven. Then you will not fail to come into that blessed and eternal life, as Christ promised, where you will live in glory and joy with God forever. To him be praise, honor, and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

***True Christian Love I***

Of all the things that should be taught to Christians, there is nothing more necessary to be daily spoken of than the issue of love. Included in the topic of love are all the righteous works that are part of it, along with the fact that the decay of love is the ruin of the world, the banishment of virtue, and the cause of all evil. It seems that almost every person creates and lives out his own definition of love, no matter how detestable his life is toward God and man, while, in his own mind he persuades himself that he has great love toward others. Therefore, you will hear in this sermon a true and plain description of love, not the kind imagined in man's mind, but the one from the actual words and example of our Savior Jesus Christ. Using this true description of love, every man can examine himself compared to it, and see clearly whether or not he is living according to it.

Loving God requires all of our heart, all of our life, and all of our powers and strength. Loving with all of our heart means that we set our heart's mind to believe his word, to trust in him, and to esteem him above all other things that we love in heaven or on earth. Loving with all of our life means that our highest joy and delight is toward him and his honor, and that our whole life is dedicated to his service, even to the point of death. It means we must be willing to forsake all other things rather than him. As Christ says, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt 10:37). Loving with all of our powers and strength means that we should pursue keeping God's commandments with our hands and feet, with our eyes and ears, with our mouths and tongues, and with all of our powers of both body and soul. This is the first and principal part of love, but not the entirety. Love also includes care for every person, good or evil, friend or foe – to have good will toward all, and to treat them well both in word and in our outward acts and deeds. Christ not only taught this himself, but also lived this out as an example for us.

Regarding the love of God, Christ instructed a doctor of the law who asked him which was the chief commandment in the law, saying,

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37). Christ also taught concerning the love we should have among ourselves, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?’” (Matt 5:43-47). These are the very words of Christ himself regarding loving our neighbor. The Pharisees, with their poisonous traditions and false interpretations, had corrupted and nearly stopped up the pure well of God’s living word, teaching instead that love only pertained to a person’s friends, and that it was sufficient for a person to love those who loved him, and to hate his enemies. However, Christ opened up this well again, clearing and scouring it, by giving a clear interpretation of his law of love, that we should love every person, both friend and enemy, and by reminding us of the reward we will receive if we do so, and the loss we will suffer if we do not. What greater thing could we wish for than to be considered as and taken as our eternal heavenly Father’s children? Christ says that we can be sure of this adoption, if we love every person without exception. And if we do not, Christ says we are no better than the Pharisees, tax collectors, and unbelievers, and will receive our reward with them, meaning that we will be excluded from the family of God’s chosen children and from his eternal inheritance in heaven.

**March 23rd**

Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent

***True Christian Love II***

Therefore, we see that Christ taught that true love is to love God above all other things, and to love every person, friend and foe. And in this way Christ lived, exhorting his adversaries, rebuking their faults, and when they would not repent, praying for them. First and foremost, Christ loved God his Father above all things, so much so that he did not seek his own will and glory, but instead the will and glory of his Father.



“... I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30b). He was even willing to die in order to fulfill his Father’s will, saying, “... if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matt 26:39b). Christ did not only love his friends, but also his enemies, who in their hearts hated him greatly, and in their acts pursued him with all of their power even to death. Despite all of their hatred, Christ did not withdraw his love for them, but still preached to them, and out of love rebuked their false teachings and sinful deeds, doing good to them, and patiently enduring whatever they spoke or did against him. When they spoke hateful words to him, he did not return them; when they struck him, he did not return the blow; and when he suffered death at their hands, he did not destroy them, nor threaten them, but prayed for them, and entrusted all things to his Father’s will. As a sheep that is led to the slaughter, and as a lamb that is shaved of his fleece do not offer resistance or make noise, in this way Christ went to his death without speaking any vengeful or evil words.

Up to this point, I have demonstrated to you what love is, not only by doctrine but also by the example of Christ himself. By these teachings and examples every person can clearly know himself, and what spiritual condition he is in - whether or not he is in a state of godly love, and therefore a child of the Father. Almost everyone will claim that he is in a state of love, but he should first examine his own heart, his life and works, and then he will not be deceived, but will clearly discern and judge whether or not he is living in love or not. Anyone who does not follow his own will and desires, but gives himself wholeheartedly to God, to do his will and commandments, can be sure that he loves God above all things. Conversely, if he is led by his own will and desires, then he is only pretending to love God. As Christ said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (John 14:21). “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words” (John 14:23-24a). In this way, the person that has a good heart and mind, and carefully uses his tongue and works toward all people, both friend and foe, can know that he has

godly love. And this person can be confident that Almighty God has taken him as one of his own beloved children, as the apostle John says, “By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil; whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10).

**March 24th**

Saturday in the Fifth Week of Lent

### ***True Christian Love III***

The perverted nature of man, corrupt with sin, and void of God's word and grace, thinks that it is completely unreasonable for a person to love his enemy, and has many plausible arguments to defend his position. Against all these plausible arguments we can bring forward the teaching and life of our Savior Christ, who loved us when we were his enemies and teaches us to love our enemies. He patiently received for us many insults, beatings, and a very cruel form of death. Therefore, we are not members of the same Body with him if we will not follow him. As the apostle Peter said, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Pe 2:21). Furthermore, consider the fact that even adulterers, murderers, and all kinds of evil people love their friends. Muslims, Hindus, unbelieving Jews, and atheists all love those that are their friends, from whom they receive their livelihood or other benefits. But to love your enemy is the expected behavior only of those that are the children of God, the disciples and followers of Christ. Man's intractable and corrupt nature, remembering repeatedly the offenses and injuries done to him by his enemies, considers it an intolerable burden to love those who hate him. But the burden should be light enough, if on the other hand the person would consider what displeasure he has done to his enemies, and what benefits he has received from them. If we do not find sufficient recompense in the benefits received from our enemies, nor in the retaliations against them, then let us ponder the offenses we have committed against Almighty God, and how often and how seriously we have insulted him. But if we want to have God's forgiveness for our offenses, then there is no other way but to forgive the offenses done to us, which are very small in comparison to the offenses we have

committed against God. And if we reason that the person who has offended us does not deserve to be forgiven, then let us consider again that we much less deserve to be forgiven by God. Even though our enemy does not deserve to be forgiven for his own sake, even so, we should forgive him for the sake of God's love, remembering the many benefits we have received from God undeservedly, and that Christ, who bought our forgiveness with his blood, has taught us that for his sake we should forgive them of the sins they have committed against us.

**March 26th**

Monday in Holy Week

***True Christian Love IV***

An important question may arise from this teaching about forgiveness that must be answered. If love requires a person to think, speak, and do good to every person, both good and evil, then how can government officials execute justice on criminals with love? How can they sentence criminals to prison, take away their possessions, and sometimes even take their lives according to the law, if love does not allow them to do this?

Here is the short answer to this important question. Civil punishments are both necessary and beneficial to a criminal, and may be given consistently with love, and with love they should be given.

As a further explanation of this short answer, you need to understand that love has two methods of functioning, contrary to one another, but both necessary, and dependent on the kind of person with which it is dealing. The one method in which love functions is to cherish good and innocent people, and to not oppress them with false accusations, but to encourage them with rewards to do well and to continue in good works, defending them with the force of the law against their false accusers. Similarly in the Church, bishops and pastors should praise people for their good works, encouraging them to continue in them, while rebuking and correcting with the word of God the offenses and crimes of all people who work evil. The other method in which love functions is to rebuke, correct, and punish wrongdoing among criminals, without partiality. The apostle Paul confirms these two methods of love, first, to reward the good, and second, to punish the

evil, when he says, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (Rom 13:1-4). In the Church, Paul similarly commands pastor Timothy to rebuke sin when he says, “As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear” (1 Ti 5:20). Both methods of love must be diligently used to fight against the kingdom of the devil - within the Church, the preacher using the word of God, and in government, the authorities using the power of the law. If they do not exercise both methods of love, then they do not love God or the people for whom they are responsible. For if there is no correction of evil, they are willingly allowing God’s commandments to be ignored, and allowing evil to destroy the people. Just as a loving father corrects his natural son when the son does wrong, so also government authorities should lovingly correct those who are committing crimes, and support those who are living within the law. In doing so, they demonstrate their respect for God and their office, and their love of the people they govern. Also, the punishments given to criminals must be executed without delay; otherwise, the offenders will continue in doing more evil, not only to themselves, but also to many other people. If justice is not delivered quickly, the criminals will draw others into wrongdoing by their example, as it seems they are succeeding in their crimes. One thief can rob many people, and can also train many thieves, and one seditious person can draw into his rebellion an entire town or even a whole country. Such evil persons, who are offending God and the order of society, are required by love to be cut off from the body of citizens; otherwise, they will corrupt good and honest people. This is just as a good surgeon cuts away the rotten and diseased part of the body because of his concern and love for the whole body;

otherwise, the diseased part will infect the other parts of the body connected to it.

Now you have heard a plain declaration of what true Christian love is, so that you should never be deceived. And if you walk in this love, not only toward God, whom you are to love above all things, but also toward your neighbor, both friend and foe, then you will neither offend God nor justly offend man. Therefore, remember carefully this short teaching, that in true Christian love God is to be loved above all things, and all people should also be loved, the good and the evil, the friend and the foe. We should love those doing good by encouraging and cherishing them, and we should love those doing evil by making sure they receive correction and due punishment, so that they might repent and be brought into good works, or at least so that God and the commonwealth might be less offended and injured. And if we diligently pursue Christian love in our lives, then Christ promises and assures us that he loves us, that we are the children of our heavenly Father, reconciled with him, and that we are members of the Body of Christ. Then, after this short mortal life is over, we will have with Christ eternal life in his eternal kingdom of heaven. To him with the Father and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory now and forever. Amen.

**March 27th**

Tuesday in Holy Week

***Do Not Fear Death I***

It is not surprising that a worldly man fears death. In his reasoning, he sees that death deprives him of all the earthly honors, riches, and possessions which make him happy, as long as he can use them at his leisure. And if he is dispossessed of these things without hope of recovering them, then he can imagine nothing but unhappiness, having lost his source of earthly joy and pleasure. The carnal man thinks to himself about death, "Will I now be separated from all my honors, all my treasures, my country, friends, riches, possessions, and pleasures, which are the source of my joy and are my heart's delight? What a terrible day that will be when I must say goodbye to all these things forever, never to enjoy any of them again!" The Wise Man of Ecclesiasticus speaks about such a man when he says, "O death, how

bitter is the thought of it to a man that lives in peace and prosperity in his possessions, to a man living a life of leisure, well pampered and well fed!" (Ecclus 41:1 author's translation).

Other worldly men, who haven't been favored by earthly riches, but have instead suffered poverty, sickness, and other adversities, also fear death. They fear death partly because the body naturally hates its own dissolution, which death threatens, and partly because sickness and disease, which cause agonies in the flesh, are common to those approaching death, and accompany death when it finally comes.

Although the two main causes of the fear of death outlined above seem the most serious to worldly men, there is another cause to fear death which is much greater than these, and which give him a just cause to truly fear death. And this greater cause of fear is the condition in which a worldly man will find himself at the time of his bodily death, a condition common to all people who have lived their lives with their hearts set upon the vain things of this world, without repentance. This fearful state is called the "second death" in Scripture, which will be the condition of all such unrepentant people following their bodily death. And this second death is the death that truly should be feared and dreaded, because it is the eternal loss, without possible recovery, of the grace and favor of God, and of eternal joy, pleasure, and happiness. And not only is the second death the eternal loss of all these blessings, but it also is the condemnation of both body and soul, without hope of redemption, to eternal suffering in hell. It was to the second death that the unmerciful and ungodly rich man spoken of in the Gospel of Luke was sent. This man lived enjoying his wealth and earthly pleasure, caring for himself daily with sumptuous food and expensive clothing, while despising poor Lazarus, who lay pitifully at his gate, plagued with disease and full of sores, suffering intense hunger pains. Both of these men were taken by death. Upon his death, Lazarus, the poor and suffering man, was taken by angels immediately to Abraham's bosom, a place of rest, pleasure, and comfort. But upon the death of the unmerciful rich man, he was taken down to hell, and being tormented there, cried out for help, complaining of the intolerable pain that he was suffering in the fire. However, it was too late for him to be helped. Following their bodily death, it is to this second death of eternal pain

and suffering that all people are sent who have their joy and happiness in the pleasures of this world, who are unfaithful to God, and who are unloving to their neighbors. And from this condition there is no hope of repentance and God's mercy. Therefore, it is not surprising that the worldly man fears death, because he has much more reason than he might even realize.

**March 28th**

Wednesday in Holy Week

***Do Not Fear Death II***

So, we see that there are three main reasons why worldly men fear death. First, because in death they will lose their worldly honors, riches, possessions, and all their other hearts' desires. Second, because in death they will suffer from the painful diseases and acute pangs that men commonly endure as they approach and experience death. Third, and most important, because they dread the terrible state of eternal damnation of both body and soul that they fear awaits them after they are forced to leave behind the worldly pleasures of this life. All these three causes to fear death apply to those men who love the things of this world, as long as they remain here on earth.

But, thanks be to God, none of these causes of fear, nor even all of these causes put together can make a true Christian afraid to die – one who is a member of Christ's Body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, a son of God, and an inheritor of the eternal kingdom of heaven. In fact, a true believer finds many causes to wish for, and greatly desire the end of his earthly life. These causes are grounded in the infallible and eternal truth of the word of God, where he sees that many benefits and rewards are given to the believer upon his death. Actually, death for the true believer is really no death at all, but a deliverance from death and from all pain, worries, sorrows, miseries, and the wickedness of the world. It is the entrance into rest, the beginning of eternal joy, the tasting of heavenly pleasure, which are so great that neither the tongue, eye, ear, or heart of man is capable of fully appreciating them. These are some of the great benefits that God our heavenly Father, by his mercy, and because of his love for his Son Jesus Christ, has prepared for those who humbly submit themselves to his will and love him truly with all their heart.

Furthermore, we must remember that death, having been overcome by Christ, cannot keep anyone who trusts in Christ under its perpetual tyranny and slavery, but that the believer will rise from death into glory on the last day, the day appointed by Almighty God, just as Christ our Head rose, on the day appointed by God – the third day. Augustine says that the Head goes first, and the members trust that they will follow after. And Paul says that if Christ is risen from the dead, then we will also rise from the dead. And the Scripture calls bodily death a “sleep,” in which a person’s bodily senses are taken from him for a time, but, when he is awakened, he is more awake and alive than he ever was before. So, although our souls are separated from our bodies for a time, at the general resurrection we will be more alive, beautiful, and perfect than we are now. Now we are mortal, but then we will be immortal. Now we are infected with many infirmities, but then we will be free from all mortal pains. Now we are tempted by carnal desires, but then we will be pure, not desiring anything except God’s glory and eternal things.

For the believer, bodily death is actually a door for entering into life, and is not to be dreaded if understood correctly. It is not a hardship, but is a comfort and remedy for all hardship. It is not an enemy, but a friend; not a cruel tyrant, but a gentle guide that leads us to immortality and its eternal joy and pleasure. Death should be thankfully taken and accepted as God’s messenger, and patiently borne by us out of love for Christ, who suffered a most painful death out of love for us, to redeem us from eternal death. As Paul says, “... your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col 3:3b-4).

**March 29th**

Maundy Thursday

### ***Do Not Fear Death III***

Why then should we be afraid of death, after we consider the many and great promises in the gospel and in the holy Scriptures? For example, “... God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:11b-13). And



as Christ says, “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day,” and “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life” (John 6:40,47). And as Paul says, “... Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’” (1 Cor 1:30-31). Paul compares the greatness of his inheritance of eternal life, holiness, righteousness, and redemption in Christ to all other things when he says, “For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (Phil 3:8b). Finally, Paul makes a simple argument which demonstrates the magnitude of God’s gifts to us, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom 8:32). Therefore, if we have Christ, then we have all good things by him and with him - everything that we could wish for or desire in our hearts. Things such as victory over death and sin, favor and peace with God, holiness, wisdom, justice, power, life, redemption, perpetual health, wealth, and joy forever.

**March 30th**

Good Friday

### ***Do Not Fear Death IV***

Therefore, everyone who is joined to Christ with true faith, steadfast hope, and perfect love, has reason to be full of joy, and reason not to fear death or eternal condemnation. For death cannot separate them from Jesus Christ, nor can any sin condemn those that are grafted into Christ - who is their joy, treasure, and life. So, let us be quick to repent of our sins, change our lives, and trust in his mercy, so that we can be confident that death cannot take him from us nor can it take us from him. As Paul says, “For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living” (Rom 14:8-9). Paul’s statement shows us that we are the Lord’s own when we die, so we can be sure that bodily death cannot harm us, but instead that it will be to our benefit, and join us to Christ more perfectly. And in this promise, the Christian’s

heart can be assured by the infallible truth of holy Scripture. As Paul further says, “He who has prepared us for this very thing (immortality) is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:5-8). Paul is saying that we can liken our life here on earth to a pilgrimage in a foreign country far from God. And when we die, we are delivered from our earthly bodies, and delivered to our true home in our own country, where we dwell with God forever in eternal rest and peace. So, to die is not a loss, but is a profit and victory for all true Christians.

What did the thief who hung on the cross next to Christ lose by his bodily death? It is better to ask what he gained by it! Didn't Jesus say to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43)? And poor Lazarus, who laid at the rich man's gate, suffering with sores and hunger pangs, didn't he profit greatly and even receive a promotion from his bodily death? Yes, the angels, God's ministers, took him to Abraham's bosom, a place of rest, joy, and heavenly consolation. So, do not doubt, brothers and sisters, that Christ has prepared for us the same joy and happiness that he prepared for Lazarus and the thief. And let us hold tight to his salvation, grace, and redemption, believing his word, loving him, and serving him from our hearts with obedience. Whatever we have done against his holy will, let us repent of quickly, and strive to correct our life, not doubting that he will be merciful to us as he was to Lazarus and the thief. Their examples are written in Scripture for the comfort of sinners, who are harassed by sorrows, miseries, and the troubles of this world, that they should not doubt God's mercy, but always trust that there is forgiveness for their sins and eternal life, as Lazarus and the thief had.

Thus, I trust that every Christian understands by the infallible word of God that bodily death cannot harm or hinder those that truly believe in Christ. Instead, Christians understand that death will profit and promote those who are truly repentant for their sins, and they will leave this earth in perfect love, and with a sure trust that God is merciful

to them, forgiving their sins because of the merits of Jesus Christ his only natural Son.

**March 31st**

Holy Saturday

***Do Not Fear Death V***

Let us be careful, as we use our own wealth, that we are not counted among the thieving, covetous, and heartless men that James tells to weep and howl because of the miseries that are in their future. Let us instead be wise in the use of our time, and learn to follow the example of the shrewd manager who made friends with his “unrighteous” wealth, so that when it failed those friends would receive him into eternal dwellings (Luke 16:1-9). Christ calls the manager’s riches “unrighteous,” because the world abuses its wealth in wicked living, even though earthly possessions in themselves are a good gift of God, and are the means by which God’s servants do good works in his name. God commands his servants not to use earthly wealth to gain rich friends, nor to obtain high honors or promotions. Instead, he commands his servants to use their earthly wealth to make friends of the poor and weak, and that anything given in this way will be counted as having been given to Christ himself. And Christ gives these poor and weak great honor and preeminence in the gospel, so much so that he says they will receive those who have done good to them into eternal dwellings. It is not that the poor and weak will be our rewarders for the good deeds we have done, but instead that Christ will reward us, as he counts as good deeds done to him those things we have done for them. Thus, by making the poor and weak our friends, we make the Savior Christ our friend, whose members they are. Christ takes their misery for his own misery, and the relief, sustenance, and help they receive as his own relief, sustenance, and help. He will thank and reward us for our good deeds done to them, just as if he himself had received those same benefits from our hands. As Christ says, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matt 25:40).

Therefore, let us be careful that our faith and hope in Almighty God and in our Savior Christ does not grow weak, nor that the love which we have for God turn cold. Instead, let us demonstrate with

diligence that we are those who truly honor and love God by keeping his commandments, and by doing good deeds to our neighbors in need. Let us relieve them of their poverty with our abundant resources, cure their ignorance with our wisdom and knowledge, and comfort their weakness with our strength and authority, exhorting them to turn away from evil works with both godly counsel and a good example, persevering in this for as long as we live. If we do this, then we do not need to fear death for any of the three causes that we have previously discussed, nor for any other cause that could be imagined. Instead, as the faithful Christian considers the many sicknesses, troubles, and sorrows of this present life, the dangers of this earthly pilgrimage, and the burden to his spirit of his sinful flesh and frail body, he will yearn for passage into the next life. As he considers the many lies of this world, the rampant pride, covetousness, and immorality, especially when there is prosperity, the impatient murmuring of those that succumb to the works of the flesh in times of trouble, and all other impediments that incessantly attempt to draw him away from God and God's life, joy, and salvation, he will increasingly desire to exit this world and enter the next. And as he considers the innumerable attacks by our spiritual enemy, the devil, with all his fiery darts of ambition, pride, immorality, envy, hatred, and gossip, along with all his deceits and traps, with which he attempts to catch all men under his rule, the Christian will long for the day when the devil, who is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, troubles him no more. On the other hand, as the Christian considers the blessed and pleasant condition of the heavenly life to come, and the sweet life of those that depart in the Lord, and how they are delivered from the continual burden of their mortal and sinful body, from the hatred, schemes, and lies of this world, and from all the attacks of the devil, he will look forward to his own departure. As he considers the peace, rest, and endless calm of life in the fellowship of innumerable angels, just men made perfect, patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, and finally, Almighty God and our Savior Jesus Christ, the Christian, who is established in God in the true faith and has confidence in God's mercy through the merits of Jesus Christ, will not only be without fear of bodily death when it comes, but will greatly desire death in his heart, when God calls him out of this life. Then, he can be free from all the evil of the world, and

instead live forever for God's pleasure, in perfect obedience to his will, with our Savior Jesus Christ. Christ, in his infinite mercy and grace, brings us into his presence, to reign with him eternally. To him, with our heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory forever and ever. Amen.



## Helpful Lenten Application Sheet

This Lent I will...

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